Workshop on Critical Theory of the Computational
16-17 October 2025 in Berlin
Venue: Weizenbaum-Institut at Hardenbergstrasse 32, 10623 Berlin

16 October 2025

9:30 – 9:45	Registration with Coffee
9:45 – 10:00	Welcome by Christoph Neuberger
10:00–10:30	Conceptual Framework for Critical Theory of the Computational by Christoph Burchard & Juliane Engel

10:30 – 12:30   Panel 1: Dialectics of the Digital: Critique, Co-Construction, and the Politics of Computation

Chair: Thorsten Thiel

Daniel Martin Feige

David Berry (online)

Leonie Hunter: Technologies of Social Abstraction: Towards a Critical Theory of Computational Power

12:30 – 13:30	Lunch Break

13:30 – 15:30   Panel 2: Crises of Reason: Knowledge, Expropriation and Ideology in Computational Capitalism

Chair: Sebastian Berg

Anna Verena Nosthoff: Cybernetic Authoritarianism: Silicon Valley and the Politics of Dark Enlightenment(s)

Christine Gerber: Generative AI in Knowledge Work and the General Intellect. On the Relationship Between Work and Rent IT-Programming and Journalism (Co-Authors Florian Butollo, Marlene Kulla and Ann-Kathrin Katzinski)

Sebastian Sevignani: Can information and data be expropriated and exploited? The computational in digital capitalism

15:30 – 16:00	Coffee Break

16:00 – 18:00	**Panel 3: Knowledge and GenAI: Between Truth and Hallucination**

Chair: Benjamin Rathgeber

Jan Batzner: Whose Personae? Critical Pathways to Representativeness and Transparency in LLM Research

Ben Potter: Synthetic Mediations

Ann-Kathrin Koster or Paola Lopez: LLMs and the Production of Truth. Rethinking Hallucinations with Hannah Arendt

Niklas Egberts: Technological Futurity and Common Sense: On a Key Metaphor of Artificial (General) Intelligence

18:00 – 19:00	Networking with Catering
19:00 - 20:00	Keynote speech by Prof Kate Crawford (online) on "Model Collapse"

The mass production and ingestion of synthetic data is destabilizing AI models, while the planetary resources needed to support this recursive cycle are growing dramatically. In this talk, Crawford will explore the relationships between algorithms, ecologies, and information that are driving toward forms of technical and ecological exhaustion.

With discussion moderated by *Benjamin Rathgeber*

9:00 – 11:00	**Panel 4: Grand Challenges and Planetary Transformation: Ecologies of Power in a Computational World**

Chair: Juliane Engel

Katharina Block: The Rise and Fall of Miss Marble

Angela Oels: Sustainability powered by digitalisation? (Re-)politicising the debate

Markus Maier or Raphael Ronge: Behind the Hype: A Critique of Artificial Reasoning

Jan-Philipp Kruse: New Challenges for Democratic Futures. Towards a Critical Account of Digital Transformations in the Age of Anthropocene

Dan Verständig: Beyond Deconstruction: Co-Constructing Critique with Computational Technologies

11:00 – 11:15	Coffee Break
11:15 – 13:15	**Panel 5: The Aesthetic, the Algorithmic, and the End(s) of Law: Critical Counterpoints to Computational Jurisprudence**

Chair: Christoph Burchard

Sabine Müller-Mall: Computational Constitutionalism?

Jessica Eaglin (online)

Katrin Becker: "Coded Law and Computed Justice: The Quest for Autonomy in the Age of Blockchains and LLMs"

Barton Beebe: Technological Change and the Beautiful Deaths of Law: A Recurring History

13:15 – 13:45	Lunch Break

13:45 – 15:45	**Panel 6: Future of liberal Democracy: Challenges and opportunities**

Chair: Christoph Neuberger

Annette Zimmermann; Radical Democratic Agenda-Setting: Contestation and Counterpower Against Big Tech Oligarchs

Markus Patberg: The Oligarchic Capture of the Public Sphere

David Leslie: AI and the heritage of democratic equity

Frederik Heinz: Technocratic Futures: AI, Digital Era Governance, and the Postliberal State

15:45 – 16:00	Final Remarks *Thorsten Thiel*

Panel Abstracts

Panel 1: Dialectics of the Digital: Critique, Co-Construction, and the Politics of Computation

This panel explores the conditions, limits, and possibilities of critical theory in the context of computational capitalism. As algorithmic systems mediate increasingly central aspects of social life—knowledge, labor, perception, and political agency—critical theory must confront not only new forms of domination, but also new modes of abstraction, production, and reflexivity. The panel interrogates technologies embeddedness in socio-historical structures and its role in reshaping subjectivity, value, and epistemology. Emphasizing relational critique, co-construction, and the transformation of critical concepts, the panel rethinks how critique can be enacted within computational infrastructures to confront the challenges of synthetic reason and digital governance.

Panel 2: Crises of Reason: Knowledge, Expropriation and Ideology in Computational Capitalism

The panel explores how computational capitalism reorganizes knowledge, ideology, and power. It examines the rise of generative AI as both productive force and site of control, the expropriation of intellectual and social resources under platform-driven economies, and the emergence of cybernetic-authoritarian imaginaries rooted in Silicon Valley's "Dark Enlightenment." At stake is a crisis of reason itself—where infrastructures meant to extend knowledge increasingly delimit the space for critique and reflection.

Panel 3: Knowledge and GenAI: Between Truth and Hallucination

This panel explores the mediation and transformation of concepts of knowledge through LLMs. We try to figure out, which impact LLMs have on our understanding of knowledge and meaning by a new way of production of knowledge and deception. Which way of critical understanding do we need to explore this new kind of ideology? Where are the limits and challenges of LLMs from a perspective of a critical theory of AI.

Panel 4: Grand Challenges and Planetary Transformation: Ecologies of Power in a Computational World

This panel interrogates the grand challenges posed by the convergence of planetary transformations and computational systems through the lens of power, politics, and epistemology. As climate crises escalate, digital technologies are frequently heralded as solutions - yet they often reinforce existing hierarchies, obscure material dependencies, and depoliticize sustainability discourse. Together, the panel examines how the computational reshapes our planetary condition - not simply as a set of tools, but as an ecology of power that entangles knowledge, governance, and the future of democracy itself.

Panel 5: The Aesthetic, the Algorithmic, and the End(s) of Law: Critical Counterpoints to Computational Jurisprudence

This panel interrogates the recurring cultural and institutional reconfigurations of law in response to the rise of computational technologies—from AI and blockchain to techno-regulation and data infrastructures. With perspectives spanning critical race theory, legal aesthetics, and digital governmentality, the panel explores how computational rationality challenges legal subjectivity, normativity, and the symbolic authority of law.

Panel 6: Future of liberal Democracy: Challenges and opportunities

When the richest and most politically powerful men in the world join forces or clash, it has a significant impact on liberal democracy – and not just in the US. Donald Trump and Elon Musk's power also stems from their ability as platform owners to present themselves as "strong men" and capture global attention through constant buzz. This raises the question of how a normative theory of liberal democracy must be linked to digital possibilities. The panel will discuss this with a view to democratizing artificial intelligence (Annette Zimmermann) as well as on AI and democratic equity (David Leslie), and using social media to empower citizens (Markus Patberg). A post-liberal, digitally centralized, anticipatory, and highly efficient state is within reach (Frederik Hein). Beyond dystopia and utopia, the aim is to develop a pragmatic understanding of democracy, according to which experimental means are used to explore how values such as equality, freedom, security, power symmetry, and cohesion can be brought into an appropriate balance.