The injustice of his sentence was very flagrant; all of Paris was indignant; and it was judged that his religion and wealth rather than the crime alleged against him had been the cause of his condemnation.

Frankenstein

DEAR BEEF

PANDORA'S MONOTONY

My husband and I are hosting a Halloween party and put together a playlist. We added all the current bops, but notice a lot of the music sounds the same. Is something going on here or are we imagining it? What should we do? *–Draw Me Like a French Girl for Halloween*

I applaud you for your listening abilities, as well as your proactive party-planning. In self-sabotage, I usually wait until the last minute to choose party music.

The argument that *music out now sounds the same* is a familiar one, in particular where generations are concerned. Growing up my grandma told me my '90s pop music *all sounded the same*, and I disagreed. I'm guessing from your costume you might be a millennial. If you're adding only tracks geared towards gen z and younger to your playlist, it might *all sound the same* to your (older) ears.

It could also be the steady homogenization of soundscapes shaped by the monopolistic control over the music industry exercised by conglomerate media companies and algorithm-driven streaming services. In that case, there's an economic and policy reason for what you're hearing.

The music industry has constricted and turned to streaming at the same time, leaving fewer people making decisions. *Not as many companies in the game* translates to a smaller pool of executive tastemakers who need to be pleased for artists to find commercial success. It also decreases the number of opportunities available for shopping around unique music. *Streaming* cuts humans out altogether, deferring its decision-making to black-box algorithms geared towards passive, endless listening. Half the time, their coders don't even understand them. The result is a musical version of gray interacting with beige, which just so happen to be the colors du jour.

I usually end up outsourcing party music to *humans*. Either friends I know who enjoy being disc jockeys or hosts of old-school *radio stations*. There's *diversity* there.

I hope your party is a success. I'm sure it will be, as long as you don't once say "bops."

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EXTRAORDINARY ISSUES

BEEF

NO. 1 LOS ANGELES

KICK MONOPOLIES OUT

Beefreaders—Victor Frankenstein keeps me up at night. Protected by family wealth and free from third-party oversight, he creates a creature who murders, stalks, and mansplains.

The danger when people pursue technological advancement *just 'cause*. Dr. Ian Malcolm summarizes it in *Jurassic Park*. Questioning whether the park's founder, John Hammond, thought through the implications of bringing dinosaurs back to life, he says: "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should." (The dinosaurs end up killing quite a few people.)

The terror when no authority steps in to represent the public's interests. Victor digs up bodies from graves; John alives velociraptors without one public hearing. *Where are the governments?*

Frankensteins and Hammonds are all over the place. After decades of lax tax policies and minimal antitrust enforcement, corporate and human monopolies now control broad swaths of our economy, politics, and national interests. They hoard wealth. Create technologies that might destroy us. Do what they want no matter the consequences, and the institutions meant to protect us cannot compete. They, like us, starved for resources.

America, land of monopoly monsters. Righting the course will likely require a combination of progressive taxation to recapture resources held by the too few and an antitrust policy aimed at preventing the levels of personal and corporate wealth accumulation we currently see.

XOXO

HOW BEEF

VERY BEEF ..... **Diversity**

BEEF ..... **Break Ups**

NOT BEEF ..... **No Choice**

NEVER BEEF ..... **Unaccountability**

PLAN BEEF

HOW TO KICK MONOPOLIES OUT

Diversify the Ownership of AI Algorithms. AI is powerful; its algorithms controlled by the few. This creates a perfect storm of shortsighted growth, economic disparity, and bias creation. Bust closely held algorithms.

Break Up Monopolies. Monopolies, particularly in the tech, media, aviation, food, and healthcare sectors, should end. AT&T was split in the 1980s, with seven independent Baby Bells emerging. Enough with big. Let's be baby.

Reform Antitrust Laws. Antitrust laws have demonstrably failed to protect the general public and our economy from aggressive business combinations. Regulations should be rethought with a view towards adopting policies that create a growing and strong middle class.

Elect Leaders Against Monopolies. Antitrust regulations aren't worth the paper they're written on if they aren't enforced. When candidates say they're looking out for our economic interests, that can only mean they have strong positions against monopolies. A litmus test in this economy.

Tax Extreme Wealth. Lenient tax policies enable the formation of monopolies and allow corporations and people to pursue ambitions no matter their impact on society at large. Unlock extreme wealth for the common good through economically productive tax policies.

BEEF NO. 1

MAIN BEEF

TOO FEW COMPANIES CONTROL AI ALGORITHMS

The algorithms that run artificial intelligence are held only by a handful of companies, yet for some reason people debate whether AI will flatten culture and create widespread economic prosperity as if we don't already know the answers to these questions.

While in some ways AI is extraordinarily unique, in other ways it is not—at least for so long as the companies controlling it maintain their monopolistic hold.

Consider what we've learned about monopolies and closely held sectors from other industries.

They reduce cultural diversity. Look at media. Disney, once it gobbled up ABC, Lucasfilm, and Marvel Entertainment, turned the Oscars into a celebration of its acquisitions. The stage began to take on the aesthetics of a Marvel movie due out, and the sonic landscape focused inward on princess films and *Star Wars* tracks. Were these decisions made by organizers to curry favor? Were they demanded by the overlord to save money on royalties and cement cultural supremacy? Who cares. They were made, and the results solidified winners and losers.

They increase consumer prices. Look at aviation. Executives will tell us airfare has increased due to rising fuel and operating expenses, but the airline industry's consolidation is a reason, too. With each carrier that disappears, it's easier for the remaining ones to increase prices and demand travelers pay for features that were once previously part of the ticket. Waiting for the day when we have to pay up to buckle up.

They decrease access and quality. Grocery-store combinations offer insight. When chains merge, it's common for new owners to close locations in underperforming (aka *poorer*) areas and swap out quality ingredients for cheaper ones (while telling us *they didn't*).

They exacerbate income inequality. Aside from higher consumer prices, monopolies can decrease wages and exclude much of the population from sharing in wealth creation through *shareholder wealth concentration*. It's a self-fulfilling prophesy. People need money to invest in companies, like through the stock market. If fewer and fewer have the disposable income to do so or high-growth companies are closely held by a select group of insiders, wealth creation increasingly flows to the already-wealthy.

Stopping here, AI's future is clear on its current ownership path. It will reduce diversity. It will make things more expensive. For consumers who rely on companies that use AI, it will mean higher prices. For entrepreneurs wanting to start their own competitive businesses, it will mean ever-higher start-up costs. For businesses currently using it, it will mean increased operating expenses. Its free or cheaper versions will also decrease in quality, making its most promising and sophisticated features increasingly out of grasp for most people. The proceeds of its blockbuster IPOs will disproportionately benefit millionaires and billionaires.

If we want the technology, including its wealth creation, to benefit broader humanity, the ownership of its algorithms must be diversified.