

# Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion in the Epoch of AI: A Southern feminist perspective

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# Outline

## PART 1

The inherent limitations of the mainstream 'DEI in AI' frame

- *The goals of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are aspirational for data science communities.*
- *Pursuing dataset diversity within the digital status quo compromises social pluralism and global justice.*

## PART 2

Algorithmic reason

- *We must challenge the institutional regime of algorithmic reason and understand its DNA.*
- *Achille Mbembe's work on brutalism transposed to infrastructures of algorithmic reason.*

## PART 3

An emancipatory infrastructure of cognition

- *Drawing from a feminist cyborgian frame, there is a need for a radical cartography of resistance - with questions for all of us to answer.*

PART 1

# The inherent limitations of the mainstream 'DEI in AI' frame



A decade of technical debiasing efforts shows that

*Capturing ground truth is extremely challenging and precise fairness remains elusive.*

Mathematical treatment of fairness also requires categorisation

*Putting people into groups in order to express individual fairness.*

**This presents a data challenge of pragmatics and ethics.**

A systematic review ([Cachet-Rosset and Klarsfield 2023](#)) of 46 DEI guidelines for AI systems from 2015- 2023 found that the overwhelming majority of guidance reduced DEI to a narrow technical idea rather than situate the techno-social-institutional dynamics of systems in context.

# Equal or Equitable?

*Both statistical parity and equalised odds are defensible depending on the context, but they are also generally incompatible.*

Despite the limits of mathematization, the tech industry has continued to flirt with mathematical fixes.

**This is owing to the fact that ideological and material underpinnings of digital capitalism are firmly grounded in dataism**

# Dataism is

## The idea

*that “large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with the aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy”*

## The assumption

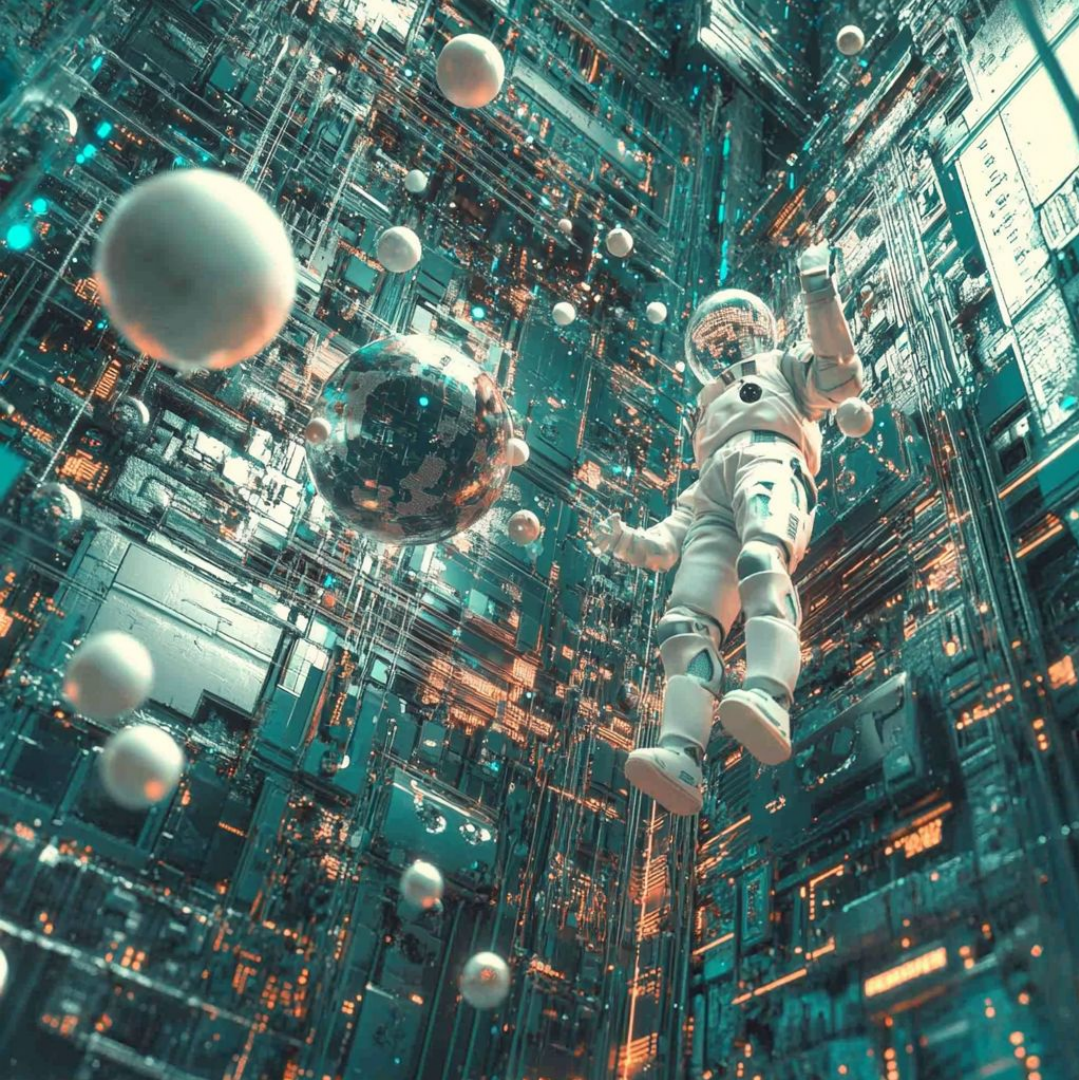
*that “each single data set is likely to have some intrinsic, hidden, not yet unearthed value”*

## The impulse

**For monopoly profit that makes AI production a closed, proprietised activity occurring on network scale through huge infrastructures that render human and humanised intervention implausible.**

*According to industry predictions ([Gartner](#)), 60% of data for AI will be synthetic by 2024 (up from 1% in 2021) to simulate reality, future scenarios and for the scientific pursuit to derisk AI. In a dynamic world of great social complexity and in the absence of real world data in so many countries to validate synthetic data, we have every reason to worry about the societal consequences of the reality and truth shaped by digital capitalism.*





PART 2

# Algorithmic reason

Data seen as absolute truth ('a priori truth') leads to a world of **algorithmic injustice**.

Pandemic-driven datafication has appropriated people and planet as a "**standing reserve**" for **techno-capitalist endeavour**.

Institutional regime of algorithmic reason is a  
**'brutalist infrastructure of extraction'**.

*"Our rationalities and associated arrogances have led us to a horrific place in the contemporary moment of techno-modernity". - **Achille Mbembe***

**Policy approaches** tend to separate AI systems and the institutional environments in which they are deployed.

**An infrastructural approach** instead helps us see digital capitalism as a dynamic socio-technical structure with multiple, distributed parts.

The infrastructures of algorithmic reason are situated in particular material conditions and “*cut through the economic, the cultural and the political*” (Amin and Thrift 2017, cited in Barua 2021).

The material,  
immaterial, and  
corporeal  
dimensions of  
algorithmic reason



a. The material  
dimension or  
infrastructures  
of plunder

The AI empire is sustained by **invisible labor**.

The exponential growth of generative AI models backed by speculative finance lead to rising energy demands and carbon emissions, **worsening climate impacts for the most vulnerable.**

“One illustration of the difficulty of investigating and tracking the contemporary production chain process is that it took Intel more than four years to understand its supply line well enough to ensure that no tantalum from the Congo was in its microprocessor products.”

- Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler (2018)  
in their piece on the *Anatomy of an AI system*

From Meta to Amazon and other Big Tech firms, a race is on to **plunder natural resources**.

Emerging platform models take advantage of migration in global care chains to **exploit** a highly precarious, informalised, feminised and racialised workforce.

**b. The immaterial  
dimension or  
infrastructures of  
ignorance**

Digital capitalism **monopolizes** collective knowledge and social cooperation.

AI leverages **ignorance as a plea** for the failure to prevent crimes against humanity.

As Mbembe notes with cutting simplicity, *“..Like knowledge, ignorance is a form of power. Knowing does not automatically lead to freedom and not knowing frees one from almost any responsibility while allowing an increase in control and in power.”*

c. The corporeal  
dimension or  
infrastructures of  
automation

In the AI empire individuals are **stratified, classified and commodified**. Data sets have proven to be **racist, sexist, casteist**.

Our digital identities are fragmented, disembodied and commodified, **losing authenticity and inner essence** (Carlsson, 2016; Mbembe).



*Tethered to liberal democratic assumptions, we fixate on individual privacy rights, obfuscating how the **capitalist AI paradigm** produces profit through the **manipulation of identities**.*

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Subjectivity, emptied of soulfulness, is a stupid remainder, the counterpart to a society of automated algorithmic intelligence (Baudrillard, J. 2005).



PART 3

# An emancipatory infrastructure of cognition

# What would it mean to question dataism?

It would mean -

acknowledging that  
a mathematical  
map can never  
excavate the full  
territory;

accepting the limits  
of mathematical  
representations of  
reality;

interrogating the truth  
condition of AI systems -  
basically, understanding  
and addressing what it  
does in the real world in  
terms of social power and

building a new  
cartography of AI  
infrastructure

*“Our sense-making, claims-making and place-making strategies must account for an emergent reflexivity – ‘a becoming social’ – that can confront the digital devil in the detail.”*

Anita Gurumurthy & Nandini Chami  
in *Feminist Frames for a Brave New Digitality*

## Policy guidance for ethical conceptions of AI

**accountability** (*responsibility, auditability, human oversight*),  
**explainability** (*interpretability, traceability, predictability*),  
**informational openness** (*disclosure, user control and visibility*)  
and **fairness** (*tied to ideas of justice and inclusion*).

(Lucas Costa Dos Sanjos, 2024 presentation)

Anchored in particular modes of knowability, the institutional ethics for AI in digital capitalism run into a problem.

They privilege the structures of cognition, but leave untouched the infrastructures of reason

The ethics of knowability are limited to a world in which data must flow, and is required to flow, Our legitimating devices for data flows are woefully narrow and distorted – compliance assessments for product safety, intellectual property, personal data protection...

Algorithmic society is also a society of fragmentation that valorises private ownership, individualism and profit at all costs.

## Feminist and Cyborgian Approach to AI Futures

For **Donna Haraway**, knowledge-making technologies must be made relentlessly visible and open to critical intervention  
(Haraway 1997, 36)

Wilson proposes four strategies - witnessing, situating, diffracting and acquiring. We look at how each of these can help us grapple with the question of a better AI sociality.

## Witnessing and situating

Witnessing, in the cyborgian lexicon, is a seeing that is simultaneously partial, yet objective.

Situating - in cyborgian terms - is a tool for seeing difference – mapping the relationalities in techno-social spaces.

*Witnessing and situating are co-dependent practices.*



To peek into and inquire about techno-social & nature-culture encounters is to understand the multiplicity of knowledge practices & to call attention to them.

How can AI infrastructure design allow for distributed geographies of vigilance that visibilise oppression, recognise, and '*re-cognise*' the multiplicity of infrastructural communities and publics related to the AI?

How can we meaningfully populate ideas of AI audits or AI explainability in public policy?

## Diffraction

Diffraction is a strategy to alter the politics of knowledge and construct knowledges differently. Diffraction is about mapping where the effects of difference appear (Haraway 1992, 300).

*“As witnessing is about ‘seeing’ and situating is about placings, diffraction is about changing knowledges, reconstructing knowledge practices such that alternative understandings of these knowledges emerge.”*

The truth condition of AI systems is not about computational representations of reality in the form of data constructs or computational definitions. The ultimate test of the veracity of such systems is pragmatic.

Making our data futures egalitarian is to go beyond revisionist thinking within surveillance capitalism.

An emancipatory infrastructure of cognition need not be in search of bigger data nor aim for perfect universal knowledge.

## Acquiring

**Acquiring** in Haraway's work is an epistemological strategy that asks us to “take risks in building working alliances for learning from the observed, to allow the unknown and the alternatively known to inhabit our ways of knowing, to alter them permanently.”

*Acquiring is an act of responsible collaboration.*

*“The human person is a compound of multiple living entities. It is not self-generating. Others are always responsible for its coming to life.”*

Reading Mbembe into Cyborgian strategies for a new politics of AI is to ask how the planet and its non-human life are accounted in data science.

What are the emancipatory ideals of freedom in an interdependent society of solidarity and dignity?

This submission is not to give yet another guidance for how to code. The leap from knowing to understanding with a *soul* is not a formula that can be encoded.

It is about the questions we can ask so that we open up the *dialogue* for a freedom of consciousness.

Thank you

