The Rulers

Corporate Power in the Age of AI and the Cloud

Cecilia Rikap




Has anything
changed from previous forms of
corporate power?

The Economist

Theresa May v Brussels

Ten years on: banking after the crisis

South Korea's unfinished revolution

Biology, but without the cells

The world's most valuable resource



Data and the new rules of competition

The Economist

Fox News. Now what?

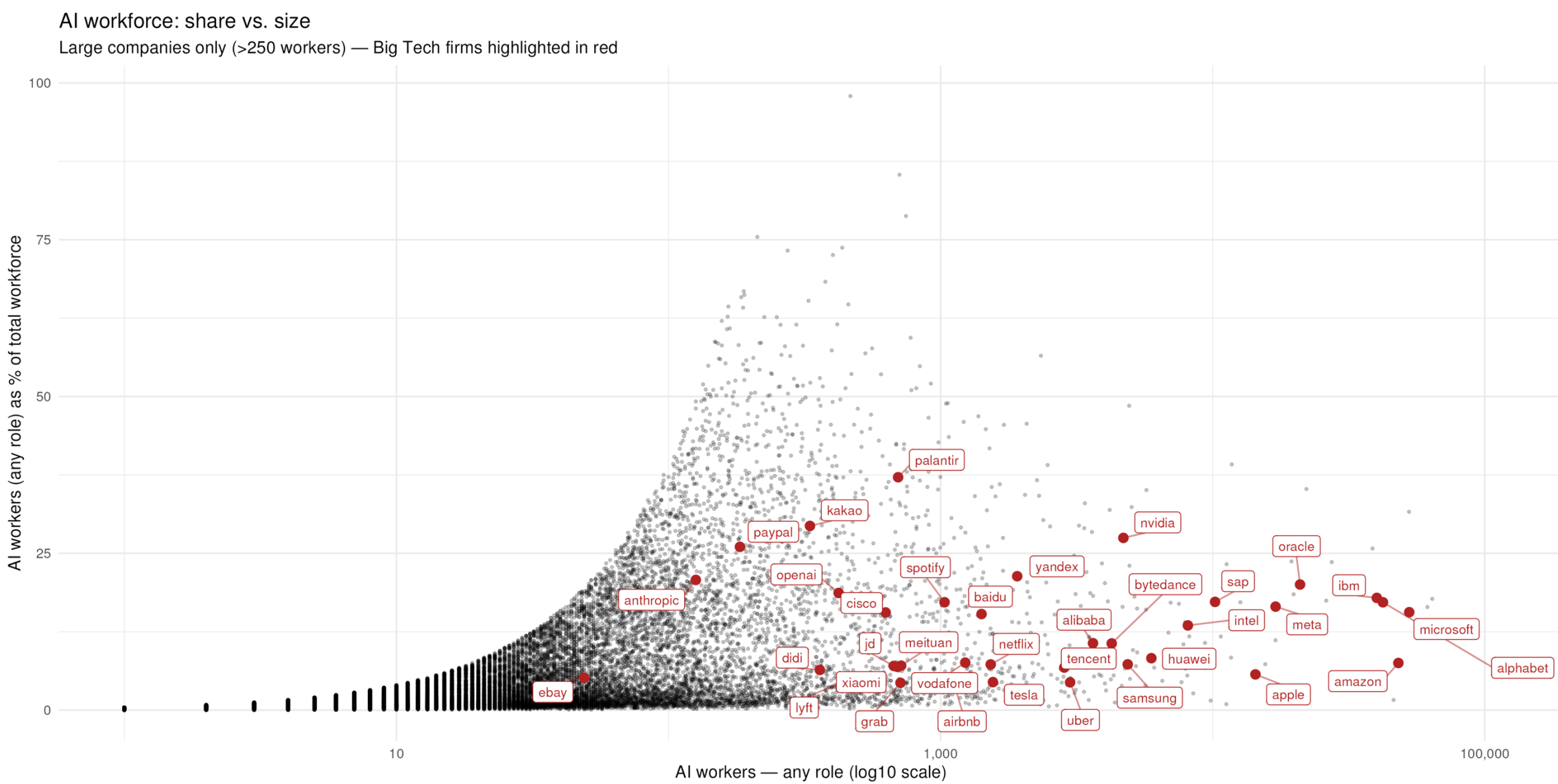
Ukraine's game plan

Why civil wars are lasting longer

A special report on the car industry

APRIL 22ND–28TH 2023




AI workforce: share vs. size
Large companies only (>250 workers) — Big Tech firms highlighted in red
AI workers (any role) as % of total workforce
100
75
50
25
0
10
1,000
100,000
AI workers — any role (log10 scale)
palantir
kakao
paypal
nvidia
oracle
openai
spotify
yandex
sap
ibm
anthropic
cisco
baidu
bytedance
intel
meta
microsoft
alibaba
jd
meituan
netflix
didi
tencent
huawei
alphabet
xiaomi
vodafone
tesla
samsung
apple
amazon
ebay
lyft
grab
airbnb
uber

The Economist

Theresa M

Ten years

South Kor

Biology, b

The world's valuable re



Data and the ne
of competiti

The Economist

AUGUST 2ND–8TH 2025

GREENLAS

How big tech plans to feed AI's voracious appetite for power

As data centres get more energy-hungry, the hyperscalers get more creative

Share



PHOTOGRAPH: DUSTIN CHAMBERS/NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE

Jul 28th 2025 | 5 min read

The Economist

Fox News. Now what?

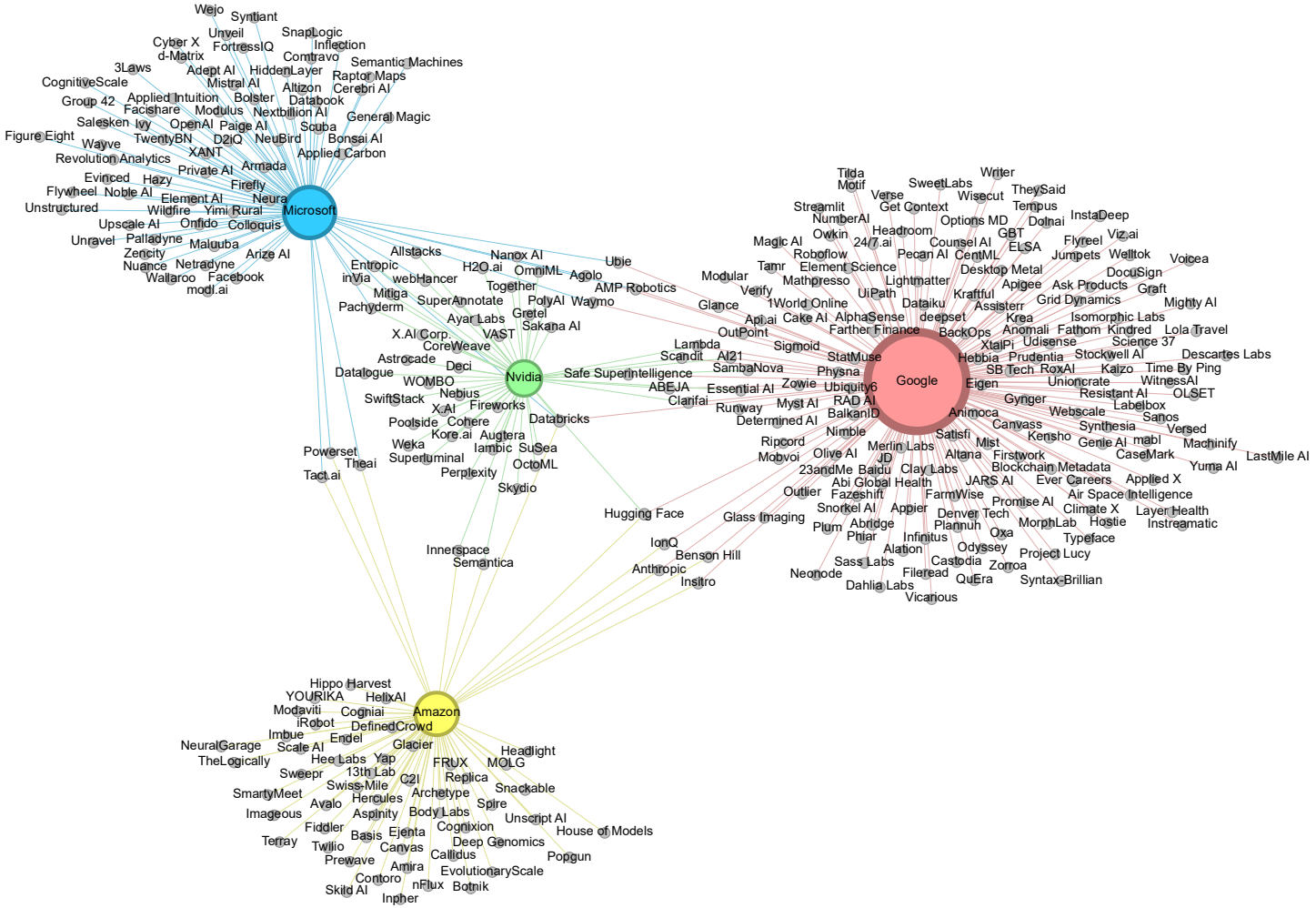
Ukraine's game plan

Why civil wars are lasting longer

A special report on the car industry

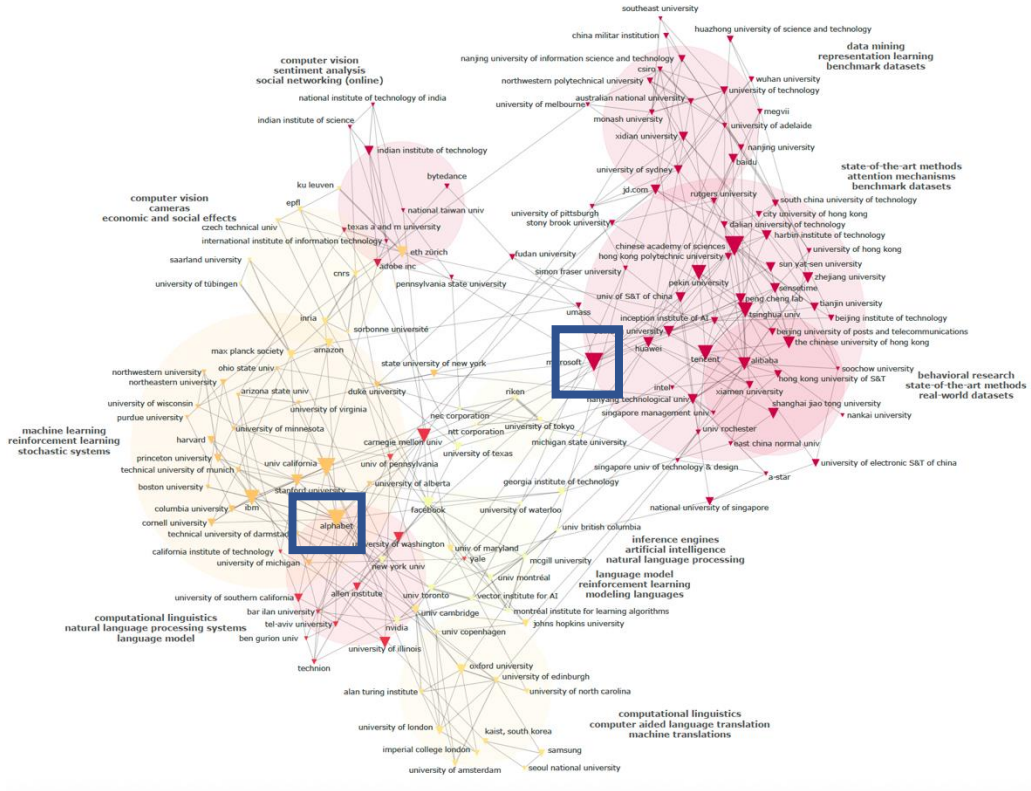
APRIL 22ND–28TH 2023





Private Venture-Backed AI Firms

Source: S&P Capital IQ Pro 2024 – Work with Joseph Baines



Source: 14 top AI Conferences (2018-2020)

	Microsoft
Total scientific publications	15,170
Co-authored publications	13,343
Share of co-autored publications	**88%**
Total Patents	35,233
Co-owned patents	518
Shared of co-owned patents	**1%**
Knowledge appropriation indicator (share of co-authorship over share of co-ownership)	**59.83**

Source: Web of Science (2012-2021)

Reconceptualize Innovation

Co-produced in corporate-led systems
- Learning is asymmetrically distributed

Combines:
- Knowledge (R&D, experiential)
- Data, information
- Narratives

Bullshit innovation

Power relation → value capture

Invention: New treatment







Innovation: Approved drug in a market


Is there anything special in tech? What and who are the “Big Tech”?

The cloud as the ecosystem

Bottleneck: Amazon, Microsoft Google

65% of the global market

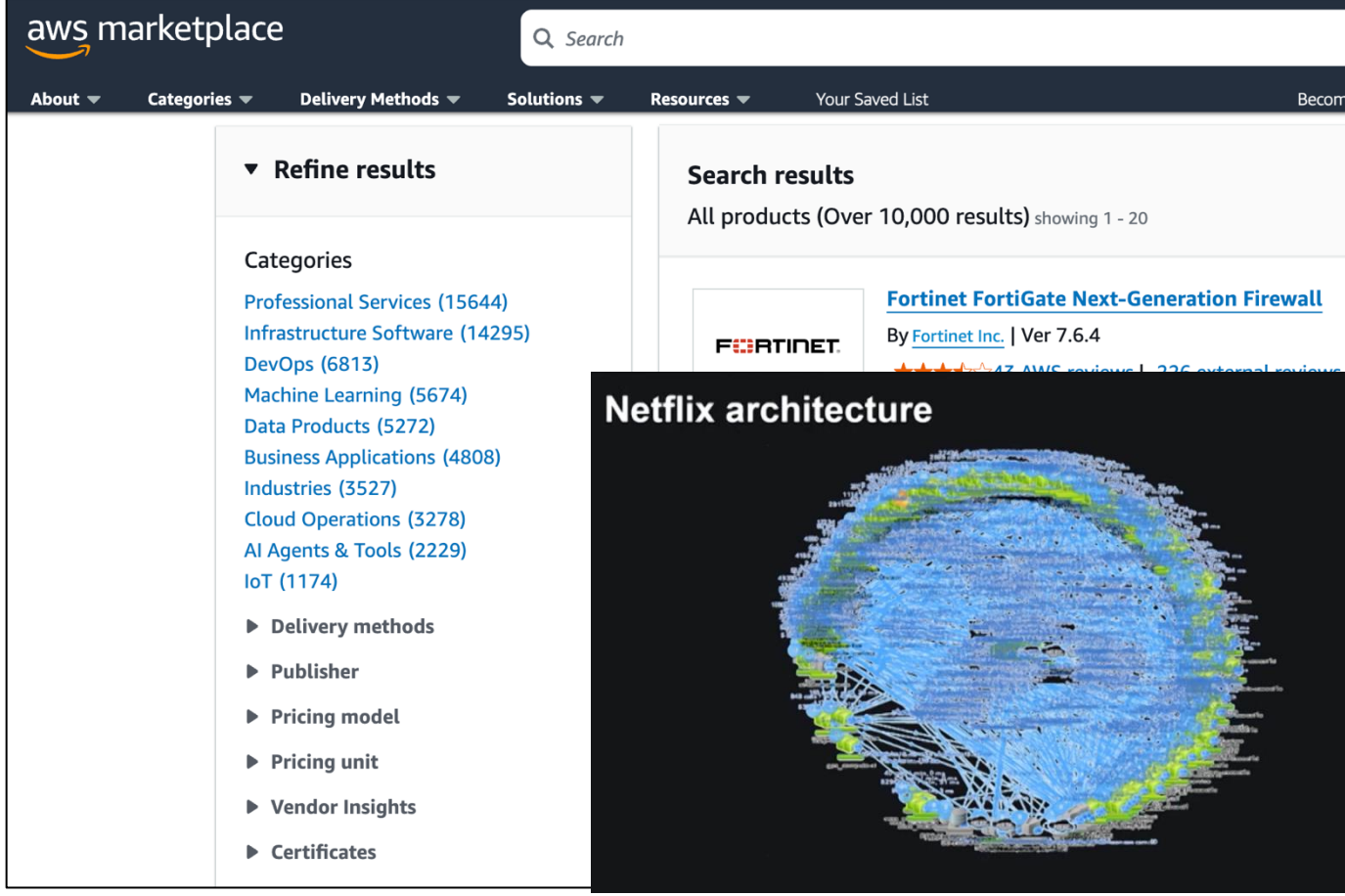
Digital is produced, exchanged & consumed in their clouds

panopticon

AI is a Trojan horse

Black boxes: use without access

→ Corporate & gov dependencies





Why do other intellectual monopolies become dependent?

Every day the plan changes with the data. You have more room to maneuver, that's the good thing. When I started, (…) I tried to find all the data (…). I would collect and then I would hit a bump because I had to have 80% of actions closed and I didn't see it and I had 20% but now having the information up to date mak… op…

We have what is called a demand driven supply chain: it means that you adjust your supply according to demand. How fast you can do it, it differentiates you from other companies, you adjust everything

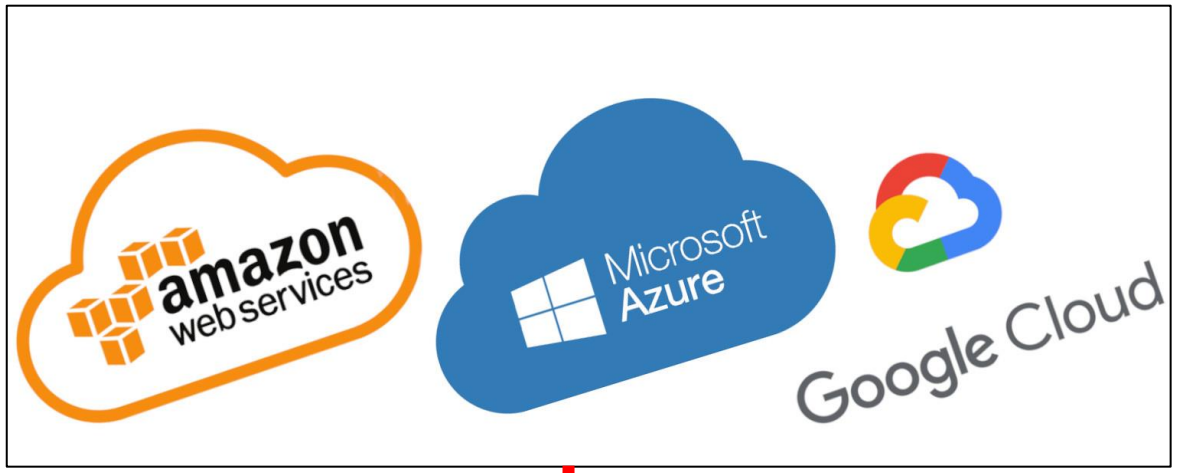
"We have a lot of workers in the oil fields. It would be nice to know where they are and what they are doing," one manager said. "If they are doing anything at all." This is what our Chevron partners were most keen to discuss: how to better surveil … workers. (Microsoft cloud engineer, //logicmag.io/nature/oil-is-the-new-data/)

…cause it is a …glorification …ess. And the …ce and data …opinion, come to be …ns of obedience. …s dev consultant).

Mars (…) inves… Microsoft doing … you pull data fr… inflation, rent… education of the people, movement of workforce in the country and (…) connect that to your demand because you have historical data and start (…) having early warnings of where to put demand available and work… (Nestlé, digital tech director)

…words of characters with machine learning. And they decided to look into that space, but they went and looked at a specific problem of drug discovery and approached Genentech and to collaborate they said first we want to acquire you. (Roche, Data Scientist/Engineer).

As a company, we want to present ourselves as experts and therefore we need more data and less luxury stories. And there is a shift towards a more scientific approach to skin care and make up based on data. (L'Oréal finance manager interview, my translation from French)



SIEMENS

States



Hospitals



Subcontractors (value chain)

Atos

DANAHER

Control technologies

In the workplace (Braverman, Beniger)

- Disciplining effect of the division of labour
- Separation of conception from execution

Between countries (incl military)

- Dependency Theory: Development conditioned by the core's monopoly of tech

Intellectual monopoly

- Sustain intellectual monopolies
- Control beyond ownership: corporate planning
- Customized (labour) control + Creative thinking automation

The Impact of Generative AI on Critica
Reductions in Cognitive Effort and Cc
Survey of Knowledge

Hao-Ping (Hank) Lee
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
haopingl@cs.cmu.edu

Advait Sarkar
Microsoft Research
Cambridge, United Kingdor
advait@microsoft.com

Ian Drosos
Microsoft Research
Cambridge, United Kingdom
t-iandrosos@microsoft.com

Sean Rintel
Microsoft Research
Cambridge, United Kingdor
serintel@microsoft.com

Nicholas Wilson
Microsoft Research
Cambridge, United Kingdor
niwilson@microsoft.com

Deskilling creative labour

workflows raises
ills and practices.

Confidence I
on Human F
Yokohama, J
1145/370659

Intro
enerative
chnical in
learning",[1]
questions a
that include
by Trithem
and the Int
Such cor
gies can ar
that ought
of automat

factors, a user's task-specific self-confidence and confidence in GenAI are predictive of whether critical thinking is enacted and the effort of doing so in GenAI-assisted tasks. Specifically, higher confidence in GenAI is associated with less critical thinking, while higher self-confidence is associated with more critical thinking. Qualitatively, GenAI shifts the nature of critical thinking toward information verification, response integration, and task stewardship. Our insights reveal new design challenges and opportunities for developing GenAI tools for knowledge work.



Intangibles extractivism: AI S&T + culture from the peripheries monetized by a tiny core.

Epistemic totalitarianism: the AI we got is the AI they want



Do we live in a market economy?

Digital sovereignty

Territory?

Nationality?

Siemens? Mistral? SAP?

Governance and democracy

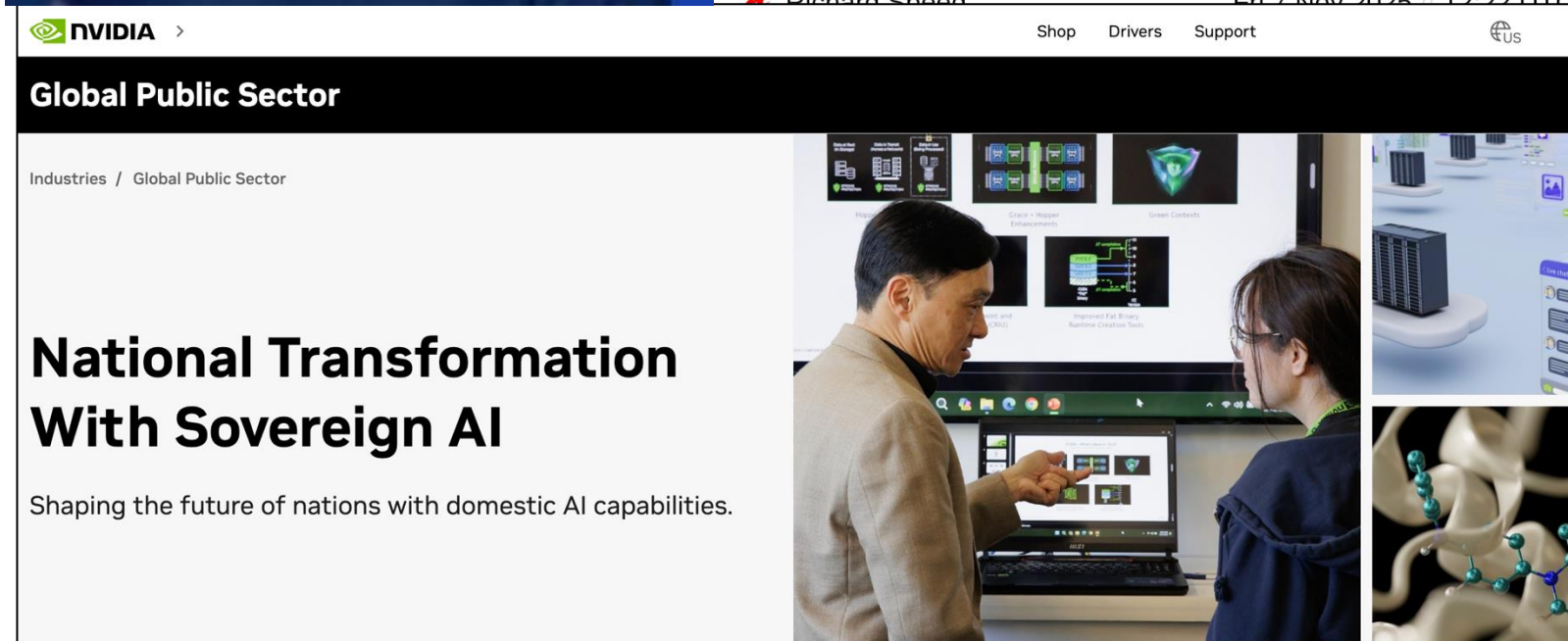
International, public-led, popular power

Decouple: States/Big Tech's ecosystem

Political imagination for democratic planning







Thanks



UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose

