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Dan McQuillan,

RESISTING AI: AN
ANTI-FASCIST APPROACH
TO ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE

Bristol University Press, 2022.

Dan McQuillan's book, *Resisting AI: An Anti-fascist Approach to Artificial Intelligence* (2022) published by Bristol University Press, is one of the seminal works that destabilizes the foundational assumption of artificial intelligence as a 'neutral' multi-layer neural network. The book is thoughtfully organized into seven chapters. The first four chapters dive deep into the structural exponents of AI (technical, scientific, philosophical, social, legal, and political), while the last three chapters focus on suggestions, challenges and solutions to resist the covert racism of AI. The book is an essential read for scholars across disciplines (humanities, social sciences, and STEM) who are developing, deploying, and doing research into artificial intelligence. It is grounded in a robust technical understanding of AI's computational logic and operations. In *Resisting AI*, the reader will also find a thought-provoking examination of

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both the historical trajectory of AI development, as well as a description of the contemporary and future projects of AI application. The book's strength lies in its thorough criticism of AI and the embedded 'fascist' dangers intrinsic to its use (e.g. the racial bias of facial recognition, the discrimination in AI classifications, and also "Orwellian levels of data capture"²).

McQuillan's central argument revolves around the idea that AI is far from neutral. Instead, it is permeated by ideological and political biases that reflect and amplify existing power structures, from racial discrimination to capitalist technocracy. McQuillan opens the book with a technical exposition in the first chapter, "Operations of AI." This chapter establishes a foundation for readers outside the technical field of AI. In it, he elucidates core concepts such as machine learning, datasets, logic of optimization, neural networks, and technological infrastructures. The inner workings of the technology, while highly technical in nature, serve as a foundation for understanding AI's broader implications and the potential consequences of its use.

The second chapter "Collateral Damage," shifts the focus to exposing the fragility of AI, and the problems that emerge "with applying AI as a solution to social problems."³ The chapter describes AI essentially as a form of "post-hoc guesswork"⁴ and "probabilistic algorithms,"⁵ which could both basically be seen as interpretable models of statistical patterns. According to McQuillan, these patterns are embedded in cultural prejudice. The author argues that AI, far from being a benign tool, often exacerbates societal inequalities. He provides thorough case studies including the COMPAS algorithm, EU's AI regulations, UK's Troubled Family Programme, and the Amazon/Netradyne system to examine the complexities of applying AI. McQuillan critiques the application of AI in social domains like law enforcement and welfare, pointing out its reliance on biased data sets that perpetuate racial and class-based disparities. The author focuses on AI's "apparent generalizability between domains,"⁶ and the threat in applying a pattern-finding technology to social issues. These examples demonstrate how AI's supposed generalizability across domains is not only flawed, but also dangerous.

The third chapter "AI Violence," marks a pivotal point in the book's critique. Here, McQuillan introduces a critical theoretical framework for understanding AI's operations as a form of epistemic violence. The chapter opens with a critique of AI's reductionist abstractions by drawing on Heidegger's notion of 'enframing.' He extrapolates the idea of AI as a reduction of being into a calculative order. This chapter is methodologically distinct, due to its positioning of AI within a critical theoretical perspective. The book's central argument is placed within this chapter, as the author argues that "AI acts as an epistemic power grab that conceals politics and ideology

² Dan McQuillan, *Resisting AI* (Policy Press, 2022), 53.

³ *Ibid*, 27.

⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

⁵ *Ibid*, 36.

⁶ *Ibid*, 44.

under its machinic opacity.”⁷ He further states that AI operates on an “engine of precaritization”⁸ that flourishes under neoliberalism, and has the potential to not only push back the conditions of work by a century, but also effectively create almost Orwellian levels of data capture.

Invoking sociologist Randy Martin and his critique of finance regarding the “social logic of the derivative,” he suggests that AI engenders a “logic of fragmentation, financialization and speculation.”⁹ Thus, the author warns us of the scaling of ‘structural violence,’ exemplified through Fricker’s notion of ‘epistemic injustice,’ and goes on to contend that AI is plausibly an upgrade to the existing bureaucratic order. In this chapter, the author builds a series of arguments to highlight the dystopian present in which we all live, and consistently alarms us about a heightened ‘precarity’ in the future. He puts forward the idea that AI in fact intensifies social marginalization by replicating what Gayatri Spivak called ‘epistemic violence,’ and is also characterized by the ‘thoughtlessness’ that Hannah Arendt believed to be grounded in “bureaucratic abstraction”¹⁰ which gives rise to “administrative violence.”¹¹ The chapter concludes with a debate on “algorithmic apartheid,” and concludes that “AI not only perpetuates racist discrimination but acts, at a deeper level, as a technology of racialization.”¹²

The fourth chapter “Necropolitics,” extends this analysis by drawing on Achille Mbembe’s concept of ‘necropolitics’ to highlight the violent ways in which AI is tied to state control, surveillance, and racialized violence. By drawing on Mbembe, he describes the continuation of slavery and colonial hierarchies in the contemporary state policies and practices, such as the welfare state model, Poland’s LGBT policies, Greece’s refugee camps, and the NarxCare database. Thus, the author is enabling the readers to envision a future within a ‘carceral state,’ marked by increased securitization. McQuillan’s arguments culminate in asserting that “separation and segregation are the fundamental operations of both AI and eugenics, and the urgent question is how much this legacy will help to shape a post-AI society.”¹³ Ultimately, the author’s evidence and theoretical framework suggest that AI is fostering fascist-like tendencies, which are rooted in neoreactionary ideologies, capitalist technocracy, data-driven eugenics, and racialized ethnocentrism.

The second half of McQuillan’s book offers a roadmap for resisting the growing influence of AI, and especially its racialized and exclusionary tendencies. In the fifth chapter, “Post-Machinic Learning,” he focuses on critiquing AI’s claims to neutrality, and proposes feminist approaches, new materialism, and critical care pedagogy as ways of reimagining knowledge production that would not be based on exclusion or domination.

⁷ Ibid, 51.

⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁹ Ibid, 55.

¹⁰ Ibid, 62.

¹¹ Ibid, 63.

¹² Ibid, 65, 66.

¹³ Ibid, 91.

In the sixth chapter “People’s Councils,” McQuillan looks into historical and contemporary examples of collective action, like the Rojava revolution (development of ‘Jineoloji,’ or the ‘science of women’) and the Luddite movement, to show various possible forms of resistance. He advocates for “solidarity” and the creation of “commoning” spaces to challenge the “algorithmic state of exception”¹⁴ that threatens to control every aspect of life through AI. This chapter offers a vision of hope, highlighting the potential for grassroots movements to reshape the relationship between technology and society.

The final chapter crystallizes McQuillan’s call to action. He argues that any attempt to resist AI must be both anti-colonial and feminist, and that the fight against AI must put the voices of the marginalized in its center. McQuillan suggests that, instead of surrendering to AI as a tool of state power, we must reclaim it and build a new apparatus that expands the commons and protects human dignity.

Resisting AI offers a comprehensive and timely analysis on AI as a new form of technology. McQuillan’s analysis is all-encompassing, and draws on a wide range of theoretical frameworks and extensive examples of current application. All of this makes the book not only a must-read for scholars in disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, political science, and computer science, but also for anyone working with AI technology, whether in academia, industry, or policy. □

¹⁴ Ibid, 122.