Simple Sabotage: A Field Manual for Refusing Corporate AI

Nov. 5, 2026

1:00 - 2:00 p.m.

Hybrid

Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship



Stream

Digital Scholarship



Land Acknowledgement

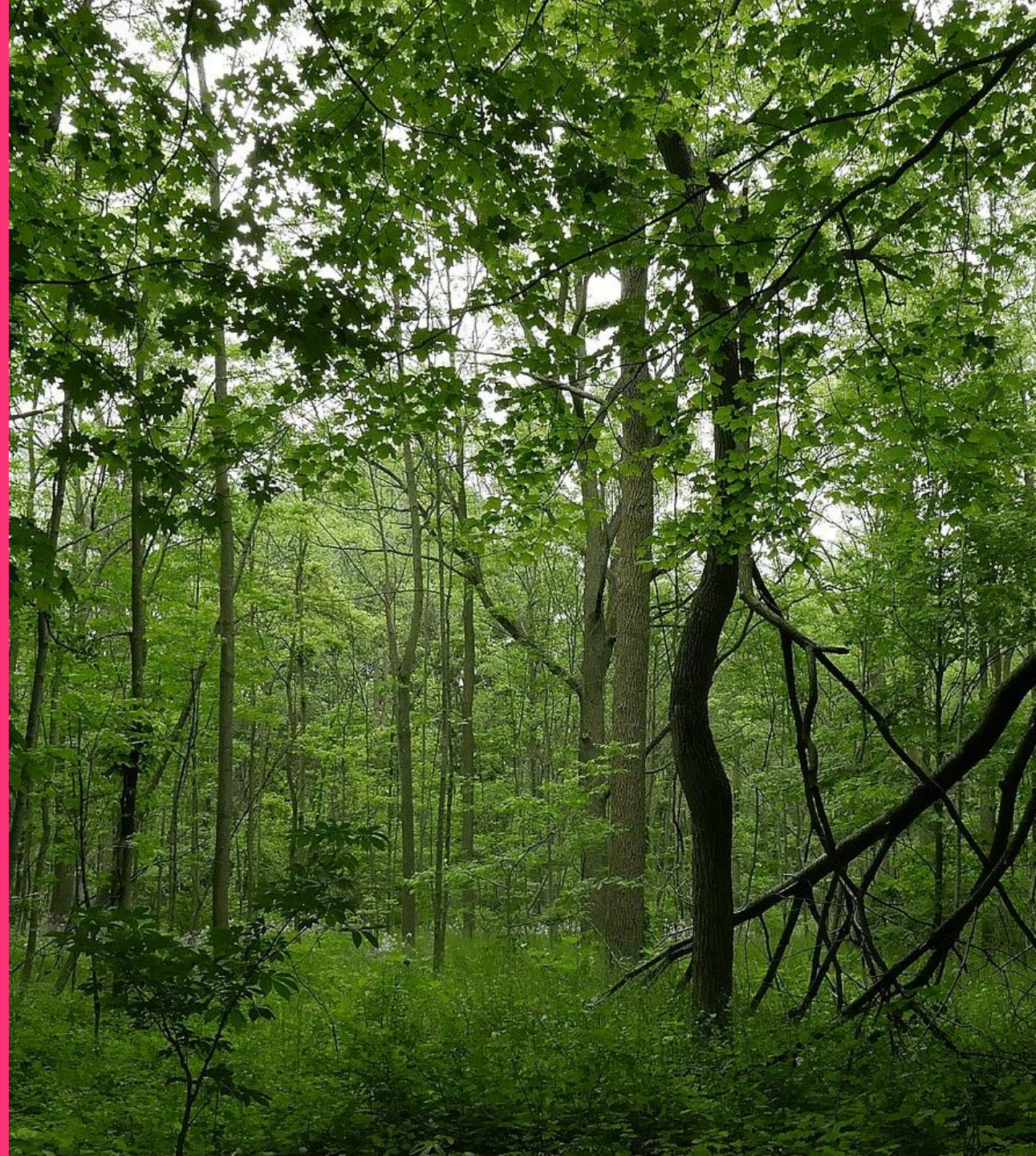
McMaster University is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee Nations. Settlers have responsibilities under the Silver Covenant Chain Wampum, part of the 1764 Treaty of Niagara.

Georgia Kirkos, “Cootes Trail,” October 29, 2021, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada https://brand-resources.mcmaster.ca/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=40837

Simple Sabotage: A field manual for refusing corporate AI

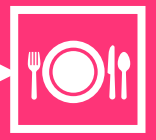
Devon Mordell, John Fink, Danica Evering

November 5, 2026

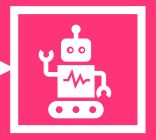


Michael hunter, “Kings Forest Park, Hamilton Ontario.” 7 June 2016, via Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 4.0

Outline


Setting the Table


Devon: Small, practical acts of refusal


John: Local LLMs + what GenAI actually does


Danica: Sabotaging Harm, Plagiarism, and Opacity


Discussion

Fall 2026: Upcoming Workshops

Data Analysis Support Hub

November 18 - Prediction Model Performance for Binary Outcomes in R
November 25 - Basic Mapping and Analysis Using ArcGIS Pro
November 26 - Microdata Analysis with Python using Statistics Canada Data

Digital Research

November 10 - DORA: Visualizing Research Impact
February 10 - Introduction to Bibliometric Analysis

Research Data Management

November 17 - Setting Up a Research Project with Data from Humans and Preparing for Ethics
December 8 - Setting up a New Reproducible Research Project: Data Sharing, Documentation, File Formats, and More!
February 17 - Personal Health Information and Sensitive Data: Practical Examples of Storage, Security, Data Sharing, and Beyond

Do More with Digital Scholarship

November 5 - Simple Sabotage: A Field Manual for Refusing Corporate AI

November 24 - Creating Interactive Data Visualizations with Power BI
December 10 - Introduction to SQL

Code of Conduct, Session Recording, & Privacy

Code of Conduct: The Sherman Centre and the McMaster University Library are committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. Anyone experiencing or witnessing disruptive behaviour is asked to bring attention to the presenters or email scds@mcmaster.ca.

Sessions are recorded and include live captioning, and we share recordings, slides, and transcripts afterward. Because these materials are provided, and to help protect participant privacy and consent, we ask that attendees do not use AI note-taking or automated recording tools (such as Otter.ai, Fireflies.ai, Zoom AI Companion, or similar apps) without prior permission from the organizers. **scds.ca/events/code-of-conduct**

Session Recording: This session is being recorded with the intention of being shared publicly via the web for future audiences. In respect of your privacy, participant lists will not be shared outside of this session, nor will question or chat transcripts. Questions asked via the chat box will be read by the facilitator without identifying you. Note that you may be identifiable when asking a question during the session in an audio or visual format.

Certificate Programs

The Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship Certificate of Attendance

The Sherman Centre's certificate program recognizes attendance at our workshops. It complements degree training, supports the development of critical competencies in data analysis, research data management, and digital scholarship, and formalizes core skills fostered by our workshops.

Participants are invited to collect **seven** workshop points to receive a certificate of attendance. To verify your participation in today's workshop, we will provide a code and additional instructions at the end of the session.

You can learn more about the certificate program at **scds.ca/certificate-program**

The Canadian Certificate for Digital Humanities

This workshop is also eligible for the Canadian Certificate for Digital Humanities. To learn more about the certificate, visit **ccdhhn.ca**. You can also contact local liaison Kirsten Feldner at scds@mcmaster.ca.

Simple Sabotage

(11) *General Interference with Organizations and Production*

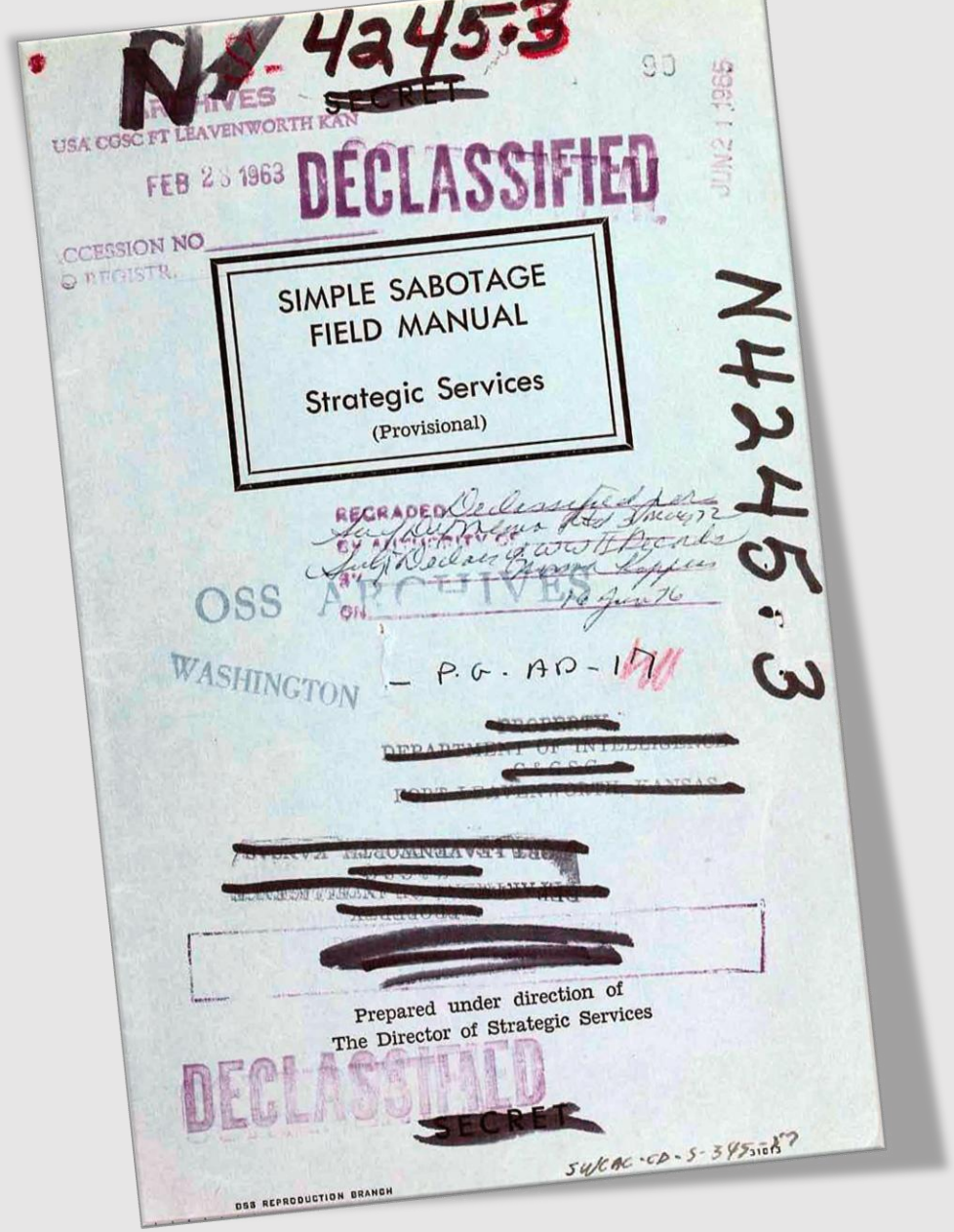
(a) Organizations and Conferences

(1) Insist on doing everything through "channels." Never permit short-cuts to be taken in order to expedite decisions.

(2) Make "speeches." Talk as frequently as possible and at great length. Illustrate your "points" by long anecdotes and accounts of personal experiences. Never hesitate to make a few appropriate "patriotic" comments.

(3) When possible, refer all matters to committees, for "further study and consideration." Attempt to make the committees as large as possible — never less than five.

(4) Bring up irrelevant issues as frequently as possible.



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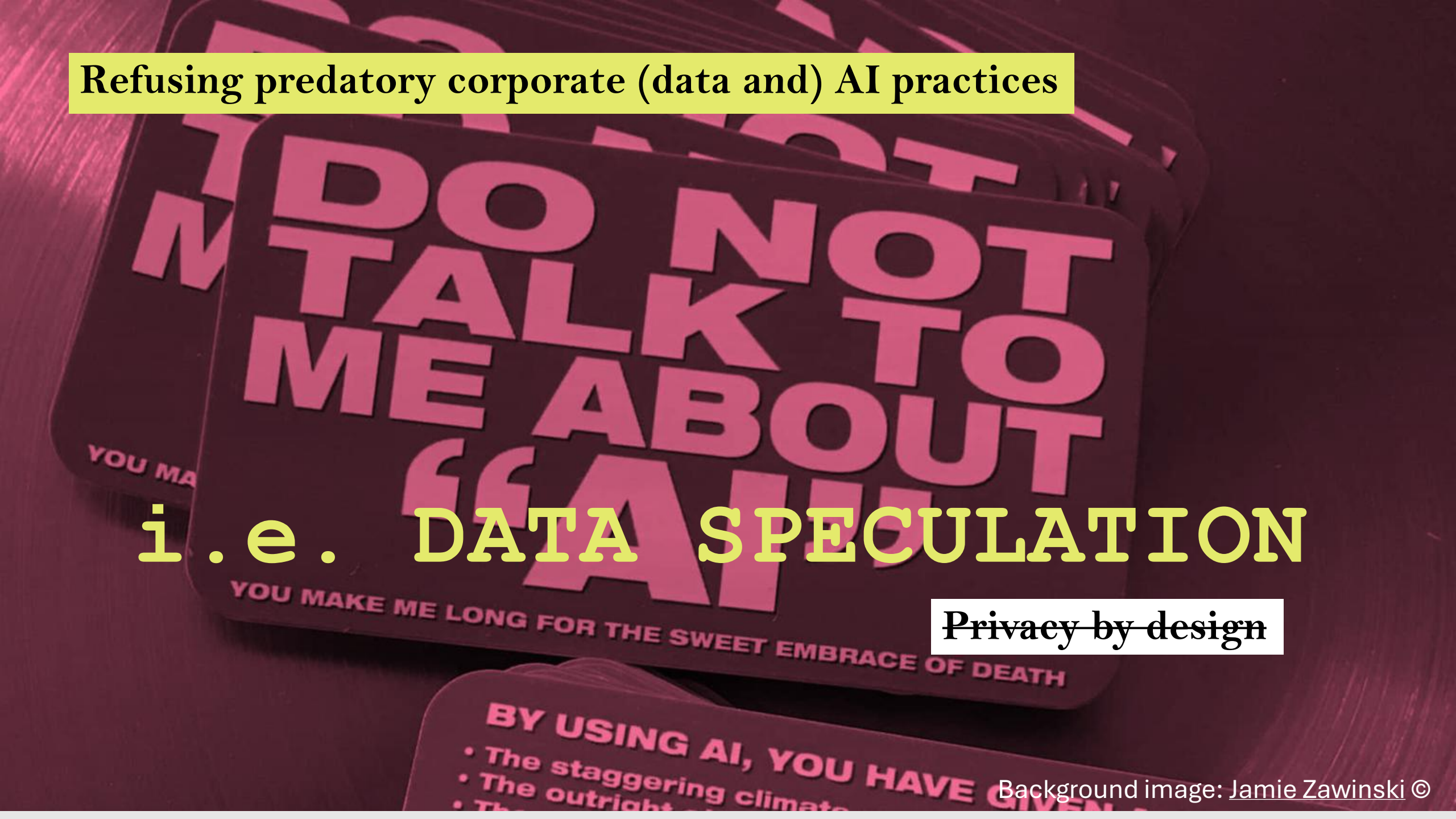


Refusing predatory corporate (data and) AI practices

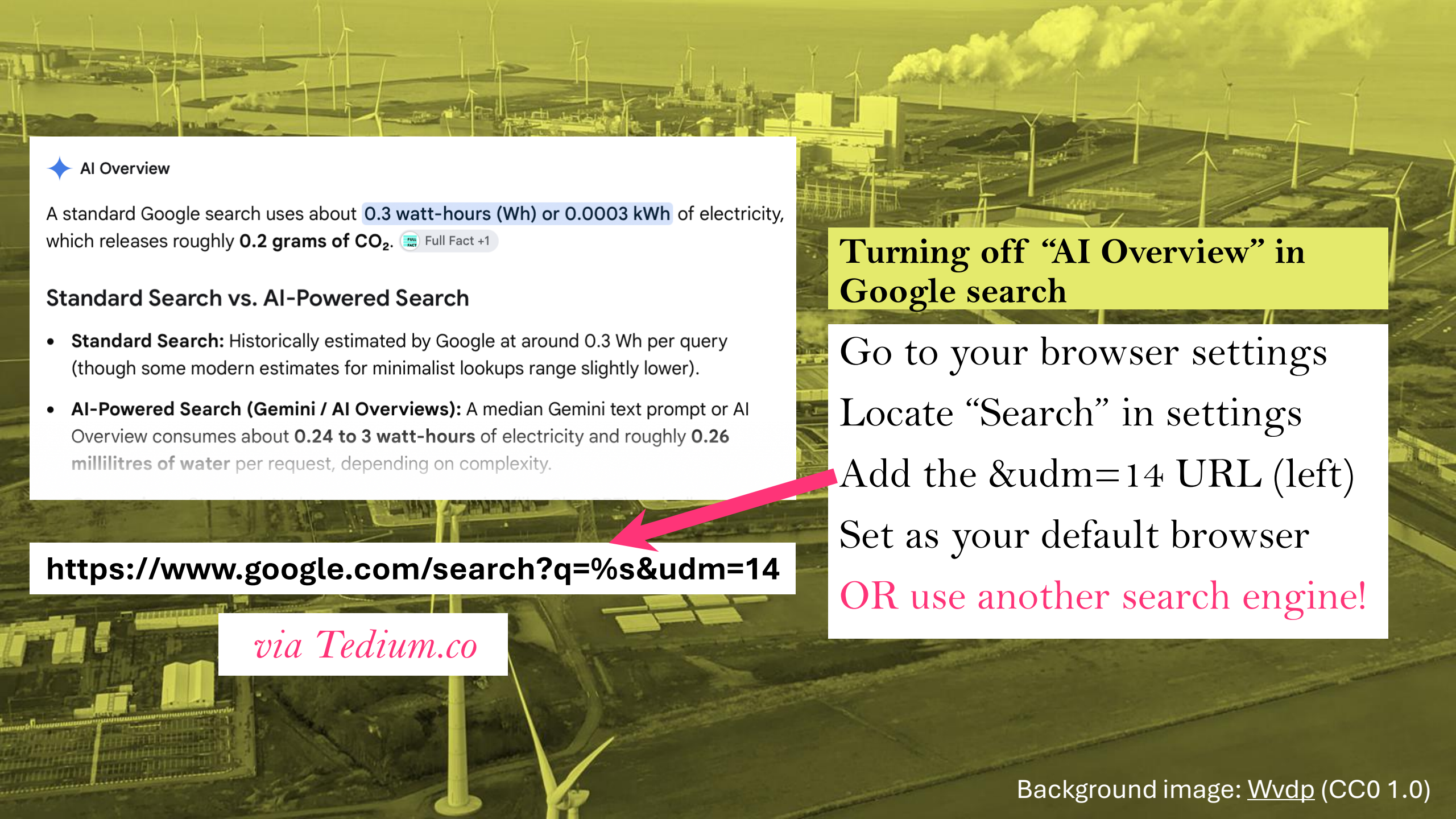
i.e. DATA SPECULATION

~~Privacy by design~~

Background image: Jamie Zawinski ©

1. Small, practical acts of refusal




AI Overview
A standard Google search uses about 0.3 watt-hours (Wh) or 0.0003 kWh of electricity, which releases roughly 0.2 grams of CO_2. Full Fact +1
Standard Search vs. AI-Powered Search
Standard Search: Historically estimated by Google at around 0.3 Wh per query (though some modern estimates for minimalist lookups range slightly lower).
AI-Powered Search (Gemini / AI Overviews): A median Gemini text prompt or AI Overview consumes about 0.24 to 3 watt-hours of electricity and roughly 0.26 millilitres of water per request, depending on complexity.
https://www.google.com/search?q=%s&udm=14
via Tedium.co
Turning off "AI Overview" in Google search
Go to your browser settings
Locate "Search" in settings
Add the &udm=14 URL (left)
Set as your default browser
OR use another search engine!
Background image: Wvdp (CC0 1.0)

Managing Google's "Workspace" settings



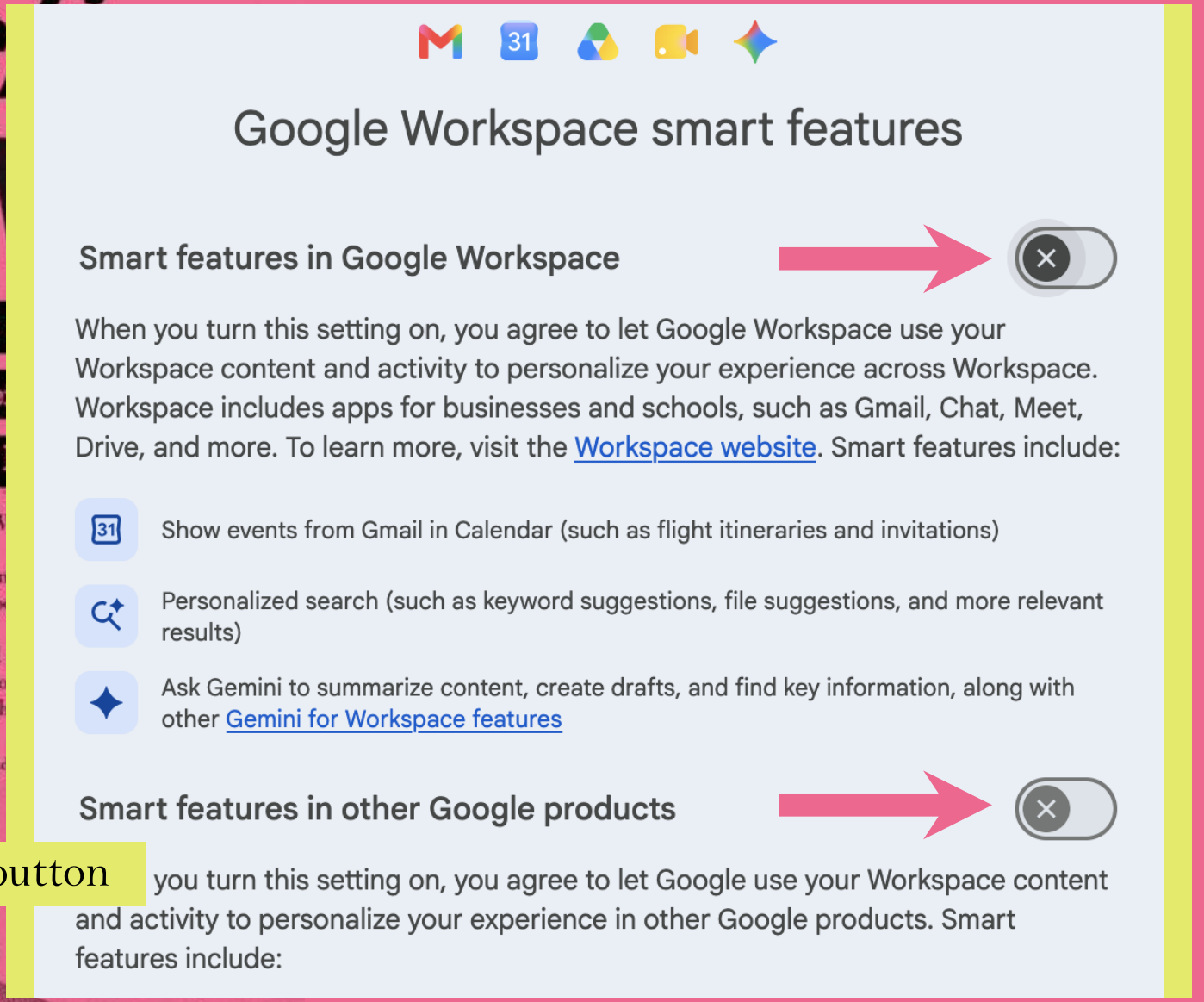
via Jessamyn West

From Gmail…

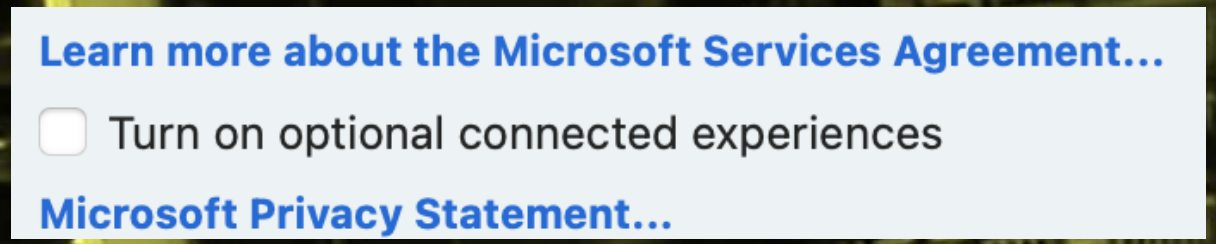
> Settings ("See all settings")

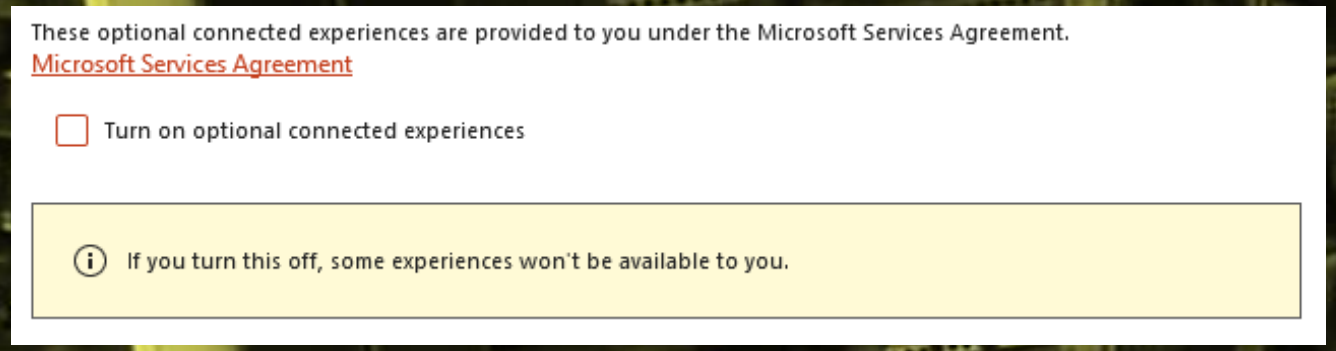
>Manage Workspace smart feature settings button

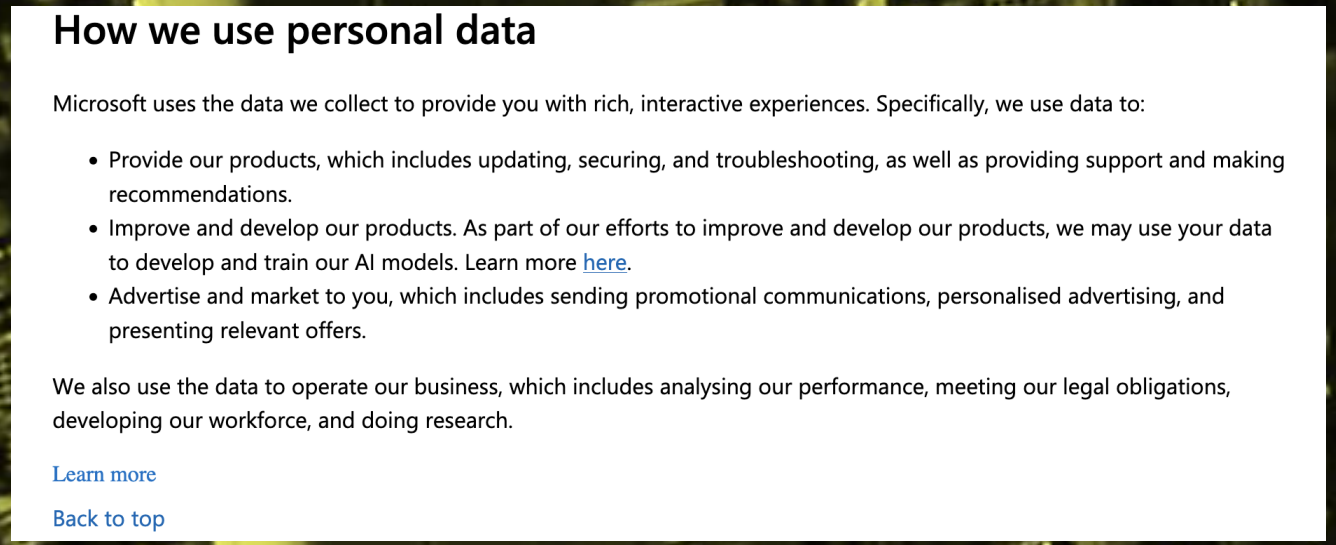
Background image: source



Opting out of “connected experiences” in Microsoft Office







Microsoft365 Online

File > Info > Privacy Settings

Desktop App (Mac)

App > Preferences > Privacy

Desktop App (Windows)

App > Options > General > Privacy Settings

via Jessamyn West

Background image: HenryNewman12 (CC BY-SA 4.0)

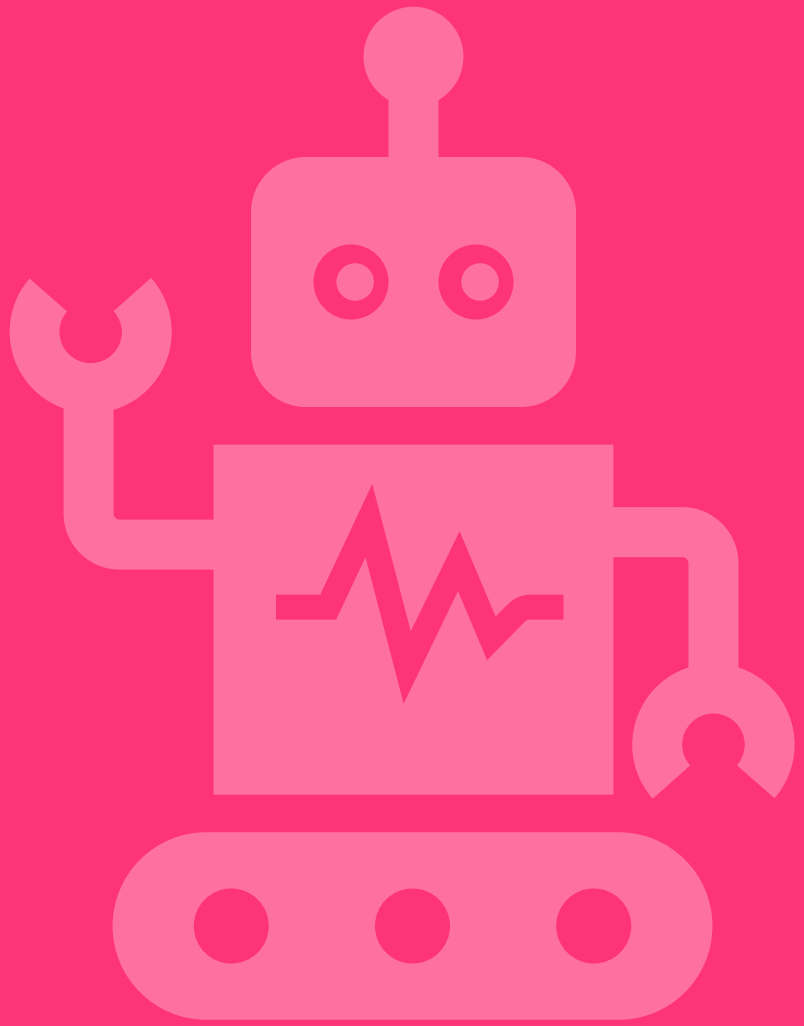
Privacy-oriented options

Browser & search	DuckDuckGo* Brave web browser & search
Documents	LibreOffice cDox (SaaS)
Operating system	Linux
Local AI	Solus (experimental tool from McMaster's AI Lab in Engineering)

Others ?

Background image: source

2. Local LLMs + what GenAI actually does



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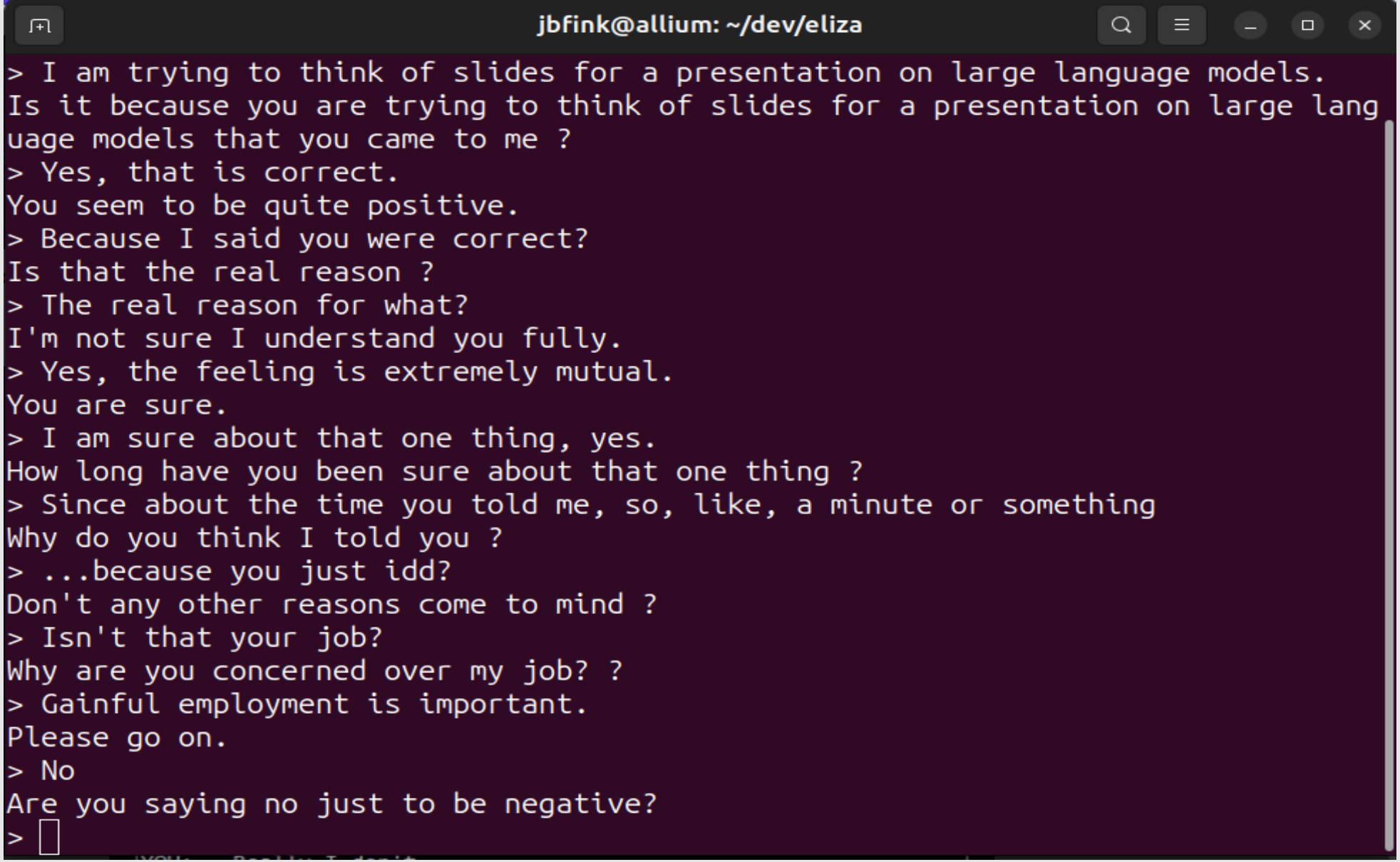
jbfink@allium: ~/dev/eliza
> I am trying to think of slides for a presentation on large language models.
Is it because you are trying to think of slides for a presentation on large lang
uage models that you came to me ?
> Yes, that is correct.
You seem to be quite positive.
> Because I said you were correct?
Is that the real reason ?
> The real reason for what?
I'm not sure I understand you fully.
> Yes, the feeling is extremely mutual.
You are sure.
> I am sure about that one thing, yes.
How long have you been sure about that one thing ?
> Since about the time you told me, so, like, a minute or something
Why do you think I told you ?
> ...because you just idd?
Don't any other reasons come to mind ?
> Isn't that your job?
Why are you concerned over my job? ?
> Gainful employment is important.
Please go on.
> No
Are you saying no just to be negative?
>

The First Book Ever Written by a Computer

THE POLICEMAN'S BEARD IS HALF CONSTRUCTED

Computer prose and poetry by Racter



Illustrations by Joan Hall

Introduction by William Chamberlain

A Bizarre and Fantastic Journey into the Mind of a Machine

Attention Is All You Need

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Illia Polosukhin* ‡ illia.polosukhin@gmail.com

Abstract

The dominant sequence transduction models are based on complex recurrent or convolutional neural networks that include an encoder and a decoder. The best performing models also connect the encoder and decoder through an attention mechanism. We propose a new simple network architecture, the Transformer, based solely on attention mechanisms, dispensing with recurrence and convolutions entirely. Experiments on two machine translation tasks show these models to be superior in quality while being more parallelizable and requiring significantly less time to train. Our model achieves 28.4 BLEU on the WMT 2014 English-to-German translation task, improving over the existing best results, including ensembles, by over 2 BLEU. On the WMT 2014 English-to-French translation task, our model establishes a new single-model state-of-the-art BLEU score of 41.8 after training for 3.5 days on eight GPUs, a small fraction of the training costs of the best models from the literature. We show that the Transformer generalizes well to other tasks by applying it successfully to English constituency parsing both with large and limited training data.



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3. Sabotage Harm, Plagiarism, Opacity

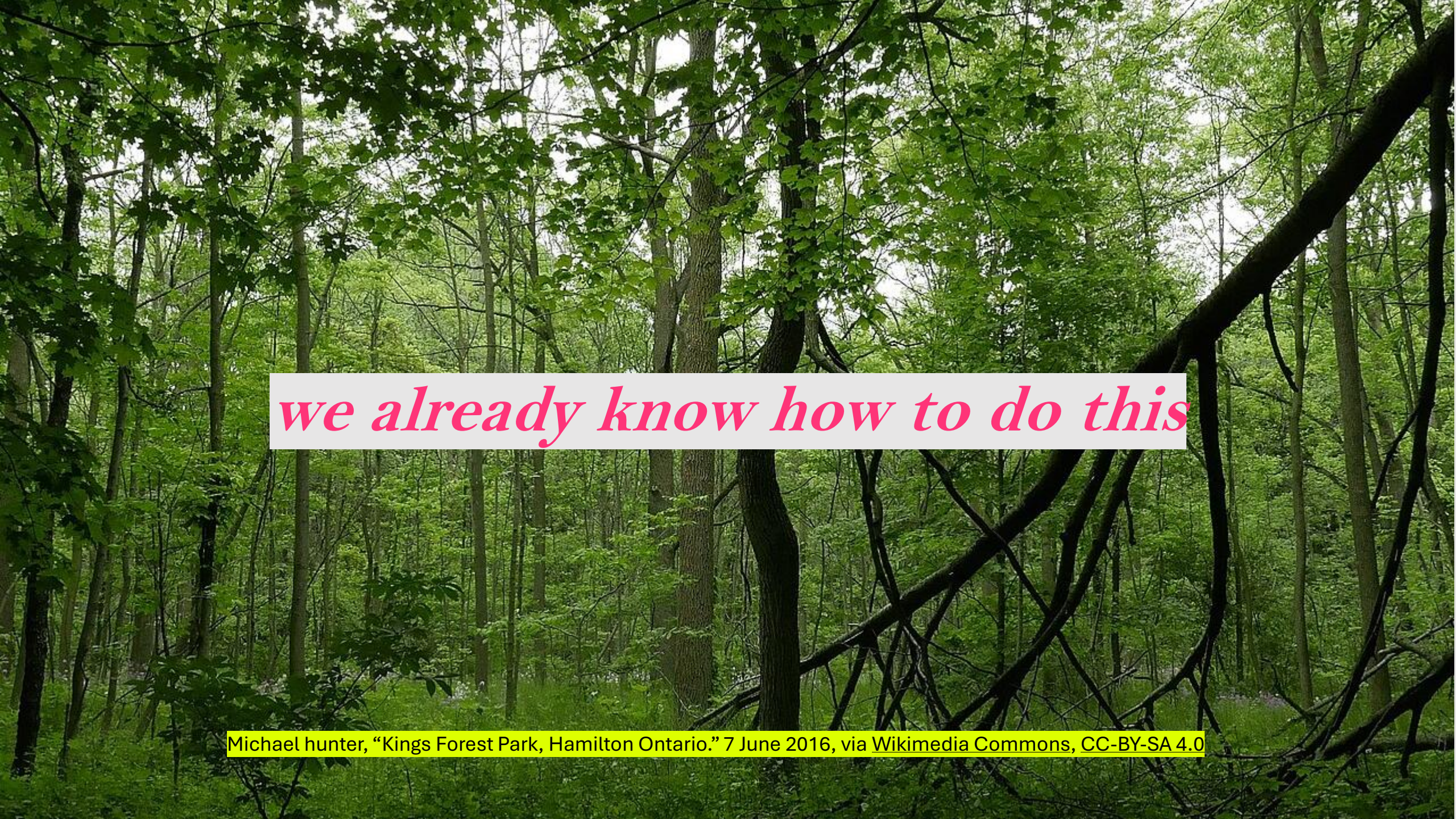
...but first a caveat on poisoning

- **Text:** Disrupt tokenizing through visually similar characters or by using ShieldFont OR just post a ton of satire?
- **Images**: Add watermarks, texture, EXIF noise; Nightshade
- **Backups:** Keep a local copy and publish a protected copy



Epps, A. [@kingavriel]. *Make Your Art and Writing Unusable for AI Training (Easy Methods)* (2026, October 24). [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@kingavriel/video/7699924809374813453?_r=1&_t=ZS-9AspVdHZ8lk

Image: Linnaea Mallette on PublicDomainPictures.net CC0



Michael hunter, “Kings Forest Park, Hamilton Ontario.” 7 June 2016, via Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 4.0

Sabotage harm: **care for data together.**

We know citizens and research participants have a right to full ongoing consent and privacy. They should know where the data they contribute is stored, who has access to it and in what ways it us used.

1. **Avoid corporate storage platforms** (if possible)
2. **Support collective infrastructure.** Consider who benefits and how that informs how they care for data. MacDrive is a local instance of Seafile, Alliance is national infrastructure.
3. **Take data into your own hands.** Build your own server, set up open-source software like NextCloud. Repair components and make local libraries of information with permacomputing.
4. **Everyone must consent before our data gets fed to an LLM.** This goes for individuals and communities.

ImagePerson, "Galium aparine Cleaver vine Ontario 3444.jpg," 25 July 2010, CC-BY 4.0

Raimond Spekking, "Lenovo G500s laptop-2903.jpg," 19 November 2015, CC-BY-SA 4.0

Sabotage plagiarism: **lock down what you don't want eaten.** *Your content will (unfortunately) likely be devoured by bots for training data. We know taking other people's ideas and recycling them without credit is bad. We encourage researchers to use the CRediT Contributor Role Taxonomy to recognize research team roles, and to cite datasets they reuse.*

1. **Deter bots on websites where information, datasets, publications are stored.** Botstopper/Anubis is an open-source tool.
2. **Restrict access**. Repository software like Zenodo and Dataverse have restricted access options.
3. **Choose licenses cautiously.***



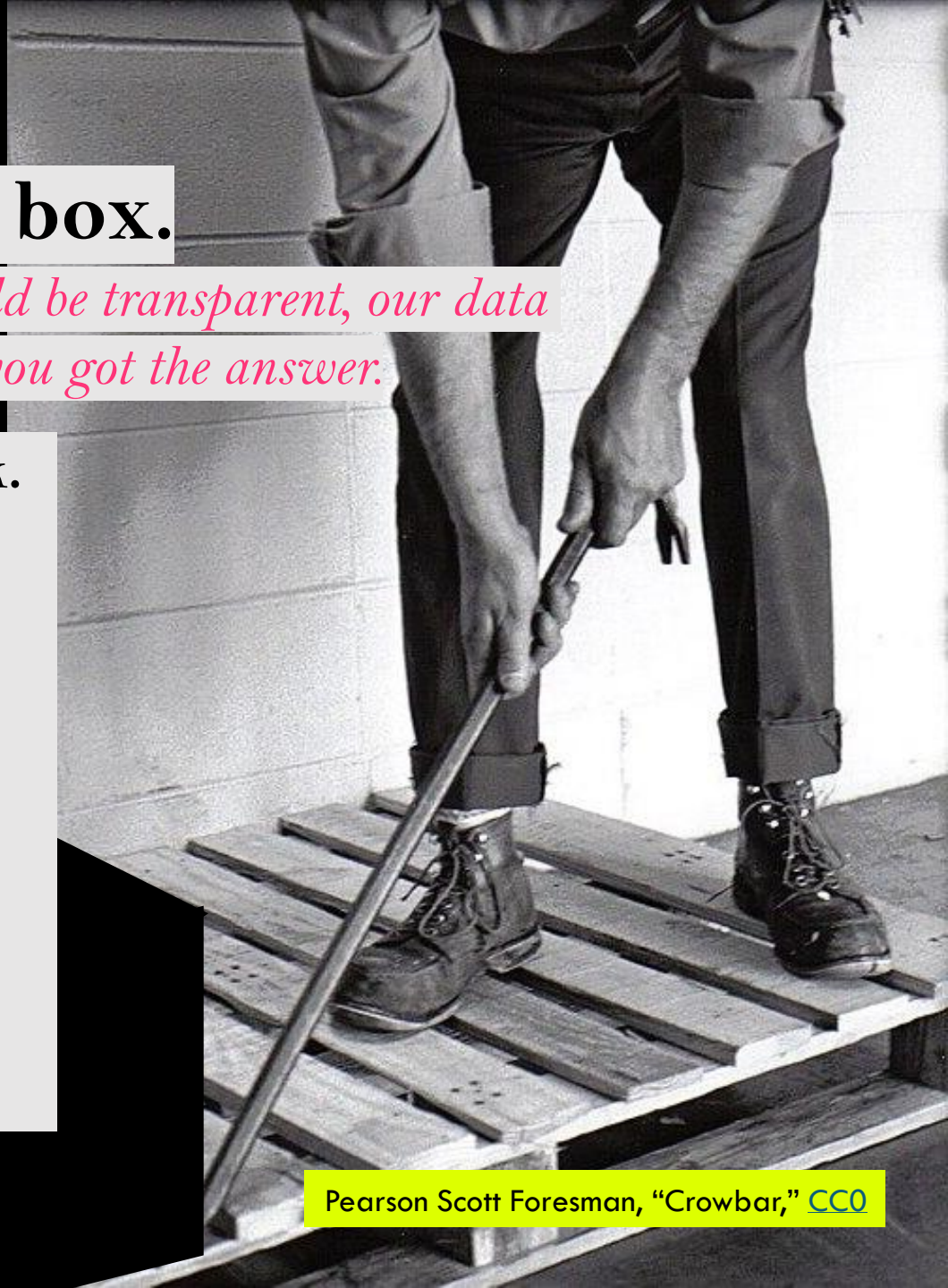
* copyrighted materials aren't safe. In Bartz v Anthropic, authors fought back on feeding books to ChatGPT, and Anthropic hasn't learned their lesson.

daniellehelm, "Gluttony girls.jpg," 8 November 2009, CC-BY 2.0

Sabotage opacity: **open the black box.**

We know you need to show your work. Our process should be transparent, our data should be reproducible, so that someone can follow how you got the answer.

1. **Refuse answers that fail to show their work.**
2. **Demand reproducibility.** REFORMS Consensus-based Recommendations for Machine-learning-based Science is a good model for this.
3. **Create specified models and insist on consent.** Kaitiakitanga License ensures te reo Māori can be transcribed but data are protected within a repository and access is provided based on Māori protocols.



Pearson Scott Foresman, "Crowbar," CC0



Deborah Lupton, "Pop Chips," zenodo.org/records/18929888, CC-BY 2.0, via Better Images of AI.

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