Everyone's Writing with AI (Except Me!) Interview with Dr. Dustin Edwards

In this episode, Dr. Dustin Edwards spoke to Maggie and Megan about his research and forthcoming book on digital damage, AI ambivalence, and the environmental implications of generative AI.

Megan McIntyre: So Hi, y'all, I'm Megan Mcintyre.

Maggie Fernandes: I'm Maggie Fernandes.

Megan: And this is Everyone's Writing with AI (Except Me!), a cheeky writing studies podcast about refusing generative AI in higher education and writing studies specifically. All of the articles and texts that we talk about today will be in the show notes. So feel free to follow along.

Maggie: Today we're excited to talk to Dr. Dustin Edwards about his work on digital damage, how he's responding to AI in his classroom, and in his work in the writing center.

Megan: So, Dr. Dustin Edwards is the director of the San Diego State University Writing Center, and an associate professor of rhetoric and writing studies at San Diego State. Dr. Edwards' research examines ecologies and infrastructures of digital rhetoric. His forthcoming book *After Digital Damage: Rhetorical Reckonings at the End of the World*, follows digital damage to 2 places in New Mexico, a Meta data center in Los Lunas, and a copper mine in Grant County and examines how digital rhetoric is intimately woven to extractive industries. We wanted to talk to Dr. Edwards in part because of his work on digital damage in his 2020 article "Digital Rhetoric on a Damaged Planet: torying digital damage as inventive response to the Anthropocene," Dr. Edwards traces the material ecological and infrastructural dimensions of Facebook's New Mexico data center and argues that attending to digital damage through story is one way to register the sensitivities, urgencies, and accountabilities needed to respond to the worlds of entangled damage. Dr. Edwards was one of the first people that we wanted to talk to, because we can't talk about the problems with generative AI without talking about digital damage. So welcome to the pod, Dustin!

Dustin Edwards: Thank you so much. I'm really happy to be here and be in conversation with you all, and looking forward to the podcast.

Megan: Awesome. We're so excited that you're here. So I get to ask the first question. And so let's start with with the way we're planning to start all of these conversations, actually, which is, what is your reaction to the current AI conversation that's happening in writing studies?

Dustin: Yeah. So I guess, to be honest, I've been pretty disinterested in the conversation, but I don't necessarily think that's been a good thing, or even the right or ethical thing. It's just been an ambivalent reaction that I've had, and I think I found myself saying several times like, "I need to learn more. I need to read more. I need to invest more time in learning the conversations as they've been taken up and writing studies and elsewhere." And that need to invest time has

probably fueled some of my frustration or disinterest in some ways. But at the same time, I think I've been keyed into conversations in, say, computers and writing that have been paying attention to similar issues all along. So you know, issues related to copyright and authorship, algorithmic curation and circulation, issues related to automation. And you know, of course, my interest, issues related to the extractive nature of big data. So I guess maybe I feel a little annoyed that tech companies like OpenAI and others have set up the terms of the conversation and also determined the urgency around it. And it kinda just feels like we're all playing catch up in some ways. And for me, I think there's also a sense that writing studies people have been forced to become experts on proprietary technologies, especially in local contexts. And I guess I don't really like playing that game too much. And I'll also just say, in a general sense, that – sorry I keep saying annoyed. But I feel annoyed that – this is a podcast to do that, right?

Maggie: That's right!

Dustin: I feel like AI is being integrated in tools and applications where it doesn't really seem all that useful or or helpful. You know, obviously, I think people make fun of Adobe Acrobat for being powered by AI, and it's like, why do we need that? Why do we need that? But another example is Instagram. So I used to use Instagram search to just look up a beach or look up a restaurant and see what the vibe is. And now it feels like, if I type more than one word into Instagram, it gives me a message back from Meta AI telling me the reviews at a beach or something. I'm like, that's not what I'm using Instagram for. You're making me use it in a different way. And that feels just frustrating. I'm like, what is the what is happening here?

Maggie: My original reaction was, oh, I think that in writing studies, I thought ambivalence was gonna be the way of it. I was pretty surprised pretty early on that we were being steered in the direction of OpenAI's terms and their urgency because it felt like – and Megan and I have talked about this – we were like, yeah, no problem, not worried about plagiarism, really. Not really. We've been thinking about these conversations for so long. Surely this won't encroach over here. And, boy, I'm annoyed to be wrong. I guess I thought that ambivalence would be the way 'cause it does feel like the more energy I put toward this, the more my Instagram is…I'm always just trying to find a cute thing about Britney Spears or something else. And it's like, do you want me to summarize the Free Britney movement? I'm like, no, I'm familiar.

Dustin: Yeah, yeah.

Maggie: I'm intimately familiar.

Dustin: Does it have you reshaping your habits? Because I do find myself now, Googling something. And oh, okay, what does the summary of AI tell me, and I'm frustrated that I'm doing that. But I'm doing it, right? It's shaping my habit, and I feel a certain way about that. I don't know if you all have felt that, too?

Megan: It's definitely shaping my habits, I would say my habit has become avoidance of Google. I was on Pintrest. I haven't been on Pinterest in, lo these many years, and I found

myself on Pinterest because I was like, I know I can find a recipe here. That is how I use Google on a regular basis. And so I'm finding myself avoiding things that I used to find really useful. I mean, Google search has not been tremendously useful for a long time. And we can definitely talk about that, too, but I think I do find it reshaping my habits, and then I catch that. And I think, that is part of the problem, right? The acquiescence is sort of the path of least resistance and acquiescence can look a couple different ways, I think, and so what is that looking like in my teaching and my research is a separate question. But if that's what it looks like in my daily life, in my interactions with the technology…Yeesh.

Dustin: Right.

Maggie: Yeah, I feel, I feel like I've been. I find myself looking at the Google Summaries to see, okay, is this right? I'm like a new parent, so I'm always googling things. And I find myself reading them pretty frequently and trying to figure out,what is this? What do I do with this information? But I also feel myself poking holes in my own hypocrisy where it's like, I'm really bothered by generative AI. But I love my little Spotify Day list. And I'm trying to figure out is this a moment for me to figure out new ways of interacting with algorithmic technologies? Do I divest completely? How do I? What do I do? I don't know what to do. I know what I want to do as a teacher, but as a person on the Internet? I really don't know. ‘Cause I sometimes love a little algorithmic curation. And that makes me feel weird to admit, even though obviously, it's the whole point of why it's so successful.

Dustin: You're right. Yeah, I think balancing those 2 things and holding them together is important for moving forward these conversations where is it truly helpful or valuable, or pleasurable or enjoyable? And where is it just annoying and frustrating and not helpful at all?

Megan: And where can we avoid? And where can't we? You know, we're a Microsoft campus at the University of Arkansas. So, you know, Copilot is in all of the Microsoft online products that we are required to use to do our jobs. And so I think about how I use Google Docs still quite a lot, because I like to, you know, collaborate across time, space, and people. But it's there, you know, and that's not gonna change. And so if I know I can't avoid it there, what other decisions can I make? What agency do I have? I think those are also important questions as we move forward in this moment. I think, though, too, pretending to know what the landscape looks like in a year or 2 years, feels also really silly to me.

Dustin: Uh huh. Yup.

Megan: I think there was a lot of enthusiasm around and discussion around things like prompt engineering. And I totally get it, as people who do things with words, that is an absolutely fascinating question. Right? And yet, I think integration has proven to be the thing where we can't escape AI. And the literal prompting of ChatGPT is not really, at this point, *the place*. And so, you know, what do we do when we don't know?

Dustin: Yeah, some of our interventions seem like surface level or catch up, right? It's like, that's the word I used earlier. And so, yeah, I feel the same way when, especially in writing studies, people claim to be experts in this realm. And I'm not trying to disparage. I think there are people who do this work in really smart and innovative ways. I'm not trying to say that. But yeah, that comment makes me just sit and think for a while what are we claiming to be experts really about?

Maggie: So just to move to the next question, how are you approaching these things in your classrooms, these tools in your classrooms? And in the writing center, what does that look like for you as a teacher and writing center director?

Dustin: Yeah. So I think my approach in both teaching and the writing center can be described in terms I used earlier, which is ambivalence in some ways. I just wanna ride out the hype wave and then see where we land. I do wanna make sure that we're making space for questions around generative AI in my classes and in the writing center.

You know, I've done this in a professional writing course, where we talked about the job market and how AI is playing a role in that. And in a grad course in modern rhetorical theory, we spent some time talking about it, and I really tried to approach these conversations as just that, conversations. How are you using AI in your everyday life, as a student, as a writer, and in the writing center? And I think, actually, it's in these encounters where I found that there is some real value in some of these tools. And one student – and I asked for them for permission to share the story, they said, yes, please – told me that generative AI tools like ChatGPT, and one that I wasn't familiar with, Word Tune, a summarizer tool, have been a game changer for them, both personally and in school. So they're neuroqueer. They have felt that these technologies have a real ability to lessen their cognitive load and that, you know, they're able to assist in writing tasks that might be really emotionally loaded and diffuse, like heightened emotions. So, for example, this student said they wrote a message to their roommates using ChatGPT, to “you need to do the dishes,” right? “You haven't been.” And so it just used language that was really disarming. And then they also mentioned that they drafted a coming out letter to their parents with the help of ChatGPT because it was disarming language, and they didn't have to rehash trauma that they went through when they were younger. And so like those stories that really stayed with me and remind me why generative AI is not all doom and gloom. And that's one of the things that I try to assert early on in in my book project, is these conditions of damage and flourishing exist in tandem. And so to that point, I don't want to introduce these conversations. And then let everything be very ecstatic without providing some room to discuss critiques and refusals of you know, the large scale planetary infrastructure that is required of these technologies.

Maggie: Yeah, no. I've had similar conversations with students that do remind me that writing is hard.

Dustin: Right.

Maggie: And we do so much hard writing, both professionally and personally, and these tools can alleviate some of that, especially. Most of my students, most of my conversations with students have been about how to navigate linguistic oppression. It's like, well, I as a student of color, this is what my teachers want, and so I can use these tools to evade some of that, and It can help me professionally evade some of that without having to be distressed. And I don't know what to do with that. But it's true that there is a utility there that I can't deny, and I find myself almost not frustrated with, like the technology itself. I don't feel frustrated that such a thing is possible. I feel stuck with what to do around the harm that it's bound up in. And that's where I feel like, you know, we call ourselves cheeky on this podcast, about how everyone's writing with AI. It's like of course, we're all like bound up in these things, so but what do we do with, I think you said I can't remember the language you used. You said flourishing, and….

Dustin: And damage. Yeah.

Maggie: Yeah, yeah, those things together. Yeah, I really, I appreciate those comments from you and my students where it's like, this is not the end of the world, although maybe we're hurtling there. I don't know.

Megan: Yeah I saw somebody writing, tweeting about the Olympics commercial, where the AI is gonna write the letter to the kid's favorite athlete instead of the kid writing it. And so they were, talking, making cheeky posts about, in the future we write with the AI. And the AI writes back to us, and coincidentally there are also no lakes. And so there's just like, trying to hold those things together, right? There is a kernel there, as silly and also sad as I found that commercial, where you know, a kid isn't writing to their hero because they're afraid. That is a high cognitive load situation, right? Like the one your students were talking about. And at the same time the fact that it feels necessary to them, is a really heartbreaking set of conditions that I hate. And also how much environmental damage are we willing to put up with or to facilitate to accomplish what we are getting out of it. What is that value proposition, and sort of, balance look like?

Dustin: Yeah. Yeah. And that's why, the terms like responsible AI always raise an eyebrow, too. Because again, it feels like it can be surface level to some extent. But really, if these technologies are like predicated on extraction all the way down, right? How do you do that responsibly? I don't think we have a good answer for that, right? So it's always gonna be fraught. And I don't feel like enough people take an infrastructural disposition to think about the massive infrastructure that's required of these technologies, and that is predicted to just continue to rise, right, in the mineral extraction that is used for the server components, right? Yeah. So yeah, I don't know.Those things are hard to square. But I think we need to keep them in mind as we navigate the next few years.

Megan: I also wonder, this is just something that occurred to me as you were talking about your experience with your student. You know, how do we balance, or how should we think about how we respond to individual students' usage? Maggie and I talked about this a lot off the pod. How do we respond to individual students' use of the tools? Versus how we respond disciplinarily. What are our responsibilities as a discipline that is arguably, you know, rooted in values like

linguistic variation and linguistic justice. Versus, what do we say to individual students when they talk to us about using a tool like this to escape the existing linguistic oppression or cognitive load issues that we know are real and challenge students all the time, both for their work in our classes and the other kinds of writing they do in their lives.

Dustin: Yeah, I love that framing of the individual, how you respond there. But I think maybe we have a bigger responsibility to talk about programmatic steps we might take, or in the discipline, stances that we might adopt. Because, yeah, when a student tells me that writing with ChatGPT really helped them to write a letter to their parents about traumatic issues, I'm not gonna be like, well, have you heard about the energy costs? I'm gonna be like, yeah, absolutely, use that tool to your advantage. But yeah, it's tricky.

Megan: Yeah, we're very pro not shaming students…like ever. And, it feels like, that's what we owe our students, is that sort of supportive kindness when they're feeling their authentic selves and talking to us about ways that they are in harm's way, and how they're trying to evade it. Like, what a lovely testament to the relationship we can have with students and the support systems we can be and not bring in the "well actually" about maybe anything.

Dustin: Right. And to me, too. It's like, I don't know if those students, they might know the harms, too. Right? We live in a capitalist world that is violent with all sorts of violences. You can only keep so much on your radar at one point. So it's like, what am I willing to put on the back burner while I move forward and try to make the best life possible like. I want to hold space for that, too.

Maggie: Yeah, there's so much daily calculus to do. I mean for our students here, just getting and parking on campus can be a struggle. Then factoring in paying for rent. I understand why ChatGPT is helpful to college students in a college town where rent is ever increasing. I get it. But as a follow up to that, how do you talk to students about digital damage? And what do you think? How should we be thinking about that alongside these conversations, even knowing that it's fraught?

Dustin: I appreciate this question. I think there's really so many ways into the conversation. So I think deciding how you're going to enter is actually very important to put some attention on that. And I think we can do a numbers game, like how much water is consumed for every ChatGPT query. You know, it's like so many bottles of water. How much carbon is being emitted per year by the data center industry? All escalating numbers. How much land is being used? And so on. So we can tell those kinds of stories. And we can also tell the sweeping stories of AI commodity chains moving from a mining site in South America to a data center in Europe to an e-waste landfill in Africa. And I think Kate Crawford's work does this quite well. And I think all of these options are important for pointing out the problem. But to me they don't really implicate us in direct ways, right? You hear a number, and you're like, "Oh, that's bad. Wow! That sucks!" But it's like, what does that really feel like in a personal way? So I think we get Donna Haraway's term, we get "the God's eye view from nowhere" when we hear these stories a lot of the time. And so one of the things that I try to do in the forward in the book, and I also try to do

this in some classes that I've taught, is argue for a more messy and implicative and personal way into the problem. To start with where you live or where you're born and what extractive technologies or infrastructures are at work there. There likely are some, right? In the places that I've lived, I've certainly found them in places where I do talks or conferences. It's not difficult to find these extractive infrastructures, and then to start asking the question of who benefits from this extraction, and also who suffers. Communities, people, but also, you know, animals and more than human worlds as well. And I think we like to pretend sometimes that some of these issues, when we hear the carbon footprint of data centers, are just a little beyond us. Like, what do we do? But I think they're often, if we dig a little bit more, a little bit closer than we might think, and so some assignments that maybe get at this a little bit, what I've done in the past – and it's doing all the all the ways that I've talked about getting into the conversation – I've had students where they've mapped their digital cloud by plotting out where data centers are for maybe the most used app that they use on a daily basis. So do some research, plot out where those data centers are located, and then maybe do deep history, a deep research on one particular place. And find out what are the histories of extraction, of colonialism, of industry in that particular place. And then I've had students do projects where they're doing an anatomy of a digital device where they're taking apart the components and looking at where. Okay, this has cobalt. Where is cobalt mined? Those kinds of things. But again, that doesn't maybe implicate in the same way, but it points out these issues. So I think some of my favorite projects are more personal. And you know, I've had students do some projects locally about so-called Lithium Valley here in Southern California, which is Imperial Valley, which is a telling name in and of itself. And I don't know if you know much about the Salton Sea. Do you all know much about the Salton Sea in California? It's really a story of a series of settler promises that never fully materialize. And it's left the land and the water and the people really vulnerable. So first, it was agriculture that has led to water being polluted from agricultural runoff. And then tourism came to the Salton Sea, and that came and went, and then solar solar panels came, and that went. And now it's lithium, right? And so it's just been this extractive economy all along. That has, you know, benefited some that don't live in the area, and then the people who live there and indigenous communities are, you know, not in the best position. So, students are digging into those stories and talking about their own positions within these conditions. Like, what does it mean to live in coastal San Diego, where, you know the temperature is 70 degrees, and then you go inland, and it's 120 degrees at the Salton Sea, and it smells really terrible because of all the agricultural runoff. And you know, that's these extractive conditions that just continue. So, students doing storytelling projects that get at those issues just have hit on a different note than maybe something that's more, “here's where all the data centers are. Here's, you know, where my device components come from” because it's again that doesn't really link them in a personal way. Where something like doing a story on the Salton Sea might, if you're local to California.

Maggie: Yeah, that's really that's really fascinating. And I feel like the numbers of it all, it is hard to feel those, especially when you have to have a laptop to be a worker or a student. You have to have a phone to call your mom. And I'm just struck by the time that it takes to actually like, dig into those stories. You can be hit with a bunch of numbers pretty quickly, and how you connect that to the number of hours I spent binging Netflix over the weekend, it's hard to do the math, but actually sitting with a place and a history and where you fit into that, that takes a lot of time.

And that's really, really interesting. And I'm thinking about how we're like always losing internet on campus because there's so many students here with the push to grow, grow, grow. So our like campus data center is probably gasping for breath every day. And I'm just thinking about how I would talk to students about that here, because that's all just so fascinating.

Megan: Yeah. And the push to cloud-based data storage, which you know as your work and others points out, is a misnomer, right? There's physicality somewhere, and so on our campus, the conversation has been, how much can we migrate to cloud-based solutions? What does that look like? And sort of removing the place-based-ness of it. That sort of feels intended to remove ourselves, users, our students from finding that story in the place. And so I really love the idea of sort of bringing them back there, ‘cause I think it can be easy to think, well, it's nowhere right, ‘cause it's up in the cloud. And not really think too far past that. And why that, as a metaphor, has really been such a darling of extractive industry.

Dustin: Yeah, I taught that one mapping project in maybe 2018. So the conversation was much different then. But I remember a student saying, “I always thought of a data center, if I ever heard that term, as this clean white box.” And like that's just interesting in and of itself, but doing the history or following where these places are, she came to a different relation. And she did this really awesome project where she looked at the water that was being used, and made a relational argument to say, “How is it that Flint doesn't have clean drinking water, and that we're using billions of gallons of water a day to just binge Netflix or whatever,” right? And so, yeah, those conversations are powerful.

Megan: It's funny. I actually had this conversation with my mother, who is 78. And so she was like, “I keep seeing this thing about all the water it uses. Why does it need water? Computers don't need water.” And so we had this long conversation about like well…cooling. Things get very warm. And she was like, “so it's like a nuclear power plant?” That is her best comparison, as a late, silent generation, early boomer, child. What sticks for her is the conversations around building nuclear power plants and using water, and what the water that goes in is and where it's coming from and where the water goes out. She was in the industrial Midwest, growing up, and then in the south. And so water was a big concern. And a big part – she comes from farmers, so you know, obviously, farmers care a lot about water. And so for her, it was just a really interesting moment to have with her where she was like, “Oh, so it's like this thing that is analogous.” And I'm like, well, it's not exactly. But that's a really interesting connection to be thinking about. You know, this relationship to where does the water come from? Where does the water go? What water comes out? What’s the water that comes out, and where does it go?

Dustin: It's really just interesting to me, too, that this is on the radar of people like your mother. She's seeing news headlines about it. Because I think even a year ago, 2, 3, definitely, 5 years ago, you wouldn't see any of these headlines about water consumption. If you would dig deep and see kinda like activist stances. You could see scholarship on it. But a lot of the headlines were, a data center is coming to this town. It's gonna bring a ton of new jobs that actually aren't a ton. The construction is a lot. But then, after that, it's minimal. And it's going to bring this huge economic impact. And I'm like, how are you measuring? How are you measuring that impact?

And then, you know, obviously, they give a lot of tax incentives for these places for data centers to be built in these certain locations. But yeah, it's interesting to track the conversation, to see how it's changed. And if that will have any sort of impact on the future build out of data centers and AI technologies. Or if we'll just stay the course. It's hard to say.

Megan: Yeah, I mean, at least at a disciplinary level, it does feel like there has been something of a change in terms of at least, for folks that I would say were more pro and less critical in their pro-AI stances, feeling like they actually have to grapple with that question at least a little bit, and I appreciate that because I think we're in a discipline where I do feel like, for the most part, folks listen to each other and and want to have conversations with each other, and it does feel like there's been a little bit of a shift in in the tenor of the conversation, since the environmental damage has been quantified, and since that quantification has really sort of broken through in the news media. I think y seeing that Microsoft missed their environmental targets and their explanation for that was OpenAI, their investment in AI products. And so that was, I think, a moment that I felt like, oh, there's been a bit of a shift in our conversation that I'm seeing on academic Twitter. So it'll be interesting to see in a year what happens.

Dustin: Yeah.

Maggie: Yeah, I hope we stay the course. I hope that stays at the forefront of people's minds because I remember one of the first times this conversation sort of broke through for me in academia was, I don't remember which conference it was. I want to say that it was ATTW. And there was an acknowledgement of the cost. I think it was part of the land acknowledgement, but I'm not sure. But the cost of holding a conference virtually and what that actually means. And I remember at that moment I was, you know, huddled in my apartment for what felt like a year already at that point, several years at that point. And I was just thinking, I haven't driven my car in so long. It feels like I'm living a very green life right now. As I doom spiral in my house. And then it was like, yeah, actually being on Zoom (as we are right now), it's material. We're doing something. So I hope that thinking about OpenAI and what generative AI costs helps us to think more about other technologies. And how can we push for collective efforts ‘cause the individual ones are obviously not super. I mean, there's so much background waste happening without choices even being made, so.

Dustin: Yeah, absolutely the push to the individual I feel like is always going to be a bit of a letdown because there's only so much we can do. And then I think, Megan, what you were saying earlier, so much of this is not opt out, right? Especially if you're a student. If you're a worker. I have to have a Gmail. I have to use Canvas; Canvas uses Amazon web services, right? These are things that I just can't escape. And there's obviously a certain amount of privilege in that. But you can't escape these conditions.

Megan: I think all the time about this. This is the premise of *The Good Place* in a lot of ways, right? So many people on, you know, this fictionalized version of the afterlife end up in the bad place because of choices they actually had no control over or were sort of bound up and they didn't realize they were making as they were making other kinds of choices. And so, you know, I

think there's a certain extent to which how we respond now matters as individuals. But like, how do we respond as campuses, as writing programs, as industries? You know, Maggie has talked about recognizing the SAG-AFTRA strikes as this important moment where there was collective action that had an impact on the future of that industry. And what could that look like in higher Ed, versus what are the individual choices we can make and can't make, and sort of all those pieces.

So, maybe we can talk about your book. Do you wanna talk more about your book project, when it's coming out? What you want people to know about it?

Dustin: Yeah. So I should say, too, the title's not finalized. You read it at the beginning of the podcast. I don't know what it's gonna be called. I sent an email with 6 bullets of possible titles. And then they're like, we'll get together and talk about what titles it might be, so who knows what it'll end up being called. Digital damage will be in title, and maybe end of the worlds or extraction or something like that.

But anyway, the book is due out…I just sent it off for the final due date, and I think it should be out by mid 2025 is the plan. The University of Alabama Press, part of the Rhetoric and Digitality series.

It's a continuation of that article that I think you referenced at the top of the Podcast, "Digital Rhetoric on a Damaged Planet," but also taking a look at another site/location in addition to the data center, which is the Chino Copper mine, which is in my hometown of Silver City, New Mexico and just trying to elevate and amplify stories that both speak to the the damage that is done in these particular locations, but also the stories of resistance, of refusal, of brilliant invention that speak back to some of the harm that's been done. And you know, I really get to let those stories shine quite a bit in the mining chapter, just because there is such a deep history of people saying *no* to the extraction of copper in very harmful ways. There's obviously the story of indigenous dispossession, of theft, of genocide of Apache people and Ndé people in my hometown. But there's also so much more than that, right? There's these stories of saying, "we're not going to let you demolish the land anymore. We're going to discuss some of the racist labor practices that are happening at the mine through a Chicano newspaper that was published in the 1980s" that I got to get in the archives and look at. And so, yeah, I do both of those: telling the stories of damage, but also the stories of refusal. And I think that can speak to our current moment thinking about AI. I want more prehistories of extraction sites that really tell us the deeper, longer, richer histories of refusal that have been going on all along, all the time. I think that can give us some guidance on how to move forward in this current moment.

Megan: Alright. I think we're down to our last question for you.

Dustin: Cool.

Megan: Which is what are you reading right now? What should we read? This is really a selfish question. What should we read, what would you recommend to readers, to listeners of the pod? Like, what are you reading that we should be reading?

Dustin: Yeah. So I think in correspondence with what I just was speaking about, I have been trying to get and and listen to and immerse myself in a lot of writing and media from the Apache stronghold that is refusing a copper mine that's being built in or is trying to being built in Oak Flat, Arizona. So I don't know if you're familiar with that, but a large land struggle. So Naelyn Pike is a really great young activist who is doing a lot of great work. And so anytime I see a video by her or social media post by her, I'm like, yes, let's listen to what she has to say. Just such a different relation to the land than what this copper mine is being proposed. So I think those kinds of stories, like stories out of Thacker Pass that are happening in lithium mines that are being targeted for extraction, elevating those stories and listening to those stories, I think is super important. And also I am closer to academia, I'm a big fan of Mél Hogan's work, and I got the chance to collaborate with them on an article that's called "The Making of Critical Data Center Studies." But anything Mél Hogan writes, I'm like, I need to read this, I need to think with it for a long time, and they also have a podcast called the "The Data Fix" that is really great.

And then, along with Mél, Zane Griffin Talley Cooper is another media study scholar who has a great public website that is accessible and useful to talk about some of these issues. Another media scholar – and then there are some writing studies scholars that I'll talk about, too. But Anne Pasek has a really great zine called *Getting Into Fights With Data Centers*. And it's this digital zine. And it's really cool. It just talks about how our goal now should be to not have another data center be built, that should be the work. And she plays out some ways that we might do that. Closer to our discipline, I think Wil Flores has his awards-winning dissertation, which I can't wait to read the article version or the book version. I think he's working on a small book. But his dissertation has this really great chapter called "The Intersectional Internet as Land," and it's both a reflection of colonial technologies. But what I love about it, it's a demand to not get stuck in those death dealing narratives and to think more capaciously, so Wil's work is great. Folks out of UT Austin, the graduate students in particular are doing really, really exciting work. So Hannah Hopkins is doing really great work at the intersection of infrastructure and energy. So I know she built a solar panel classroom where the computers were being powered by solar panel panels, and then along the way they were able to have conversations about energy footprint and that sort of thing. So I think she's writing her dissertation about this, and I can't wait for that to come out. And then I'll also just say – like end on – I think I've been really drawn to writers who think a lot about place and place making, and you know how conditions of freedom and unfreedom are made in places. So like people like Katherine McKittrick and Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Leanne Simpson, Malea Powell and centering place and lands and waters in these conversations, I think, is central. Because, and we said this before, tech companies don't want us thinking about land and water and energy and people's relation to these things. But these thinkers bring us back to that conversation. And so, you know, while they may not seem squarely within the realm of AI, I think we see these long and brilliant traditions to make less violent and extractive worlds, and those are the kinds of readings I think we should be attaching to thinking about AI and place.

Maggie: Thank you so much for that generous list. I feel like you've just given us so much and so many people that we wanna talk to as well. And I love the move to think with people who aren't necessarily thinking about AI because I don't necessarily think that we all need to be AI scholars to talk about something that's so prevalent and touches our lives in so many different ways. So thank you for that.

Dustin: Yeah, absolutely.

Megan: I think that's all we got. Thank you so much for joining us. This has been such a great conversation, and we will probably ask you to come back. Maybe after we know even more or even less, depending on where the conversation goes.

Dustin: Yeah, thank you all so much. It's been really enjoyable. And I again look forward to tuning into the podcast.