



*Blueprint*, a painting by Leigh Ruple, whose work was on view in October at PAGE (NYC), in New York City.

The incident might have been an opportunity to reckon with the limits of ethical AI in the private sector, but it became, instead, a familiar tale of censorship and suppression, of tech bros silencing women and people of color—a narrative that Gebru and Mitchell had courted, perhaps knowing which buzzwords would trigger the media algorithm. They called the race for bigger language models “macho,” and Mitchell compared it to anxiety about penis size.

This narrative, however, smoothed over some enduring confusions about Google’s methods of repression, which, whatever their ultimate purpose, do not seem to rely on the familiar gestures of censorship. To hear Lemoine speak about Google’s “very complex” internal structure is to glimpse what the internet might feel like if it were bottled as concentrate. “There are thousands of mailing lists,” he wrote in 2019. “A few

of them have as many as thirty or forty thousand employee subscribers ... several of the biggest ones are functionally unmoderated. Most of the political conflict occurs on those giant free-for-all mega-lists.” Given the public controversy these forums have created, it’s not immediately clear why Google continued to host them.

Even Gebru’s account of her time at Google suggests something more complex than corporate muzzling. Far from being ignored, she recalls that she and her team were “inundated” with requests from co-workers about ethical problems that needed immediate attention, that she was frequently conscripted into meetings and diversity initiatives, that she was constantly called upon to write and speak. “I’ve written a million documents about a million diversity-related things,” she told one interviewer, “about racial literacy and machine-learning, ML fairness initiatives,