

Refusal Is Not Resistance

By Austen Tucker · 2026

Why I use AI when the people coming for me already do.

I am a blind trans woman in tech whose actual life's work is about people turning into animal people.

I don't get the luxury of refusal.

I am already surveilled. Already legislated at. Already, by multiple metrics, exactly the kind of person the next ten years are being designed against. Refusing the most powerful new tool of my lifetime on principle, while the people coming for my rights speedrun their own training arc, is not purity. It is unilateral disarmament.

If we are to moralize individual choices, those choices deserve a chance to stand their ground.

So I'll stand on mine.

The energy and water costs of large-scale AI are real. They are also not solved by individual abstinence. The datacenters are being built. The contracts are being signed. The grid is being remodeled around them by people who do not need my consent. If I never type another prompt in my life, that water still gets used.

That does not mean the costs do not matter. It means the fight is policy, regulation, labor, procurement, and public pressure. The leverage point is not pretending my personal abstinence can halt an infrastructure buildout already underway.

Surveillance is the same logical move dressed differently. I should refuse AI because it learns from me. Fine. So does the phone in my pocket. So does my insurance company. So do the algorithms that decide whether the trans woman applying for a loan is a default risk. The surveillance regime is here. Refusing one of the most usable interfaces to it does not opt me out of being watched. It opts me out of being literate in the language that watches me.

Our moral and ethical enemies are becoming highly trained Sith while we argue about the ethical sourcing of kyber crystals.

You may not have heard of BLOCKADE. You will.

BLOCKADE is the AI-assisted book-banning operation working its way through American libraries and school boards. Books pulled. Statewide bans triggered. Two dozen titles gone, last count.

(Reporting: 404 Media, K-12 Dive. Systemic context: Brennan Center for Justice.)

It does not look like somebody yelling at a school board meeting. It looks like a compliance dashboard. Targeted titles. Coordinated complaints. Talking points generated and shipped to volunteer mouthpieces faster than any teacher can keep up with.

The people who built that are not afraid of the tool. They are using it on books like mine — the ones about people turning into animal people — with precision.

AI writing is not easy to spot when the operator knows what they are doing. Lazily implemented AI writing is easy to spot. The experts do not make those mistakes.

The operations coming for people like me are not the clumsy ones. They sound like teachers. They sound like concerned moms. They sound like the local paper. They sound like whatever the next room needs them to sound like, because that is what the tool is for.

We keep bringing pussy hats and inflatable costumes to infrastructure fights.

And we lose.

Over and over again, we lose.

That is why literacy matters. Not because the tool is pure. Because the people using it against us are not amateurs.

AI is hard to learn.

I know that sentence sounds like a joke. It is not. The interface tricks you into thinking you have learned it the first time it gives you something usable. You have not. You have learned the lazy version.

The lazy version is the version most refusers have seen. That is how the refusal got its shape.

Writing with AI is not a shortcut. It is a method — the way Scrivener was a method, the way the spreadsheet was a method, the way Final Draft changed what a screenplay looked like. It is not a time-save so much as a quality multiplier. The work is still the work. The tool moves where the work can go.

I have been practicing this for three years before it was cool. Unglamorous. Cumulative. Most of those three years was me being bad at it. But now that I have learned, I can do things that were impossible a year ago. A month ago. Last week.

I spun up a professional-looking website and pulled fifty subscribers in two weeks. Now that I know how, I can do it again, faster, on the harness I already built.

Compound interest. That is the whole game.

This is a decision I have made for myself, at great social cost.

In the past week, I have been unfriended over AI. Not once. Not twice. Three times. Often with a final message, a block, and no room to respond.

I am not telling you that to elicit sympathy. I am telling you because if we are to moralize individual choices, those choices deserve a chance to stand their ground.

And believe me — the moralization has made my blade much sharper.

If you refuse, the future does not wait for you. It builds around you.

Refusal creates a vacuum. Institutions do not leave vacuums empty. The people most eager to ship surveillance, propaganda, and the slow erasure of trans lives are already filling that space with tools, workflows, dashboards, and policy arguments.

Their hands are not clean because mine stay folded.

I am telling you what I know so you can make a more informed decision about the future.

Pick up the saber. Leave the saber. I do not care.

But I will not confuse refusal with resistance.

And I will not enter the future unarmed.

Appendix

This essay was drafted with AI assistance. I am including the full working conversation as an artifact so you can audit my process. Not because the tool wrote this for me. Because process matters, and mine is visible.

The tool is visible. So is the author. Draw your own conclusions.

Read the full working conversation.