

# BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

## CONFERENCE

### *Which Smartness? Whose Intelligence? Critical Perspectives on Digital Technology and Political Subjects*

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**Agostino Cera (University of Ferrara)**

***From Techno-Politics to Techno-Ontology. A Phenomenology of Dataism***

My paper sketches a *Phenomenology of Dataism* – i.e. the interpretation (reduction) of any entity as (to) datum – understood as a potential *Weltanschauung* for the digital age. More precisely, as an *evolution from Techno-politics* (or Techno-anthropology) to *Techno-ontology*. This phenomenology consists of three parts: I) an *Ontology of Dataism*; II) a *Genealogy of Dataism*; III) an *Anthropology of Dataism*.

I). According to Yuval Noah Harari, the dataism – i.e. the ideological side of the so-called *dataification* – “says that the universe consists of data flows, and the value of any phenomenon or entity is determined by its contribution to data processing”. As *worship of data*, the dataism stands out when stands out the firm belief that datum represents the *ultimate configuration of all entities*. According to this approach, an entity exists only insofar as it is (or can become) a datum. As a consequence, all that is not (or cannot become) a datum has no ontological legitimacy. The basic assumption of dataism is the *ontological equation between being and being computable*. Its potential epigraph would sound: “*esse est computari?*” (Rafael Capurro). This means that a datum corresponds, by definition, to the total reduction of an entity to its computability. That is to say to its complete dematerialization, digitalization.

II). From a historical-philosophical perspective the dataism can be seen as the final stage of that “disenchantment of the world”, which Max Weber considered the authentic goal of modernity. Such a process aims to realize *homo faber's (homo technologicus)* utopia: the maximum extent of its will to power, that is a world totally anthropized, entirely reduced to human measure. I call this phenomenon Pan-anthropism. We can find at least three stages in this process, corresponding to three different interpretations of entities: The first stage – the *Cartesian Stage* – interprets entities as an *objectum*, i.e. object; The second stage – the *Vichian Stage* – interprets entities as a *factum*, i.e. fact; The third stage – the *Heideggerian Stage* – interprets entities as a *Bestand*, i.e. standing-reserve. The interpretation of entities as datum represents the final stage of this process: the accomplished disenchantment of the world, its definitive *reductio* to a human (i.e. pan-anthropic) measure. As a datum – something entirely computable – an entity loses even its material consistency, namely the basic form of its autonomy and otherness.

III). However, at the basis of the dataism hides an *anthropological paradox*, already emphasized by Günther Anders almost half a century ago. In order to realize the pan-anthropism utopia, namely to extend his will to power on every entity, the *homo faber* must transform himself in *homo materia*. To become *homo creator* (i.e. the subject of the present reality), he must make himself *homo materia* (i.e. the object of his own making), he must subjugate himself to his own technological

power thus becoming an object among objects: a *Bestand-Mensch* (stranding-reserve human being). To use a more familiar word: a *human resource*. According to Harari's vocabulary, we can affirm that *the real face of homo deus is homo datum*.

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**Andrea Zoppis (University of Ferrara)**

***Images as third reality and the practices of sentiment: Simondon, Dufrenne and the techno-aesthetical individuation***

With this presentation, I would like to consider the role played by digital objects in the human process of subjectivation. To do so, I will mainly consider the notion of image as *quasi-organism* and *third reality* proposed by Gilbert Simondon in his course on *Imagination and Invention*, as well as the notion of *imaginary* and its sentimental implications in Mikel Dufrenne's philosophy.

Understanding the imaginary implications of technical objects, and thus their role in the formation of subjectivity, means first and foremost not reducing their mode of existence to their functionality while questioning their fundamental expressive connotation. This initial thematization will therefore be possible from a preliminary focus on the notion of *techno-aesthetics* as well as its ontological implications for a theory of technical objects.

From a techno-aesthetic point of view, considering images as quasi-organisms means understanding technical objects from their motor and perceptual implications, that is, how they graft their presence onto a field that precedes that of conscious reflection, or cognitive perception. Their status is therefore critical for human life, since, in addition to implementing functions that can bring improvements to collective life, they remain holders of an expressive charge, i.e., an overabundance of being, which not only indicates their potential for new future uses but also indicates a dimension of indeterminacy and unpredictability. It is important to note that, as much as its functionality, this expressive overabundance in technical objects plays a fundamental role in the formation of subjects. Subsequently, I will consider the Dufrennian notion of imagination, showing its essentially sentimental connotation. The sentiment must be understood as an integral dimension of experience, that is, as a disposition towards a profound understanding of the expressive mechanisms at work in processes of subjectivation.

Imagination is thus to be understood as a mode of participation in the imaginary texture of reality, that is, as resonance and inspiration towards a dimension of depth from which reality itself is formed. In this sense, sentimentally understanding our sensible and expressive involvement in technical experience

means being able to gain new insight into the techno-digital phenomenon by considering it in its inscription in the perceptual event. This perspective seems particularly useful because, by proposing a fundamental perceptual reframing of the digital object, that is, by promoting an understanding of it that is both intellectual and affective-sensible, it provides the means to consider the intrinsic expressive overabundance of the technical object. Such an operation thus makes it possible to initiate new practices of objects that do not fail to consider their expressive and creative potential. What is ultimately proposed with this intervention is therefore to rethink our individuating relationship with digital technical objects from the point of view of a techno-aesthetic genetic phenomenology, revealing how technical objects possess their proper aesthetic dimension and how this affects the formation of human individualities. Only by considering this dimension of superabundance, therefore, does it seem possible to activate a new understanding of digitalization, thereby grasping its creative and possibly subversive potential.

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**Harry Halpin (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)**  
***Artificial Intelligence versus Collective Intelligence***

It has been claimed by Bostrom that artificial intelligence models such as ChatGPT are the next step in the evolution of a 'super-intelligence' that will replace humanity. We argue this view reflects an impoverished image of intelligence. The ontological presupposition of AI is the liberal autonomous human subject of Descartes and Locke, and the ideology of AI is the automation of this particular philosophy of intelligence. Yet this reading of AI both fails to grasp the essence of large language models, which are a statistical model of the commons of human knowledge on the Web, and simultaneously fails to acknowledge that human intelligence is built on social - rather than individual - being. This is self-evident for even ChatGPT as the data that enables its massive neural networks are fundamentally built on the surveillance and capture of data from human language. More hidden is the ideology inherent in AI that social change is prevented by the application of cybernetics to society as a whole, where the goal of AI is not just to replace human beings, but to manage humans in order to preserve existing power relations as given by an argument between Mead and Bateson. As the source of intelligence in AI is

distributed cognition between humans and machines as per Clark and Stiegler, the alternative to AI is collective intelligence, where computers amplify rather than replace human intelligence as put forward by Licklider and Engelbart. Rather than meta-stabilize a society of control, collective intelligence can go outside the Western philosophical tradition by incorporating the "open world" of the pluriverse, as theorized by Escobar and Mbembe, as an alternative ontological path for AI that puts AI at the service of humanity, rather than a technocratic elite.

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**Benedetta Milani (Leuphana University of Lüneburg)**  
***Network and Immersion: Reconsidering the Digital Subject through Cassirer's Concept of Symbolic Form***

My presentation adopts as its starting point and overall theoretical framework an interpretation of the digital world as a symbolic form, in the sense of Ernst Cassirer. This framework allows to analyse the digital world as a productive and, above all, creative form that shapes our way of being in the world. As a symbolic form, the digital world and its immanent categories become the condition of possibility and constitution of our orientation in reality. In this sense, they generate and inform specific epistemologies, ontologies, aesthetics, and subjectivities unique to the digital world. This premise is crucial for genuinely understanding the *novelty* of the digital while recalibrating our theoretical and epistemic tools for effectively analysing current digital forms and tendencies. In the first part, I will focus on elucidating the fundamental concepts of network and immersion, concepts as omnipresent as they are analytically slippery. These concept-metaphors not only describe the technical aspects of computational technologies but, more importantly, encapsulate the digital condition in which we find ourselves *immersed*. Network and immersion play fundamental roles in defining an epistemology, aesthetics, and digital subjectivity: that is to say, they serve as tools for identifying and determining how we are involved as subjects within the digital world. Network and immersion, as metaphors and analytical proposals, appear to lead to conflicting forms of subjectivity. The network metaphor best expresses the digital logic of subject discretisation: the subject, understood as a node, data, variable, or a black box, seems to lose its inherent status and becomes a *user* to which the network is indifferent, yet regulates, governs, and exploits it. The network embodies a digital aesthetic of discreteness, shifting focus from the fullness of the *continuum* of reality to the identification of nodes and their relationships. Conversely, the immersion

metaphor depicts subjects not as trapped in a network, but rather immersed in bubbles - filtered, artificial, virtual realities that involve us as relational subjects due to our capacity to be affected and to affect. The term "immersion" itself alludes to an analogical idea of being in an environment where immersed subjects are *acted upon* and *act in* affective resonance. Facing this apparent contradiction, my proposal is to view network and immersion as complementary tendencies operating within the digital world, not mutually exclusive but rather interrelated, sometimes in conflict and at other times in collaboration. In the second part, utilising the Cassirerian framework, I propose that by reconsidering the digital subject within the perspectives of network, immersion, and the exclusion of contingency (the predictive matrix of computational technologies), a fruitful parallel to the mythical subject can be drawn. From this starting point, I will briefly outline a possible direction for emancipating the digital subject. Grounded in Cassirer's morphological and processual perspective on symbolic forms, this approach enables a theory of digital subjectivity that surpasses modern binary thinking and dialectics but retains differentiation, moving away from the inclination to eliminate the subject of trans- and post-humanist conceptions.

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**Anthony Longo (University of Antwerp)**  
***TikTok Gave Me ADHD: On User-Algorithm Relations in Platformed Diagnosis***

Trying to understand political subjectivity in the digital age is doomed to fail if we do not take into account the fundamental role of technology in shaping subjective experiences and intersubjective interactions. However, the field of political theory has been slow to fully incorporate these dynamics into its foundational concepts and methodologies (Berg, Staemmler, and Thiel 2022, 253) . In response to this delay, a growing sub-field of 'political theory of technology' is emerging that explicitly addresses the intrinsic relationship between politics and technology (Feenberg 2010; Bantwal Rao et al. 2015; Rosenberger 2017; Gertz, Verbeek, and Douglas 2019; Verbeek 2020) . A particular concern in these debates is how algorithms as so-called 'smart', 'intelligent', and 'personalized' technologies are a tool of formatting, commodifying, and interpellating users into neoliberal subjects in service of a capitalist ideology (Thomas 2018; Fisher 2021; Flisfeder 2021;

Armano, Briziarelli, and Risi 2022; Matzner 2023) . These critiques are typically grounded in a (neo-)Marxist and structuralist approaches to technology and share the claim that algorithms produce forms of knowledge and power by circumventing the self, and therefore challenge the very contemporary notion of subjectivity in itself. However, these approaches face a double challenge: (i) its typical macro-level focus comes at the cost of concrete descriptions of how user-experiences of algorithmic interpellation are actually structured; and (ii) it therefore does not take into account how the physical and the digital relate to each other through the embodied user. This paper claims that a phenomenology of user-algorithm relations can help understand how 'algorithmic subjectivation' operates as a productive and relational force in the context of platformed diagnosis. To make this clear, the paper and its main arguments are illustrated with a case study of the formation of algorithmic publics around 'platformed diagnosis' (Alper et al. 2023) . The paper proceeds in two steps. First, it argues that Foucault's productive and relational understanding of power and resistance is a useful starting point to open up a phenomenological inquiry into algorithmic subjectivation. Second, it offers a phenomenological analysis of platformed diagnosis through the themes of 'identity-in- actualization', self-reflexivity and the normativity of experience. In conclusion, this paper aims to advance our understanding of the political dimension of algorithms, by accounting for the user-algorithm relationalities that enable algorithmic subjectivation, power and resistance.

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**Jordi Viader Guerrero (TU Delft)**  
***Beyond Epistemic User Engagement: The Limits of Technological Mediation and Media Literacy***

The post-phenomenological tradition has thoroughly theorized the ways in which individual users experience technology (Idhe, 1990) through the notion of technological mediation (Verbeek, 2011). It is thus a rich source of inspiration to reflect upon how users use, misuse, reclaim and overall experience technology, as well as offering an interpretation of technology as a constitutive force of user practices, experiences, and political subjectivities (Rosenberger and Verbeek, 2015; Kudina, 2019). However, when offering paths for civic action post-phenomenology tends to limit itself to the micro, individual perspective of users.

The scope of its experiential analysis of technology tends to be constrained to the enabling of informed or responsible user engagement (i.e., Kudina, 2022). Therefore, it also restricts its conception of agency with technology to individual decision-making. Post-phenomenological analyses tend to focus their attention on concrete technological devices or systems: a gadget, a social media platform, a specific feature, etc. While this strategy allows for empirical studies of individual use cases as well as concrete suggestions of use, it does not critically approach the ontological status nor the historical and political dimensions of the studied technological objects. By anchoring philosophical reflection of technology on 'existing' devices, features, or systems, post-phenomenology assumes that the way in which technology exists is that set by large technological corporations. This approach elicits to sketch a parallelism between the post-phenomenological understanding of technological mediation and notions of technological agency from other disciplines, such as media literacy in the domain of media studies. Media literacy also puts forward a pedagogy of informed engagement with technical objects. A set of strategies for analyzing media discursively (deciphering what they claim and represent) with the objective of spotting biases, misinformation and overall to demystify and clarify their semantic content (Breakstone et al., 2018), media literacy and technological mediation are both methods that center epistemic and individual engagement as the main agential (and implicitly political) dimension of mediatic and technological practices. The political task to be done with technology and media appears then to be one of attaining transparency to produce virtuous subjects: achieving clarity from an unobscured and neutral critical standpoint to act intentionally and ethically. In this sense, post-phenomenology can be regarded as expanding media literacy discourses beyond the explicitly textual or communicative while retaining its shortcomings: doubling-down on the individual political responsibility of confecting literate epistemic subjects as the main goal of philosophical reflection on technology. Using this analogy between mediation and media literacy as a departure point, I would like to open a discussion on the advantages, limitations, and political implications of an epistemic model of technological engagement. Furthermore, starting from the notion of alienation as understood by the Marxist and critical theory traditions (i.e., Lukács), I will propose counter-notions that expand the seemingly ahistorical and apolitical notion of mediation towards models of engagement with technology that enable collective, affective, and practical subjects.

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**Dani Shanley (Maastricht University)**

**Darian Meacham (Maastricht University)**

**Stephen Hughes (University College London)**

***The Nightmares and Dreamscapes of Digital Touch***

The landscape of haptic technologies has evolved significantly, encompassing an array of devices each with a unique method of tactile stimulation. Numerous fantasies, dreams, utopias, and dystopias are conjured in the development of emerging digital touch technologies. Digital touch refers to new hardware and software technologies that provide somatic sensations such as touch and kinaesthesia, either as a stand-alone novel interface with users, or as part of a wider immersive experience. VR, AR, XR, and novel stimulation methods imagine and order the relationships between touch, human bodies, and technology. In this paper, we will explore utopic and dystopic registers, from fantasies of touchless haptic experiences to conspiracies about militarised virtualisation of the natural world. We seek to question engineers' attempts to abstract and quantify touch, asking what happens when physical sensations are emptied of their relational, practical, social, and historical meanings. We want to explore the conflicts and uncertainties brought about by new digital touch technologies - tensions between distance and proximity, violation and consent, pleasure and pain, and hype and conspiracy. Ultimately, we want to subject fantasies of digital touch to some reality testing, asking: what anxieties and desires underpin them? Who stands to benefit from them? Who will take on the burden? Whose bodies are on the line? And, importantly, what do technologies like this do for us as critical researchers? We will reflect upon our work as ethics researchers across two European funded projects: GuestXR and Touchless, examining a range of touch-interfaces and devices, 'real', prototype, fictional and imagined, as this offers a route to excavate insights on the values surrounding social touch and the conventions from which they emerge. Where feasible, these will be in-the-wild studies. We will draw upon a number of participatory methodologies, including exploratory speculative design methods - cultural probe packs, rapid prototyping workshops, design fictions and scenarios, coupled with focus groups, and interviews.

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**Bruno Hinrichsen (University of Coimbra)**

***Approaching a Smart-experienced Body through Staccato Gestures: A Contribution based on Vilém Flusser's Late Work***

Dwelling is traditionally a notion either spiritualized or materialized in space. One either dwells in the “interiority” of the self, as consciousness; or in the exteriority of the earth, the home. However, what about the question of dwelling related to digital technologies? The query revolves around what other forms of dwelling one can experience since the modification of human sense configuration by technological development culminating in computing. Vilém Flusser contemplated some paths in this regard. Thus, this presentation uses some of his reflections to discuss not only dwelling but also the experience of corporeality arising from digital existence. Concepts such as “non-thing” and “immateriality” must be addressed to consider the reshaping of the self-experienced body in an informatic and informative paradigm. As the central point of this discussion involves corporeality, an investigation of the gestures is unavoidable to analyze the correlation between the subject's corporeality and digital technologies. Also, Vilém Flusser's philosophical production explores the theme of “gestures”. Indeed, Flusser sought the formalization of a “general theory of gestures”, especially in his 1991 publication “*Gestures: An Attempt on Phenomenology*.” But despite this, a significant portion of the work is dedicated to the investigation of “banalities” such as ‘smoking,’ ‘photographing,’ ‘writing,’ and ‘researching.’ Nevertheless, this talk proposes an extensive interpretation of his gesture theory through his late-period philosophical publications. Thus, I turn my attention to his book “*Into the Universe of Technical Images*” and, specifically, to a chapter titled “*Fumbling*.” The focus of this talk will be the consideration of the fumbling-like gesture searching for an explanation for digital dwelling and smart-experienced body. One might fumble, for example, not only a keyboard, but also a screen, a surface, and the like. A subject may click, type, fumble, palpate, press, compress, and squeeze – keys. In the gesture of fumbling keys, one must ask, on the one hand, what is fumbled and pressed, but on the other hand, and perhaps primarily, how a subject articulates a body that fumbles? Consequently, the question is how fumbling alters the subject. The intention is to demonstrate that the act of fumbling keys addresses how the body articulates itself in staccato-like movements and becomes constrained in mechanical motion within a “calculable universe.”

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**Arianna Petrosino (University of Naples – Federico II)**

***Health, Performance, or Surveillance? Quantified Bodies under Digital Capitalism***

Efficiency, productivity, and growth represent the beating heart of the dominant socio-economic logic, influencing even facets of life traditionally considered beyond the realm of production itself. While the comprehensive commodification of the whole process of reproduction has not only recently commenced, digital capitalism has introduced new avenues for its realization. The transformation of objects, spaces, activities, and more into flows of data is a pivotal component of the commodification process within digital capitalism (Sadowski 2019). Consequently, the inclination towards quantification and datafication has expanded to encompass diverse aspects of life, including production, private life, health (Ruckenstein and Schüll 2017), as well as environments, and public spaces (Andrejevic & Burdon 2016).

This contribution aims to investigate how these dynamics reflect the Cartesian hierarchical dualism between mind and body, examining the interplay of dataveillance (Clarke 1988), quantification, health, and performance in the intersections of labor process and social reproduction. Drawing on an ethnographic observation into a warehouse and a literature review on wellness capitalism (Kopper e Zelickson 2023) and quantified self (Lupton 2016; Moore 2018), we will investigate the potential existence and characterization of a subjectivity that arises from the processes of quantification and the internalized pressures fueled by productivity.

As previously said, the centrality of performance and productivity has expanded beyond the workplace (Chicchi and Simone 2017). In this context, the concept of a "healthy body" often appears synonymous with a "performative body," where performance implies striving for a neutral notion of health with standardized goals and targets (Ruckenstein and Schüll 2017). Thus, the quantification of body and private life seems to follow the same logics that are at the basis of capitalist labor discipline. Moreover, the datafication of the body along with its existence in the environment – and of environments themselves – recalls the early capitalistic objective of controlling nature and transforming it into a site of extraction and commodification (Moore 2017). This process first started with the deprivation nature of any supernatural power (Federici 2015), and with its subjection to some form of property; namely, nature was rendered completely rational, measurable, quantifiable, and exploitable. Looking at the application of this process to the body, it means that the body itself becomes a locus for extraction and commodification, often occurring without any form of consent – sometimes even without individuals being aware of these ongoing processes (Marx 2002).

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**Ângelo Milhano (University of Évora)**

***Where is my Office? Smart Technologies and the Transformation of the Subjective Experience of Work***

The digital age has ushered in a transformative era where technology is progressively becoming an integral part of our lives, increasingly fusing with the human body. From the personal computer to the laptop, and then to the smartphone, smart glasses, and cutting-edge developments like Neuralink, technology's relentless incorporation into our daily existence is undeniable. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of media anthropotropism, proposed by Paul Levinson in the 1990s. However, this journey towards greater technological incorporation is not without its consequences. Philosophy of Technology grapples with the ethical, social, ontological, and other issues stemming from the growing incorporation of technological artifacts. Don Ihde, in the post phenomenological perspective, highlights the inevitable sensory trade-offs associated with the incorporation of technological artifacts. Each technology's use often necessitates a natural trade-off, enhancing one sense at the expense of others. Building on Ihde's work, Peter-Paul Verbeek further underscores how the incorporation of technology shapes our intentional relations with the world, occasionally leading to what he terms "cyborg intentionality."

Andrew Feenberg reminds us that technologies carry not only formal but also deeply ingrained political biases, influencing our worldviews. It is vital to question the extent to which smart technologies alter our relationship with work. They mold our experiences of the world, our interactions with others, and even our self-perception when we use them. The march towards ever increasing incorporation renders these biases nearly imperceptible, appearing "transparent" in Ihde's terminology. Often, we assume their neutrality, making it challenging to discern the extent to which our judgments, values, and subjective experiences are independent of the technologies we employ. Yet, over the past decade, numerous social institutions have questioned this neutrality, underscoring the need for reflection on the political biases of digital technologies and their regulation.

This study draws from the works of Martin Heidegger, Byung-Chul Han, Don Ihde, and Vincent Blok, exploring how smart technologies reshape our subjective experience of work. The aim is to unravel the ontological implications of the transformation of our subjective experience of work in a digitalized "environment." How profoundly do smart technologies sculpt our "lifeworld"? In

what ways do they affect our perceptions of space and time? Is it still possible to distinguish between leisure and work in this digital landscape? Does the Kantian distinction between a public and private use of reason remain relevant? These are some of the core questions that guide our inquiry. We intend to foster a meaningful discussion around them. As technology's incorporation continues at an ever accelerating pace, the need to scrutinize the political biases of digital technologies and their profound impact on our daily existence becomes increasingly vital. In sum, the inexorable journey of technology's incorporation into our lives is a paradigm shift that raises profound questions about our relations with the digital world, our work, and ourselves. This study endeavors to shed light on the multifaceted implications of this integration, inviting a rich and informed discourse on the evolving dynamics between humanity and technology in the 21st century.

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**Ricardo Mendoza-Canales (University of Lisbon)**

***The Bubble: The Dark Side of Cultural Memory***

It has become commonplace to hear that "everything is cyclical." It seems normal to us that fashions "come back," that vintage is *first* 'hipster', *then* becomes mainstream and *then* is replaced by "something else": *something else* that recycles elements from the past to present them again as "original." We live in a bubble: the bubble of "contemporaneity." But it is only an illusion. This contemporaneity has an identifiable beginning: the 1950s. What on the surface appears to be a transgenerational community sharing the same cultural references and cultivating a common cultural memory on a global scale is in fact the illusory effect of the imposition of an "empty and homogeneous" (Benjamin) historical time. In my paper, I will first present a diagnosis of the contours of what I call "the bubble" and the risks it entails. In a nutshell, the bubble creates the illusion that we live in the same epoch and that we are contemporary on a global scale. I will then critically examine the concept of "cultural memory" (Erl, Assman, Huyssen) from a Stieglerian point of view (*Technics and Time*), specifically with regard to the influence of technical reproducibility has on the (in)formation of memory. It will become clear that cultural memory is not immune to the economic effects and ideology of global capitalism, which tend towards the collective homogenization of taste and the "modulation of affects" (Simondon, Deleuze).

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**Tiago Mesquita Carvalho (University of Porto)**

***The Guarding of the Eye: Towards an Askesis for the Digital Age***

In this presentation I hope to *develop* the insights regarding the digital age offered by “classic” authors in philosophy of technology such as Ivan Illich and Gunther Anders. Although both could not witness all the late innovations in communication and information technologies, artificial intelligence and the virtualisation of everyday life, both authors were already acutely aware of some of the implications of the scientific acceleration of social life. So, a first step will be to argue how although “smartness” was not addressed by these authors, the demand for connectivity, availability and algorithmization were already recognizable features of technology in the 20th century, along with a view of how industrialization results in a symbolic fallout that promotes *disembodiment*. Anders places the drive towards overcoming one’s obsolescence in the “age of the second industrial revolution” as will for transcending time and space that nowadays the virtual prosthetics of our mobile devices allegedly achieve through a ubiquitous networking.

For Illich, the image of the self has since the Middle Ages been shaped according to a textual metaphor. This draws on Gehlen's concept of human being as a *Mängelwesen*, a being that lacks both a fixed, stable essence and a ready to use world. According to Anders, human beings are driven to continuously make themselves and their world through technology and concurrently, technology provides an image for their own selves. Regarding subjectivation, ours is an “age of systems”, an epochal event that signals the transition to another watershed, as the image of the self is now mostly cybernetic, networked, weightless and *data* driven. The computer, and not the book is now the prevailing technological metaphor. A second step of this presentation will then establish, according to Illich, what are the features of subjectivity that the textual metaphor affords and why is it important to maintain it.

Moreover, Illich did not equate the digital age as implying a complete overhaul of the textual metaphor. The digital age is marked by a co-existence of subjectivation forms, but given the encroaching pervasion of digital technologies in the social lifeworld, Illich underlines the importance of a *refusal* in order to safeguard other, fragile subjectivation forms. In the same way, Anders wrote about the *anaesthetic force* of modern technology to describe how it is used without any emotional and sensible involvement, and uprooting its bond to others and to a place. Finally, the third step of this presentation will take us to an alternative devised

by the late Illich in order to keep the digital disruption at bay. In the “age of the show” we are exposed to an unprecedented flood of artificial computerised and advertising smart images and other graphic and quantified representations of reality. Their sheer number means a self-distraction and an individuation of these virtual worlds. Illich recovers the medieval *custodia oculorum* for the age of systems as a way of guarding the eyes, a training achieved through a conscious, ascetical self-denial that establishes rules for relating with the optic regime of digital technologies.

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**Francisco Nunes (NOVA University Lisbon)**

***Escaping Smartness: Temporality and Subjectivity in the Age of Planetary Digital Integration***

In recent years, debates on the intersection between the rise of digital technologies, and new forms of governmentality have coalesced onto a number of conceptual tools, such as “surveillance capitalism,” (Zuboff 2019) “the black box society,” (Pasquale 2016) or “communicative capitalism” (Dean 2009). Among those, ‘smartness’ emerged as not only a term to designate a number of technical features, but as an epistemological regime with profound political consequences (Halpern and Mitchell 2023). These debates have revitalized long-standing concerns regarding processes of subjectification against the backdrop of an increased technologically mediated political existence, prompting an actualization of Deleuze’s (1992) seminal reflections on the overcoming of the mass/individual dyad through the emergence of “dividuals.” Moving along two conceptual axes – temporality and subjectivity – in an attempt to explore the critical juncture between both, and drawing largely from Halpern and Mitchell’s theoretical articulation – ‘the smartness mandate’ –, this article seeks to interrogate the ways in which the temporality of smartness, predicated on a demo-logic of historical amnesia, driving towards further optimization and resilience, underwrites the emergence of a particular form of political subjectivity. Following Galloway (2014, 109), who states that the vital challenge in the age of extended digital integration is “to rescue history from its own consummation” this article attempts to explore how, within the framework of the ‘smartness mandate’ and adjacent theoretical articulations, the constitution of a subject as a node of information leads to a particular way of overcoming liberal notions of self-enclosed subjectivity in the most nefarious of forms, in a continuation of what Hayles (2006) noted on cybernetics and



posthumanism. Pushing against this present state of affairs, some authors have considered *anonymity* and *subtraction* as ways to bypass the gigantic techno-scientific apparatuses that structure life in the age of planetary digital integration (Galloway 2021; Culp, 2022), while others emphasize the need for a “positive biopolitics” (Bratton 2021) or a “biopolitical learning consensus” (Halpern and Mitchell 2023). This article discusses the conceptual and political differences between seemingly disparate ways of critically rearticulating resistance and emancipation in the digital era, further arguing that possible lines of flight away from the neoliberal futurities promoted by the infinite *smart* optimization of life will need to temporally and materially reinscribe forms of political subjectification.

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**Simone Bernardi della Rosa (University of Molise)**  
***Exploring Digital Habits: Predictive Algorithms and the Co-Constitution of Human Subjectivities in Smart Environments***

This paper delves into the nuanced relationship between digital environments and human behavior, with a particular focus on habits and their intersection with predictive technologies. The central hypothesis posits that understanding the interplay between habit structure and predictive algorithms is crucial for unraveling the profound influence of smart technologies on subjectivities. The investigation unfolds through two interconnected stages: an examination of the interaction between habit and predictive technologies, and an analysis of the contemporary impact of predictive mechanisms on human subjectivity and the profound influence on human behaviors and beliefs. The contemporary discourse on digital technology often emphasizes ethical considerations and social injustices related to algorithmic prediction (Kordzadeh & Ghasemaghahi 2022; Johnson 2021). This paper seeks to address a gap in the current debate by exploring the conceptual entanglement of habit, self, and predictive technologies. In particular, it wants to explore a part of the contemporary debate on human habits that is mostly still unexplored, on the topic of their relationship with digital media and technologies (Airoldi 2021; Romele 2020, 2023) - e.g., the way digital media and technologies contribute to flattening individuals on their habits rather than promoting more “authentic” forms of subjectivation. Through this work, this paper aims to shed light on a new aspect of this emerging debate: the anticipative role that data and algorithms have in these automatic forms of habituation of the self.

Key questions guiding the research include: Does digital behavior depend on the predictive structure of the technological environment? How does the anticipative structure of habit explain the influence of contemporary predictive mechanisms, embodied in algorithms, on behavior and beliefs? To answer these questions, this paper formulates a set of research hypotheses across three stages. Firstly, it explores the ontological and epistemological status of habits as a predictive concept (Clark, 2015; Mendonça, Curado & Gouveia, 2020; Wiese & Metzinger, 2017, Poli 2017, Verplanken 2018), challenging traditional notions and addressing risks such as determinism. Secondly, it analyzes the conceptual engineering behind prediction machines, putting forward a hypothesis regarding the predictive nature of algorithms mirroring cognitive and ontological habit structures. Lastly, based on this assumption, it posits a hypothesis of co-construction and mutual influence between digital predictive mechanisms and human subjectivity. This research contributes to an underexplored dimension of the contemporary critical perspectives on digital technology, shedding light on the intricate dynamics between predictive digital technologies and human subjectivation. By uncovering the conceptual foundations and empirical connections between predictive algorithms and forms of habituation of the self, it aims to inform interdisciplinary approaches and extend the impact of the inquiry beyond theoretical realms.

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**Antonio Oraldi (University of Lisbon)**  
***Smartification and Political Subjects: Optimization, Adaptation, Gamification***

Philosophers of technology and critical theorists have highlighted the connections between technological developments and processes of political subjectivation. Drawing from contributions that relate computation with its economic and political dimensions (Pasquinelli, 2023; Bratton, 2015, Galloway, 2023), this paper considers that techno-political configurations correspond to socially embedded and materially organized forms of rationality. By extending “technological reason” (Marcuse, 1941) into its successive historically situated forms, the first part of this paper inscribes the techno-politics of smartness into the adventures of techno-political rationality, leading up to the contemporary “smartness mandate” (Halpern & Mitchell, 2023). We will consider how, on one hand, as a form of unbridled optimization, the techno-politics of smartness resonates with earlier critiques of technocracy (Marcuse, 1964; Feenberg, 1999; Simondon, 1958), as well as

presenting novel features. We will note that the critique of technical rationality as a political rationality theoretically substantiates the political subject of smartness, as one that (i) is captured in a potentially infinite process of optimization and (ii) whose privileged mode of action is adaptation within a context of generalized crisis. In this light, smartness can be interpreted as a political imperative of adaptation through (planetary-scale) computation, sensing technologies, and machine learning.

After outlining the relationship between rationality, technology, and power, the paper moves on to discuss the role of digital games in the new technocracy. In considering the mediatic transformations around 21<sup>st</sup> century forms of subjectivation, the second part discusses the relationship between optimization and play. Seen as a fundamental element of human culture and freedom (Huizinga, Schiller), and employed as a tool against productive efficiency by some critics of capitalist technological society (Fourier, Marcuse, Debord), the concept of play faces new challenges in the age of digitality and smart machines. Alongside the analysis of the digital game as the emerging dominant cultural form after cinema (Wark, 2007), the integration between cybernetic and physical reality implicit in smartification appears thus as the social, economic, and infrastructural configuration for the emergence of a gamer subject (or gamer citizen). Through a discussion of Negroponte's pioneering work on "intelligent environments" (1970; 1975), the paper explores the intimate connection between smartification and gamification. Gamification appears as a form of subjectivation in the smart age, not simply as an operation hiding work under play, but also in virtue of an ontological convergence between the (video)game and socio-technical reality under the lenses of optimization. In both, reality appears as a demo, namely a temporary reality subject to constant improvement, re-adjustment, and modulation. Lastly, if the convergence between work and play appears in the form of optimizing gamification, the affirmation of a critical technological rationality cannot simply rely on free play. On this basis, any affirmation of a critical politics (of play) requires a critique of optimization (e.g., delineable as a "strike on optimization", Lovink, 2022) to distinguish itself from its poor gamified version integral to digital capitalism.

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**Jaanika Puusalu (Estonian Academy of Security Sciences)**

**Tanel Mällo (Cybernetica AS)**

### ***Constructing the Political Agent in Digital Society: an Estonian Vision***

With state services worldwide becoming increasingly digitalised, it is essential to ask whether any space remains for the political agent to exercise their democratic rights by questioning or directing the development of state digitalisation, including determining which services would be truly beneficial and what alternatives should be considered. To address this question, this talk presents the results of a document analysis investigating how the political agent has been envisioned and constructed through two decades of digital state development plans in Estonia. Some saw the introduction of the commercial Internet and the rapid development of digital technology at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as providing a voice for society's members and a platform for public debate that would fulfil the ideals of participatory democracy (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Kellner, 2000). Digital solutions to political processes, like electronic voting, were envisioned as ways to facilitate and extend the public use of state services beyond the traditional. Championed by technovisionaries, the term E-democracy, and later the related terms e-government, digital government, and the digital state, came to refer to digital means that bring the state apparatus closer to society and aid political agency while reducing the marginalisation of certain social groups. Yet, introduction of these means has not necessarily enhanced the relationship between the political agent and the state in the democratic sense. As has been argued, the Internet did not fulfil the dream of the public sphere (e.g., Dean, 2003; van Dijck) and the digitalisation of state processes has also failed to guarantee democratic engagement, e.g., electronic voting has not led to the entire voting-age population participating in elections. Indeed, digital solutions may provide more convenient access to some state services (e.g., online healthcare services) and make it easier for the political agent to fulfil some of their responsibilities towards the state (e.g., filing tax reports and voting), but the digital development of the state is seemingly still driven by ideas of convenience, the elimination of human subjectivity, efficiency, and speed, underwritten by the intention to implement these new technologies as quickly and extensively as possible.

This research is motivated by this seeming discrepancy between the role of the political agent in contemporary digital states and democratic ideals and asks whether there is space for the political agent to question or direct the development of state digitalisation. This study addresses this question via the case study of Estonia, employing policy documents analysis and interviews with key stakeholders to investigate the role the individual has been ascribed as a political agent in the

process of state digitalisation and compare the current discourse to the concept of the ideal state and core values of democracy.

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**Paulo Melo (NOVA University Lisbon)**

**Ana Viseu (NOVA University Lisbon)**

***Hyper Surveillance of Public Space: The Case of Bairro Alto***

The field of public surveillance studies has undergone numerous changes in the past 20 years. The popular studies of CCTV of the 90s were supplanted by studies of web surveillance and, lately, of what Zuboff (2019) termed ‘surveillance capitalism’ and Lyon (2018) calls a ‘surveillance culture’. As this went on, CCTV technology became a different a different beast: from a static, granular, stand-alone artefact, it became a 360°, connected, sound-recording, night-vision, facial-recognition enabled digital assemblage. In Portugal, for policymakers and public security agencies it also became “the strategic, and smart, means to protect the public”. In 2024, Bairro Alto – a Lisbon neighborhood known for its nightlife and attractive to tourists – will complete ten years of video surveillance system operation. In a document from the Ministry of Internal Administration (MAI), the Public Security Police (PSP), the entity responsible for managing the surveillance system, describes it as operating “uninterruptedly, twenty-four hours a day, every day of the week” (Portugal, 2022, s/p), through the capture and recording of images and, “whenever there is a situation of concrete danger to the safety of people and property”, possibly sound. Likewise, both in interviews conducted by the authors and in outdoors in the city of Lisbon, those responsible for these systems perform a semiotic operation of moving them from ‘video surveillance’ to ‘video protection’.

The case of Bairro Alto highlights a logic observed globally, analyzed for at least four decades by surveillance studies (Lyon, 2022), which, among other perspectives, discusses the implications for the right to privacy (Viseu, Clement & Aspinall, 2004) and makes critical comments about surveillance as an “easy solution” that “transports” the real problems to another location (Carli, 2008).

Drawing upon interviews with relevant actors including, MAI, police, and residents, as well as documentary and policy analysis, this paper does two main things: (a) it examines the visions and motivations that are mobilized to promote and legally and politically justify the use of video surveillance in Bairro Alto, including the ways in which the community of residents position themselves in relation to this

surveillance; And, (b) it examines the practices of operation and use of this system, highlighting the dissonances between the legal scope and the use of video surveillance in Bairro Alto.

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**Dmitry Muravyov (TU Delft)**

***Failure, not an Error: A Call for the Public Engagement with Algorithmic Mistakes***

AI systems make mistakes all the time, yet rarely are such mistakes seen as grounds to stop applying technology in a particular way. An often-incurred response to AI mistakes on the part of technological companies has been to render them a part of a continual learning process, a source of improvement, a transient yet unfortunate step towards making a better product. While making completely infallible technology is unlikely, not only is this way of understanding algorithmic mistakes just one of many, but it also complicates thinking about how not all mistakes may not be worth repeating. Moreover, this discourse often empowers companies to be the primary agents of change, capable of intervention. Because of the power that technological companies at present possess in the context of technological development, the error transience, both as a discourse and a strategy to address algorithmic harms, often becomes the dominant way of thinking and dealing with algorithmic mistakes.

In this paper, I critically address ethical, political, and epistemological limitations of understanding algorithmic mistakes as transient errors by suggesting that a separate class of algorithmic failures should be established as instances in which algorithmic mistakes provide grounds for technological refusal. By introducing this distinction, I also elaborate on the underlying philosophical assumptions about algorithmic mistakes, arguing that they are, at least to a certain extent, indispensable and that technological fallibility can have generative ethical and political potential. Seen this way, technological mistakes may not always and necessarily be events to be avoided at all costs since it is, in its formulation, an impossible task but a point of departure to envision the politics and ethics of AI otherwise.

Furthermore, drawing on sociological and historical studies of AI/ML, I detail why it is difficult to draw the distinction between algorithmic errors and algorithmic failures publicly. On the one hand, making this distinction is complicated by the technological and scientific history of the development of

artificial intelligence and machine learning, in which errors have consistently been understood not as the horizon of the knowable but as a way to overcome these boundaries. On the other hand, the nexus of data science and AI development is often positioned as a domain-agnostic technique to intervene in different fields, rendering its epistemological, economic, and social aspirations universally suited to address various issues.

Lastly, I explain how the boundary between algorithmic errors and failures is a public problem that calls for the formation of publics. I also attempt to provide several ethical and political considerations of discussing and dealing with algorithmic mistakes for such publics. I conclude that the theory and practice of responsible AI should meaningfully account for the possibilities of technological refusal and that the repertoire of political subjectivity should entail specific responses to algorithmic harms.

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**Luca Possati (University of Twente)**

***Why We Need a New Political Technology Assessment: Exploring the Limits of Responsible Innovation and Technology Assessment***

This paper's central argument is that the frameworks of Responsible Innovation (RI) and Technology Assessment (TA) are rooted in an antiquated political and geopolitical paradigm, necessitating a conceptual overhaul. This argument is supported by two primary reasons. First, RI and TA are not neutral towards technological innovation; instead, they inherently align with a specific political and geopolitical model—the liberal world order (LWO). This model is currently experiencing significant challenges and crisis. We explore this through a literature review of RI and TA in Section 1 and a subsequent political and geopolitical analysis in Section 2. The second reason, as highlighted in Section 3, is that the very essence of our technologies has dramatically transformed over the past twenty years. We now live in a world dominated by intricate global engineering systems that are not only political but also geopolitical in nature. These systems, being transnational, influence the decisions and interactions of nations. The current LWO framework struggles to grasp and manage these influential global systems effectively. Section 4 builds on the findings from Sections 2 and 3, presenting a reinterpreted version

of Rodrik's trilemma. We propose to reformulate and extend the trilemma as follows:

- *If we want to maintain and deepen democracy, we have to choose between state sovereignty and international economic integration, but we need both of these aspects (governance + free market) to control technological innovation within engineering systems in a responsible way.*
- *If we want to keep state sovereignty and self-determination, we have to choose between deepening democracy and deepening globalization, but again we need both of these aspects (democracy + free market) to control innovation within engineering systems in a responsible way.*
- *If we want to maintain and deepen globalization, we have to choose between state sovereignty and democracy, but again we need both of these aspects (governance + democracy) to control technological innovation within engineering systems in a responsible way.*

The three logics (democracy, free market, and government) cannot coexist—this is Rodrik's theorem. It is a logical impossibility: if we accept at least two of them, we must modify the third. The conclusion is twofold: *on the one hand*, the new version of the trilemma shows that a governance of technology based on current RI and TA methods is not viable; *on the other*, the raise of global engineering systems and the complexity of technological innovation force us to develop a new geopolitical-oriented approach to the technology assessment.

This reformulation is designed to consolidate and expand upon the insights gained in the preceding sections. Section 5 revisits the issues identified earlier in the paper, emphasizing the urgency to revamp both TA and RI, particularly in light of the unique challenges posed by the Anthropocene era. As we embark on this reassessment, the invaluable insights that philosophical reflection brings to the table should not be underestimated.

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**Yaqub Chaudhary (University of Cambridge),**

**Jonnie Penn (University of Cambridge)**

***Large Language Models as Instruments of Power and Control***

In this paper, we argue that the impacts on society and political subjects of large language models (LLMs) arising from the rapid adoption of these technologies are underestimated when they are considered as isolated computational artefacts. Instead, we highlight that assessments of the impacts of LLMs should proceed by

recognising them as computational instruments that are contingent on large-scale computational infrastructure within which they may be instrumentalised toward different purposes in concert with other computational techniques. First, we draw attention to the ambitions and commitments of major technology corporations to situate the technologies of generative AI as a new foundation for the future of digital computing. Second, we discuss multiple areas of emerging applied research on LLMs, each of which builds on the capabilities of LLMs to render them as new components within the techno-political category of “smartness”. We show how LLMs may be re-purposed to fulfil each of the functions represented by the SMART acronym, namely, Self-Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Technology, and may thus serve to establish a new informational regime in which LLMs are revealed as instruments of power and control.

We discuss the inauguration of a new form of modulatory power that may be realised via LLM-based systems and the vast apparatuses of computing infrastructure upon which they are contingent with reference to the disciplinary and modulatory regimes of power identified by Foucault and Deleuze. In particular, we provide examples from the emerging literature on novel LLM-based applications and systems that demonstrate the versatility of LLMs and how they can be repurposed toward different ends, in combination with other significant areas of machine learning research, to produce mechanisms of control that serve to co-constitute users as they are hailed through text-based interactions with LLM-systems and thus interpellated as computationalised political subjects. This includes, first, the combination of LLMs with reinforcement learning to produce controllable and steerable dialogue models, second, emerging research which repurposes LLMs as implicit computational models of human agents, and third, new methods for the evaluation of synthetic personas. We end with a discussion on how these emerging areas of applied research may be combined to build LLM-based systems that serve as powerful instruments of individual, social and political control via LLM-based simulation, prediction and manipulation of human behaviour, intent and action.

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**Aarón Moreno Inglés (TU Delft)**

***Artificial Intelligence for Emancipatory Projects: Potentialities and Pitfalls***

The predominant discussion about Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its societal impact is mainly focused on the *AI Ethics* paradigm, which broadly explores the

idea of developing “good” or “fair” AI, addressing bias and privacy issues, amongst other topics. One of the main shortcomings of this approach is that it often fails to examine the socio-political relations and structures in which AI-systems are embedded, because it heavily focuses on individual actions, whether they are undertaken by its designers or by its final users. Due to this, scholars in the field of critical AI studies are starting to shift the conversation about the impact of AI in society to a wider interdisciplinary outlook, drawing upon frameworks from sociology, anthropology and political sciences. When studying AI, it is crucial to understand its position within the neoliberal political economy and its modes of production to grasp the ways it re-shapes and re-produces individual and collective subjectivities and political imaginaries.

In this context, it becomes relevant to explore the potential of AI to become a tool for political action. Could (and should) AI play a role in the strategies of social movements and political organisations seeking emancipation? The importance of this research topic is twofold – on the one hand, exploring this issue would allow organisations to take AI into account (or disregard it) when building their emancipatory roadmaps. On the other hand, the result of such research would reinforce techno-optimist or techno-pessimist approaches to AI and assess its wider socio-political impact. In this sense, the concept of *emancipation* and its relation to AI has not yet been widely explored. One of the reasons for it may be the “ambivalent meanings” that are often found in the understandings of the term (Rebughini, 2015). Nevertheless, certain research on the emancipatory possibilities of digital technologies have already been made (Skotnicka, 2017; Kane et al., 2020; Young et al., 2021). The objective of this paper is to provide a critical account of the potentialities of AI-powered systems as tools for emancipation projects, along with their challenges. To achieve this, I will proceed in three steps. First, I will provide a general historical introduction to the role that digital technology has interplayed in political emancipatory strategies. Second, I will assess different ways in which AI technologies can be designed and used as tools to support particular emancipation projects. I will present the development of Natural Language Processing tools for Māori communities (Solano et al., 2018) and the case for Cyber-Communism (Cockshott and Nieto, 2017; Moreno-Casas, 2022) as potential examples, amongst others. Finally, I will explain the multi-dimensional challenges towards this idea of emancipatory AI. Through this analysis, I will argue that it will become crucial for emancipatory movements to learn about AI, especially in terms of their resistance strategies. Although AI technologies might become useful for small-scale emancipation projects, its current ways of production in terms of labour and ecological impact would not make AI desirable in the quest for emancipation at a global scale.

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**Shaked Spier (University of Twente)**

***The Politics of Platform Technologies: A Critical Conceptualization of the Platform and Sharing Economy***

Digital platforms increasingly mediate social, economic, and other forms of human interactions, which puts them in a position to influence the power dynamics and moral values that shape these interactions. In this paper, I focus on the platform and sharing economy – an economic model, in which digital platforms facilitate social and economic interactions such as lending, renting, providing, and sharing access to goods and services. These platforms can be roughly divided into two platform models. *Mainstream platforms* refer to the commercial, corporate platform model that dominates the platform and sharing economy and deploys "smart" technology mechanisms to increase efficiency and monetize data and labor. Examples of such platforms are Airbnb (home-sharing/short-term rentals), Wolt & Deliveroo (food delivery), Uber (car sharing/ride-hailing), and TaskRabbit & Upwork (freelance labor).

Additionally, countermodels to mainstream platforms are on the rise. The main model among these alternative platforms is the *platform cooperative*, these are "businesses that use a website, mobile app, or protocol to sell goods or services. They rely on democratic decision-making and shared ownership of the platform by workers and users" (Platform Cooperativism Consortium, 2020). To name a few examples: Fairbnb (home-sharing/short-term rentals), CoopCycle (food delivery), Eva (car sharing/ride-hailing), and Coopify (freelance labor). Each of these platform models aims at bringing different social and economic realities into being, which extend beyond the platform's direct application or utility (e.g., home-sharing, food delivery). The dichotomy between the mainstream and cooperative platform models suggests the relevance of the philosophical positions/theories of Politics of Technology and Critical Theory of Technology for addressing the platform and sharing economy. Digital platforms are, to paraphrase Bryan Pfaffenberger, "not politics pursued by other means; they are politics constructed by technological means" (Pfaffenberger, 1992, p. 282).

In this paper, I study the political aspects of digital platforms. Building on Langdon Winner, Andrew Feenberg, and Bryan Pfaffenberger's work, I identify the key analytical concepts and tools that will be used for analyzing digital platforms' politics. I then investigate in which sense and to what extent digital platforms are

political. I make the analysis concrete by showing that each platform model, the relations between the platform models, and the platforms themselves have politics. Furthermore, I use particular platforms from each platform model as case studies to support my arguments. This paper adds to the existing literature in two main ways: first, using the case study of two alternative platform models, the paper shows in which ways and to what extent digital platforms are political. Thus, it fends off the de-politicizing effect of technology-centered and data-driven governance approaches (Morozov, 2013; Shelton, 2017) that are apparent in the contemporary platform and sharing economy. Second, the paper addresses the actual politics—the social, economic, political, etc. realities—that are constructed by means of these platforms. Thus, it offers an empirically-informed contribution to the mostly theory-oriented literature with critical perspectives on digital technologies.

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**Deniz Karahan-Alp (University of Otago)**

***Rejuvenating Eros in Social Media: Herbert Marcuse and the Possibility of Non-repressive Connectivity***

This paper will investigate the relationship between Marcuse's theory of *Eros* (the non repressive life instincts) and the possibility of fostering non-repressive connectivity within the realm of contemporary social media platforms. The analysis will begin with a brief overview of the repressive features inherent in these platforms in order to illuminate the obstacles that hinder genuine human connections in the digital era. Commercialization, alienation, and the repression of subjectivity will be identified as formidable barriers to authentic human self-relations. The analysis will then shift towards Marcuse's utopian perspective on technology as an emancipatory force. It will explore whether social media platforms have the capacity to transcend inherited repressive tendencies, become instrumental in promoting social change, cultivate human bonds, foster collective action, and challenge one-dimensional conceptual frameworks.

Emphasis will be placed on determining the characteristics of social media platforms that are consistent with Marcuse's philosophy of technology as a tool for liberation. The analysis will scrutinise specific platform types that incorporate elements that facilitate non-repressive connectivity. I will focus on the features of alternative and non-commercial social networks, grassroots digital communities, and platforms centred on user empowerment instead of profit. The objective is to examine whether the elimination of capitalist relations, which Marcuse identified

as *surplus repression*, can lead to the revitalisation of *Eros's* life-affirming tendencies on social media platforms. This perspective may offer a means of promoting genuine human connections not impeded by the restrictive elements inherently present in capitalist social media platforms. Overall, by examining these alternative digital platforms, the paper aims to provide insights into how specific platforms may embody the emancipatory potential posited by Marcuse, in order to contribute to discussions on the possibility of rejuvenating *Eros* in the digital era.

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**Matteo Camerini (Université Paris Cité)**

**Ruben Maria Eeckels (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)**

**Daive Liggi (University of Bologna), Massimiliano Muci (York University)**  
***If 'the Medium is the Message', then What Kind of Message are Social Media?***

Starting from the well-known quotation by the sociologist Marshall McLuhan, «the medium is the message», the aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the material structure of Social Media (hereafter SM) carries a specific capitalist ideological message, regardless of any specific content it may convey. While scholarly literature, especially in the last decade, has shown an increasing interest in the phenomenon of SM – basically in a Foucauldian perspective (M. Andrejevic; D. Lyon; S. Zuboff) – there is a lack of systematic studies that analyze their constitutive elements, along with their meaning, and structural coherence (D. Schiller; N. Srnicek).

First, we will begin by distinguishing the concept of Social Network (hereafter SN) from that of SM. If SM are the medium, SN is the network of people using SM to create social, economic, political relationships. In other words, SM are the condition of possibility of such relationships. The idea itself of a "*social network*" presupposes a concept of such relationships as if they replaced a "natural" situation in which individuals were unrelated. Individuals in SM do not stem from the idea of community; instead, they perceive themselves as atoms and engage with their otherness only by virtue of the artificial medium itself. The *quid pro quo* for accessing SM is the creation of a self-defined identity. This category logically precedes its external relations; what is more, its self-definition qualitatively *shapes* them.

A further point to be analyzed is the difference between SM and the Internet. While the former is based on the private accumulation of data - algorithms are normatively charged and establish a *law of use* of this medium - the latter lacks centralization, is distributive, and resembles a rhizomatic network (Deleuze) that is neither normative nor pre-normed. Next, we will show how SM create a real dynamic of alienation of individuals from themselves and the product of their labor. Unpaid labor processes the raw material of information into data that, thanks to the advertising system, becomes in turn a commodity and generates surplus value for the company that owns such data (Fuchs). Finally, this paper will explore the main features of SM (Profile, Post, Pictures, Scrolling, Chats, and Likes) and show how, by virtue of their own design, they are not a neutral medium, but an ideological means that reproduces capitalist practices. These findings point to the need to develop a *critical theory of Social Media*, in order to make sense of the relationships between subjectivity, the capitalist socio-economical system, and digital technologies.

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**Andrea Pavoni (ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon)**

**Andrea Mubi Brighenti (University of Trento)**

***Urban Atmoculture and the Problem of Automation***

Modernity has created a movement-space where the problem of finding one's way through an increasingly 'displaced' urban space first emerged, with noticeable psycho-social consequences. As thinkers such as Tarde, Simmel or Goffman differently observed, immanent choreographies of norms, gestures, pattern recognition and inattention emerged out of this disorienting space, allowing for the smooth unfolding of urban life, while inscribing all sorts of biases within the common infrastructure's silent functioning. This early, pre-digital forms of urban automation were accompanied by the rise of atmoculture, that is, the gradual convergence of a spatial-affective understanding of culture as atmosphere, and the rise and rise of a culture of the atmosphere.<sup>1</sup> Atmoculture, we contend, is the spatial-aesthetic, psycho-cultural, and bio-technological milieu that prepares space for convenient navigation, reorienting urban experience towards atmospheric considerations by seeking to maximize safety, efficiency, and pleasure in the user's encounters with the environment. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, atmoculture has unfolded via three main vectors: the imperative of adaptation;<sup>2</sup> the aesthetic of comfort;<sup>3</sup> and the systemic delegation of intellectual, emotional and ethical urban skills to techno-legal proxies.<sup>4</sup>

Exploring urban computation, including the advent of smart and cognitive city imaginaries, through this genealogical lens allows to zoom in onto the complex aesthetic, normative and infrastructural dynamics of the ongoing ‘automation of automation’ of the urban.<sup>5</sup> Here, we do so by particularly focusing on the potential ‘calcifying’ effects – e.g. notions such as ‘stupidity’,<sup>6</sup> ‘affective ankylosis’<sup>7</sup> or ‘proletarianization’<sup>8</sup> – that urban computation might have on the field of the problematic out of which modes of subjectivation emerge, and more precisely on the collective capacity to pose rather than simply solve vital problems.<sup>9</sup> While smartification is self-evidently associated with an increase in urban liveability – as calculated by ‘liveability indexes’ –, in fact, it actually threatens to exhaust what Massumi terms the surplus value of life, that is, the incomputable quality of living as it unfolds: its atmo-cultural excess.<sup>10</sup>

After developing a genealogy of atmoculture and a diagnostic of smartification, the paper will conclude by gesturing on other socio-technical strategies to outsmart urban life by actually expanding, rather than foreclosing, the gaps, vacuoles and glitches of the current urban condition – that is, towards developing new and undesigned ways to master the void of non-mastery opened up by the current planetary condition, as opposed to concealing it beneath the promise of a solution-oriented smart future.<sup>11</sup>

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**Erik Bordeleau (NOVA University Lisbon)**

***The Cosmo-Financial Pharmakon and The Making of Neganthropocenic Localities***

The question of how we expose ourselves to the open-ended, the incomputable and the unforeseeable, or what Stiegler calls *l’avenir*, in contrast with the (programmable) *future*, is central to any discussion regarding new modes of collective self-organization in the (Neg)Anthropocene. It points to our differential and situated sense of shared potentiality, to the way we engage in adventures of knowledge that participate in the formation of transductive milieus, contributive co-learning territories and other processual, precarious *localities*. What kind of techno-social recursions – collective rituals, proofs-of-celebration and other metamorphic protocols of *belonging-in-becoming* – can we imagine for the consolidation of scalable disjunctive collectives and other transnational digital tribes to come?

In this presentation, I would like to revisit Stiegler’s great drama of the neganthropocenic presence and his critical genealogy of the (dis)accredited subject of late modernity; his interest in a renewal of computational reason, the principle of uncertainty and the limits of calculability; and his late engagement in the elaboration of new macro-economic models for the ecological transition, through the prism of emergent cryptoeconomics tools, practices and experimentations. By facilitating the creation of new kind of digital instauration and individuation processes, that is, programmable organizations through innovative practices of contributive accounting and other modes of *financial grammatization*, cryptoeconomics opens up original possibilities for organizational scalability that resonate closely with many a proposition formulated by the *Internation* collective and, more generally, with Stiegler’s pharmacological taste for the organological and techno-institutional. The quest for scalability tends to banish meaningful diversity, that is, diversity that might make a difference. At worse, the proliferation of cryptoeconomics’ modes of organization might signify the destruction – i.e. the economic reduction – of countless other types of worlding practices, more subtle, more improbable, less calculable too. But at best, it could contribute to the elaboration of a *neganthropic pharmakon*, where the economy itself works as a “general therapy for the biosphere” as Stiegler suggests extending the work of V. Vernadsky, reversing the destructive course of the contemporary smartness mandate (Orit Halpern) by favoring soulful and localized modes of emplotment (Mackay, Wynter).

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**Laura Lotti (Other Internet Research Institute, New York)**

***I Am Stonks: Dumb Money, Smart Contracts and The Accidental Politics of Networked Finance***

In parallel with the mounting interest in and mystification of artificial intelligence, computer-assisted idiocy has taken over the internet. Since the pandemic, hordes of self-proclaimed “degens”, “retards” and “apes” have harnessed social media, memes, and increasingly web3 technology to counter the power laws of algorithmic finance—both in traditional markets and ‘decentralized’ ones (the latter made possible by blockchain-based smart contracts). These micro-cultures of terminally online retail traders, that the Wall Street Journal evocatively defined as “swarms of willfully ignorant investors,” can be seen as a byproduct of smartness in the context



of the ever more pervasive digitization and integration of social, financial and affective relations.

This paper presents a comparative cyberethnography of contemporary financial practices, discussing the cases of r/wallstreetbets (a subreddit emerged around social trading apps such as RobinHood and eToro) and DeFi (decentralized finance) as peculiar instantiations of the smartness mandate and investigates the political ramifications of these recent trends. It explores how these digital communities appropriate and pervert the logics and practices of populations, experimental zones, derivation and resilience at times with materially significant effects (such as leading to the bankruptcy of a \$12 billion hedge fund in the case of \$GME, and providing a practical critique of voluntary carbon credit markets in the case of crypto protocol KlimaDAO). After introducing the use cases through the analytical lens of the smartness mandate, the presentation investigates the novel subjective formations and political praxis that these examples illustrate. If the 2008 global financial crisis made explicit the neoliberal tendency toward the financialization of the social (Martin, Bryan and Rafferty, Lee and Li Puma) with human capital (Feher) as the subject par excellence of the present technomic condition, these cases shed light on the novel strategies and tactics that become available by taking derivation and speculation as points of departure. More precisely, they expose the primacy of the logic of leverage at the base of the present post-foundational political economy (Konings) — a logic where control depends on “the ability to serve as a central point of reference in the specular logic of contingent claims.” Working within and against the operations of securitization, these examples leverage the fundamental insecurity and contingency of derivative sociality to catalyze unthinkable “future presents” from the blind spots of the “present futures” engineered by financial models (Esposito).

But are dumb memes enough to outsmart algorithmic governmentality? And what happens when these grassroots experimental digital zones dissolve back into the ether of mass social media? Furthermore, in a context in which ‘fundamentals follow price’ what kinds of *values* can back the creation of alternative techno-economic networks? And what techno-social imaginaries transpire from these examples of financial worlding (Zhang)? The presentation delves into these questions and concludes by reflecting on what else may be required to move from ‘degenerate’ to ‘regenerative’ technocultures.

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**Daide Vecchi (University of Lisbon)**

***The Age of Leisure: Utopia or Dystopia?***

This presentation’s aim is to question the “smartness” of the impending radical automation of the labour market. A basic principle in the evaluation of the societal effects of any technology concerns its potential harms. This principle has a long history and can be applied to any technology. In Plato’s Phaedrus, Socrates questions the assumption that the writing technology will benefit humanity. A similar critical stance characterises Luddite attitudes towards the protection of the labour market from automation. Economic orthodoxy suggests that, by destroying machines, Luddites overreacted (i.e., the “Luddite fallacy”). Economic orthodoxy also often considers full employment (with low rates of structural unemployment) an indispensable goal. Work is often deemed a human right (e.g., article 23 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights). The Italian Constitution goes even further, as its first article reads: “Italy is a democratic Republic, founded on work.” The rationale seems to be that work (more precisely, wage labour) is essential to human dignity, freedom and existential fulfilment, that work has a central role in the social contract and that an ethical society should aim for full employment. Ironically, as the Luddites “incorrectly” foresaw, automation increasingly erodes this rationale. In the 1930’s essay “Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren”, John Maynard Keynes predicted that, in 100 years (i.e., 2030), all economic activities would be so automated as to produce “technological unemployment”. The scenario is materialising, as the pervasive encroachment of automation on the labour market - engendering systematic employment insecurity in manual and intellectual professions alike - testifies. Keynes envisaged the advent of an “age of leisure” characterised by human “freedom from pressing economic cares” and extensive free time. In the Socratic tradition, instead of assuming that the age of leisure is a utopia, Keynes asked: “If the economic problem is solved, mankind will be deprived of its traditional purpose. Will this be a benefit?” The critical evaluation of the potential harms of automation should encompass the central role of wage labour within the social contract as well as the policies tailored to its replacement. Given mass unemployment, we either all work less or grant a universal basic income to those deprived of their “traditional purpose”. The problems with the latter policy concern its provision, whether it will be conditional on complying with specific behavioural norms, whether it will be perceived as charity and engender alienation etc. The reorganisation of what would be left of the labour market is just one of the epochal political changes that will be needed in the age of leisure: a radical overhaul of the goals of education, of the nature of welfare, of the organisation of the leisure sector etc. will also be necessary. Notwithstanding, we seem to approach the age of leisure acquiescently, if not with downright uncritical

connivance. Ultimately, relinquishing the foundational idea that wage labour is essential to human existential fulfilment leaves a vacuum. Unless we find appropriate ways to fill this vacuum, with resistance being an option, the impending age of leisure remains a dystopia.

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**Jaana Parviainen (Tampere University)**

**Paula Alanen (Tampere University)**

***The Silent Revolution of Automated Decision-making in Administration. Building and Eroding Trust between Government and Vulnerable Citizens***

There is a quiet revolution occurring in welfare countries, as governments all over the world have increasingly started to use algorithmic or automated decision-making (ADM) to streamline their administrative processes. Suspicions of misuse of benefits have turned governments to automate their service systems, so distrust in citizens seems to be one of the drivers behind the implementation of ADM. Automated systems are intertwined with the transformation of the welfare state since the early 1970s, but with ADM systems, citizens are experiencing a shift toward a new phase of austerity politics that is intricately linked to algorithmic regulation, resulting in new forms of control and surveillance.

The implementation of ADM as surveillance system and its subsequent severe problems - especially for vulnerable citizens - have caused numerous scandals in recent years, such as 'Toeslagenaffaire' in the Netherlands and 'Robodebt' in Australia. A growing literature shows that inaccessible and inexplicable algorithms may erode public trust and this has led to put algorithmic transparency central as a means towards trustworthy algorithms in EU. Instead of a neutral bureaucratic tool in the administration, we consider ADM as a 'technological interpellation', potentially causing tensions and conflicts between citizens and government. Using here Louis Althusser's (1972) formulation, ADM as a technological interpellation 'hails' those individuals who are dependent on social benefits by constituting their identities. The increased use of ADM in administration may lead to hardening attitudes in society, treating humans as mere numbers and dividing people into "winners and losers".

Drawing on critical theory, the philosophy of technology and recent empirical literature on ADM, the aim of the paper is to examine how implementing ADM systems in public administration and services affects mutual trust between government and citizens. We introduce a novel trust model that captures four

different dimensions of trust: 1) government's trust/distrust in citizens, 2) trust/distrust in ADM by policymakers, 3) public trust/distrust in ADM and 4) citizens' trust/distrust in government. Since many vulnerable groups of citizens are both the targets of surveillance and the largest user group of public services when implementing ADM systems, the dynamics of trust primarily concern how the mutual trust is built up between government and vulnerable citizens. In the era of post-democratic dynamic, emotions of mistrust as well as frustration and disillusionment regarding the welfare state are mixed within Western populations toward their governments. Against this background, recent scandals around ADM can generate deep mistrust not only towards algorithmic systems themselves, but towards governments, democracy, and the institutions of the welfare state.

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**Sebastian Nähr-Wagener (FU Hagen)**

***Smart Home Technology and the Production of Subjectivity***

In the context of smart household devices, e.g. "smart" fridges, ovens, dishwashers or washing machines, the time savings for users and the ecological benefits are usually emphasized in addition to the increased convenience. And there's no doubt about it: with the right devices, running the household can not only be made more convenient, but also more efficient and environmentally friendly in a certain sense. But for whom will it be more efficient? Still mainly for women, of course, and it can hardly be considered a coincidence that a corresponding increase in the efficiency of housework goes hand in hand with the economic desire to integrate women into the labor market. In addition, the increase in efficiency with regard to housework also refers back to the optimization rhetoric that is all too familiar from the context of self-tracking technology and the quantified self (see e.g. Lupton 2016; Duttweiler et al. 2016; Mämecke 2021): Smart household devices ensure that the products the family loves are not missing from the fridge, the cakes turn out better and the laundry is whiter - the 'Optimize yourself!' usually also becomes 'Be a better housewife!' when it comes to smart household devices. And when it comes to the ecological benefits, a look at the entire production cycle of a smart household device often raises considerable doubts. Moreover, on a closer look, the prominent narrative of the ecological benefits of smart household devices almost seems absurd in view of the global lack of action with regard to the climate catastrophe and the irrelevance of individual action for global interdependencies. And the fact that the wealthier classes of the global North are the target group for smart household

devices - i.e. precisely those classes that have a greater ecological footprint than other, financially weaker social milieus - is perhaps not only related to their economic opportunities in this setting. But in what sense are smart household devices actually 'smart' in this context? Because they automate or connect certain activities or processes in the household - i.e. ultimately only because of their state of technological development? Or isn't it rather the case that there are some other 'smart' effects, which are important here? This assumption is particularly plausible if one dares to take a 'critical perspective' on technology: From this perspective, both the promise of increased efficiency regarding housework and the valorization of ecological and moral convictions are to be seen under the given socio-historical conditions as components of certain neoliberal regimes of governmentality and corresponding processes of subjectivation (cf. fundamentally Foucault 2020 and Foucault 2022) - however, such devices are 'smart' not so much in terms of their technical functionality, but primarily because they very subtly contribute to the production and regulation of certain subject forms in late capitalism. The talk *Smart Home Technology and the Production of Subjectivity* addresses these ideological dimensions of smart household devices and thus adopts a 'Critical Perspective on Digital Technology and Political Subjects' in an area of ideology per excellence: the household.

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**Eric-John Russell (University of Postdam)**  
***When What is Known No Longer Has Any Meaning: Toward a Critical Theory of Opinion***

Terms such as 'post-truth' circulate freely today within the popular lexicon, an environment where objective truth has "become less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (OED). In these circumstances, it is vital scholars understand the implications of *subjective opinion* as a distinct and historically specific epistemological structure. My paper will explore the figure of the *opining subject* as a particular form of subjectivity requisite to the contemporary digital landscape, where a compulsion to have an opinion on virtually everything reigns within dominant mediums of communication.

To have an opinion might be one of last enclaves from which we claim something as our own. We naturally tend to think of our own opinions as akin to the coins we carry around in our pockets, transferrable and yet, in form, inalienable. Opinion can be described as *socialized thinking*, or a form of thinking that yearns for agonist collaboration. Opinions are by nature *promiscuous*—they come into their own in an atmosphere of many, mingling and mixing, sometimes staunch or easily swayed, pollinating and fermenting this way and that. An opinion left unexpressed is arguably no opinion at all. We may give them expression, share or alter them, yet in form they remain our own, sacrosanct as registers of our very sense of self. To claim that one's opinions aren't one's own would appear as an absurdity, or at least eliciting an individuality under great duress.

I will argue that the dynamics of opinion formation and circulation within the digital landscape—and the structuring of subjectivity therein—is best explored through the critical theory of Adorno, specifically with his concept of *Halbbildung*, a form of social consciousness nourished by the spread of information and the development of economic compulsion. Although Adorno refers to television and radio, contemporary social media platforms are twenty-first century mediums by which we might register the significance of *Halbbildung* today as the arena of the opining subject.

*Halbbildung* requires from individuals only the bare minimum, specifically in a lauded freedom to express opinion, or most overtly, to *like* or *dislike*. Within a digital environment and economy of attention of ephemeral information and stimuli, the opining subject nevertheless adopts the standpoint, in the words of Adorno, "of being in charge, of having a say, of conducting oneself and considering oneself as an expert." I will argue that opinion is the epistemological structure adequate to *Halbbildung* in the present moment. To have an opinion, at once both proprietary and inalienably mine, even if blatantly delusional, is today facilitated and reproduced through mediums of digital communication and technological schematism. With this critical theory of opinion, I aim to provide new insight into how *opinion* has become ever more pervasive in this alleged 'post-truth' society.

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**Tamara Caraus (University of Lisbon)**

***Contesting Technology, or How Luddism meets Critical Theory***

This presentation proceeds from the assumption of a critical gesture as the ‘ultimate universal’, that is, a capacity equally possessed by everyone for contestation, disruption, and questioning the given, and which emerges every time there is oppression, exclusion, exploitation, humiliation, etc. The critical gesture, as the minimal individual act of contestation, depends on human creativity and on the context. Historically, when the context of oppression and exclusion had a technological dimension, the critical gesture was configured as Luddism. But what exactly does this critical gesture mean? What are the resources for this type of critique, and what can such a critical gesture archive? Thus, in the first part, the presentation briefly examines the ‘original’ Luddism from the beginning of 19th-century England, with its ‘two types of machine-breaking’, as identified by Eric Hobsbawm in a text from 1952. The first type implied no special hostility to machines as such but was a means of putting pressure on employers and ‘a technique of trade unionism’ during the early phases of the Industrial Revolution. The second type of hostility towards machines, which Hobsbawm detects as ‘surprisingly weak in practice’, was not confined to workers but was shared by a great mass of public opinion, including many manufacturers. The first part of the presentation proceeds by arguing that these two types of hostility towards machines accompanied the development of technology during the last two centuries, up to the current neo-Luddism in the digital age, and that it can be detected further as ‘Luddism from below’ of those exploited by machines and ‘Luddism from above’ of manufacturers of technology, such as hackers. The two types of hostility to technology can also be mapped as ‘practical Luddism’ of those committing acts of resistance to technology and ‘methodological Luddism’ as a principle infusing most of the academic and theoretical discussion of technology, be it in terms of critique and alarm-sounding analyses or as concerns for ‘responsible innovation’, ‘nano-ethics’, etc. Yet, despite different Luddite ways of critiquing and resisting, technology continues to proliferate, transforming industries and societies and showing its resilience in the face of critique and resistance. In addition, criticism usually comes after a new round of technological innovation. Thus, the second part will examine how Luddism as a critical gesture meets critical theory, broadly speaking, in their common failure to significantly affect technological development. The presentation will identify the multiple causes—moral, existential, epistemic, economic, and political—that make both practical and theoretical Luddism sound inefficient in the face of technological development, causes that pertain to the ‘essence’ of technology. However, the questioning of technology should not be abandoned, as the last part of the presentation will argue, but it also requires

concomitantly addressing the fundamental question of political philosophy: what kind of society do we actually want and value?

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**Jan H. Wasserzieher (London School of Economics)**

***What’s Wrong with Machine Intelligence?***

I recently read Hubert Dreyfus’ 1972 *What Computers Can’t Do* and one might think that a work in which the author asserts that computers won’t be able to play decent chess cannot have aged well. Surprisingly, however, it has. Whilst Dreyfus underestimates the inventiveness of the AI community with regards to solving thorny programming problems, his philosophical take on humanity’s ‘being-in-the-world’ remains timely for it points to the innately non-formalizable nature of the human existence (Dreyfus, 1979, Part III). At a time when technical progress has led to considerable public and academic hype, where researchers assert the possibility for machines to become conscious (Butlin et al., 2023) and claim to have found the first “sparks of AGI” (Bubeck et al., 2023), it is worth pushing back against the eventually reductive and anti-humanist idea that machine intelligence could conceptually resemble human intelligence. But rather than asking what ‘computers can’t do’ (they may well turn out to be able to do almost anything), we should ask if ‘the ability to do things’ qualifies as a good measure of intelligence.

In my paper, I will take the position that claims about machine consciousness and intelligence are implausible in principle, focussing on the latter. Suffice it to say that the possibility of machine consciousness relies on a conceptualization of consciousness in computational terms (Butlin et al., 2023, p. 13f.) and is therefore circular (= *if* consciousness is computable, computing could give rise to consciousness). It excludes the view that consciousness is a biological phenomenon which has evolutionarily emerged as a mechanism to manage an organism’s life (Damasio, 2021, 2010). Concerning intelligence, behaviourists who consider task completion a credible measurement ignore that the exhibition of certain skills does not require a machine to ‘know’ what it does (Searle, 1980). Describing a digital machine as ‘intelligent’ is just as misguided as calling an industrial machine ‘strong’. Intelligence is the property of sentient beings, fundamentally bound up with those beings’ care for themselves and others. Against the Platonic notion of reason which depicts human passions as a disturbance (Plato, 1994), I will pose that a great deal of intelligence is grounded in human compassion – “men (...) would never have been any better than monsters if nature had not

given them pity to support reason” (Rousseau, 1984, p. 100). Moral intelligence – practical reason – in so far as it relates to compassion for fellow sentient beings, necessarily relies on a species-specific conception of goodness/badness and requires an empathetic understanding of ‘what it is like’ to be a living being. Due to its subjectivist nature, it cannot be captured by rule-based computations. To the degree that practical reason is bound up with a notion of care (I seek to avoid doing to others what I would not like to be done to myself), the idea that intelligence is well-described by the capacity to solve problems appears ethically deeply flawed. We should, therefore, reject the idea that machines’ ability to complete complex tasks amounts to an intelligence that is ‘human-like’.

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**Sofie Lekve (University of Oslo)**

### ***The Circular Fallacy of Human and Artificial Intelligence***

In this presentation, I aim to point out problematic circularities in our understanding of intelligence. More specifically, how we collectively understand human intelligence and artificial intelligence, and why this understanding is greatly problematic. Ever since Alan Turing created the *Imitation Game* or what is now referred to as the *Turing Test*, passing it has become a collective goal of technological advancement. The test will be passed when a machine or artificial intelligence successfully displays an intelligence either equal to, or indistinguishable, from that of a human being. Since then we have repeatedly heard how complex and seemingly impossible it is to re-create human intelligence. However, we have also seen that throughout history, we have used dominating contemporary technology to describe and make sense of our biological brains and minds, a concept termed *mechanomorphism*. Whilst we in the past have described our brains as machines with cogs and wheels, or as telegram switchboards, we now utilise comparisons to computers. The problem with this is that it leads us to a circularity in which we aim to create technology that mimics human intelligence, whilst simultaneously using technology to *define* our intelligence. One might perhaps argue that as human intelligence is increasingly entangled with machines, such a separation might not be all too important.

In this presentation I will demonstrate how this initial circularity can have a far more profound effect on how we *evaluate* our own intelligence against an artificial intelligence. I will present examples of cases where we have shown hubris in relation to technology as well as cases in which we have pedastilized it. Through

these examples I will demonstrate that we seem to have differing understandings - both as individuals as well as societies - of whether we should understand our human intelligence to be *superior* or *inferior* to technology (and specifically AI). Perhaps even more troublesome - our differing understanding of whether or not these expectations should be adjusted for the future given the exponential growth of AI. Finally I will discuss how this initial circularity and inconsistent evaluation of human intelligence should be resolved *prior* to the widespread introduction of AI without explainability.

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**Yonathan Listik (Leiden University)**

### ***Can Stupidity Resist the Obligation to be Smart?***

In a short text entitled *Fragments de la bêtise* (fragments on animality/stupidity) included in an edition of *Le Temps de la Réflexion* dedicated to the theme “*De la bêtise et des bêtes*”, Jean-Luc Nancy explores an ontological experience of stupidity. According to him, stupidity is not an error or a simple limitation but perhaps its opposite: the absence of problems, a form of security that would challenge the possibility of thinking. This paper aims to develop this intuition into an account of the role of stupidity in subjectivity.

This intuition can be developed in line with Heidegger’s affirmation in *What is Called Thinking?* that ‘we are still not thinking that which is most thought-provoking’ and that ‘science does not think.’ In those statements, Heidegger argues that knowledge (science) and thinking are not only different, but perhaps opposite. In this frame, one could say that the fact that we know, is what refrains us from thinking. He then elaborates that this is itself the most thought-provoking element of our condition: our inability to think is what calls on us to think. In this sense, Nancy’s intuition that stupidity emerges the security established in knowledge, can be connected to Heidegger to ask the question: how to overcome this limitation of thinking?

The paper will try to answer this question by showing that if it is knowledge that hinders our capacity to think, then it seems intelligence is responsible for our inability to think since it establishes a subject who knows. Stupidity, on the other hand, can be seen a form of non-knowledge that would invite thought. As Heidegger states, our inability to think is the most thought-provoking element of our condition so it is possible to frame stupidity as a form of intellectual curiosity

that would challenge the limitations imposed on thought while not negating knowledge itself. One could think of the figure of Socrates who despite learning and becoming more knowledgeable, remains as wise as he originally was. Socrates is not sceptic about the knowledge he acquires. He does not dismiss it as untrue or invalid. He merely refuses to take knowledge as assurance, as solutions that would eliminate the problems he is engaging with and hence he refuses to let knowledge limit his capacity to think.

Most of the literature on stupidity, for example Sacha Golob (2020), Roland Breeur (2018 [2015]; 2019) and Michel Adam (1975), portrays it as a superficial issue. Despite its overwhelming presence, in their account it does not challenge our conception of intelligence. So most of the investigations into stupidity are occupied with modes of avoiding or restricting it. This thread can be extended to Bernard Stigler's (2015) account of finance capitalism as generalized proletarianization and systemic stupidity. This paper will try to offer an alternative account of stupidity. One where stupidity presents a counter-hegemonic force against a 'smartness mandate' as it was conceptualized by Orit Halpern and Robert Mitchell (2023). Stupidity overcomes the subject who knows and erects a world grounded on that knowledge. As a response to the limitations imposed by knowledge/security, the paper offers the uncertainty of a stupid experience of reality. The counter intuitive thesis being that we might need to become stupid to be able to think.