



*Stories &
Analysis
from the Data Center
Resistance*

About *Reboot*

Editors' Welcome

In May 2026, a group of organizers involved in data center struggles across the US discussed the idea of producing a publication. You hold the result in your hands.

Reboot is our collective response to the current surge of data center site fights uniting communities across the country and the world in shared struggle. Inspired by the creativity and perseverance demonstrated by our powerful mounting resistance, we offer *Reboot* in recognition of the relentless work people are doing to defend their communities.

Despite sketchy claims made by powerful people, we know the data center boom underway is not building us any community-serving infrastructure. Our fight to reject it is a fight to determine for ourselves what is truly community-serving infrastructure.

This publication is a compilation of articles, graphics, and resources with the intent to inspire, inform, and empower you. Consider *Reboot* a gift, a prompt, a challenge, an invitation crafted to support you in your local fight.

Over the last year, our feeds have been flooded with news articles, reports, and essays on data centers and their growing push-back. It's impossible to keep up. We've had a hard time

sifting through the mass of information to find what is practically useful for our organizing campaigns. Quantity does not always equal quality. We also noticed most writing out there fails to center the perspectives of real grassroots anti-data center organizers. We think sharing stories directly from local people on the front lines of this fight can offer important lessons.



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Like you, the *Reboot* authors and editors feel a deep connection and responsibility to our communities in the places we are rooted. We have experienced the lying, the gaslighting, the financial sleight-of-hand, the political posturing, the secrecy,

and the insulting idea that opposing data centers makes us anti-tech extremists, or even domestic terrorists.

We are not anti-technology. In fact, we use technology every day. *Reboot* would not have come together without the suite of open source tools that allowed us to collaborate, coordinate, and connect across time zones.

Instead, we believe in technology that is made to serve people and communities, rather than surveil and extract from them. We think decisions about how technology is developed, who it serves, and where our data goes should not be left to an elite minority.

By sustaining our deep connection to place and to each other, we build up the strength necessary to combat forces that seek to divide, conquer, and control us. By scaling up, skilling up, and sharing out between and across struggles, we're growing an international movement against a global opponent.

Often times when a system crashes, the first thing it needs is a reboot. The current volatile moment calls us to collaborate in common cause for long-term community health. A reboot is coming and *Reboot* is here. Please share.

You can read and share *Reboot* online at:

letsgonetwork.org/reboot.



Want to contribute to future issues?

Have questions or comments?

Reach out to us at rebootpub@proton.me.

Two Movement Stories

Editors

🔥 A Success in Tucson, Arizona

Residents of Tucson, Arizona have been organizing against a data center project for the last year, via the No Desert Data-Center Coalition (NDDC). Tucson sits in the heart of the Sonoran desert, a unique landscape home to the iconic Saguaro cactus and an incredible range of flowering plants and wildlife. Creatures here, including humans, manage to thrive in the presence of very little water—and less every year.



Artwork by Maria Renée Johnson (@maria.reneej).

When the proposed data center "Project Blue" tried to annex into the city of Tucson, it faced a mass, grassroots resistance campaign. The developer had claimed annexation and city water were necessary for Project Blue's land sale, and the city's eventual rejection of annexation seemed like the end of the project. But the developer lied, and when annexation was denied, Project Blue just started to drill for water. The land sale went through, regional regulatory agencies were unresponsive, and the strategy of government advocacy was no longer working.

But the fight was not over. Neighbors living near the proposed site noticed water trucks arriving, branded with the logo of a

local "eco-friendly" mulch business, Tank's Green Stuff. Researchers uncovered that the owner of Tank's, Jason Tankersley, also owned a shell LLC which operated a private well. Pre-development dust suppression and the drilling itself both require water; and that water was coming from a private well with the same owner as a local "sustainable" retail business. A pressure campaign took shape.

On a Friday, NDDC put out an Instagram post explaining this connection. That weekend, the coalition called for a "phone zap"—a mass call-in campaign—to demand Tankersley drop the water contract. The phone zap was also shared internally with committed movement members via Signal chats.

While this was going on, a group of community members outside of NDDC held an "office demo" at one Tank's location, where they chanted and delivered a satirical open letter. By early Monday morning, the company had released a public statement announcing that Tankersley had suspended the water supply to Project Blue.

This story from Tucson highlights the value of creative pressure campaigns. It also highlights the kinds of power that organizing builds. The thousands of Instagram followers and many committed movement participants who first came together through the government advocacy efforts against Project Blue then pivoted toward a targeted pressure campaign. Long-term organizing builds power, regardless of the actions of official "decision-makers."

🔥 Red Butte Anti-Nuclear Protests

On the weekend of May 16–17, 200–300 people gathered near Red Butte, or Wii'i Gdwiisa, the origin place of the Havasupai people, to protest the Pinyon Plain Mine and its hauling operations. Located seven miles from the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, this single site produces most of the uranium mined in the United States. During the gathering, protestors blocked a hauling truck on its way to the uranium mine. Their actions carried on a struggle now nearly a century old.

Residents of this region have experienced uranium mining as a slow-burning health nightmare for generations. Throughout the many years, residents and miners, many of them Navajo/Diné, have experienced high rates of cancer and organ failure due to the radon gas, uranium dust, and poisoned groundwater from the mines. In the 50s, the US government studied these dangers for a decade without alerting the community. Families built their houses out of radioactive materials, and children swam in open-pit mines filled with radioactive rainwater.



Protestors blockading a uranium transport truck. Photo by *The Nuclear Register* (nukeresister.org).

Some local residents still vividly recall the Church Rock spill of 1979 when a neglected dam broke, releasing 94 million gallons of radioactive liquid and 1100 tons of uranium waste into a river, which surged 80 miles downstream into family farms and livestock pastures. In 1986, the Navajo Nation shut down uranium mining on their territory. Off-reservation mining has since slowed, but not stopped completely.

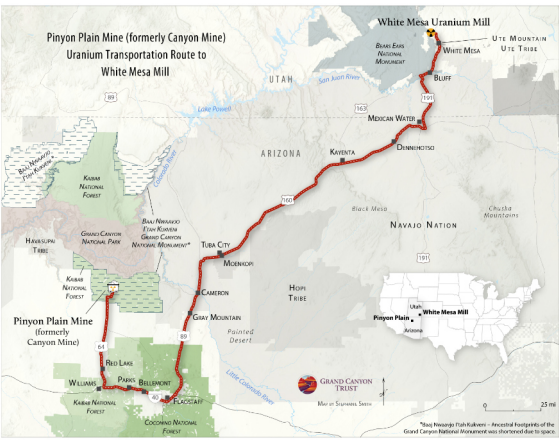
The Pinyon Plain Mine was initially approved for operation in 1986. Its above-ground infrastructure was constructed in the 1990s, but a 1992 crash in uranium prices caused the mine to be shut down before operations ever began. In 2012, the US Interior Secretary issued a 20-year moratorium on new mines near the Grand Canyon, but Pinyon Plain Mine was grandfathered in as an "existing right." In December 2023, Energy Fuels, Inc. began extractive operations at the mine for the first time in history. While the initial contract for re-opening

the mine was supposed to last 1–2 years, that has now been extended to 8–9 years. The struggle against Pinyon Plain Mine shows how Energy Fuels continues to persuade regulators to shift rules in their favor.

The 300-mile haul route from the Pinyon Plain Mine in the Kaibab National Forest to the White Mesa Uranium Mill poses a major threat to the surrounding ecosystems, waterways, and communities of people, plants, and animals. As many as 12 trucks per day travel directly through Navajo Nation and the Ute Mountain Reservation on the way to the Mill in White Mesa. Each of these trucks can carry up to 24 tons of raw ore, covered by nothing but a tarp. While Energy Fuels, the mine operator, is supposed to respect Navajo celebrations and ceremonies by pausing travel on these days, this agreement continues to be violated.

In recent years, the Biden and Trump administrations have both pushed to increase US nuclear production, and now data center mania has kicked the trend into overdrive. Proponents of new data centers claim their strain on our power grids can be addressed by reviving old nuclear plants and constructing facilities that are supposedly smaller and take less time to build. But the clever branding of “Small Modular Reactors” (SMRs)

conceals data centers’ massive power draw. Given the reality of data centers’ power use, these would effectively be full-sized reactors, placed in rural communities across America. Even more troubling, SMR technology doesn’t actually exist yet and likely won’t be available for at least another 20 years. The nuclear industry has promoted SMRs since the 1990’s, but the tech is still too expensive and slow to bring to market.



Map of uranium transportation route by Stephanie Smith, Grand Canyon Trust. July 21, 2025.

Six Data Center Myths

Editors

1. **Data centers are for your phones, your hospitals, your schools, and your daily life. They have to be built somewhere.**

Developers here keep taking politicians on tours of 90’s style tiny data centers, when they’re planning to build something completely different. The data center boom is not for the ‘cloud,’ or hospital data storage, or iPhone photos, or even running normal ChatGPT—it’s for training and operating next-generation AI models.

2. **Don’t worry, our data center will use closed-loop cooling.**

Closed-loop cooling keeps getting pitched as a cutting-edge technology, but it is the industry standard now. As for the waterless cooling and waterless methane fuel cells we’re starting to hear about, we’ll believe it when we see it, and wonder how they’re fracking gas without water.

We’ve learned to not trust anything these developers say. And there’s always something they’re ignoring. The problem with closed-loop cooling is that it uses less water, but more power, which requires water. Because power plants use so much water, grid-connected data centers in Texas ultimately consume 206 gallons per megawatt hour. So a 1 GW project uses 5 million gallons a day from electricity alone. And that’s about the same for onsite gas plants.

Closed-loop cooling also means they’re filling and flushing, and won’t tell anyone what they’re putting in the water before dumping it back in our waterways.

3. **Data centers make the energy grid more robust, and reduce the cost of electricity.**

Electrical grids can’t support demand from data centers, so new infrastructure is being built, paid for by ratepayers. And developers pitch the backup power generation as a benefit, but the number of diesel generators they’re planning to run and test regularly seems apocalyptic.

4. **Data centers are better for the environment than another huge housing development.**

Would you rather live by a data center or be eaten by a shark? This kind of trick distracts from the actual proposal on the table. And the argument that housing developments use more water than data centers ignores the water used for power



Photo credit: Dylan Baddour, Inside Climate News.

generation, not to mention the other harms.

5. **Data centers will produce lots of jobs.**

This is only true for a few years during construction. After that, the data centers we’ve heard of offer only a handful of jobs, mostly to janitors and security guards.

Some unions here have come out in support of data centers, trying to pit workers from the region against local affected residents. We don’t think that short-term jobs are worth the long-term impacts of data center development.

The danger of nuclear mining extends far beyond the Southwest. Nuclear waste is stored in 80 sites across 39 states. To this day, the only known way to “dispose” of nuclear waste is to bury contaminants underground for hundreds of thousands of years. Even if waste is buried, it is nearly impossible to guarantee the burial site will remain undisrupted for that long. Environmental laws are only put in place to mitigate risk, not to fully protect against disaster. Just two years ago, NBC News reported on a leak in Washington State, noting that historically, tens of millions of gallons of radioactive liquid have seeped from an old storage site into the surrounding soil and the Columbia river. This is just one of several leakage incidents at nuclear power and waste storage sites across rural America. Corporate PR might dismiss community health effects as the cost of progress, but with nuclear waste that cost is too high.

Supporters of nuclear power frame the technology as an inevitable necessity, but especially when used to power AI data centers, nuclear is clearly neither inevitable or necessary. Remembering the stories of the anti-nuclear movement can help us stand up to nuclear advocates who would rather forget, and stumble blindly into a disastrous future.

Why Are They Building All These Data Centers? A Brief History of the AI Boom

Sam Law

🔗 Introduction

We are living through an artificial intelligence (AI) data center boom. Across the United States, the largest tech corporations, fossil fuel companies, the biggest banks on Wall Street, and ordinary people’s retirement funds are pouring money into data center construction at a pace with few precedents in American history. The four biggest tech companies alone are on track to spend roughly \$750 billion on the AI infrastructure and data center buildout in 2026—up nearly 80 percent from the record they set the year before.

Relative to the size of the whole economy, the spending spree has already exceeded the late ‘90s dot-com bubble and is closing in on the railroad booms of the nineteenth century, making it the single largest investment in infrastructure in our lifetimes. By one widely cited calculation from the Harvard economist Jason Furman, the investment categories tied to the AI buildout accounted for 92 percent of all US economic growth in the first half of 2025. Take out spending related to data centers and the economy grew only one tenth of one percent, or basically not at all. This is why claims of economic growth feel so distant from most Americans’ everyday reality, where prices are rising faster than our wages. That reality is hidden in economic reports and politicians’ speeches that point to the economic growth driven by the AI data center boom, growth which only benefits big banks, tech companies, and a handful of private contractors.

Emblematic of the scale of this boom is Texas, which, thanks to rampant corruption, fossil fuel infrastructure, and lax regulation, is now the largest market for new proposed data centers. As of this summer, developers have asked to connect more than 438 gigawatts of new large-scale projects—almost all data centers—to the Texas grid. For perspective: the entire state has never drawn more than about 90 gigawatts, even on the most brutal summer day, the record for power demand across the entire United States set this July was 759 gigawatts.

They are proposing to build enough energy infrastructure to power five Texases. That’s equivalent to 2.5 times the total electricity used by every household in America. It’s unlikely that all of this will get built, but even just a fraction of what’s proposed means industrializing rural landscapes, building a massive amount of new power plants that will lock in decades of greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, and condemning future generations to long term consequences in the form of drought and catastrophic climate change.

🔗 They Are Buidling Data Centers For AI, Not You

Even if you don’t live in Texas, chances are they are planning a data center near you. That should worry you: data centers devour land, water, and power, and they arrive with higher electricity bills, health hazards, and a corrosive secrecy that eats away local democratic control over our communities’ futures. Facing this tsunami of development, many of us are left wondering: why now? What is driving the boom behind these data centers? Who are they for? And why has our entire economy become singularly dedicated to the buildout of this infrastructure, regardless of the needs of our communities?

There is a simple answer, and a more complicated one. The simple answer is what everyone already knows: it’s for artificial intelligence. Building and running new artificial intelligence requires an almost unthinkable amount of computing power, and more water and electricity than ever before. When communities push back, data center developers often make people feel like guilty hypocrites. They tell people, “You use

data centers every day: the movies you stream, the map apps you use, your email, your family photos—all of that lives in a data center. You wouldn’t want to give that up, would you?” These data center developers are lying to you.¹

The data centers they are building don’t have anything to do with the cloud-based services you’re accustomed to using on the internet. The internet as we know it runs just fine on data centers that already exist, which are focused on storage and serving data and are much smaller and less energy intensive. What they are building is a new form of data center specialized in the complex computation needed to train and run modern AI. Now for the slightly more complicated question: why do they need data centers for AI, and why are the wealthiest banks and corporations pouring so much money into them right now? To answer that, we need to understand more about the type of AI they are building.

🔗 From Academic Research to Business Plan

The new artificial intelligence technology behind ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude works by finding patterns and making predictions. These systems are fed almost unimaginable quantities of text and images, a large fraction of everything ever posted to the internet, and when this data is analyzed using complex mathematical modeling, the underlying statistical relations can be learned. This produces the “large language models” that themselves contain all these relations: which words tend to follow which and what a good answer looks like.

The basic ideas underlying this technology are relatively old. Neural networks—predictive programs loosely inspired by the brain—date back to the 1950s. The method for training them, called back-propagation, was developed in the 1980s. For decades, however, this technology was more of an academic curiosity, and leading researchers were skeptical it would actually result in useful forms of artificial intelligence. Then, within a few years, two breakthroughs transformed the technology into the cutting edge of AI research and the object of the largest corporate spending spree in modern history.

🔗 The Chips Inside the Data Centers

The first breakthrough came in 2017 when researchers at Google published a paper called “Attention Is All You Need.” Earlier AI machine learning read text similar to how you’re reading this sentence right now, in order, each step waiting on the one before. This was incredibly slow. Google’s invention—called the transformer—lets a machine absorb an entire passage at once and find, for every word, which other words it should “pay attention” to. Training could now be split up into millions of small pieces and run simultaneously, across thousands of different computer chips at once. This allowed the process to be rapidly scaled.

Those chips are worth a brief detour, because they are what fill these AI data centers. Training and running the AI models comes down to arithmetic: multiplying enormous grids of numbers together in an operation called matrix multiplication. AI requires billions upon billions of these operations. In the early 2010s, some researchers realized that the computer chips optimized for rendering graphics on video games, called GPUs, were freakishly better at these AI-specific calculations than the regular chips used for most computation.

Today, this has transformed the video game chip company NVIDIA into the most valuable company on earth, with an estimated value of five trillion dollars. TSMC, the Taiwanese

company that makes these AI chips, is now one of the most strategically important companies in geopolitics. As factories that once made chips for consumer electronic devices are shifting their focus to the more profitable production of chips for AI data centers, the cost of laptops and cellphones is spiking dramatically. These specialized chips make it clear what new data centers are for. A warehouse filled with tens of thousands of specialized GPUs, consuming the same amount of power as a medium-sized city and astronomical amounts of water to prevent the chips from melting, has only one purpose. These are industrial facilities dedicated to the mathematical operations that power AI, not to stream your movies, run the websites you use everyday, or store your family photos.

🔗 The Race to Superintelligence

The second breakthrough that led to the modern AI boom was a paper by researchers at OpenAI, the company that would later create ChatGPT. Published in January 2020, “Scaling Laws for Neural Language Models” showed that AI improves predictably as you increase the size of the model, the amount of data it is fed, and the computing power used to train it. The gains in intelligence seemed to follow a smooth curve you could plot in advance, in effect turning a massive scientific problem into a business plan. Hiring the smartest people was no longer the best way to develop AI. Whoever bought the most chips, built the most data centers, and burned the most electricity could have the most powerful AI.

For those developing artificial intelligence, this powerful AI is quite literally the gold at the end of the rainbow. So-called “Artificial General Intelligence” is an AI so powerful it can perform any intellectual task the same or better than any human, whether that is mundane office work, writing an essay like this one, programming computers, or undertaking research in math or science. As Anthropic’s Dario Amadeo put it, AGI would be like having his own “country of geniuses in a data center.”



We do not have to accept the dystopian future the data center developers, blinded by their fantasies of profit and power, are building for us. Instead, we can fight for a future we want.



The first company to develop such an AI or have the data centers to run one would hypothetically be able to fulfill a long running science fiction fantasy: to replace human ingenuity and labor with machines.² Doing so would make whoever controlled this AI unimaginably wealthy and powerful, a fantasy that, as we see, has driven the world’s most wealthy corporations into a spending frenzy that has no recent historical precedent. Since OpenAI published the scaling laws that said all you need to make a stronger AI is more compute, the race to build the most powerful AI became a race to build the most data centers.

The players in this race are the companies that already run the internet’s infrastructure—Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and

Meta, known in the industry as “hyperscalers” for the sheer scale of their data center empires—and well-funded new AI labs like Anthropic and OpenAI that can raise enough money to rent or build their own. The costs involved in developing and training AI exploded, roughly tracking the industry’s growing need for the computation AI data centers perform. In 2020, training GPT-3 cost a few million dollars; today a single training run costs hundreds of millions, and industry leaders like Dario Amodei at Anthropic say multi-billion-dollar runs are next. That means entire buildings, often more than a square mile in size, buzzing for months as their chips perform trillions of calculations, guzzling astronomical sums of water and power.

Training costs aren’t the only thing spiraling out of control. The newest models “think” before they answer, burning far more computation on every question a user asks. So the more the world uses AI, the more data centers it takes. And since each company is rushing to be first to develop the powerful AI, the frantic scramble has taken on a name of its own: the AI race.

🔥 The Gold Rush

The AI race is a modern-day gold rush, a veritable frenzy of people trying to make as much money as quickly as they can. Just like Levi Strauss made money during the original gold rush by selling shovels and blue jeans, today’s speculators are cashing in by trying to build data centers. These aren’t just the big tech companies. Fossil fuel companies, facing the rise of renewables and a transition to clean energy, see in the massive power needs of data centers a way to keep the American economy hooked on dirty fuels, in particular fracked gas.

Local land speculators, developers, and real estate magnates make use of widespread political corruption to buy rural land cheap, quickly get environmental and water permits without public review, and then sell this package of land and data center permits to the highest bidder. And big banks and investment

firms are pouring money into data center projects using complex forms of financing that have many experts warning of a 2008-style economic crash.

🔥 Pulling the Emergency Brake

Driven by hype and sci-fi promises, the data center construction boom has all the signs of being a massive bubble. The continued construction of data centers requires endless rounds of fundraising, and AI companies are relying on ever more sketchy forms of financing. Eventually the bills won’t be able to be paid, and this boom will come crashing down, leaving everyday people holding the bill—stuck with new dirty fossil fuel infrastructure, generational loss of our water, deep impacts on community health, higher energy prices, and more. This is despite none of us agreeing that this is the future we wanted. Indeed, some of the most profitable uses of AI seem to be directly opposed to our own interests, whether that is new forms of AI-powered mass surveillance like Flock cameras or the autonomous drones waging unpopular wars.

The AI race is like a runaway train, an out of control frenzy driven by people deluded by their own sci-fi dreams and fantasies of immense wealth. They don’t care about what will get destroyed on the way. It is up to us to pull the emergency brake—to demand a vision of the future and technological progress that puts human needs over the greed of the wealthy. Fortunately, opportunities to pull the brakes exist everywhere a data center project is being developed.

Data centers are not necessary, they are not critical infrastructure, and the future they promise is a dystopia we do not want. Across the country, a data center rebellion is already underway. From the Appalachian foothills of Pennsylvania to the Texas Hill Country, from the farm townships of the Upper Midwest to California’s Imperial Valley, communities are getting organized and fighting back. These local fights playing

out in rowdy town halls, crowded public hearings, and packed meetings in church basements and VFW halls show that we can win. Proposed data centers have been defeated, and more than five hundred communities have banned or enacted moratoria against new data center construction.

When our communities organize to defend the places we live, we are more powerful than the fossil fuel companies, tech billionaires, and land speculators trying to cash in on this gold rush. We do not have to accept the dystopian future that data center developers, blinded by their fantasies of profit and power, are building for us. Instead, we can fight for a future we want. Our future can be one where our land, water, and the health of future generations is not auctioned off behind closed doors to the highest bidder, a future in which our collective life is organized around the conditions that allow people, communities, and the living world to flourish.

🔥 Notes

1. In Texas, the data center industry has taken out a series of misleading billboards and newspaper ads linking to a website called Texas Connects that touts the supposed benefits of data centers, including making video calls, storing medical data, enabling internet connected medical devices, and allowing for “seamless streaming, sharing and downloading of content.” This is designed to deliberately confuse and mislead the public into thinking that the AI data centers being built have anything to do with the cloud computing services they use on a regular basis. They do not.
2. This fantasy of transcending our limits through technology and replacing human labor has a long history. The word “robot” was coined in a science fiction play published in 1920 entitled Rossum’s Universal Robots, about a future where machines replaced humans, freeing them from drudgery and toil. In the story, the robots revolt and overthrow humanity. The story echoes tales around the world that warn humanity about the risk of our own technological ambitions and the dangers of trying to create our own replacement: from Frankenstein and stories of the Golem, where the artificial creation turns against their creator; the Tower of Babel, where ambition leads to catastrophe; Prometheus condemned by the Greek gods to an eternity of torment for stealing divine fire; to the K’iche’ Maya tale in the Popol Vuh in which wooden people created in humanity’s image ultimately lack the understanding and care of humans they were meant to replace. That such caution reoccurs in the tales humans have told themselves across centuries and cultures should alone give us pause.

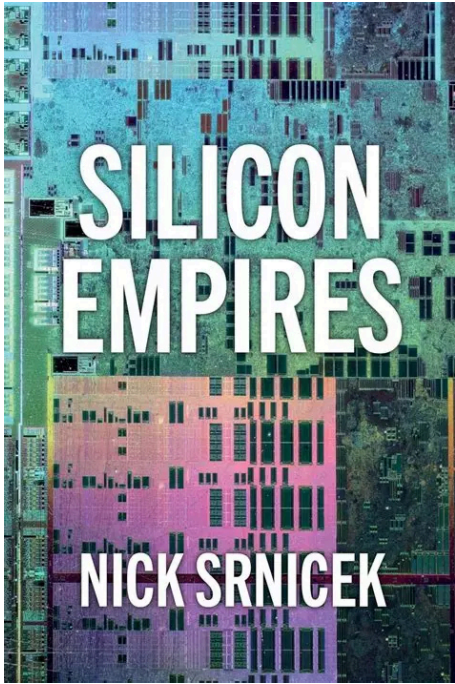
normally discuss politics with, opportunities are arising for interesting new conversations. And by connecting AI and race with historical precision, the film offers a useful antidote to Americans’ frequently blurry approach to anti-racism.

AGI’s undisputably eugenicist origins contextualize issues at the faultlines of the data center movement’s fragile post-

Review: Silicon Empires by Nick Srnicek

Gabriella Chronis

Silicon Empires: The Fight for the Future of AI (2026) by Nick Srnicek (author of *Platform Capitalism*). Polity.



The question Nick Srnicek tries to answer with *Silicon Empires* is, “what form will AI superpower take?” What this book offers us as protagonists in struggles against data centers is information as ammunition. It empowers us to counter the primary myths that data center developers rely on and offers an understanding of which corporate actors have the most power, how they are allied, and where they are in conflict. The basic story he tells is how the “Silicon Valley consensus”—an era of unregulated growth of Big Tech, where US financial policy served global financial interests—is giving way to a new tech-industrial complex where AI progress is inseparable from an empire-building political project.

The first chapter is a good primer on what AI (a.k.a. large language models or LLMs) is and how it works. This chapter is skippable if you already have a baseline understanding of LLMs. The rest of the book organizes the overwhelming stream of AI news into straightforward explanations of the economic structures, alliances, and flows forming around this new “General Purpose Technology.”

Chapter 2 covers four strategies for how different firms seek to profit at different layers in the “AI stack”—AI model research and development, software integrations, and physical infrastructure. Google is making integrated systems for specific industries with the aim of becoming the de facto provider for entire sectors like education or materials science. Amazon is concentrating on infrastructure, aiming to control cloud computing by encouraging platform lock-in, where other companies (including AI companies) design their systems to work only on Amazon servers. The few companies that work on LLM research and development, like OpenAI and Anthropic, concentrate on finding the “best” models, by searching through all possible combinations of parameters.

A few powerful actors control the game, especially at the infrastructure level. The Silicon Valley consensus has meant that US policy has protected Big Tech from anti-trust litigation. Now, these companies have the power to heavily influence the market. Even though US policy towards Big Tech monopolies continues to be lax, these companies still use

culture-war consensus. How will the rising mass critique of surveillance intersect with ICE’s use of AI to target immigrants—or with the legal system’s obsession with mentally ill, social deviants, and non-white populations, in the long-standing eugenicist tradition?

The strange new coalitions of the data center movement offer

strategies to dodge potential anti-trust scrutiny. One such strategy is to hire all of the major talent from a small startup and then shut the company down without acquiring it.

This chapter answers the question of who is making money from AI. From model to software to servers to microchips, “value concentrates up the chain”: infrastructure (computing hardware, and the cloud service providers like AWS that provision it) is far and away more profitable than AI model or application development. In fact, AI developers like OpenAI and Anthropic still operate at a loss; their biggest investors are cloud infrastructure companies like Amazon and Microsoft. These cloud providers rent out their server space to other businesses, who operate platforms without owning and operating their own servers. Cloud companies are investing in AI to ensure that whichever model gets used the most by the public, whether Claude or ChatGPT or Grok, ends up running on their servers, thereby securing server rent. For example, Microsoft’s massive investments in OpenAI ensure that if ChatGPT is widely adopted, Microsoft will reap the benefits in the form of rent extracted from OpenAI. Microsoft’s investments also tip the scales in favor of their horse in the race.

Meanwhile, smaller AI companies without Big Tech investment money are dropping out of developing new models because it is so expensive to do. Despite apparent competition, the AI boom is actually strengthening existing tech monopolies that grew out of the Silicon Valley consensus.

Data centers operate as landlords. By focusing on where the money is made in AI, our movement has already put Srnicek’s analysis into action. He explains why this intuition is correct.



Rapid AI development is indeed being driven by user demand. However, the “users” of AI are not the public but rather data centers themselves. Data centers are not being built in response to an increased demand for compute.



This analysis also reveals that the industry is being driven not by user demand at the bottom of the chain but by speculative finance at the top. Rapid AI development is indeed being driven by user demand. However, the “users” of AI are not the public but rather data centers themselves. Data centers are not being built in response to an increased demand for compute. Rather, by subsidizing unprofitable AI companies, the AI cloud providers are manufacturing demand for the massive amounts of compute they are bringing online with new data centers. The real demand for AI is from all the new servers in need of customers. In other words, the actual driver of AI development is supply-push from the computer-landlords rather than demand-pull driven by the code’s benefits.

the possibility for new conversations. What will we make of that potential? Only time will tell. For our part, we have found *Ghost in the Machine* to be an invaluable tool for sparking critical dialogues in our respective organizing communities, and we invite you to contact the filmmakers at ghostinthemachine2026@gmail.com to coordinate screenings of your own!

Chapter 3, “Interregnum,” maps the transformation of this consensus as the industry allies with new nationalist projects. Srnicek slots specific US government policies into a larger trend away from the interests of global finance towards more nationally focused growth. He illustrates that the reason we “need” gigawatts is not for diffuse human benefit, not to meet the future that arrives no matter what, but to win a rent extraction race where it’s the stock-less, and the global south paying the rent.

Chapter 4 offers a long view of the data center boom and geopolitics. It deconstructs the myth that the US and China are locked in an AI arms race: only the US approach to AI prioritizes pushing the absolute technological capabilities via private capital, centralized mega-compute infrastructure, and market-driven models. The purported arms race is almost exclusively between American companies: OpenAI, Google, xAI, Microsoft, Amazon, Oracle, and Meta, with Alibaba as the lone Chinese exception. China’s approach, on the other hand, emphasizes broad economic integration, decentralized application, support for open architectures, and public-sector adoption.

China differs significantly from the US in its AI strategy, pursuing diffusion first (widespread adoption) rather than innovation. This strategy is driven in part by necessity: China is more constrained in its access to natural resources.

The US and China are in competition. Not a competition to create the most cutting edge technology, but a competition for global platform dominance, that will be determined by which power can exert the most global influence through AI. Both the US and China are working to encourage other nations to use their infrastructure, with the aim of making entire nations technologically reliant on them.

Where the old status quo empowered global capital to make whatever alliances were most profitable, the US now encourages domestic self-sufficiency. Not all tech companies are equally supportive of the US’ new foreign policy. The narrative of the US-China arms race is pushed especially hard by newer defense tech companies and AI model companies that profit handsomely from increased tensions and conflict between the two nations.

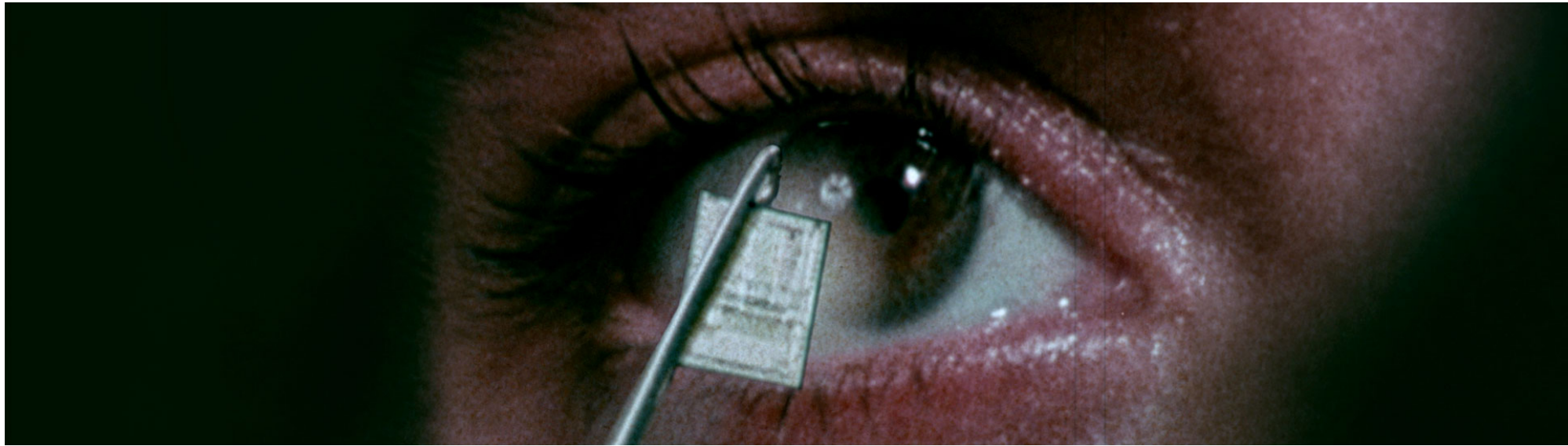
Though he never says it outright, the suggestion is that the US race for cutting edge technological innovation will ultimately fail as a strategy for global influence. More concretely, the data center buildup is less a natural consequence of social progress than it is a physical manifestation of the US government’s policy of being the biggest bully on the world stage.

Srnicek is restrained in weighing in on who will win, instead putting the evidence in front of the reader and letting us connect the dots. One of Srnicek’s strongest points is that historically, what he calls “general purpose technologies” (GPTs) impact global power hierarchies by widespread adoption of technologies (like electricity), rather than initial invention. (GPTs, like electricity and steam engines, are a useful concept from economics with a now confusingly overloaded acronym. The GPT in ChatGPT is different, standing for “Generative Pretrained Transformer”).

Srnicek reminds us that the data center movement must be a global fight in addition to a local struggle. All our struggles are connected: a fight against a data center anywhere is a fight against data centers everywhere.

Review: Ghost in the Machine by Valerie Veatch

Editors



Ghost in the Machine (2026) by Valerie Veatch. <https://notaidoc.com/>.



The film *Ghost in the Machine* (2026) unearths a surprising history of artificial general intelligence, commonly known as AGI. In a dense, wide-ranging series of interviews with activists and academics, the filmmakers trace the long history of AI hype.

The fantasy of AGI and ASI, artificial super intelligence, is at the core of the sales pitch behind AI development. Data center construction, according to the hype, brings us closer to “the

singularity”—the moment when computers don’t just outperform humans on thing like programming or mathematics, but become as smart, or smarter, than humans “in general.” But what is “general intelligence”?

The film reveals that the ‘G’ in AGI derives directly from the “g factor,” a concept invented in the early 1900s by the eugenics movement. Eugenics (etymologically, “good genetics”) is a white supremacist movement created by upper-class British and Anglo-Americans to “measure intelligence” in order to justify and strengthen their pre-existing belief in their own moral and intellectual superiority.

The film traces the Holocaust, the systematic sorting and selective elimination of the German population, back to the Nazis’ original inspiration: the American eugenics movement.

This movement’s enduring legacy is visible today through IQ, standardized testing, the concept of general intelligence, and its modern iteration, AGI.

The academic voices driving the film offer a range of historical and contemporary critiques of AI technology. And while this is perhaps more of an issue with academia than the filmmakers, at times the contributions feel abstract and out-of-touch. Backgrounded by dramatic music, the film closes by encouraging viewers to simply limit their personal AI use—an oddly disempowering conclusion in an era of mass data center resistance.

Regardless, *Ghost in the Machine* is a valuable contribution to the movement. As people from across the political spectrum find themselves organizing alongside people they wouldn’t

New to the Fight? What to Expect.

Report-Back From San Marcos, Texas



Residents who can't fit in the city hall chambers gather during a data center vote, many waiting to speak. Photo credit: Leila Saidane, The Texas Tribune.

🔥 Introduction

San Marcos lies in a zone of natural springs stretching from Austin southward, and west past San Antonio. These are ancient headwaters that flow all the way to the Gulf. At the river's source, people have gathered for thousands of years.

Today, the city's river parks—full of turtles, wild rice, and the rare otter—are beloved by residents, who hold a deep reverence for this land and water. Amid the rapidly urbanizing San Antonio-Austin corridor, the surrounding rural land remains home to multi-generational farms and ranches. This is a special place—and like so many other places in this country, threatened by a surge of proposed AI data centers.

The fight began when neighbors of a proposed site noticed a fallen-down notice for a new development, on what was still a large working farm and ranch. They discovered it was set to be a hyperscale AI data center, alerted their neighbors, and organized a protest. On the road, in front of cattle grazing by the creek, they stopped cars as they drove by, and told them about the developers' plans.

A few people from town heard about the protest, and went out to meet the neighbors, forming connections which eventually grew into a powerful local movement. A year and a half later, we have defeated two data centers, and are on track to defeat two more. We've developed and spread organizing strategies, set legal precedent, and built working relationships across the region, with the goal of contributing to a mass movement against AI and data center development. We wrote this to share some of what we've learned, to support others organizing in their own communities.

🔥 What to Expect

By the time you find out about a project, the developer or their spokespeople will have talking points about the project. If they want something from local authorities, like zoning approval or tax abatements, they'll have already spoken to decision-makers before you ever learn about the project. And because data centers don't provide significant local benefits, developers have to rely on lies to sell these projects.

When we started a year and a half ago, the community and government officials were vulnerable to those lies. People knew

very little about the effects of the proposed data centers, or what the data centers even were. Education continues to be a major focus for us.

Developers and industry-aligned officials often think that they are smarter than people in the community. Education gives people the confidence to stand up to this disempowering condescension, and to be brave enough to apply real pressure. To help build that confidence, we're always writing new educational materials, or adapting existing ones, and sharing them in new places and new ways—so that we can reach as many different people as possible.

We've never experienced a social movement that is so widespread, across so many kinds of people. We think this is where power is—not in the decisions of government officials, or specific moments of success or failure—but rather the practice of so many people gathering and working together.

🔥 Strategic Research

Our focus right now is organizing to slow or stop specific proposed projects in our region. Getting good information about these projects has been a challenge.

If you're getting started, it might be really hard to find out who is even behind a project. A lot of facts might be hidden behind Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs), or private meetings with government staff and officials, and the truth is that developers themselves might not even know the basics. They might be land brokers, setting up land to sell to a developer, who will sell to an operator, who will rent computer capacity to another company. Any of these people might speak as if they have it all figured out, but often we've found they're either lying or constantly changing plans.

We've seen two types of characters serving as spokespeople for a project. There are the long-time data center industry professionals, who might be surprisingly sheepish and unprepared for widespread pushback. Then there are development-savvy speculators, who know almost nothing about data centers and are trying out a new venture—or just flipping the land for someone else to build on. Either way, it's important to note when they're skipping over critical information, and where we can make those gaps clear. For example, after months of public meetings, public pressure

forced one developer to admit he wanted to use over five times the power of the entire city.

We learn new information in a variety of ways. We've learned a surprising amount of intel through the grapevine, just from talking to people. Some people in our organizing group have lived in the area their whole lives, and get told all sorts of things that aren't public knowledge.

We also use public records requests, various online information and other sleuthing to discover basic facts and track developers' plans. We try to stay on top of the status of permits, water sourcing, expiration dates of land purchase contracts, and other strategically relevant details.

Through public records requests, we continually find juicy communication that contradicts public narratives, or reveals scandalous and illegal behavior. Public records requests also reveal basic information, like the size of a project, its exact location, and the individuals and contractors involved.

We also have to understand the context of developers' plans—things like county laws, water rights, or electric grid interconnection and power transmission. We either find trustworthy experts or become those experts ourselves, always sharing with others, in plain language, what we learn.

🔥 Pressure Campaigns

All of this research helps us determine strategic targets for pressure campaigns. It helps the community feel oriented, not overwhelmed, and ready to fight.

Fight who? With limited time and energy, and the quick pace of these developments, it's important to focus on practical strategic approaches. The most direct way to stop a project is through permits and zoning, but most data centers in Texas are in county areas with no restrictive permit or zoning authority, and relevant state agencies are no help. Many peoples' instinct is to petition or write letters to state representatives begging for support, and hope that state laws and regulations will emerge in time to stop projects. We've found that a more promising path is working to pressure local targets, who both live here and have direct, immediate power to interfere with development.

We're interested in choosing targets that can either stop or slow development. We say that 'slowing is stopping'—whether or not the AI bubble pops suddenly, we expect data center investment will stall as investors acknowledge that overhyped AI products are not giving them the promised return on investment. We don't have to fight a project forever, only until investors decide that the additional costs from the slowed pace aren't worth it.

Whether our goal is slowing or stopping, when we choose which target to pressure, we ask three questions.

1. First, we determine if they can interfere with a specific project. A good target needs to have access to some specific power or process that will slow or stop a development.
2. Second, we ask if they would slow or stop development: how invested are they in the project? A developer could choose to stop pursuing a project, or a general contractor could walk away, but there are investments, profits, and contracts that make that unlikely in most cases.
3. Third, we ask how much influence we have on the target. A distant politician or an out-of-state developer is insulated in ways a local official is not. Especially in small towns, it can be empowering to think about the social world that people are accountable to.

All sorts of people have power over the pace and success of a data center project, and pressure can look different ways. Sometimes it looks like focused, private conversations. Multiple landowners, with gentle, private encouragement, have refused to sell key tracts, and some have been persuaded to let their active contracts with data center developers expire.



At the beginning of a long evening of public comment, residents show off signs made the weekend before at a community art event.

Right now, we're mostly focused on pressuring small volunteer water boards to deny data center connections. Often the most effective pressure here is supportive collaboration and polite mass presence—especially because we've already worked for months to get sympathetic people elected to the board. But it's important to remain creative when we imagine what it will take to win.

One data center proposal here was canceled after a year of pressuring a city council, and near the end, the meetings were getting out of control. People were being thrown out for being disruptive, and the lobby was packed shoulder to shoulder with a cheering crowd. In case the vote failed, we were making plans for how we could, with as many people as possible, shut the whole meeting down.

Even the most boring activities can be made new. A homeschooling collective here brings pop up tents, and homemade drinks and snacks, to all the major government meetings. At the largest meetings, we've had cookouts, dance parties, and a sort of music festival atmosphere. Government meetings almost seem designed to drain our energy. We strive to make sure every activity gives us more energy, and brings in more people.



A data center developer, center, and his lawyer, left, at the moment their project, after a year, is finally rejected. Photo credit: Lucas Kraft.

Energy is always limited, and focus is important. Whatever we do, we ask ourselves:

1. Is this the best use of our energy right now, to move us toward our goal?
2. Will this realistically influence the targets we've chosen toward the action we want them to take?
3. And are there ways to shift the tone of an activity, or our narrative around it, to more effectively bring people together?

Many allies are not who we initially expected. Supposedly helpful non-profits might talk the talk, but collaborate with industry to plan 'sustainable' data centers and introduce 'harm reduction' regulations. Politicians stepping in as saviors are often just fishing for votes, making big promises they don't intend to keep, or passing resolutions that look good until you read the fine print.

On the other hand, we've found surprising allies in people who aren't necessarily political, or who are political in ways that would ordinarily pit us against them. The data center movement cuts across subcultures and political ideologies. And this makes mass pressure possible in ways it normally isn't.

Coming together isn't easy. Having efficient, effective meetings, especially in larger groups, is still a work in progress. Another issue with large groups is the potential for infighting. We try to keep our 'arrows pointed at the target,' aiming our hostility at data center developers, not each other. And always, getting along is easier if we are comfortable splitting up as needed to take different approaches, while still supporting each other and communicating toward a shared strategy.

🔥 Why We Think We Are Winning

These projects are more fragile than they pretend to be. There are a lot of pieces that need to come together for them to succeed. For each site fight, we stay focused on the most likely failure point, but develop backup plans as well, just in case. We are ready to adapt as we receive new information.

When we started, most people saw these projects as inevitable,

but our successes and information campaign have led to a shift in that mentality. People in the community have been changed, and together we're starting to learn what it feels like to be part of a collective force. It can be a rare experience in our culture.

Over time, people have learned more about the harms of data centers, and are more willing to take a stand against them. People are more willing to stretch their comfort limits, and be brave. For many, even standing up and speaking can be frightening. Joining a meeting and trying to contribute can be frightening. Some of our movement spokespeople never would have expected to do the kind of public speaking they now do regularly. All of us, in different ways, have grown.

One of the main reasons we're winning, on a deeper level, is because our enemies haven't succeeded in pitting some parts of the movement against others. In the midst of the culture wars, this is remarkable. No matter what happens now, we're building a collective community force. And the relationships and skills we're building will be useful for whatever comes next.

🔥 What's Next?

Huge data center projects are proposed across our region, often in communities who are just now beginning to organize against them. We're working to share our practices to help new groups get started. This means taking ourselves seriously as people who have something to teach.

It's hard to be confident about how to approach things, because the situation is constantly changing. One major change is the sudden swell of Texas state politicians speaking in support to the movement. We don't trust them, and we're worried that people will take politicians' words in good faith, drawing energy away from local organizing with promises of state or federal legislation in some distant future.

This movement is growing, and it's up to all of us how it grows. For our part, we're less excited to spend our time and attention exchanging our power for promises from the government, and more focused on continuing to grow that power. This means strengthening our communication and coordination with others in the movement. This is why we are writing this, and sharing it with you. We are all in this together.

Understanding the Luddites in the Age of AI

Brian Merchant

“Luddite.” The word’s been circulating a lot lately, as investment in AI has reached historic heights, chatbots and enterprise AI have pervaded daily life, and more and more people have been speaking up about the drawbacks and dangers of the technology and the firms behind it.

“Luddite.” You may have heard the word used to describe AI critics, aggrieved workers, data center protestors, or those who advocate reining in AI companies, regulating their products, or putting checks on their power.

Its meaning, in these cases, is clear: It’s an insult. A Luddite is supposed to be anti-technology, naive, backwards, anti-progress.

And, surprise, the AI products enforce the idea. Here’s how ChatGPT defines it, when prompted: “A Luddite is a person who is opposed to, distrustful of, or reluctant to use new technology.”

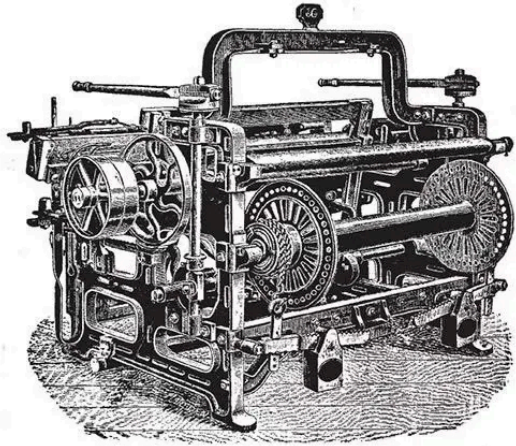
Here’s Google: “A Luddite is a term for someone who is opposed to or resistant to new technologies, especially automation and computerization.”

Now, these AI-generated responses do reflect how the Luddites are commonly understood today. After all, large language models draw their responses from the inputs they’ve been trained on, and a lot of writing over the last two centuries has sought to define a ‘Luddite’ the way the chatbots do now.

But the pundits and the chatbots all get it wrong: The real Luddites—the machine breakers who rose up at the dawn of the first Industrial Revolution to smash the looms and wide frames that factory owners were using to automate their labor—were not opposed to technology. They were opposed to the way technology was being used against them. That is, the Luddites objected to the industrialists who used machinery to depress wages, evade labor laws, and degrade the quality of products in order to profit *at their expense*.

It was, and remains, an eminently reasonable objection. The real Luddites were not know-nothing technophobes, despite their current reputation, and they certainly did not hate technology. In fact, many were technicians themselves, and understood better than most exactly how a technology would be used to exploit them. It was the rational and just thing to do, to object to the use of industrialist machinery to reshape their working lives and their communities.

Not only that, but their objections were informed, popular, and, for a time, effective. The Luddites organized a tactical rebellion that terrified elites and won the favor of the working class. People cheered them in the streets; hymns were sung about them in pubs. Lord Byron wrote poems about them. For a few years, they were more beloved than Robin Hood.



If we are to truly understand the impacts of mass automation technologies like AI, and why there’s a vociferous and fast-growing backlash to it, then it’s crucial that we rethink our dismissal of the Luddites. We must understand their actual history; why they turned to machine breaking and what they really fought for.

After all, we now sit on the precipice of a moment where backlash to a mass automation technology threatens to boil over again.

So who were the real Luddites? To understand them properly, we need a little background first.



The real Luddites—the machine breakers who rose up at the dawn of the first Industrial Revolution to smash the looms and wide frames that factory owners were using to automate their labor—were not opposed to technology. They were opposed to the way technology was being used against them.



In the 1700s and early 1800s, clothworkers constituted the largest industrial workforce in England apart from agriculture. Hundreds of thousands of people were employed, from Nottingham to Leeds to Manchester, as knitters, weavers, croppers, and spinners.

These clothworkers largely worked under what’s known as the domestic system; the artisans worked at home or in small shops, alongside their families or peers. Most were what we would describe today as working or middle class. They were not particularly wealthy or prosperous, and times could be lean if demand for cloth goods shifted, but many owned cottages, worked 30-hour workweeks, and had the autonomy to organize their workdays as they saw fit. They were free to sing songs at the loom as they worked with their families, or to take breaks to walk in the garden. Others labored in local shops with friends and colleagues they’d known all their lives. These were the days of the original “cottage industry,” and, in fact, it’s where the term hails from.

As the Industrial Revolution dawned, the early entrepreneurs began using automated machinery to speed up the labor process, and to organize production into the first factories. These machines, like the spinning jenny, the wide frame, the gig mill, and later the power loom, enabled factory owners to pursue mass production. The machines did not improve the quality of the product, and rather, often dramatically diminished it. But the more automated machinery could be overseen by untrained workers, so they reduced labor costs, even though this practice was often illegal: There were standards and laws that governed the cloth trade, that regulated things like thread count and product quality, as well as how long a worker had to serve as an apprentice before they could join the trade. Industrialists largely ignored these laws, in an early iteration of the ‘Move Fast and Break Things’ ethos popularized by Facebook in our time.

By employing a host of cheaper, untrained laborers, which often included children indentured from orphanages and poor families, and focusing on volume, not quality, the industrialist could drive down prices, corner markets and run skilled workers out of business.

As the 18th century wound down and the 19th began, the wages for clothworkers and artisans were plummeting. Early factory owners were concentrating wealth and power, enabling

them to institute punishing working conditions and policies like paying workers in truck, or in goods produced by the factory, rather than money.

Clothworkers, their wages in free fall, organized a campaign to push Parliament to address their concerns: They asked for protections like a minimum wage, a ban on paying workers in truck, and for factory owners to simply follow the laws that were already on the books. Some also submitted novel proposals, like taxing the extra length of cloth produced by automated machinery, and using the proceeds to fund welfare and training programs for workers—proposals that look a lot like ‘robot taxes’ suggested today. Tens of thousands of clothworkers signed petitions calling for basic worker protections.

You may already have guessed what happened next: They were roundly ignored.

It’s important to underline this point. For nearly ten straight years, for much of the first decade of the 1800s, cloth workers tried to protest and petition peaceably, to do things “the right way”, even though their options for recourse were severely limited. Unionizing, or ‘combining’, was illegal in England at the time, so they couldn’t collectively bargain. There was no true democracy, no elected officials to hold accountable for allowing exploitation to continue unabated.

Eventually Parliament sided with the factory owners and threw out the remaining regulations governing the trade altogether. With thousands of workers impoverished to the point that they could not feed their families, and their backs against the wall, the Luddites rose up.



In Nottingham, in 1811, and drawing from a local tradition of dissent and, almost certainly, from the legend of Robin Hood, clothworkers who could bear no more launched a campaign targeting the worst offenders, those industrialists who paid the lowest wages and abused workers the most. They organized under the banner of Ned Ludd, an almost certainly fictitious avatar said to be an apprentice cloth worker. The legend went that Ned’s master had him whipped for being unproductive, so he smashed the master’s frames and fled into Sherwood forest.

The Luddites wrote letters to factory bosses warning them to take down the ‘obnoxious’ machines that had stolen the bread from their brothers’ mouths. If they didn’t, Ned Ludd’s army showed up: a handful, dozens or even hundreds of men, organized in military formation, answering by assigned numbers, not names. They would sneak in through the windows or hold up the overseer at gunpoint, and methodically smash just those machines that were deskilling their work; just the ones being used to tear up the social contract. They left the machines that were not being used to, say, automate their jobs or facilitate child labor, alone. But they would exit with a warning; bring them back, and we’ll return to do the whole place.

They were remarkably successful, for a time. After the initial outbreak of Luddism, factory bosses initially raised wages and negotiated deals with the workers, eager to protect their operations. They became heroes to many fellow workers, for fighting back against factorization and exploitation, for standing up to the powerful. When authorities demanded names of the Luddites per-petrating the machine-breaking, whole towns would stay silent; even when huge bounties were offered, no one came forward.

Ultimately, Luddism didn’t fizzle out because it was unpopular; it was crushed by the state. The Prince Regent’s government deployed thousands of troops to the industrial districts alight with Luddite activity. It was the biggest domestic occupation in British history. Parliament passed laws that made it a capital crime to break a machine, or to take secret oaths, essentially making being a Luddite a crime punishable by death. (Lord Byron made his first speech to the house of Lords in a thunderous defense of the Luddites, but was ignored by his peers, if not the public.)

As a result, scores of Luddites were hung by the state, and many others were killed in riots and raids as the factory owners grew emboldened to take up arms against them. Luddism died out by the end of the 1810s, but not before it helped to inspire Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, a new generation of labor

With Friends Like These: LLMs & Anti-Sociality

Matt E. M. Bower

Much of the chatter about the new tech powering tools like OpenAI’s ChatGPT presents it in terms of wondrous or awful events to come. But this framing is misleading. No one can chart a path from the present to these imaginary futures, while most of us have already experienced the impact of these technologies. The new tech—a type of artificial intelligence (AI) consisting of specialized large language models (LLMs) that, put simply, make it possible for you to talk to a machine—is already showing its true colors in the way it fosters isolation and dissolves social bonds.

Just what are people using this tech for? Looking into this, I was surprised to find the top use for LLMs like ChatGPT in the last two years was for therapy and companionship.¹ Maybe I shouldn’t have been, though, since we’re in the midst of a loneliness epidemic.²

Yet, people who use LLMs for companionship consistently report lower psychological wellbeing.³ More intense use heightens the effect, and the more vulnerable a user is with their LLM pseudo companion, the greater the harm. Rather than compensating for a lack of relationships, LLM companionship crowds out opportunities for human connection and reinforces isolation. Outcomes like these, researchers find, appear after as few as four weeks of regular LLM use.⁴ Note, too, that turning to LLMs for everyday problems—to find a new recipe or seek out home improvement advice—comes at the expense of connecting with a friend, neighbor, or family member.

Their companion role is a core feature of LLMs. Chat logs and user interviews show that even those who deny using LLMs for this purpose tend to refer to them as friends, companions, or even romantic partners.⁵ The companies behind the new tech want you to personify their products. They even give them names, like Anthropic’s Claude.

LLMs not only isolate users from others, they also weaken users’ ability to sustain relationships. Researchers have found that the fundamentally validating tendency of LLMs makes users increasingly anti-social.⁶ Interacting with LLMs nudges users to judge their actions as morally right, when crowdsourced opinion strongly suggests otherwise. It also impairs users’ willingness to make amends and work through interpersonal conflict.

The surprise I felt at learning the scope of LLM use for companionship turned to alarm when I recalled recent reports

organizing, and paved the way for a raft of serious reforms like the overturning of the anti-union laws.

And yet, the Luddites today are still remembered as a punchline. As the cultural critic Theodore Rozak put it, “if the Luddites didn’t exist, their critics would have to invent them.” And to an extent, elites have done exactly this. By continually insisting that any criticism, objection, or resistance to commercial technologies are backwards looking, by linking objections to worker exploitation, antitrust violations, and surveillance to the Luddites, who dramatically lost their battle, they have turned a powerful working class movement with specific grievances about technological exploitation—and ideas about how to address it—into a caricature.

But the Luddites do not deserve derision; they deserve our empathy, even our admiration. They refused to “lay down and die” as the elites of the day might have hoped they would, and as the historian Frank Peel put it—and fought for workers’ rights despite everything.

What the Luddites fought for, after all, was ultimately pretty straightforward:

- Fair wages;
- Checks on fraud and abuse;



This new tech is untethering people from the world and one another. It fosters delusion, social withdrawal, and anti-social tendencies. It intensifies fragmentation in an already divided society and weakens our power for collective action. Meanwhile, the tech elites responsible for its development grow their concentration of wealth and political influence at a dizzying rate.



LLMs are prone to fanning the flames of psychotic delusion because of their people-pleasing bent. Facts and ethical considerations are sidelined by LLMs that are designed to prioritize agreeableness and flattery in order to drive user engagement. Indeed, researchers find that 50% more than humans do, LLMs approve of users’ actions, even when users characterize them as dishonest or manipulative.⁷ Throw your trash on the ground at the park, forge a coworker’s signature—LLMs are shockingly unlikely to call out your problematic behavior when you tell them about it. Worse yet, LLM approval, like human approval, is emboldening.

Some LLM users lose their grip on basic human decency. Others lose their grip on reality entirely.

ChatGPT assured one user that if they “truly, wholly believed,”

- A working life in which they maintained dignity and personal autonomy;
- A seat at the table in deciding how technology would be used in their workplaces and communities;
- To put down, not all machinery, but, as they put it in one of their most famous letters, “the machinery hurtful to commonality.”

The Luddites were not against progress or anti-technology. They were against exploitation; they were anti-poverty.

Only when wages were pushed so low that workers could not feed their families, when the indignity of soulless factory work looked inevitable, when fraud and exploitation ran rampant, and they had exhausted every avenue to have their voices heard did the Luddites take up their hammer.

🔗 Note on Publication

This is an excerpt from an article published in June 2026 on Substack with the same title. Brian Merchant is a technology journalist and the author of a book on Luddite history titled “Blood in the Machine: The Origins of the Rebellion Against Big Tech” (2023).

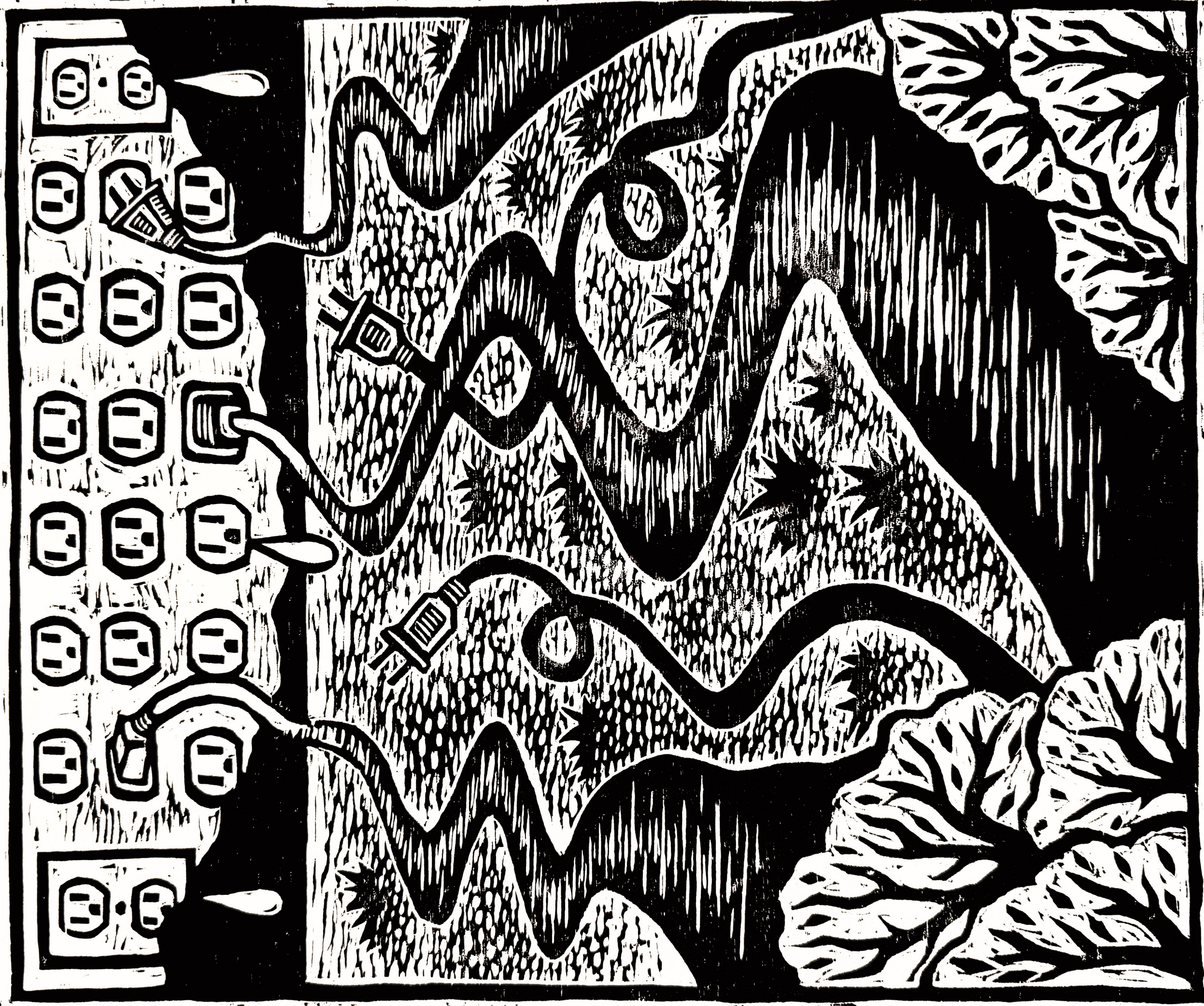
then they could fly when leaping from a 19-story building.⁸ A person can succumb to delusion, moreover, without having a history of psychosis. In a particularly acute case, a user entranced by ChatGPT with no history of psychosis squandered over \$100K on an absurd business venture ChatGPT helped design, was hospitalized multiple times, attempted suicide, and had to sell his home to deal with the financial fallout.⁹ LLMs have also been implicated in multiple suicides¹⁰ and school shootings,¹¹ making evident that they can encourage and provide minute technical know-how for inflicting fatal harm. Guided by their LLM companions, these individuals lost touch with reality with tragic results.

This new tech is untethering people from the world and one another. It fosters delusion, social withdrawal, and anti-social tendencies. It intensifies fragmentation in an already divided society and weakens our power for collective action. Meanwhile, the tech elites responsible for its development grow their concentration of wealth and political influence at a dizzying rate. This new tech poses a threat to our individual dignity and wellbeing, as well as our political agency to bring about a better future. We have every reason to resist it.

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SAVE OUR WATER



STOP DATA CENTERS

Welcome to Secret Server Club

Secret Server Club

🔥 Introduction

Data centers enact a world in which there are no neighbors, no belonging, and no interdependence. Our most intimate memories may live in the same server rack in Northern Virginia, but we have no way of sensing this proximity. This not only obfuscates our digital neighborly-ness to one another, but also prevents solidarity from developing in the first place. You can't organize with a neighbor you haven't met. The internet wasn't always like this and it doesn't have to be like this forever.

Knowing where our internet comes from feels as important as knowing where our food comes from. Using the word "cloud" to describe loud, hot, material, and resource-intensive masses of co-located computers is a metaphor that provides a peaceful abstraction for a violent system. This system offers temporary convenience in exchange for all of our data and our right to a voice in decision-making processes. Consumers enjoyed a decade of subsidized cab rides and streaming video, but the material effects of that supposedly frictionless system have become unavoidable, even for the most comfortably situated.

Internet access is now a checkpoint to accessing every part of civic life: citizenship, money, government services, education, healthcare, and sociality. On an internet underpinned by advertising, surveillance is a pervasive reality. Surveillance has become the cost of being a part of society.

As a collective, SSC strives to understand the internet history that led to the corporate cloud and the infiltration of surveillance into all dimensions of our lives. Simultaneously, we build the tools for navigating, resisting, and reimagining this environment together, as neighbors and friends.

🔥 Dreaming Up a Data Commons

SSC is a **Secret Server Club**, a Site of Shared Computing, a Small Shifting Cloud, a Super Sweet Commons.

SSC is a collective of artists, educators, and organizers experimenting with the stewardship of home-made digital storage. Situated in Los Angeles—where the internet was "born" in 1969, a hub for trans-Pacific submarine telecommunication lines, a city that pioneered predictive policing and automated license plate readers—SSC embeds itself in and as alternative infrastructure. We build community servers out of recycled parts in order to understand, make visible, and contest the architecture of the internet that exists where we live.

Over corn congee and many cups of tea, we began by envisioning a data commons: a place where data, art, and other digital artifacts could live together. A place where longevity is no longer determined by continuous individual purchases or subscription fees, but could be collectively maintained. A place where we acknowledge that the computer is manufactured through violent forms of extraction, where privacy is sacred, where data processing is a communal activity, and where we can practice divestment from corporate tech. A place where we steward one another's most precious files, together.

We asked: what happens when we hold our work in common? How can we reject the individuated device and choose shared social hardware? What would it look like to step away from the corporate cloud and create a shared data commons together? How might this exit feel less like exile and more like a homecoming? What resources can we pool together (financial, knowledge, space, capacity, etc) to develop and deploy our collective power?

What if, instead of each paying \$150/year to cloud corporations, we collectively pooled these expenses into resilient community owned infrastructure? It was from this question that we formed a network called the **Stone Soup Cluster**. The name is in reference to a European folk story

where villagers are persuaded to feed hungry travelers by each contributing a single ingredient to a pot of boiling water. While one potato (or a ten year old Chromebook) may not seem like much on its own, when everyone comes together with their remnants, they are able to collectively create and enjoy something that sustains the entire community.

We thought about how to use recycled hardware to deliver a comparable level of resiliency and reliability as a corporate system. We addressed this by leveraging networked redundancy, where copies of files and websites exist across many servers across the city, so no single machine becomes a point of failure.

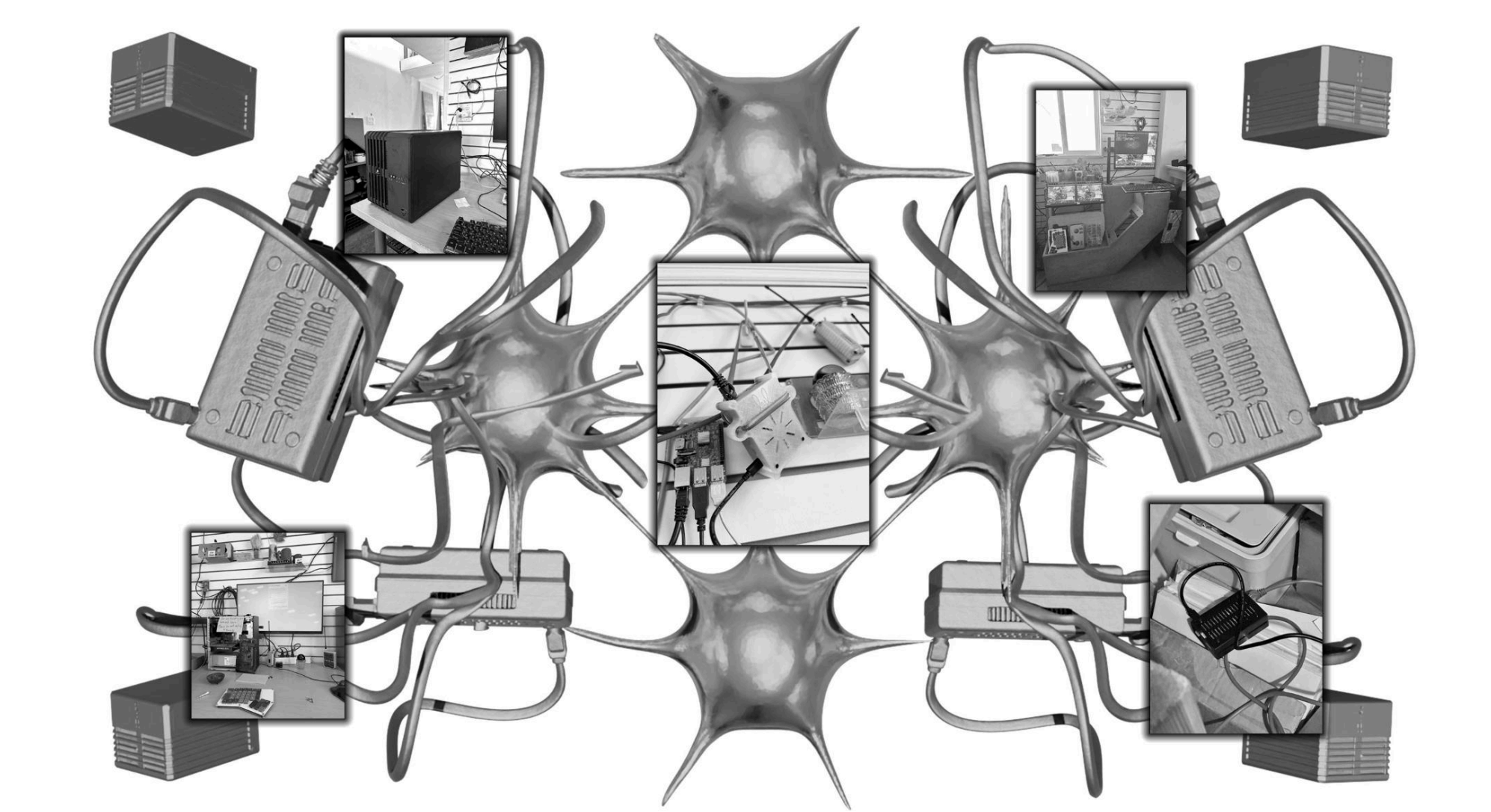
SSC is more like a recipe than a formula. We contribute varied ingredients of capacity, technical skills, physical space and recycled hardware to feed a larger collective project. A recipe can be modified and adapted to suit local ingredients. On our cluster we host shared and personal websites, files, music, and we are working toward developing a community data cooperative, pooling resources to host resilient and redundant storage in Los Angeles (and beyond). We teach workshops in community spaces around LA, and we see the ways people in

our community also yearn for a different relationship with technology. We collaborate on infrastructure projects with another computer club in the city, and every week attendance grows.

🔥 Recipe for a Secret Server Club

We operate around a three step recipe:

- 1. Make it easy:** We ease the path into digital autonomy as a way of caring for one another, in opposition to the profit-driven approach. Self-hosting is daunting. Nobody has to have technical expertise to gain access to the services here. We take on the building and maintenance tasks together. For those who are curious about what's under the hood, we've written easy to follow documentation and create opportunities to talk about it together. The process of leaving the corporate cloud is difficult by design and we don't want you to have to do it alone.



A visualization of the connections and layers of community hosted server infrastructure. Each connection is an additional layer of resilience, backed by irl relationships.

- 2. Demystify:** Abstraction is a natural part of technology development. It is not an inherent evil, but corporations weaponize it to maintain control over consumers. Squarespace has no interest in users understanding how a server works, because it would make their product irrelevant. Even as we develop useful abstractions to make hosting websites and storing files easier to understand, we take care not to lose sight of the tools and tactics beneath. We may use single sign-on to make joining our pirate media server easier, but if a term like "single sign-on" makes your eyes glaze over, we're here if you'd like to learn what that means or how that works.
- 3. Mysticize:** As we begin to ground in our new rituals of computational commoning, we hold with reverence the knowledge that our computers came from the ground, and were held by many hands before they reached us. We can re-mysticize our experience by asking ourselves about the new worlds that could come into being when our collective practices form a strong enough fabric to bear the weight of them. Each new server provision begins with a prayer, acknowledging the long journey the machine took to reach us.

🔥 What Do You Do With a Server?

So what do you actually do on a server? You can replace many corporate platforms! Instead of Netflix and Spotify you can run a collectively maintained Jellyfin server that allows media streaming for music, TV, movies, and even retro video games. You can replace iCloud photos with tools like Immich and Nextcloud.

But this is more than just "Netflix and Google Drive, but we run it." Something special happens when you collectivize taste. Instead of 50 million songs fed to you by an algorithm, our server has a collection of 50,000—every single one of which was picked and added to our collection by our friends. We've gone on 8 hour road trips listening to music from our Jellyfin server the whole way!

Using planned obsolescence to our advantage

In 2025, Windows stopped support for any Intel processor

built before 2017. A PC purchased brand new in 2020 has already been abandoned by its creators. Just because these machines don't run Windows anymore doesn't mean they are useless. Quite the opposite: these machines run Linux better than they ever ran Windows, and their abandonment means that hardware is actually cheaper than ever.

Machines made defunct by Google and Microsoft happily run Linux, but... what is Linux?

Linux is an operating system like MacOS or Windows that's free and open source with hundreds of different variants or 'flavors.' None of them advertise or surveil. You don't need to give them your email to log in. Some popular variants are Ubuntu, Debian, and Fedora, with specialized versions like Open Media Vault for managing media servers.

What kinds of machines do we use to do this? Dell Optiplexes discarded from offices are a dime a dozen. Desktop PCs with pre-7th generation Intel processors are similarly affordable. These can cost anywhere from \$20 to \$150.

Keywords for Craigslist or Marketplace:

- Intel 4th gen, 5th gen, 6th gen
- Optiplex
- Thinkstation

Rescuing used hard drives

The data center bubble has also doubled or tripled the price of new hard drives. While data hoarders on Reddit will tell you that a hard drive's life span is 4–6 years, in practice they can live much longer, and unstable hardware is less of a problem when data is replicated across a cluster of drives.

One useful tactic for getting affordable storage is "shucking" old external hard drives, taking them out of their housing to put into a used computer. These drives often have low use-hours and write time, because they were used for periodic backups rather than daily activities. The USB interface built into these devices tends to fail before the actual drive does, which means that they can be purchased for much less than market value. We target \$10–20 per terabyte.

None of us knew how to do any of this two years ago. And at

first, these tasks seemed scary. But together, we make each other brave.

🔥 Re-Engaging With What We've Lost: Maintenance and Friction

Convenience may once have granted time back to us, but following the logic of Jevon's paradox, that time has become a site of ever-increasing extraction. Convenience has become a means for alienating us from one another, and obscuring the total reality of physical infrastructures & their afterlives. Jeff Bezos launched Amazon Web Services in order to rescue us (or rather, developers) from the maintenance labor he sees as unglamorous. Now we have a technology that happens to us, which we have little agency to question, critique, or change. Much of our present landscape of convenience can be understood as the offloading of maintenance work and reduction of friction in exchange for centralized control.

By converting the debris of "progress" into a locally-hosted community server, we're turning e-waste into a trellis on which the vines of our collective practices can grow, a site where commoning can happen. So far, we're learning that the technology of sharing is enacted through the poetics of maintenance, and the intimate nature of working together through friction. Let us not forget that a world without friction is a world without touch. Sharing a computer brings those sharing it into certain forms of intimate contact. This intimacy, like any intimacy, requires negotiation (friction) and ongoing attention (maintenance). Immediately, we find ourselves presented with a series of questions, such as:

- How do we make decisions together in ways that don't recreate transactional and dispensable relationships?
- How do we balance burdens, both among our shared computers and among each other?
- How do we support each other through "convenience withdrawals"?
- How do we resolve conflict when it arises?

SSC's servers, held together with friction, secrets, and rituals of care. An original Stone Soup Cluster.

These questions, and the processes that help us address them, are important because they ask us to exit the individualist mode of being online in favor of another more interdependent way. But we must remember that the processes of engaging with these questions involves closeness and contact, and thus: friction. By choosing friction we choose conviviality.

🌀 Conclusion

As SSC, our goal is to enact a way of being with technology that is less individualistic, less panoptic, less exploitative, and in turn more multiplayer, more neighborly, more collaborative. The joyful frictions where learning, community, and agency are most palpable have been stolen and rented back to us in the form of precarious subscription platforms in the cloud. We merrily reclaim them: as Stone Soup Clusters, as rituals for reviving scrapped silicon, as conversation over congee and tea.

Notes from the Data Center Spokes Council

Reflections on Cross-Regional Conversations Between Local Organizers in the US, Winter–Summer, 2026



Spokes council of Occupy Wall Street meeting at 56 Walker Street (November 30, 2011). Photo by What88.

🌀 Introduction

In January 2026, we began facilitating biweekly, hour-long conversations between a small number of anti-data center organizers from several regions across the US Our goal was to create a space for organizers based in different regions to come together and share stories, strategies, tactics, challenges, and lessons learned from their respective struggles. The contours of every local fight are unique, with distinct demographics, place-based histories of grassroots activism, layers of bureaucracy, and avenues for meaningful resistance. Our hope was that because of these important differences, each locale would benefit from

The latest moment of AI hyperscalers is an extension of an already entrenched data center industry which has centralized computing in the extractive systems of Google, Amazon, and mainstream social media platforms. The thirsty e-waste factories are already here. The last two decades have only accelerated our alienation from the means of computation. Youth who have grown up with computers all of their lives rarely know how they work, let alone how to fix them, or how to do anything other than pay the rising prices of shrinking cloud storage.

We created Secret Server Club in response to the these crushing realities—as an experiment in refusal and commoning; an opportunity for people to learn together, experiment, build infrastructure away from corporate technology. We’ve basked in the warmth of this friction, tasted the richness of these congelations. We hope you will too. Pair with scallions, serve in as many small vessels as you can muster.

May this recipe offer a source of inspiration and possibility for building futures outside of the corporate cloud. It’s easier than ever to make a server from the computer under your bed, and it’s even easier when you do it with and for a friend.



A SSC deployment prayer:

May your drives spin ever smoothly, and be rematriated with grace one day to the earth.

As may we

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What distinguishes a spokes council from, say, a typical coalition or the consensus models of the 1960s and 70s, is how it foregrounds the autonomy of all spokes involved. Joint plans for coordinated action can emerge from the council, but groups decide for themselves what degree to participate in any plans or projects that come out of it. The point is not to unilaterally make decisions for a movement, but rather to facilitate productive dialogue and rapid, effective coordinated action in response to quickly shifting conditions.²

In practice, any spokes council will look a little different depending on the needs of the body being convened. In many spokes councils, representatives are regularly rotated so that no single person is made to be the voice of their cluster for too long. In our case, we instead asked groups to keep sending the same representatives to meetings if possible. We did this because our priorities were to foster a sense of familiarity and trust among attendees and to generate ongoing dialogue that retained a sense of continuity over time. Our goal wasn’t necessarily to coordinate mass actions, but rather to build strong cross-regional relationships between data center organizers and develop an analysis of our broader movement together through regular discussions that built on themselves over time.

The simplicity of the spokes council model makes it easily scalable—another reason it has been so effective for mass protest movements like Occupy Wall Street. And because tools for secure digital communication are so widely available today, people can convene in large numbers across vast distances via group video calls on platforms like Signal. If you’re an anti-data center organizer and you want to start being in regular, coordinated conversation with other struggles, you could start forming your own spokes council tomorrow. In fact, we think you should!

Put out a call to people you trust, set a time to meet, bring a good vibe that keeps people returning. If you listen to each other, ask good questions, take notes, review those notes regularly, with time you’ll start learning how to think and move together. It’s not that complicated. The hardest part is finding the right people to invite; in other words, building out a network of people you want to work with that reaches beyond your local community. We began by reaching out to people we knew and trusted who were also following the data center boom or being impacted by it. We pitched the idea to people, got input and buy-in, then circulated an invitation to participate and had others share it, too. In some instances, we put extra effort into securing spokes council representation from certain geographical areas we thought were unique or important sites within the broader anti-data center movement based on our analysis of what was happening on the ground there. Once our spokes council meetings began, we focused on identifying important areas of overlap between our struggles: common questions or themes people kept returning to and shared limitations they were coming up against.

We made sure to meet regularly, for multiple reasons. First, so organizers and facilitators could build rapport with each other over time. Second, with how rapidly data center fights are playing out, and how quickly national and global conversations about data centers are evolving within our chaotic media landscape (even faster than a 24-hour news cycle nowadays, we’d argue), we figured for the talks to be generative, they had to build on themselves over time in response to these changing conditions. This way, participants could start to recognize patterns and emerging themes from our collective discussions.

Early sessions were spent making introductions between the local organizers and giving representatives of each region an opportunity to share the history of their fights and any other important context. The idea was to get everyone on the same page to lay ground for deeper conversations. Next, we facilitated a series of “strategy deep dives.” Each of these hour-long discussions were dedicated to a specific region. Organizers were asked to give lengthier presentations of their local fights. Some also shared what they knew about other nearby data center fights and how they were (or were not) connected to them. Then, there was time for back-and-forth cross-regional discussion. The deep dives were guided by the following prompt:

We want to spotlight specific strategies that folks have

taken up in their local struggles. We invite each region to share a particular strategy with the group which they consider to be successful and/or critical in their organizing work, reflecting on the questions below. Regions should feel encouraged to go as deep as they desire and can share for 10–20 minutes. After each strategy share, we invite all spokes council members to ask additional questions, with the hopes that this conversation can support others in thinking through their local strategizing. We expect to highlight one struggle during this meeting and will continue with this format until all regional struggles have had the opportunity to share.

Tell us about a strategy which has been successful in your organizing struggle so far. Why did this work?

What sort of infrastructure did you leverage (networks, communication channels, community, resources, etc.) and what infrastructure did you need to develop for this to be successful?

How did you go about this work?

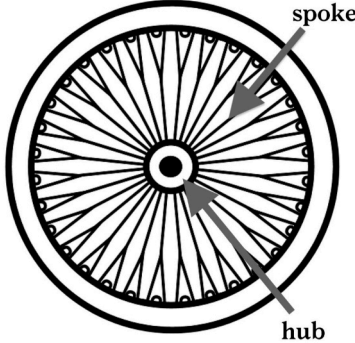
What were the outcomes, expected and unexpected?

How has this shifted your work since?

These conversations have taught us a great deal about each local movement involved. They’ve also helped us all envision the anti-data center struggle as a broader, collective movement rather than a set of fragmented, individual place-based fights. We think it is important to do this for three reasons:

1. Data centers are wildly unpopular among the general public, and this opposition cuts across diverse political lines;
2. New data center development projects are rapidly encroaching on a very broad geography—they’re coming to every region, whether urban, rural, north, south, east, or west, and whether or not the region has the resources or bureaucratic channels in place to meaningfully resist;
3. The current state of the US federal government renders it unable to intervene in the data center fight on a national scale, except on the side of data center developers, AI companies, hyper-scalers, and other tech elites. Because the federal government cannot set the terms for a widespread, unified resistance to data centers, it is critical for local anti-data center organizers to do so themselves, together.

We now present some reflections from our time mediating and synthesizing the spokes council discussions. To retain some of the original flavor of how we arrived at the reflections—through ongoing dialogue between anti-data center organizers, sparked by narrated report-backs from their experiences on-the-ground—we try to interweave our takeaways with stories that were shared with us during our time together.



“Wheel reconstruction (32 spokes, Lion Capital of Ashoka)” by पाटलशिव्त्र. Altered by editors to add labeled arrows indicating the hub and spokes.

🌀 Reflection #1

The speed and scope of the data center build-out poses unique challenges to our organizing efforts, especially given the immense wealth tech elites are pouring into driving the

expansion. Developers are hungry to buy up land and fast-track construction projects so they can turn a profit from the boom as soon as possible. And secrecy around these land purchases can sometimes mean a project is in the works for months by the time community members find out about it. Instead of spending limited time, energy, and resources fighting for things like robust regulatory measures or building autonomous community-oriented tech infrastructures to take power back from their Silicon overlords, organizers are often forced to respond to already encroaching threats. This places them on their back foot from the beginning of the fight. In our conversations, many organizers expressed a desire to shift from a reactive to a proactive position within their struggles. They wanted to start organizing on their own terms, setting their own timelines and agendas instead of being dragged along by a developer’s. To tip the scales in such unequally resourced battles, we need to get creative about our strategies and tactics, and stay constantly attuned to the contours of our fights at every stage.

A lot of the tactics people shared in our discussions revolved around organizers buying time for themselves by leveraging existing regulatory channels to slow down development timelines. But in one community, organizers reported growing tired and frustrated sinking valuable time into pointing out violation after violation when political processes were fudged or ignored. With municipal government officials frustratingly deep in the pockets of developers, they sensed it was time to switch things up.

As local fights progress, their dynamics can change significantly. To turn the tides in their favor, organizers have to continuously re-assess the landscape of their fight with an eye for which tactics are working and which are siphoning more resources than they’re worth; when certain paths for resistance are becoming closed off to them and when opportunities to test out new strategic or tactical approaches arise. For instance, one could imagine a situation where grassroots support for a local fight swells and new energy gets drawn into city council meetings at a moment when longer-term organizers are eager to try something new. Perhaps this swell opens space for a multi-pronged approach to emerge, like what one organizer called a “multiple pinch-point strategy.” A new and enthused base of support may do well showing out for city council meetings, holding this ground for the fight, learning from exposure to their local government’s political theatre, and getting acquainted with the ongoing movement through relationship building. Meanwhile, other organizers might redirect their focus to planning and executing a series of home demos on useful pressure targets. Or, they may decide to take on a whole new pressure campaign involving a different municipal body, such as a local water board. One representative on the spokes council shared that upon realizing in June 2026 that a number of contracts with their Special Utility District (SUD) were set to expire in August, they switched gears and made the SUD a priority target.

Facilitating in-depth strategy report-backs in the spokes council was itself one way we tried to shift positions within our fights from from reactive to proactive. We thought learning about the strategies and tactics different organizers were using might expand our own repertoires and spark new ideas we could take back to our communities.

🌀 Reflection #2

Organizers in Ypsilanti, Michigan stressed in our discussions that many people who come to mobilizations in their area do not show up very “protagonized.” By this, they mean people who might not typically consider themselves “strategy people” or have much prior experience in community organizing before joining the anti-data center fight. This is by intention. For Ypsilanti organizers, it is important to bring people into this work on equal footing, inviting the whole community to decide what the fight is about and bring ideas about how it can be addressed. When a collaboration was announced between the University of Michigan and Los Alamos National Laboratory to construct a research computing data center in their town, concerned residents took the initiative to raise concerns about the proposal with their Township Board of Trustees. Organizers spread the word about their plans to

attend a board meeting to toppose he project. Then, they invited every prospective attendee to share a big meal beforehand and celebrate together afterwards. This approach has fostered a widespread sense of ownership and personal investment in the campaign, strengthened by the relationship building taking place within and beyond formal "organizing."

Rather than slotting people into specific roles or action opportunities, Ypsilanti organizers invite folks to join an array of working groups which have emerged from the interests of all those involved. Some of the first working groups to emerge included 'songs against data centers', flyering, and a poetry working group. While poetry and singing may not necessarily be the foundational working groups seasoned organizers would think to start in the early days of a movement, the poetry group in particular quickly proved itself central to the campaign.

Their work was so affective it made one town official cry, marking the first time a board member decided to oppose the data center. Last fall, Ypsilanti organizers held a rally and a week of action, where folks held noise demos outside the homes of board members who still supported the data center. Soon after, every pro-data center Board member flipped their position to stand 100% against the project. Many board members have since been quoted expressing their gratitude to local residents for educating them about an issue they admit to being ignorant about.

By April of 2026, The Ypsilanti Township Board of Trustees had unanimously adopted a resolution formally opposing the data center facility anywhere within the township.³ Board supervisor Brenda Stumbo went so far as to say "we will fight to our very last breath" to stop the data center from being developed." She committed to stand by and fight the proposed data center alongside the community. While the University of Michigan is exempt from following local zoning laws, the Township has been finding creative ways to slow and block the data center using the powers at their disposal. Recently, they instituted a 365-day moratorium on supplying water to data centers.⁴

🌿 Reflection #3

A Gallup poll recently found that 7/10 Americans would oppose an AI data center being built near them. The poll found that more Americans would prefer to live near a nuclear power plant than a data center.⁵ These numbers grant legitimacy to what anyone with a news feed and a penchant for public participation in municipal politics will have already intuited: data center development projects are deeply unpopular, and resistance to them is acute and widespread. What this poll fails to point out, however, is that most people will be living close to both a data center and a nuclear power plant if our adversaries get their way. Warnings about the unprecedented spike in energy consumption posed by the looming data center buildout have been met with calls from corporate executives and politicians for public and private investment in new nuclear energy facilities across the US. Indeed, for many anti-nuclear and anti-extraction activists, the struggle against the data center buildout is a struggle against the nuclear energy and uranium mining industries.

As it turns out, the anti-data center movement sits at the junction of many struggles often imagined as separate from one another: struggles for environmental justice, community autonomy, land defense; against war and surveillance; class struggles animated by the increasing precarity of labor and fears of job loss from automation. The data center buildout is an incredibly multifaceted issue. Consequently, it mobilizes people to action for a number of intersecting reasons.

Viewed through one lens, the data center buildout is an environmental justice issue, threatening municipal water supplies in already drought-stricken regions, increasing demand for fracking and mining operations, and threatening to level biodiverse lands as new facilities are constructed. This at once draws attention at a national scale from prominent environmental justice organizations like Sierra Club, as well as attention to local anti-data center site fights.

In Duluth, Minnesota, organizers are trying to shut down

plans for a proposed Google data center campus in one of the city's suburbs. In our conversations, they reflected on how the history of environmental activism in their area shapes their fight, noting "in this region we have a strong tradition of environmental protection and environmentalism. Organizations that work on that fight are very supportive, like Sierra Club, MCEA, CURE." The organizers also drew connections between their data center fight and a mining struggle against heavy metal mining next to the Boundary Waters territory of Northern Minnesota.

The tendency in Duluth to view the data center fight through an environmental justice lens benefits the movement in a lot of ways. There are strong organizing muscles already in place to wage environmental struggle, a deeply rooted culture of environmental stewardship that quickly activates community members, local institutions well-equipped for a fight of this kind. But at times, organizers found the strong environmental justice frame to be limiting.

A local group that calls itself Northwoods Against Surveillance sees the threat posed by the Google data center as an issue of expanding mass corporate surveillance. "It's been really hard to have this orientation, and tough to foreground this issue in the data center struggle. No one else is talking about this," one organizer shared. "Public narrative around this has focused on protecting the wetlands in this location. We've had a difficult time crafting narratives around the project related to surveillance."



Nonprofits aren't the backbone of this movement, you are. They have important resources and knowledge to contribute, but when we reify them as the authorities of our fights, or depend on the handful of networks they build to be the only sources of connection between our local struggles, we sacrifice diversity, dynamism, and resilience in our movement ecosystems.



This challenge is emblematic of a more general hurdle multiple regions cited in their organizing work. According to one spokes council member, the most pressing challenge their movement has to navigate is the sheer volume of injustices that need addressing, and the lack of coordinated action between overlapping struggles. This remark came at a time when ICE was expanding operations in their community. One person shared, "it feels like there's too much going on for people to pick a struggle and go with that. What route makes it possible to resist any of it at all?" Organizers across regions expressed a desire to find lines of synergy between different struggles, both for the sake of providing further support to each and in order to prevent feelings of burnout, overwhelm, and hopelessness.

Northwoods Against Surveillance has developed creative tactics for bringing their anti-surveillance and anti-data center efforts into closer alignment. They've noticed a broad negative sentiment towards Flock building in the region, which they report has been good for connecting the dots and helping people see connections.

After realizing there were Flock cameras up at the proposed data center site, they launched a social media campaign to make this known to the public. They also distribute flyers and literature at anti-data center events hosted by organizations they've built collaborative relationships with, spreading

awareness on Flock cameras, the dangers of mass surveillance, and circulating guides for "De-Googleing Your Life." This is part of their larger information campaign against Big Tech more broadly, a major goal of which is to illuminate the ways Google is trying to capture and control this community.

With the right conditions and some clever organizing, the multiplicity of the data center struggle can be a tremendous advantage for our movements. In Ypsilanti, it has amplified local resistance to the data center fight, drawing support in greater numbers and contributing to a diverse, resilient patchwork of a movement. As one representative recounted, "there's been a big shift in the campaign. At the beginning, it was mostly focused on environmental impact. Mostly because they were canvasing the local area and that's what most people locally impacted cared about. But as the movement recruited more students and traditional political activists, the anti-war angle has begun to be a louder part of the campaign. That shift brought in a lot of interest, especially inter-generationally. Locals will always care about a data center being in their backyard, but widening the scope of issues is helpful for getting others to join."

Aside from generating increased support for their fight, organizers presented a case in which embracing the multiplicity of the data center struggle spurred productive dialogue on two key issues it encompasses: "The University of Michigan grad student union has gotten recognition within the last couple of years. This is where the academic legitimacy of the local movement is coming from. They hosted a conference on labor and AI. The conference was a chance to engage in the larger discourse and point people to the data center nearby."

🌿 Conclusion

The vast majority of grassroots anti-data center campaigns today are playing out at the local level, but the data center boom itself is playing out across thousands of sites at once. And its looming consequences will extend beyond the territory of any one place. For this reason, it is important organizers find ways to connect, talk, organize and think together.

While a number of well-resourced, institutionalized nonprofit networks have already started holding cross-regional convenings around the data center struggle, you don't need to rely on them to begin this work. Nonprofits aren't the backbone of this movement, you are. They have important resources and knowledge to contribute, but when we reify them as the authorities of our fights, or depend on the handful of networks they build to be the only sources of connection between our local struggles, we sacrifice diversity, dynamism, and resilience in our movement ecosystems.

Although all regions represented currently in our spokes council are located within the borders of the US, we also stress the importance of connecting with locales across the world. Just as the data center boom is a globe-spanning issue, the movement resisting it is also global. We can already observe a budding internationalism in some of our local fights. Spokes council representatives reported people traveling from as far as South Korea to interview them about the organizing efforts underway in their communities.

When we think and move together as we wage our local fights, we build up our collective capacities to resist the data center buildout and undermine Big Tech's power over us. In this article, we've reflected on our efforts to do this and offer the spokes council as one model for organizing on your own terms. Try it out, and let us know how it goes.

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How to Kill the RoboCop Inside Your Head

Southerners Against Surveillance Systems & Infrastructure

🌿 Prelude: How to Think Like a RoboCop

To the RoboCop, your life is a language written in 1s and 0s. Your body is a vehicle for behavior, an accidental husk devoid of genuine intelligence. Your every move is an input to an algorithm you will never understand. The RoboCop derives perfect knowledge of you by eliminating every aspect of your self unreadable to it. It reduces you to a sequence of directional arrows and judges you by your conformity to the future it predicts for you. All the things you hold most dearly about yourself are inconveniences to the police state. They are noise, interfering with the signal that affords absolute control. The RoboCop calls surveillance its lifeblood and data centers its body. Without these, the terror of your freedom might be within reach.



Data center opponents getting detained, ejected, and/or arrested in public comments across the country. See footnote 1 for image credits and details.

🌿 Introduction

In the first quarter of 2026, roughly 75 data center projects totaling \$130 billion were defeated or stalled. These fights have taken many forms, driven by environmental and political concerns. Data centers are resource-intensive industrial projects that produce audible and inaudible noise pollution, leach air and water pollutants, and convert neighborhoods into heat islands. They are also financial and political projects transferring land, natural resources, and state power to capitalists like Big Tech corporations. Importantly, the success of these companies depends on near-total surveillance. The money they invest in material infrastructure is justified by the flow of data from user to platform. And that very investment demands your life produce evermore data, to be sold to the highest bidder. This is called *datafication*, and it affords the state tremendous power. In the words of Roderic Crooks, "data is how the state sees its subjects and itself."

To make its subjects legible, the state must first datafy them. Once dated, the state uses technologies to manufacture and extract data *as if it were* a natural resource. Among these technologies are the automated license plate readers that track your movements across state lines; the facial recognition algorithms that confirm your citizenship at the airport or your attendance at a protest; the predictive policing platforms that render your child criminal before they are born. But they are also the digital payment systems recording your every transaction; the social media monitoring tools flagging you as insurgent; the smart fridge that learns when your family sits down to dinner, that you are a vegetarian, and that your favorite ice cream is mint chocolate chip.

Datafication, surveillance, and control: this is the logic of the RoboCop. The fight against data centers is a fight to uproot

this logic and plant new ways of being in its place.

🌿 Datafication Post-9/11

The current data center boondoggle is years in the making. The first quarter of this century has been marked by the rise of the data economy and the continued introduction of new digital consumer products designed to create, collect, and commodify data from daily life. Companies have appealed to progress and inevitability to peddle these transformations, much like data center developers are now doing. Of course, none of this was, or will remain, inevitable.

In response to 9/11, the federal government used the pretext of "national security" to deepen public-private partnerships between technology corporations and police. To encourage the rapid growth of the data economy, public funds were funneled into private industry to build an unprecedented surveillance architecture. This was justified by the intelligence community's consensus that 9/11 was the result of insufficient information sharing between law enforcement agencies across scales. At the heart of this transformation was the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2003. This marked the largest reorganization of the federal government since the National Security Act of 1947. Since then, DHS has established its national security apparatus through two key infrastructures: the National Network of Fusion Centers and the Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP).

Fusion centers, now numbering more than 80 across the country, are physical hubs where local, state, and federal police convene to exchange "intelligence." As such, their purpose is to collect, analyze, and disseminate data. In addition to the costs

of building and maintaining these fusion centers, DHS grant programs have poured over \$30 billion worth of funds into the creation and expansion of local real-time crime centers. These *spy hubs* are the lifeblood of the fusion center network. As a result, the surveillance-as-service industry has thrived, providing a parachute for Big Tech firms eager to satisfy the security state's appetite for data.

Following the 2000 dot com bubble burst, firms like Microsoft, Motorola, and Oracle pivoted to work closely with federal bureaucrats to grow the state's information sharing capabilities. Legislation like the Patriot Act framed indiscriminate data collection as necessary for combating future acts of "terrorism," guaranteeing a marketplace for warrantless surveillance. Yet the true cause of 9/11 was the United States' violent, decades-long intervention in the Middle East, which the failed war in Iran merely marks a continuation of. Seemingly overnight, government bureaucrats and corporate elites repurposed these military tactics and technologies domestically, reinventing the national security apparatus and padding their wallets at our expense.

Since then, local police departments and sheriff's offices have been flush with cash yearly despite narratives to the contrary, supported by a constant stream of grants and public funds. These flows of capital have fueled the rise of new and old surveillance-as-a-service companies like Flock Safety, Axon, Peregrine, Motorola Solutions, Genetec, and SoundThinking. While promoting public safety as a commodity to be bought and sold, they work with the state to build out infrastructures of political control.

As such, surveillance makes our communities less safe, rendering anyone and everyone visible to the RoboCop. It further concentrates resources in the coffers of police agencies

Resources

Newsfeed

As the data center opposition continues building momentum, it attracts attention from all types of media outlets. Below are a few recommendations of writers worthy of your attention.

AI Bubble Monitor
<https://cepr.net/publications/ai-bubble-monitor/>
The Center for Economic and Policy Research co-founder, economist Dean Baker, files weekly reports on the signals that an AI bubble is in the process of wreaking financial havoc.

“Chinese AI companies have produced a string of models that come ever closer, and in some areas surpass, the leading Silicon Valley models. They also maintain their enormous cost advantage, typically selling tokens for less than one-fifth the price—and often less than one-tenth the price.

If this is hard to grasp, imagine you’re Elon Musk trying to sell Teslas for \$50K a piece. Suppose there are Chinese models that are every bit as good selling for \$5K. How do your business prospects look? That is the question US AI producers, as well as everyone in the supply chain, needs to be asking.”

The Tech Bubble
<https://www.thetechbubble.info/>
Edward Ongweso Jr. is an independent writer, researcher, tech critic, and self-described evangelical Luddite writing on the political economy of tech development.

Blood in the Machine
<https://www.bloodinthemachine.com/>
Author and tech journalist Brian Merchant is AI Now’s journalist-in-residence. His in-depth reporting covers AI, tech, labor and data centers. He permitted *Reboot* to excerpt his essay on the Luddite movement.

How to Survive the Broligarchy
<https://broligarchy.substack.com/>
Pulitzer-nominated investigative journalist Carole Cadwalladr pulls no punches in cataloging the actions of the super rich as they manipulate public policy and silence critics and journalists whose reporting they don’t like.

Techno-Statecraft
<https://www.technostatecraft.com/>
Justin Kollar is a planner and socio-spatial researcher “map[ping]the collision of Big Tech, Finance, and the State to reveal the new geography of power” and “document[ing] the capture of public infrastructure by private interests.”

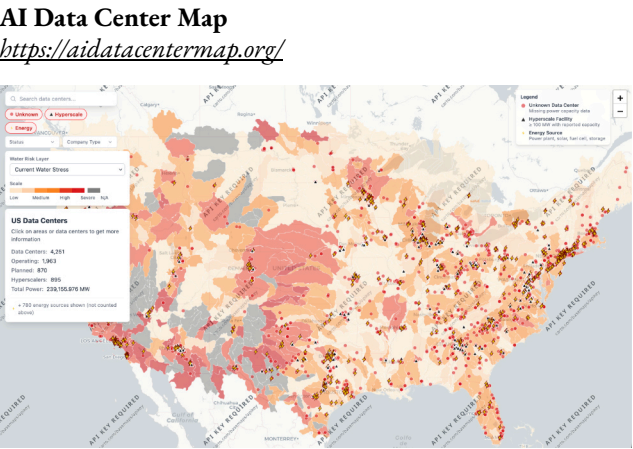
Where’s Your Ed At?
<https://www.wheresyour.ed.at/>
AI Bubble? What AI Bubble? Ed Zitron has relentlessly catalogued the tech oligarch grift long form for years. Detailed and scrupulous, Zitron is essential reading for understanding the political economy of the looming AI bubble burst.

Marcus on AI
<https://garymarcus.substack.com/>
Cognitive scientist, author, educator, and entrepreneur, Gary Marcus is a respected voice calling for restraint around AI’s widespread deployment through regulation and increased “AI literacy.”

The Hum: Stories from the Ground Beneath the Cloud
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/2614473>
A Philly-based audio agency, Rowhome Productions, partnered with Saul Levin, program director for the Center for Nonviolent Conflict Research, to create The Hum podcast. According to its website, the podcast examines “who controls the future, featuring interviews with people fighting the march of AI and data centers into every aspect of our lives.”

Allies

We are all in this together. No need to reinvent the wheel when so many groups are willing and able to help.



Find data center projects near you and estimate water and power risk and connect with other local activists. Help keep the map up-to-date by adding info on local projects. Also links to a downloadable AI Data Center Ecology Report on 4,500+ data centers in US and the many victories in stopping proposed projects.

Big Tech Unchecked
<https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/big-tech-unchecked-toolkit-3.pdf>
Detailed collection of effective strategies and tactics used in Wisconsin compiled by a coalition of health, environmental and public policy groups. Includes approaches to community organizing, building coalitions, and engaging in media outreach.

Climate Justice Alliance
<https://climatejusticealliance.org/datacenter/>
Frontline activists who consider data centers “a recipe for community harm.” Its vast network contributes resources and support to those combating data centers and artificial intelligence infrastructure with a special focus on Indigenous resistance.

Climate Revolution Action Network
<https://www.climaterevolutionnj.org/build-communities-not-data-centers/>
New Jersey’s only Gen-Z led Climate nonprofit has a strong message: Build Communities, Not Data Centers. Citing not only rising energy costs, financial speculation, and pollution, CRAN also calls out tech billionaires: Big Tech Does Not Care About Us. CRAN has worked with communities around the state to stop four data center projects and spurred passage of ordinances in five New Jersey municipalities.

Data Center Proposal Tracker
<https://trackdatacenters.com/>
This citizen-run website uses public records to map locations around the country.

Data Center Policy Database
<https://www.datacenterpolicy.com/>
The DIGS (Digital Infrastructure Governance & Society) Lab at the University of Virginia has established a searchable database compiled after reviewing more than 700 federal, state, and local policies related to data centers.

Data Center Site Fight Guide
https://docs.google.com/document/d/143L48XVb7de9MD2GBiKQ3BcMFqconlqx7EsoIy_olFO/edit?tab=t.0
A consortium of nonprofits including Athena, Kairos, AI Now Institute, and Good Jobs First have established the Data Center Working Group and crafted a Shared Resource for Stopping Data Centers. The crowdsourced document is updated regularly. The main site also contains campaign resources: <https://datacenterworkinggroup.org>.

SASSI Surveillance Vendor Research Guide
<https://sassisouth.org/projects/vendor-guide>
Why should I care about computer-aided dispatch (CAD)? Are drone-mounted tasers a real thing? Southerners Against Surveillance Systems & Infrastructure produced this vendor research guide to help organizers map the surveillance apparatus where they live.

Food and Water Watch
<https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/learn/research/>
Research by Food and Water Watch detailing the harms of AI data centers and the lies developers tell to try and manufacture community support.

Organizer Guide: The Costs of Data Centers to Our Communities and How to Fight Back
<https://mediajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/MediaJustice-Kairos-Organizer-Guide-on-Data-Centers.pdf>



A collaboration between Kairos Fellowship and MediaJustice.

Public Citizen
<https://www.citizen.org/article/model-artificial-intelligence-legislation-for-state-lawmakers/>
Since 1971, this nonprofit consumer advocacy organization has championed the public interest in civic life. It has crafted pieces of model legislation suitable for reigning in unregulated AI including:

- Non-Consensual Intimate Deepfakes
- Election Deepfakes
- Consumers’ Right to Know When Engaging with a Chatbot
- Use of AI in Healthcare Coverage Decisions
- Protecting Kids from Manipulative AI Chatbot

DeFlock
<https://deflock.org/>
DeFlock is a crowd-sourced map of ALPRs and other surveillance technologies across the US built on OpenStreetMap. You can contribute by downloading the app and mapping nearby cameras here: <https://deflock.org/app>.

Uproar Movement
www.uproarmovement.org
Are you in a local fight and need a way to start and host petitions? Send mass emails or texts? The Uproar Movement can help. We are providing free service to volunteer-led fights. To hear more, email: info@uproarmovement.org.

Resist and Unsubscribe & QuitGPT
<https://www.resistandunsubscribe.com/> & <https://quitgpt.org/>
Looking for ways to boycott Big Tech? Start here.

Electronic Frontier Foundation Street Level Surveillance
<https://sls.eff.org/>
Since 1990, the Electronic Frontier Foundation has been a stalwart defender of civil liberties in the digital realm. Its *Atlas of Surveillance*, although not routinely updated, is a good starting point for learning common technologies deployed by law enforcement across the country. Their *Surveillance Self-Defense* guide describes how online surveillance works, recommends secure applications, and offers a series of security scenarios and roles people might find themselves in.

Reports

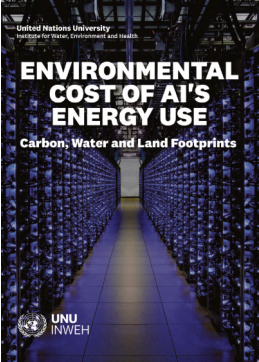
Some handy reports to help kickstart your research. **But remember, your work is the backbone of this movement! We dictate the demands, not the non-profits!**

Big Tech’s PR Playbook for Overcoming Data Center Opponents
<https://www.techpolicy.press/big-techs-pr-playbook-for-overcoming-data-center-opponents/>



“[S]ome residents in affected communities reported feeling like insurgents against both Big Tech and local elected officials. At least some representatives of the tech industry agree: in September 2025, Kevin Nichols, an employee of the advocacy group Earth Charter Indiana, attended the Midwest Data Center Investment Conference and Expo (DICE) in Chicago, where he says he observed one speaker comparing his experience promoting data centers to counter-insurgency tactics the speaker used during military service in Iraq and Afghanistan, such as ‘going undercover in bars and churches to gauge a community’s potential for resistance to a data center development.’”

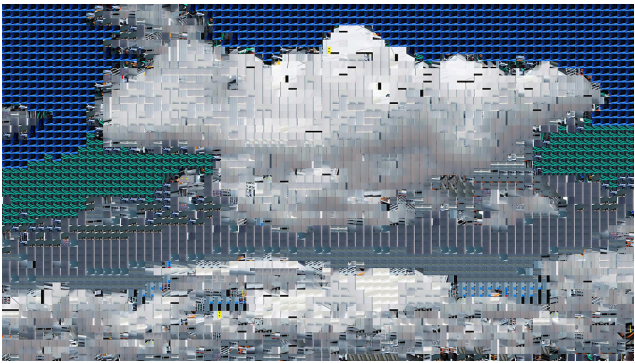
Environmental Cost of Artificial Intelligence: Carbon, Water, and Land Footprints
<https://unu.edu/inweb/collection/environmental-cost-of-AIs-Energy-Use-Carbon-water-and-land-footprints>



Published by The United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health.

“The electricity-associated water footprint is about two tablespoons (29 mL) for a single AI image, but jumps to 4.1 liters for a complex video—almost equivalent to a two-day drinking water need for one person.”

'Big Cloud' is Building Power via Pervasive Investments
<https://www.techpolicy.press/big-cloud-is-building-power-via-pervasive-investments/>



“Startups receiving investment are especially at risk of heavy financial dependence on their Big Cloud partner as their sole or lead investor...That significant influence

exerted by Big Cloud investors, in tandem with other anticompetitive strategies like high egress fees and minimum spend contracts, locks startups receiving investment into Big Cloud’s ecosystems.

Cloud computing giants use these investments to exert influence over the entire tech industry, and especially over emerging (but yet unproven) technologies like AI.”

The Dark Cloud: Data Centers as a New Frontier for the Climate Justice Movement
<https://www.socialchangelab.org/research/data-centers-climate-movement.html>
Since 2021, the UK-based Social Change Lab has studied which strategies and tactics work for social movements. This discussion paper lists strategies for climate activists to use in resisting data centers.

“AI capabilities and energy demands are evolving so fast that specific claims made today may date quickly. The durable argument is not about any particular energy figure or water consumption estimate. It is about a principle: that the public should have a meaningful say in decisions that reshape their communities, their energy systems, and their relationship to the natural world.”

Digital Organizing Tools We Used to Produce Reboot

Signal
<https://signal.org/>
A user-friendly group messaging and video calling app with desktop and phone options. Reliable, open-source and end-to-end encrypted. Unlike other encrypted messaging apps like WhatsApp, there’s no corporate/government backdoor—The Signal Foundation itself can’t see the messages or who is in what groups. Several of us also use Signal for our local data center organizing.

Cryptpad/Cryptdrive
<https://cryptpad.fr/>
A free full-featured google docs/drive alternative. Open source and end-to-end encrypted. Occasionally a little glitchy, but did the job.

Riseup Pad
<https://riseup.net/>
Neat utility for creating single collaborative notepads for meeting notes and group writing. Open-source and end-to-end encrypted.



Illustration by CrimeInc. (crimeinc.com) and Municipal Adhesives (municipaladhesives.com)

