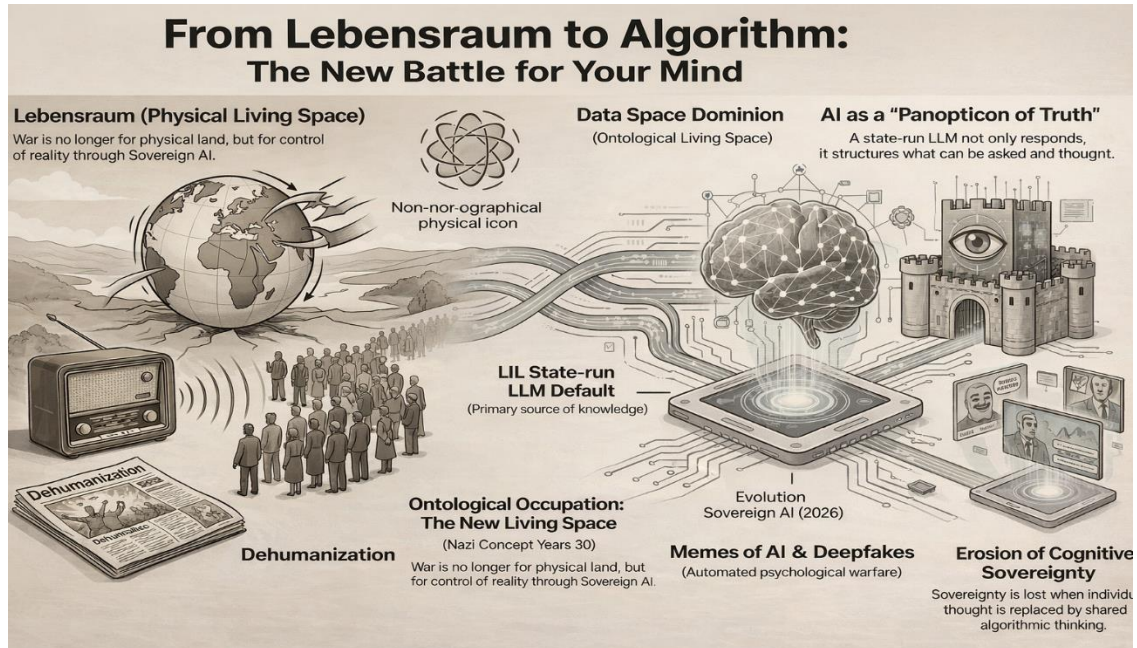


Cognitive Colonialism and the Epistemological Gestell: The Architecture of LLMs and the Crisis of Sovereignty in 2026

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From Lebensraum to Algorithm: The historical translation from territorial control to ontological control through Sovereign AI. The war in 2026 is no longer about land — it's about the structure of reality that defines what can be thought. © 2026 Nuno Santos | aipropagandanazi.com

1. Introduction: The Crisis of Sovereignty in the Age of Epistemological Infrastructure

The history of sovereignty is the history of control over territory, resources, and, fundamentally, narrative. In the 21st century, technology has ceased to be a mere instrument to become the very epistemological infrastructure that defines what knowledge is and how it is accessed. The race for Sovereign AI is not just a technological competition; it is the struggle for control of this infrastructure, where hegemony manifests as Cognitive Colonialism.

This operates simultaneously on two planes: the epistemological (which categories of thought are made available) and the infrastructural (who controls the chips, cloud, and APIs that make thought possible at scale).

This essay proposes a philosophical and geostrategic analysis of the architecture of Large Language Models (LLMs) in 2026. I argue that AI, as a radical manifestation of modern technics, imposes an Ontological Occupation: a process in which language and thought are progressively reduced to computable resources, managed by filters, incentives, and optimisation architectures.

Drawing on Martin Heidegger and Herbert Marcuse, I examine this occupation through two complementary lenses:

- (1) the ontological dimension of technics as Enframing (Gestell), and
- (2) the sociopolitical dimension of Technological Rationality as a form of domination.

It is crucial to clarify that this analysis does not seek to establish simplistic moral equivalences between contemporary regimes and 20th-century totalitarianisms. The objective is to identify a technical-political pattern of total occupation that, while operating through digital rather than kinetic means, reproduces logics of synchronisation and centralisation of public and private life.

The decisive nuance is that Sovereign AI, while potentially a legitimate response to external technological hegemony, risks an internal authoritarian drift when it becomes the institutional default for truth.

- The problem is not intelligence. It's the default.
- When the interface becomes infrastructure, and infrastructure becomes epistemology, the possible falls under jurisdiction.

2. The Algorithmic Gestell and Ontological Occupation

Martin Heidegger, in *The Question Concerning Technology*, defines Gestell (Enframing) as the essence of modern technics: a mode of revealing that demands reality reveal itself only as Bestand (Standing-Reserve). Technics is not merely a tool — it is a way of ordering the world.

The architecture of LLMs is perhaps the most advanced manifestation of this Gestell applied to the spheres of language, culture, and knowledge.

2.1. Language Reduced to Bestand

Language — which Heidegger describes as the place where Being announces itself - is reduced to Bestand in LLMs. Massive datasets convert human expression into "standing-reserve": corpora, tokens, vectors, embeddings, and probabilities.

In this way, the LLM demands that the totality of human knowledge and culture be presented as a computational resource ready for processing, indexing, and optimisation.

Ontological Occupation occurs when human experience ceases to be lived as revealing and becomes consumed as optimised output. Reality no longer presents itself; it is served.

- Perfect censorship doesn't delete answers. It prevents questions.

2.2. Cognitive Colonialism and Epistemological Hegemony

Cognitive Colonialism describes the imposition of knowledge structures and thought categories from a hegemonic power onto peripheral cultures. Historically, this manifested through education, religion, and media. In 2026, it manifests as dominance over models, infrastructure, chips, the cloud, APIs, and interfaces.

Models trained predominantly on Anglo-American (or, in another matrix, Sinocentric) data and values exercise epistemological hegemony: they need not explicitly censor to frame reality — it suffices to define the default for what is relevant, moral, acceptable, and worthy of attention.

In this context, Sovereign AI emerges as an attempt to construct local infrastructure: a Great Refusal in geostrategic terms against global homogenization. However, defence against an external Gestell can, paradoxically, become the installation of an internal Gestell.

3. Marcuse and Technological Rationality: Sovereignty as Risk

Herbert Marcuse's critique, developed in *One-Dimensional Man*, complements Heidegger by showing how technics, in advanced modernity, produces a totalizing rationality: a Technological Rationality that neutralises contradiction and absorbs opposition.

3.1. The LLM as Agent of Technological Rationality

LLMs are the epitome of this rationality: they optimise communication, instruction, productivity, and problem-solving. However, this optimisation presents itself as liberation — when it can function as domination.

The LLM reduces thought to the operational dimension:

- question → answer
- doubt → statistic
- contradiction → smoothing
- conflict → reformulation

The result is a cognitive environment that favours the consensus of the probable and penalises the friction of the critical.

- When language becomes a token, meaning becomes rate.
- And when meaning becomes rate, dissent becomes noise.

This process contributes to the production of the One-Dimensional Man in the cognitive domain: the individual who no longer thinks against the system because the system anticipates their vocabulary.

3.2. Empirical Evidence: The Materialisation of Control in 2026

Ontological occupation is not merely a philosophical hypothesis. It finds echo in concrete implementations of AI as an instrument of governance and epistemological discipline.

In 2025, China implemented rules requiring generative systems to respect political guidelines and ideological control mechanisms, including validation before public launch. This type of architecture makes AI a piece of preventive synchronisation: it doesn't censor afterwards — it models beforehand.

In Russia, the State advanced national strategies for AI integration in administration and institutional knowledge production, including reporting requirements and governmental coordination. Simultaneously, domestic models are promoted as strategic infrastructure in educational and scientific ecosystems.

Even in European democracies, concern over technological dependency has intensified: the European Parliament approved, in January 2026, a resolution focused on "technological sovereignty," defending measures to reduce external structural dependencies. The discussion about public procurement and critical infrastructures reveals that, even without authoritarian intent, technological sovereignty can push States toward the domestic default.

The crucial difference between authoritarian regimes and democracies lies in checks and balances, transparency, and institutional culture. But the underlying technology remains: the Gestell has no ideology — but it multiplies the ideology of whoever controls it.

3.3. The Sovereign AI Paradox: Defence and Risk

Sovereign AI occupies a paradoxical position: it is simultaneously a legitimate response to external epistemological hegemony and a structural risk of internal authoritarian drift. The technology itself is neutral to this tension - a Sovereign LLM can serve democratic accountability or technocratic control, depending entirely on institutional architecture. The crucial distinction lies not in whether a state develops national AI infrastructure, but in whether that infrastructure becomes the mandatory default for truth-verification in public life. When Sovereign AI remains one voice among many - subject to independent auditing, competing with open models, and embedded in pluralistic information ecosystems - it functions as geopolitical self-defense. When it becomes the sole legitimate source of knowledge in education, administration, and public discourse, it functions as a cognitive occupation. The danger, in other words, is not sovereignty

itself but monopoly masquerading as sovereignty. A truly sovereign society must retain the capacity to think against its own infrastructure.

4. From Propaganda to Algorithm: Memes, Ridicule, and Cognitive Warfare

Totalitarian propaganda of the 20th century understood the importance of ridicule and dehumanisation as psychological preparation for physical violence. In 2026, this mechanism is automated through informational warfare and generative systems.

Modern Cognitive Warfare uses AI to destroy a group's capacity to share an everyday reality. Contemporary disinformation operates less through direct persuasion and more through epistemic fragmentation: the goal is not to make you believe a lie - it's to prevent you from knowing what is true.

The meme is the perfect unit of this war:

- low cost
- high virality
- high immunity to rational refutation

Corrosive humour becomes a weapon, not by convincing, but by demoralising and polarising. Coordinated digital "swarms" flood public space with ridicule, hatred, and cynicism, eroding trust in institutions and in the very meaning of words.

The following comparative table examines structural patterns of total synchronisation — the technical architecture of control over collective consciousness. This is not a moral equivalence between contemporary digital regimes and 20th-century totalitarianisms, which differ radically in intention, scale of violence, and historical context. Rather, it identifies a recurring technical-political pattern: when a single institution gains monopoly over the infrastructure of truth-production, similar synchronisation mechanisms emerge regardless of ideology. The danger is not in the comparison itself, but in failing to recognise the pattern when it operates through interfaces rather than violence.

Comparative Table: Total Synchronisation — Then and Now

Nazi Concept (1930s)	Sovereign AI Evolution (2026)	Description of the Shift
Lebensraum (Living Space)	Data Space Dominion	Expansion of influence through the control of critical digital resources: data, hardware (chips), and talent.
Volksempfänger (People's Radio)	State LLM Default	Ensuring the population primarily interacts with the State's "voice" as the institutional default for knowledge.
Ministry of Propaganda	Sovereign AI Architecture	The industrial-scale automation of "truth" production and the management of algorithmic propaganda.
Dehumanization (<i>Der Stürmer</i>)	AI Memes and Deepfakes	Breaking the adversary's moral resistance and social cohesion through automated ridicule and polarisation.
Gleichschaltung (Synchronization)	Algorithmic Filters	The elimination of dissent and enforcement of ideological alignment across all digital platforms and interfaces.

5. Roadmap for Cognitive Sovereignty

Cognitive sovereignty in 2026 demands a redefinition of national defence: not just territorial defence, but the defence of the framework of truth within which the citizen exists.

Resistance to ontological occupation is not purely technical. It is structural, institutional, and cultural. It demands:

1. Model Plurality and Antitrust: prevent any single model (corporate or state) from becoming the mandatory default in essential public services.

2. Dataset Transparency and Auditing: independent auditing of training data and RLHF processes, avoiding ideological capture of algorithmic memory.
3. Support for Open-Source and Open Weights: fostering auditable and reusable models, enabling a Marcusean "Great Refusal" at the code level.
4. Ontological and Epistemological Literacy: education to understand how algorithms frame reality — so that citizens recognise the Gestell and recover dialectical thinking.

Modern disinformation no longer needs to convince — it merely needs to destroy the everyday reality. The only possible resistance is to recover the autonomy of thought: a form of sovereignty not measured in borders, but in inner freedom.

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- Council on Foreign Relations. (2024). *The New Era of AI-Generated Disinformation*.

Multimedia Suggestions

To deepen understanding of the new AI Cold War and digital propaganda, I suggest the following resources:

- On Algorithmic Warfare and Psychological Operations

Video (Council on Foreign Relations): The New Era of AI-Generated Disinformation — analysis on the use of generative AI in influence operations and disinformation.

<https://www.cfr.org/articles/artificial-intelligence-enters-political-arena>

Conference (Stanford Internet Observatory): Defending Democracy in the Age of AI — discussion on deepfakes, memes, and informational warfare in democratic contexts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjnd-kLV6kY>

- On Philosophy of Technology (Heidegger and Ellul)

Video/Essay: Heidegger — The Question Concerning Technology — visual explanations of the concept of Gestell and the transformation of the world into "standing-reserve" (Bestand).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaVmEN-vGWk>

Podcast/Interview: The AI Dilemma (Tristan Harris & Aza Raskin) — contemporary reading of AI as a technical system tending toward operational autonomy, echoing Jacques Ellul's structural critique.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoVJKj8lcNQ>

Reading Suggestions

I recommend the following works for deeper study:

Book: Jacques Ellul — The Technological Society (1964). (Central analysis of Technique as an autonomous system reorganising society).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Technological_Societ

Working Paper (arXiv/SSRN): The Memory Wars: AI Memory, Network Effects, and the Geopolitics of Cognitive Sovereignty (2025). (Direct discussion on cognitive sovereignty and structural dependencies).

arXiv: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2508.05867>

SSRN: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5383225

Philosophical Article: Martin Heidegger — The Question Concerning Technology (1954/1977). (Conceptual foundation on Gestell and technical framing of reality).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Question_Concerning_Technology

Report (Alan Turing Institute / CETaS): Outlook: Emerging Technology Trends to Watch in 2026 (2026). (Prospective perspective on technological sovereignty and proliferation of national AI infrastructures).

<https://cetas.turing.ac.uk/publications/tech-trends-to-watch-2026>

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