

CRITICAL THEORY OF THE COMPUTATIONAL

International Workshop, Berlin, 16/17 October 2025

This workshop takes stock of a CRITICAL THEORY OF THE COMPUTATIONAL. It engages critical theories (both in the tradition of the Frankfurt School *and* beyond) in order to examine how computational/digital constellations are shaping (upheaving, consolidating, etc.) foundational dynamics in society, and how said computational constellations are themselves embedded in ongoing planetary transformations (such as global heating). In interrogating possible preconceptions and assumptions entrenched in critical theories—such as human exceptionalism, and universalist aspirations—, we ask how these might be rethought in light of computational and planetary transformations.

The workshop will explore how computational constellations not only introduce new actors—such as AI systems and human–machine hybrids—but also shape existing understandings of agency and its properties like autonomy and emancipation. For example, the computational may give new opportunities for critical discourse, but it may equally give rise to numerous phenomena in politics and other parts of society that give cause for concern (such as power concentration, erosion of public discourse in liberal democracy, and enormous energy consumption).

By revisiting key concepts of critical theories—such as autonomy, emancipation, and social transformation—, the workshop will explore whether they require rearticulation or replacement to address the complex interplay of human, non-human, and planetary orders. Through cross-disciplinary dialogue, we invite participants to confront the assumptions that underpin both critical theories and contemporary discourses on computation. Together, we aim to develop a critical framework capable of addressing the multilayered and entangled realities of a computationally mediated world facing transformations of planetary scale.

The following three central questions will be discussed in the workshop:

- **Why Critique—and How?** How do we justify a critical stance on the computational amidst planetary stress—should our critique aim for constructive engagement, or does its force lie in unsettling entrenched norms? Which biases frame our standpoint, and how might a reflexive critique, attuned to social and planetary concerns alike, help shape more just futures?
- **The Grand Challenges of Computational and Planetary Transformation:** How does the computational reshape and challenge our understanding of the relationship of the human, non-human, inhumane, and no-longer human, and what ethical and political implications arise from these shifts?
- **Future of Liberal Democracy:** As computational networks and infrastructures become ever more embedded in polycrisis and planetary-scale change, how might liberal democracy be reimagined or reconfigured to remain legitimate, inclusive, and capable of addressing the complexities of a computationally mediated world?

Submissions

The workshop is open to all career levels. Deadline for submissions is **April 30, 2025**. We expect a short abstract (500 words) that formulates theses on the questions raised in the call. If accepted, an extended abstract (1500 words) is expected.

Short abstracts should be submitted via Easy Chair: <https://easychair.org/conferences?conf=ctc25>. Please create an account for submission.

The program committee will select the submissions and invite additional contributions.

Members of the program committee:

Christoph Burchard, Center for Critical Computational Studies, Frankfurt a. M.

Juliane Engel, Center for Critical Computational Studies, Frankfurt a. M.

Christoph Neuberger, Weizenbaum Institute, Berlin

Benjamin Rathgeber, Center for Responsible AI Technologies, Munich

Contact

For questions please contact: Annegret.Kunde@weizenbaum-institut.de

Event place

The workshop will take place at the Weizenbaum Institute, Hardenbergstraße 32, 10623 Berlin. Support for travel expenses can be provided in individual cases (on request).

Publication of contributions in the „Weizenbaum Journal of the Digital Society“ (<https://ojs.weizenbaum-institut.de>) is envisaged.