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## **NO&\_ forum on technological refusal**

This forum begins from the idea that refusal is, among other things, a rejection of one's current relationship to technology (as an individual and/or as part of a collective) and a simultaneous commitment to another way of being in the world. The 'no' is accompanied by a 'yes' to another path. In this sense, refusal demands a careful articulation of what needs to change as well as a vision for a future that can (and should) be worked towards.

With this forum we provide space for conceptual, practical, and alternative explorations of refusal, with the history and philosophy of technology as important starting points. At the same time, we welcome diverse perspectives to explore refusal as a method for going beyond critique, for opening pathways towards new possibilities, new choices, and new ways of being in the world.

### **Critical Technoscience Platform @ Maastricht University**

The Forum marks the launch of the Critical Technoscience Platform at Maastricht University. The platform provides a space for dialogue about the role of technology in contemporary life. The research of our members spans historical and contemporary perspectives on technology, from foundational questions in the philosophy of technology to urgent contemporary challenges e.g. digital sovereignty, surveillance, and the future of work, and care. Together, we examine how technologies are developed, deployed, and experienced, with particular attention to questions of power, participation, and resistance. The platform operates under the MUSTS Research Programme and is part of a national research network interested in the ethics and politics of emerging technologies (EPET). Our members proactively develop connections outside of the university, fostering collaboration between academic research and diverse societal actors.

The conference organisation committee:

Dani Shanley (chair CTP), Tricia Griffin, Marte Henningsen, Ricky Janssen, Judith Campagne, and Flora Lysen.

The 'No & ...' Forum brings together researchers, designers, practitioners, and activists to think collectively about technological refusal. We're here because we're interested in refusal as more than simply saying no. We are interested in refusal as a practice that creates openings for different relationships with technology, different priorities, and different ways of being in the world. Throughout these two days we'll explore how refusal functions as both a critical stance and a creative act, one with tangible implications for how we navigate technological life today and tomorrow.

Through keynote sessions, panel presentations, workshops, and roundtable discussions, we hope you'll find numerous opportunities to examine refusal as both method and practice, as well as to consider its philosophical foundations and political dimensions.

Below you'll find some brief practical information to help you navigate the forum.

### A word on the panels

You'll notice the panels don't have titles. This was intentional. In keeping with the spirit of the forum, we chose to resist imposing predetermined themes or categories, creating space instead for unexpected connections and cross-pollinations to emerge organically.

We recognize this approach may make it harder to choose which panel to attend. We ask that once you've selected a panel, you stay for the full session, moving between rooms to catch different presentations disrupts both speakers and fellow attendees.

The reality of any gathering like this is that you can't experience everything. But we encourage you to use the breaks intentionally: seek out the speakers whose sessions you missed, continue conversations that began in your panel, and let these informal exchanges become part of your forum experience!

## Workshop selection

Please note that some workshops have limited capacity (most around 15/20 people). Since workshops will take place directly after lunch, if there is a particular workshop you would like to attend, please go early to help ensure you get a spot. In case your first choice is already full, we encourage you to find another workshop where there is still space available.

## Location

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences is housed in 5 buildings (Grote Gracht, Maastricht). The main entrance and reception (where you will find the registration desk) is located at Grote Gracht 90-92.

There is another street entrance for the Grote Gracht 80-82 building (though this typically requires ID card entrance). In this building you will find the 0.01 room (ground floor), the Spiegelzaal (second floor) and the Attic (third floor).

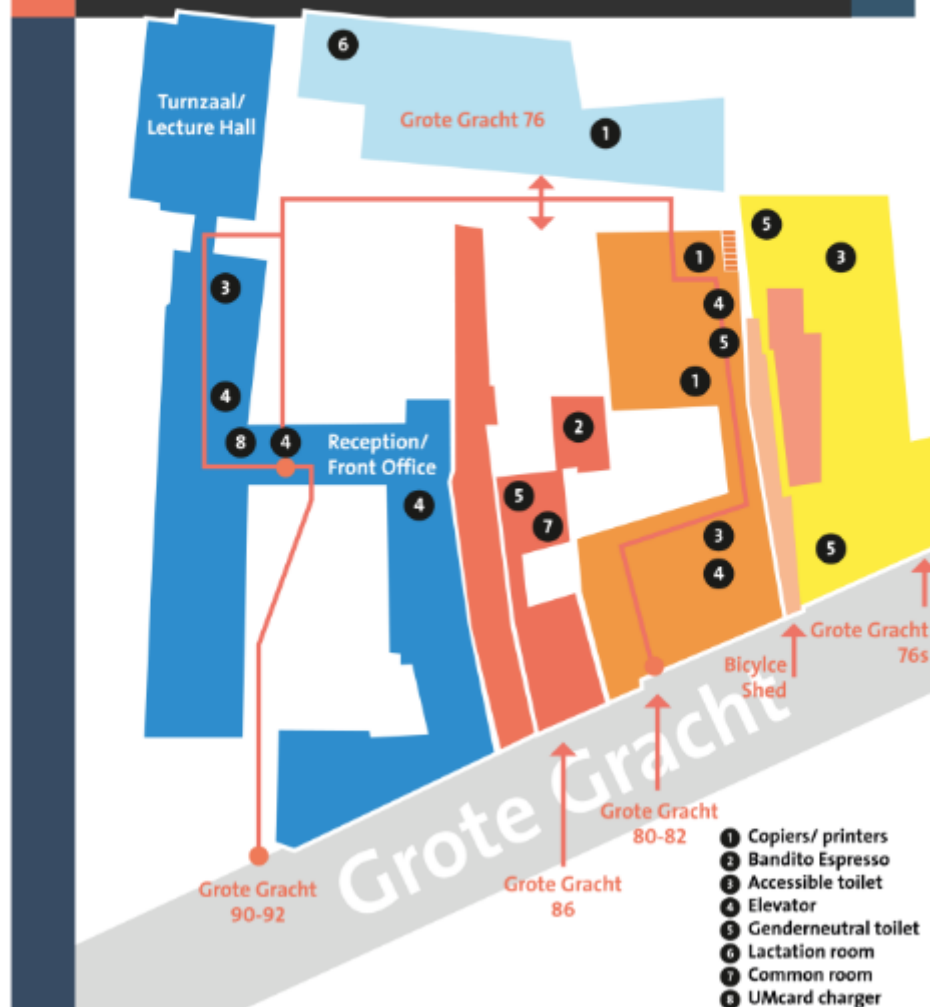
Once you enter through 90-92 you can access all the buildings (including 80-82) from within. There are plenty of signs and you can also see the map attached below.

All of the keynote sessions will take place in the Turnzaal (our large lecture hall) located behind the main reception.

The 76 building is to the side of the Turnzaal (at the back of the faculty), and the entrance to our in-house cafe, Banditos (in the 86 building) is directly opposite the 76 building.

We will place additional signs with the 'No & \_' logo around the faculty and the organisers and student ambassadors will be around to guide you between sessions.

## Find your way in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences



### Accessibility

All buildings are fairly accessible for people with a physical disability, although there are some exceptions.

Details about accessibility for wheelchair users, including the location of accessible toilets and floor plans, can be found in the detailed descriptions for each building on the faculty's website, where you will

also find more general information about accessible parking, public transport links to and from the faculty, and what to do in the event of an evacuation:

<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/faculties/arts-and-social-sciences/contact/disability-access-fasos>

In case you have any specific needs or requirements, please do not hesitate to contact us.

### Coffee breaks and Lunches

We are happy to be able to provide coffee and lunch at Banditos (located in Grote Gracht 86). However, please keep in mind that there is limited space in and around the café area. We therefore ask you to collect your coffee and/or lunch and enjoy it in any of the forum rooms (see No & \_ signs) located throughout the faculty buildings.

### Dinner

For participants who registered for dinner, the restaurant (VeerMestreech) is less than 5 minutes from the faculty. Please arrive at the restaurant by 19:00, take a seat, have a drink and help yourself to the buffet. There are 3 drinks per person included (you will receive your tokens upon entry). After that, please go to the bar to order anything further and pay directly. We need to leave the restaurant around 21:00-21:30. Please note that VeerMestreech is run by the Philadelphia Zorg Foundation who help people living with disabilities to live their own lives and to discover and develop their talents within the hospitality industry, handicrafts and gardening. This is why we are asked to arrive and depart at relatively set times, so that their staff know what to expect, and can relax and take good care of us.

## Tech Support

We have tech support on call throughout the forum. The organisers and student assistants can help you to contact them. You can spot us by looking out for the people wearing red lanyards.

## Display Table

If you have a recent publication, poster, flyers, or any other type of material you'd like to promote during the forum (which is loosely connected to the theme), we will set-up a display table at the registration desk. Please feel free to bring whatever you'd like to put on display!

## 'Making & Doing' Materials

Some of the workshops are creative, crafty, 'making & doing' sessions. If you have old newspapers, magazines, or other craft materials/tools that you'd like to use (or be made use of) during these sessions, please bring them along! You can drop them off at the registration desk when you arrive.

## Shared resource list

We have started an open, shareable list of resources on refusal. Please feel free to use and add as you see fit. Please note that this a collaborative document, so be careful not to delete former entries!

<https://pad.riseup.net/p/techrefusalresources-keep>

## WiFi access

### WiFi access for UM guests



SMS keyword  
refusal

Phone number  
+316 3574 4774

#### SMS

Use your mobile phone to sms the keyword to the phone number

#### Receive

An SMS will be sent back to your mobile number containing your username and password

#### Connect!

Connect to the "eduroam" network using the username and password you received. You are on-line!

Valid on  
4 - 7 February 2026

\*1 text only (standard text message rates apply)

### Anything Else?

If there is anything else you need throughout the forum, please don't hesitate to ask. Find one of the people with a red lanyard, or head to reception, who can contact us any time.

We hope you have a great time!



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**Thursday Programme**

**09:00-10:00: Arrival & Registration**

Please check in at the registration desk located in the front entrance of Grote Gracht 90-92 (please see map for further details).

**10:00-11:00: Keynote Lecture**

Tanja Bosch, Professor of Media Studies and Production at the University of Cape Town  
Location: Turnzaal

**11:00-11:30: Coffee Break**

You are welcome to grab a coffee at Bandito's, located in Grote Gracht 86, which you can then enjoy in any of the open faculty rooms and lecture halls.

11:30-13:00: Panel Session 1							
76, 0.07		80-82, 0.01		80-82, Spiegelzaal		80-82, Attic	
Chair: Marte Henningsen		Chair: Tsjalling Swierstra		Chair: Ricky Janssen		Chair: Katleen Gabriels	
Matthew Archer	<i>The Ignorant Schoolmaster 2.0: Refusal, Resistance, and Resignation in the Neoliberal University</i>	Darryl Cressman & Massimiliano Simons	<i>Refusing Technology's Historical Narratives</i>	Dominik Schlienger & Oleksandra Nenko	<i>We need to refuse the difference between technique and technology to reclaim technologies as human practices</i>	Lucie Dalibert, Valentine Gourinat & Paul-Fabien Groud	<i>Injunctions, experiences, reappropriations: an exploration of the practices and trajectories of 'refusal' of prosthetic limbs</i>
Pieter van Rees & Neha Miglani	<i>Resisting Technologies of Measurement: Co-constructing meaningful education</i>	Andrea Alessandro Gasparini	<i>The Power of Rejecting Technology in Modern Society When Using Reversed Time</i>	Lotte Krabbenborg	<i>Technology Refusal as dynamic practice: studying how citizens respond to new technologies over time</i>	Marije Miedema	<i>The refusal of a digital death: engaging with personal digital heritage through excess and expenditure</i>
Lukas Seidler	<i>Tending to the unbearably heavy: Doing Academia amid Planetary Ruptures and Techno-Imaginations</i>	Jose Luis Guerrero Quiñones & Paula Gürtler	<i>(In)direct control, freedom and the democratic imperative to refuse AI</i>	Hannah Fitsch	<i>No means no. AI and a future worth wanting - how to get there</i>	Thomas Zenkl	<i>Re-assembling (algorithmic) refusals</i>
Mariska Thalitha Bosschaert	<i>Refusing Certain Features of Technologies in Livestock Farming</i>	Alicia Patterson (& Kelly Bosworth)	<i>When the music stops: the past and present infrastructures of technological refusal</i>	Mariana Fernandez Mora	<i>Lullament as refusal</i>	Donovan van der Haak	<i>Transcendental technology ethics: an ethics of refusal?</i>

<b>13:00-14:00: Lunch</b>			
Please pick up lunch at Bandito's, located in Grote Gracht 86, which you can then enjoy in any of the open faculty rooms and lecture halls.			
<b>14:00-15:30: Workshops</b>			
76, 0.07	80-82, 0.01	80-82, Spiegelzaal	80-82, Attic
<i>The smart city they say we want versus the city we need: Rethinking community and public space</i>	<i>RE(F)USE - (C)REUSE</i>	<i>Technology as a Problem Solver?! - Questioning society's relation with technology through theatre improvisations across the ages of humankind</i>	<i>From refusal to hopeful design: A data feminism workshop</i>
Sage Cammers-Goodwin	Ike Kamphof & David DuBois	André Baier & Vanessa Schaller	Daniella Pauly Jensen & Annika Richterich
<b>15:30-16:00: Break</b>			
You are welcome to grab a coffee at Bandito's, located in Grote Gracht 86, which you can then enjoy in any of the open faculty rooms and lecture halls.			

16:00-17:00: Roundtable Discussions			
80-82, 0.01	80-82, Spiegelzaal	80-82, Attic	76, 0.16
<p><i>Alternative Proteins: Futures Worth Wanting</i></p> <p>Sarah Kunze</p>	<p><i>Cybersecurity and the Human Factor</i></p> <p>Bastian Küppers</p>	<p><i>The right to be offline: Discussing the (in)visibility of resistance</i></p> <p>Hynek Trojánek, Jascha Bareis, Roberta Barone, Irma Mastenbroek</p>	<p><i>We Do Need No Education</i></p> <p>James Garforth, Benedetta Catanzariti, Meenakshi Mani, Alex Gillespie, Fabio Tollon, Kimberly Paradis &amp; Jacqueline Row</p>
17:00-17:30: Break			
Take some time to stretch your legs and use the washroom before moving to the Keynote Discussion.			
17:30-18:30: Keynote Discussion			
<p>Sally Wyatt and Willem Schinkel will discuss Schinkel's book <i>Waarom ik geen mobiele telefoon heb. Aphonismen</i> (Why I don't have a mobile phone. Aphonisms) (2024, Leesmagazin). There will also be time for questions from the audience.</p> <p>Location: Turnzaal</p>			
19:00: Dinner			
<p>For those who pre-registered, dinner will take place at VeerMestreech. Location: Grote Gracht 74, 6211 SZ Maastricht (approximately a 5-minute walk from the faculty)</p>			



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## Friday Program

**09:30-10:00: Registration (For those only attending the Friday program)**

Please check in at the registration desk located in the front entrance of Grote Gracht 90-92 (please see map for further details).

**10:00-11:00: Keynote Talk**

Thomas Dekeyser (Techno-Negative: A Long History of Refusing the Machine) & Nolen Gertz (The Technological Unconscious) discuss their forthcoming books.

Location: Turnzaal

**11:00-11:30: Coffee Break**

You are welcome to grab a coffee at Bandito's, located in Grote Gracht 86, which you can then enjoy in any of the open faculty rooms and lecture halls.

11:30-13:00: Panel Session 2							
76, 0.07		80-82, 0.01		80-82, Spiegelzaal		80-82, Attic	
Chair: Darian Meacham		Chair: Judith Campagne		Chair: Massimiliano Simons		Chair: Tricia Griffin	
Jan Jasper Mathé	<i>Human Says No: A Kierkegaardian Take on Prompt Engineering</i>	Sercan Sever	<i>Getting Out of the Tragedy of Technological Promise: Non-use as a Chance for Resonance</i>	Marie-Hélène Pietraru & Jorrit Smit	<i>Refusing industrial capture, rediscovering iron with urine. A low-tech experiment for degrowth metallurgy</i>	Rachel Ankeny	<i>What Kind of Moral Argument Attaches to Claims about 'Food Security'? Seeking More Realism in Agricultural Genomics Publications</i>
Timon Beeftink	<i>Lessons from a Bittern</i>	Janos Mark Szakolczai	<i>"Resisting Capture: crisis and critique of going 'Offlife'"</i>	Pierre Depaz	<i>Keeping distance: spatial implications of neganthropic dynamics</i>	Koen Beumer & Lilya Khachatryan	<i>Agricultural robotics and labour substitution: How responsible innovation closes down pathways to refusal</i>
Ole Thijs	<i>Ahab, Bartleby, and the apple of the Earth: for a planetary post-technological ethos</i>	Ludo Gorzeman & Paulan Korenhof	<i>Zen and the art of computer maintenance</i>	Ana Buchadas & Valeria Zambianchi	<i>Of balance and transformation: unpacking decisions to (not) install agrivoltaics</i>	Hans Radder	<i>Medical research without big pharma</i>
						Gemma Milne	<i>Refusing lab to market: the realities of managing science into existence another way</i>

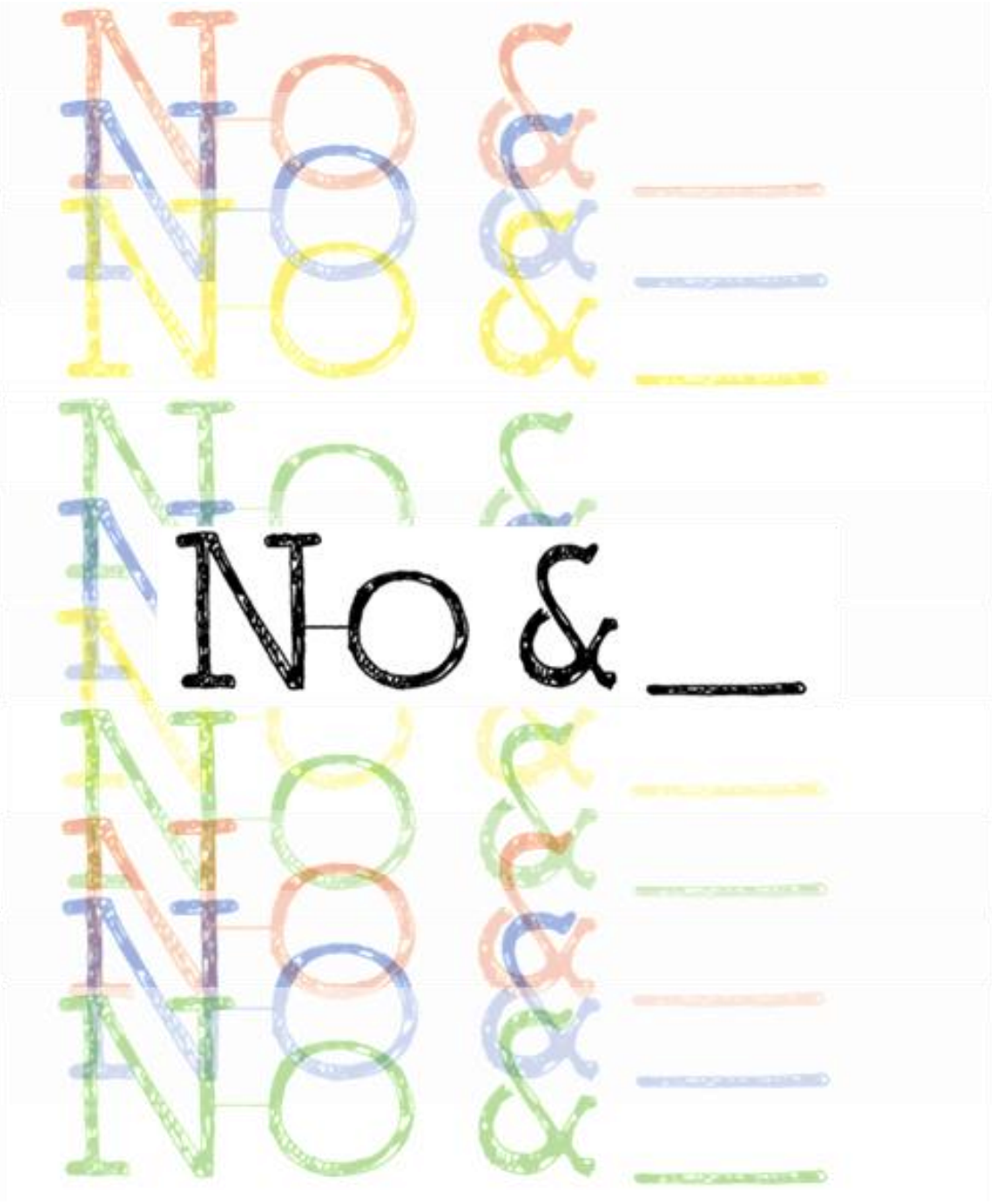
<b>13:00-14:00: Lunch</b>			
Please pick up lunch at Bandito's, located in Grote Gracht 86, which you can then enjoy in any of the open faculty rooms and lecture halls.			
<b>14:00-15:30: Workshops</b>			
<b>76, 0.07</b>	<b>80-82, 0.01</b>	<b>80-82, Spiegelzaal</b>	<b>80-82, Attic</b>
<i>Resisting, Refusing, Reclaiming and Reimagining: Countering narratives of AI inevitability together</i>	<i>From Debunking to Dunking: a collaborative workshop of tech hype refusal</i>	<i>Emotional Defences and the Discomfort of Being Told, "No!"</i>	<i>Building a Solar Punk Commons: Experimenting with a Hands-On Refusal Lab</i>
Tania Duarte & Dylan Orchard	Charles Pidgeon & Ronnie Angel Pope	Stephen Hughes and Cecilie Hilmer	Jaime Simons
<b>15:30-16:00: Break</b>			
You are welcome to grab a coffee at Bandito's, located in Grote Gracht 86, which you can then enjoy in any of the open faculty rooms and lecture halls.			

## 16:00-17:30: Panel Session 3

80-82, 0.01		80-82, Spiegelzaal		80-82, Attic	
Chair: Maud Oostindie		Chair: Dani Shanley		Chair: Flora Lysen	
Chris Hesselbein & Sahar Tavakoli	<i>Paratechnology: From Refusal to Repair, Innovation, and Critique</i>	Hugo Idarraga	<i>Fugitive Traces</i>	Dylan Orchard	<i>Mapping Accessible Resistances to Artificial Intelligence and their Motivations</i>
Tanja Ahlin	<i>Re-theorizing resistance to social robots</i>	Ryan van Nood	<i>At home with the non-human, at home with the human: philosophy of health after techno-modernism</i>	Naomi Wynter-Vincent	<i>Bartleby and the Mimetic Embrace of AI in the Age of DOGE</i>
Elöise Soulier & Jason Branford	<i>Relational autonomy and technological refusal: The case of genAI</i>	Zoë Robaey & Mariana Hase Ueta	<i>Imagination as a collective capability for resistance as refusal</i>	Dmitry Muravyov	<i>Algorithmic fallibility and technological refusal</i>
		Michael Kibedi	<i>The spirit of Bartleby</i>	Berta Galofré	<i>The robot's face: Toward a Non-Dehumanization for Relating to Artificial Intelligence</i>

## 17:30-19:00: Closing and Drinks

Please join us for the closing and drinks in the Turnzaal.



# BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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# KEYNOTES

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February**

**10:00-11:00: Lecture**

**Tanja Bosch**

**Location: Turnzaal**

Tanja Bosch will explore the concept of "refusal" as a generative and insurgent mode of scholarship within decolonial studies, moving beyond simple negation to enact epistemic disobedience and challenge capitalist structures in academia: rejecting extractive logics, resisting metrics of impact, and centring labour, sovereignty, and solidarity.

Tanja Bosch is Professor of Media Studies and Production at the University of Cape Town and is the author of *Broadcasting Democracy: Radio and Identity in South Africa* (HSRC Press, 2017), *Social Media and Everyday Life in South Africa* (Routledge 2020); co-editor of *Digital Citizenship in Africa* (Zed Books, 2023), and *Digital Feminist Citizenship in Africa* (Bloomsbury, 2025); as well co-editor of the *Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics* (2nd edition, forthcoming). Her research includes work on decolonising digital methods, digital citizenship, and social media culture and activism.

Thursday 5th February

17:30–18:30: Dialogue

Sally Wyatt and Willem Schinkel

Location: Turnzaal

Sally Wyatt and Willem Schinkel will discuss Schinkel's book *Waarom ik geen mobiele telefoon heb. Aphonismen* (Why I don't have a mobile phone. Aphonisms) (2024, Leesmagazin). The session will start with a short summary of the book by Sally Wyatt, especially for those members of the audience who cannot read Dutch. Wyatt and Schinkel will then have a conversation about what Schinkel describes as 'working around' or resisting the ubiquitous mobile telephony infrastructure. Wyatt will draw on her earlier work about non-use of digital technologies to explore Schinkel's views on how we can illuminate possibilities for challenging the digital imperative and for examining the diverse, context-dependent forms of use and non-use (such as forced, reluctant, partial, or selective use). Schinkel's auto-ethnographic approach provides a particularly valuable point of departure for addressing the methodological challenges of studying technological non-use and resistance. There will be time for questions from the audience.

Willem Schinkel is professor of Social Theory at Erasmus University Rotterdam. He publishes on a wide range of subjects in social and political theory, including migration, property and algorithms. In 2024, he published *Why I don't have a mobile phone. Aphonisms*. He teaches in the master's programme Power, Publics and Engagement and hosts the Compositions Book Club podcast.

Sally Wyatt is professor of Digital Cultures in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences (FASoS) at Maastricht University. She publishes on social aspects of digital technologies, including non-users of technologies, health information on the internet, (digital) citation infrastructures, and the use of metaphors in digital media studies.

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> February

10:00–11:00: Book Talk

Thomas Dekeyser and Nolen Gertz

Location: Turnzaal

Dekeyser and Gertz will explore the contested terrain of human-technology relations, examining both how we've been shaped to think about technology and the persistent refusal to accept its dominance.

In his new book *The Technological Unconscious*, Nolen Gertz critically investigates the ideological influence of "technology movies" by exploring the parallel histories of the technological development of robots, AI, and VR, and of their cinematic depiction. This investigation reveals how much Big Tech and the Big Screen have come to influence each other, and how much both have shaped what we think is (and especially what is not) possible concerning human-technology relations.

Drawing from his forthcoming book *Techno-Negative: A Long History of Refusing the Machine* (University of Minnesota Press), Thomas Dekeyser pushes against teleological narratives of technological history, revealing the oft-perplexing and stubborn existence of a tenacious urge to negate life's technologization. From early machine breakers in ancient Greece to ultra-leftist armed assaults on capitalist computation in 1980s France, the extension of the technical realm has been inextricably tied up with political struggles over who counts as human and whose lives are worth saving.

Each author will present their work before engaging in discussion about the ideological forces that shape our technological imaginations, the persistent

resistance to technological domination, and what it means to think critically about technological refusal and resistance today.

Thomas Dekeyser is a human geographer and film maker at the University of Southampton whose works examine digital cultures, pessimism and political refusal. His forthcoming monograph is 'Techno-Negative: A Long History of Refusing the Machine' (University of Minnesota Press), and his films include 'Machines in Flames', an experimental documentary about the 1980s French computer bombers.

Nolen Gertz is an Associate Professor of Applied Philosophy at the University of Twente in the Netherlands. He is the author of *Nihilism* (MIT Press 2019), *Nihilism and Technology* (Rowman Littlefield International 2018), and *The Philosophy of War and Exile* (Palgrave 2015).

# **WORKSHOPS**

**Thursday 5th**

**February 14.00-15.30**

## 76, Room: 0.07

The smart city they say we want versus the city we need:  
Rethinking community and public space

Sage Cammers-Goodwin

Although to many our physical existence may feel more like an extension of our digital presence, with screens occupying our vision for both work and leisure, at least for now, we still are rooted in physical space. Our cities and their *physical* infrastructure, just as digital infrastructure, makes decisions for us – the routes we take, where we shop, how we exercise, what we eat, and with whom we interact. Our cities can be argued to be our first frontier for digital refusal, because, unlike our cell phones and laptops, there is no off button from interacting with public space. Moreover, physical space, how it is run, policed and managed is being rapidly digitalized and, if certain companies and individuals have their way, increasingly infused with AI technology.

This 'Making and Doing' activity calls for researchers, citizens, urban planners, and young and old alike to participate in a radical rethinking of how we envision public space, community, and infrastructure. We invite participants to build a future city in the Netherlands generated from our aspirations instead of those passed down from technology conglomerates, authoritarian leaning regimes, and historical happenstance. In doing so, we will build a collage of a smarter city by and for the people. By saying "no" to neotraditional urban structures, we may find room cleared for saying "yes" to a society that we had not dared to find possible.

The workshop begins with a brief overview on "smart cities" before swiftly diving into group concerns with current city infrastructure as well as larger overarching global anxieties. Examples may include traffic, segregation, climate change, safety, loneliness, expense, technocracy, surveillance and health. Next, we pinpoint what aspects of cities further perpetuate the concerns that we want to say "no" to, and conversely, what elements of Dutch

cities are we happy to expand upon. With these metrics defined, we will brainstorm what is missing from public space and formulate it into a list.

Our new list of city desirables will inspire a group art piece. Through the mediums of collage, drawing, and text, the implementation of the reimagined city will be visualized on an A0 poster. With our prototype complete, we can begin to consider the feasibility of our creative endeavour. What are the repercussions from this newly developed city? How will the city updates be financed? What policies need to be put into place to make our city work?

Without public physical space there is no retreat from the digital world. This activity aims to inspire ideation, build community, inspire further research, and bring participants into a present offline discussion centred in physical activism (as opposed to, but not in conflict with, digital protest).

# 80-82, Room: 0.01

## RE(F)USE - (C)REUSE

Ike Kamphof & David DuBois

Recent concerns on the alleged impact of social media on the mental health of users, have led to more general reflection on our relationship with media technologies. In many of these reflections analogue media are, implicitly or explicitly, presented as an alternative, even as non-media (Wieghorst 2021). At the same time analogue fan practices, that pre-existed current debates, often redefine themselves as 'digital resistance' (Minnitti 2021), celebrating the tactility and materiality of analogue media and media products, and the unpredictability of handling them as 'closer to life'. In a second step many of these fan practices—e.g. around film photography, vinyl and cassette sound media—deliberately disrupt the process of proper use and distress the products of analogue media to creatively (re)appropriate media and its products. Think of scratching vinyl, boiling or otherwise 'dirtying' film, looping cassette tapes, etc.

Facile distinctions between digital and analogue technologies, and claims of the analogue as more 'real' or truthful, should be criticized—instead the meaning of these categories is relationally produced in cultural contexts of e.g. resistance (Wieghorst 2021). Nevertheless, analogue technologies, by their mechanical nature, are often more open to creative hacks than many digital media. In that, they offer a fruitful point of departure for hands-on reflection on how processes of 'resistance', 'refusal', 're-appropriation' in relation to technologies can work.

In this workshop we will use selected analogue media as support for hands on reflection on what technological refusal, and creative reuse and -appropriation mean. We will ask ourselves: What does this technology want? How can we break open that structure for other forms of production and alternative products? What are the limitations we encounter in creating alternatives? What does this tell us about technological refusal, -resistance and (re-) appropriation?

# 80-82, Room: Spiegelzaal

**Technology as a Problem Solver?!  
Questioning society's relation with technology through theatre  
improvisations across the ages of humankind**

**André Baier & Vanessa Schaller**

The hands-on theatre impro workshop draws on the Blue Engineering course concept – a student-driven, modular teaching format that addresses ecological and social responsibility in engineering education. Since 2009, more than 4.000 students at TU Berlin and partner universities have learned through building blocks – around 60 to 90 minute long, methodically diverse teaching and learning units which often combine critical reflection, cooperation, and creative experimentation, all while addressing a broad range of engineering and technology related topics.

One of the core units of the Blue Engineering course is the building block 'Technology as a Problem Solver?!' which sets the stage to explore the role of technology within society across different ages of humankind. It takes one of the most fundamental issues of social and technological organisation as its starting point – the provision of clean drinking water. Participants are confronted with a scenario in which water has suddenly become contaminated – which is an existential problem.

Participants re-enact in short theatre improvisations how societies across the ages – from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages, the Colonial Age, the Present, and imagined Futures – respond to the same situation. Each group develops a brief scene that does not aim for historical accuracy, but instead embodies different imaginaries of how humans define, confront, and attempt to solve this shared problem. The theatrical form turns abstract critique and discussion into embodied experience. By shifting between epochs and perspectives, participants witness how technological fixes often re-create the very crises they are meant to solve – revealing patterns of dependency, centralisation, and exclusion.

Rather than teaching technological history, the workshop makes use of performance art to open a democratic space where participants question their own relationships to technology and imagine other ways of being in the world. The session concludes with a collective reflection guided by the TINS\_D constellation (Technology, Individuals, Nature, Society, and Democracy), connecting the micro-level of the performances with wider questions of society's relation to nature, equality, and freedom. In this way, the workshop embodies the forum's aim - to move beyond critique toward generative acts of saying no and ... yes to alternative, more democratic futures.

## 80-82, Room: Attic

From refusal to hopeful design:  
A data feminism workshop

Daniella Pauly Jensen & Annika Richterich

What connects hope and refusal? In recent years, there has been an upsurge of authors calling for a rediscovery of hope in technology design and analysis. Payal Arora (2024), for example, argues that critical technology discourses in the Global North have fallen into a state of 'pessimism paralysis' (p.2). In contrast, she points to sites of hopeful, aspirational engagement with technology in the Global South, where creativity, adaptation, and innovation thrive beyond the narrow frame of big tech. Importantly, Arora rejects the conflation of hope and optimism with naivety.

Instead, she demonstrates that innovation frequently arises from people's refusal to accept the status quo: a refusal that becomes the starting point for hopeful, creative appropriation of technology. Arora is not alone in her call for re-emphasising hope. Välikangas et al. (2025) discuss how impending failure in climate activism can yet give rise to 'actionable hope'. Benjamin (2022) explores how we may 'build the world we want', while Solnit (2000) insists on the enduring possibility of 'hope in the dark'. It may not be a coincidence that such a rediscovery of hope is gaining momentum amid weakened social cohesion and geopolitical crises, which big tech exploits to its full advantage. Hope, in this sense, entails a refusal to accept a situation and can function as a springboard for action and activism (see also Silverbloom 2024; Fenton 2008; Rorty 1999).

This Making and Doing session invites participants to explore refusal as a starting point for hopeful, actionable design. It is structured in three parts. The first part sets the scene with a brief introduction to intersections between hope, refusal, and alternative approaches to technology design, zooming in on feminist technology. The workshop organisers will introduce data feminism

(D'Ignazio and Klein 2023) as a framework for inspiring such hopeful design, providing conceptual grounding for the second part of the workshop. In the then following part, participants will be invited to bring examples (objects or images) of technologies they are refusing or have refused in the past. These will be shared and used as starting points for a speculative design exercise (see e.g. Barendregt and Vaage 2021; Galloway and Caudwell 2018), encouraging participants to move beyond refusal and explore possibilities for alternative technology design. In the third and final part, the speculative design outcomes will be discussed in plenary, conceptually linking them back to the relationship between hope and refusal. In doing so, the workshop frames refusal not as a gesture of mere withdrawal, but as an invitation to imagine technologies otherwise and to transform critique into collective, hopeful imagination.

# **WORKSHOPS**

**Friday 6th February**

**14.00-15.30**

## 76, Room: 0.07

### Resisting, Refusing, Reclaiming and Reimagining: Countering narratives of AI inevitability together

Tania Duarte & Dylan Orchard

We invite you to contribute to a workshop run by Tania Duarte and Dylan Orchard by testing, developing, and adding your projects to a framework of 'Resisting, Refusing, Reclaiming, and Reimagining AI' ([Duarte et al, 2025](#)). This taxonomy has gained significant international attention; giving voice to a public readiness for challenging dominant narratives of AI inevitability. Now the next phase of the project is an interactive database aimed to bring together movements to build collective power and capacity. Through mapping and profiling organisations, campaigns and projects using practical strategies for resisting or reshaping AI technologies and infrastructure, we hope to enable the spread of spread the skills, connections, inspiration, tactics, and support which people need to push back.

Workshop participants will add to the evolution of this movement building project by exploring what skills, connections, inspiration, tactics, support people need for resistance that they might be able to gain from connecting with other resistance orgs. They can add their projects to the resource, suggest others, and give feedback on questions such as:

- How do we identify whether something is really challenging as opposed to resistance our ethics washing / distracting
- What else is needed to facilitate connections and solidarity? What are the barriers or risks?
- Where should we go next?

We and AI is a UK nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing public understanding of AI power dynamics and societal impacts, which also runs the Better Images of AI collaboration and image library.

# 80-82, Room: 0.01

From Debunking to Dunking:  
a collaborative workshop of tech hype refusal

Charles Pidgeon & Ronnie Angel Pope

*"I don't want an AI chatbot in every app, I want to move an image in Microsoft Word without it fucking up the whole document." – most users of Microsoft products*



Many scholars carefully undertake the sober analytic work of debunking the technology industry's over-hyped claims about the future. In this workshop, we ask participants to put that aside. Rather than debunking the technology industry's speculative claims about the future, we will instead dunk on their past failures. Google Glass? Metaverse? NFTs?... Yeah, how is that going?

In the spirit of No & ..., the workshop extends refusal beyond critique, using technological failure as a way to imagine relations to technology that are less reverent and more communal. Levity becomes a form of refusal: it allows us to see the absurdity of technological grand narratives and to step outside them. Rather than engaging with technology, on its own determinist or "existential threat" terms, we take up a stance that neither debunks nor dignifies hype, but instead laughs at it.

In this workshop, we encourage participants to gleefully embrace the position that the difference between an AI product and a scam is about \$50 million of

venture capital funding. This may involve refusing to buy into the authoritative glamour of mathiness, jargon, or supposed technical complexity. (i.e. "You just don't get it, you're not a high IQ genius like Musk!") As James Bridle wrote in 2018: 'you should be able to understand technological systems without having to learn to code at all, just as one should not need to be a plumber to take a shit, nor to live without fear that your plumbing system might be trying to kill you.'

We will refer to a roster of "dunkers" throughout the workshop, such as Cory Doctorow on enshittification (2022), Emily Bender and Alex Hanna on AI as con (2025), Tressie McMillan Cottom on AI as "mid" (2025), Molly White's work on crypto grifts (2021-now), and more.

## 80-82, Room: Spiegelzaal

### Emotional Defences and the Discomfort of Being Told, “No!”

Stephen Hughes and Cecilie Hilmer

Being responsible sometimes means not doing things. This is no different when it comes to innovation. Sometimes we need to say, “no” to certain technologies. Innovators’ emotional defences make this kind of work challenging. Emotional defences are the management strategies that people employ to avoid experiencing uncomfortable emotions. Realising or being told that something that you care about (a technology you are working on) might be harmful and that it shouldn’t exist can trigger emotional defences like denial, projection, and idealisation/demonisation. These defences make it difficult for the innovator to tolerate the discomfort that arises when being asked to confront ethical issues related to their work.

This workshop will consider how researchers working in responsible innovation and adjacent forms of technology ethics can engage with innovators and their emotional defences. We will explore a diverse range of contexts and consider what kinds of strategies might bring about more or less containing environments that can allow innovators to hold onto uncomfortable feelings relating to their work. The aim is to develop an approach that can facilitate mature conversations about innovation, up to and including the capacity to say “no!” to some technologies.

# 80-82, Room: Attic

## Building a Solar Punk Commons: Experimenting with a Hands-On Refusal Lab

Jaime Simons

This participatory workshop transforms technological refusal into an embodied practice. Participants will actively engage in material practices that say "no" to dominant paradigms while simultaneously saying 'yes' to a better future by building solar punk alternatives that aim to be socially just, sustainable, and optimistic.

Following a short solar punk commons mapping introduction, each activity pairs a specific refusal with an alternative to open space for moving beyond 'no' with the aim of building something to which we all want to say 'yes'. Through four hands-on experiments, participants will practice technological repair, create an energy-aware system, discuss data (seed) sovereignty, and explore care-based practices towards data visualization.

1. By having participants involved in real repairs, the mini Repair Café brings attention to the culture of disposability and planned obsolescence and rejects it as much as possible. Participants will try to diagnose malfunctions, try various fixes, and record the obstacles that they faced which are 'designed in' to the device (such as proprietary screws, glued components, and intentionally missing documentation). Together, they will draft a mini-repair manifesto (possibly in zine form) to document what they have discovered.

2. By drastically slowing down our relationship with information, Slow Data: Seeing the Human in Numbers rejects algorithmic abstraction and extractive data practices. Using craft materials, participants create tangible representations of small data sets. Participants experience data at the speed of attention rather than computation by carefully selecting materials, naming

people, and devoting time to each data point. What is lost when data processing puts scale and speed ahead of human dignity is made clear by this embodied practice.

3. Corporate ownership of biological and informational commons is rejected in an experimental Seed Library & Data Sovereignty station. Participants will use seeds as a stand-in for data to talk about Indigenous data sovereignty and data ownership. Participants investigate how sovereignty, commons-based sharing, and anti-extractive protocols can be applied through a collectively dreamed mini seed library by packing, labelling, and creating a seed-sharing system at FASoS.

4. Determining the amount of energy that we use in a day feels almost impossible, and imagining a limit on energy-intensive computing systems is something that many computer scientists would laugh at. Energy Budgeting lets participants calculate energy budgets by prototyping 'low(er)-power' digital tools in place of unnecessarily high-powered alternatives. This station engages participants' creativity to cope with energy constraints, showing that lower-power technological tools are both possible and practical.

# **ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS**

**Thursday 5th**

**February 16.00-17.00**

# 80-82, Room: 0.01

## Alternative Proteins: Futures Worth Wanting

Sarah Kunze

Alternative protein technologies promise to produce animal proteins without the use of animals, such as precision fermentation for milk or cellular agriculture for cultivated meat. Within growth-oriented, capitalist frames, these technologies risk reinforcing or strengthening current issues of food systems rather than contributing to the change they are promoted under, such as providing solutions to sustainability challenges or liberation of animals. How can we imagine other futures with these technologies, where their promissory nature would not be empty?

In the polycrisis we are facing, I suggest a systems thinking approach to engage with alternative protein food technologies. My project considers post-growth and degrowth frames to ask what the conditions are for alternative protein technologies like cellular agriculture to become a degrowth technology. Degrowth Technologies highlight technology's potential to support degrowth transitions while acknowledging the need for critical evaluation. I study this question through lab ethnographies and attending events in both alternative protein and degrowth spaces. I am currently collecting imaginations in cellular agriculture to engage with.

Along the theme of 'No & ...' the collection of imaginations can provide the base for bringing actors from alternative protein and degrowth spaces together to explore their limits and co-create imaginations worth wanting. This includes both the choices of how technologies are imagined functionally and in relation to the systems around them, for example, by questioning patenting, accessibility, or who is (not) involved in decisions.

For this session, I'd like to bring imaginations on alternative protein technologies from my fieldwork with bio and foodtech scientists to discuss in dialogue and conversation with the participants of the event.

# 80-82, Room: Spiegelzaal

## Cybersecurity and the Human Factor

Bastian Küppers

Despite the widespread availability and continuous advancement of cybersecurity technologies, still a lot of cyber security incidents happen. However, these incidents are in the very most cases not caused by flaws in the technology. In theory we know how to build a secure system. So, the reasons for system insecurities are thought to be mostly caused by an interplay of human factors. More generally speaking, Cybersecurity typically assumes active engagement with technology, e.g. by complying with policies or by altering workflows to make them more secure. However, the challenge arises when essential security measures must be adopted within environments that reject or limit technology.

While such positions often emerge from ethical, environmental, or psychological motivations, they can unintentionally create security problems. Outdated systems that no longer receive updates, or the absence of digital protections altogether, can expose users to cyber risks such as data breaches, identity theft, and even infrastructural vulnerabilities. Moreover, institutions interacting with such communities — for example, healthcare providers, government agencies, or NGOs — face challenges in maintaining security and privacy standards across these mixed technological environments. This shows an urgent need to rethink cybersecurity not as a purely technical discipline, but as a socially adaptive practice that respects the values and agency of diverse user groups.

The “No &”-Forum offers a great opportunity to discuss how cybersecurity strategies can be adapted to such contexts without compromising the values and autonomy of technology-refusing groups. Bringing together people from different contexts could help to shed more light on the challenges of cybersecurity but could also help to identify strategies on how to make systems more secure while guiding the user of such systems through this process. Exploring this more deeply offers opportunities to develop inclusive and context-sensitive cybersecurity measures that maintain essential protections without imposing unwanted technological intrusion. It also

encourages critical reflection on broader questions such as: How can security be sustained when technological participation is partial or selective? What does it mean to be “secure” in a low-tech world? And how can trust and cooperation be built between cybersecurity experts and those skeptical of digital systems?

## 80-82, Room: Attic

The right to be offline: Discussing the (in)visibility of resistance

Hynek Trojáněk, Jascha Bareis, Roberta Barone, Irma Mastenbroek

Regardless of the generation or social status: without a smartphone, participation in society becomes more difficult - if not impossible. From online banking TAN procedures, to dating apps, to vaccination passports in QR codes. From the obligation to be available at work at all times, to emotional participation with friends through social media. Nothing works without a smartphone. One vanishes - as one is easily excluded from infrastructure, public services, education and social participation.

But to choose not to be digitally available and to vanish paradoxically puts one on the spot as friction. This is the duality of refusal: Simply by not going along with the innovation imperative, one transforms from being a trend-ignorant to a difficult to categorize social oddity. Outed by the omnipresent digital imperative to connect or by personal confession: To choose to be offline is met with both awe and eeriness. The phone-less, or brick and flip phone user quickly transforms into the freak ("Wow, how do you get around without Google maps?") - or the tedious "extra" burden ("You do not have WhatsApp? Well sorry, no group chat infos about the exam for you.").

In this round table we want to discuss this double aspect of (in)visibility. Confronting the societal sanctioning of being made both invisible and salient comes with costs - but also with benefits: re-experiencing time and space, the playful and contemplative, wholesome social ties.

First, the initiative The Right to Analogue will present collaboratively its activities and give a short input on the adventures of being offline - and of the necessity to approach this state not only as a personal choice, but as a fundamental right. In the second part of the round table we invite offline practitioners but also haunted smartphone addicts to share their experiences of what it means to be constantly online or offline. What gets hidden, what is made constantly salient?

## 76, Room: 0.16

### We Do Need No Education

James Garforth, Benedetta  
Catanzariti, Meenakshi Mani, Alex Gillespie, Fabio  
Tollon, Kimberly Paradis, and Jacqueline Row

In recent years, critical scholars have repeatedly presented evidence of societal harms propagated by data-intensive systems. AI and data practices can automate bias and harm, exacerbate local and global power dynamics, and shift power away from individuals and towards few powerful organizations (Noble, 2018; Benjamin, 2019; Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Crawford, 2021). In response to these critiques, a growing body of work is concerned with integrating ethics within computer science education (Fiesler, Garrett & Beard, 2020; Goetze, 2023). However, as a standalone intervention, it fails to transform student understanding of their responsibilities as engineers or enable them to bring about real-world change in contexts (Widder et al., 2023; Darling-Wolf & Patitsas, 2024). Critical scholarship has so far paid relatively little attention to the role educational contexts and environments themselves play in concretising epistemic norms and values into data and AI practice.

We draw on two of the proposers' experiences as a Computer Scientist and a Science and Technology Studies scholar teaching a large undergraduate course in an Informatics department on the social and ethical dimensions of technology, followed by a startup-style group project course. We observe first-hand the tension between honest reflections on technical limitations, or outright abandonment of flawed projects, and the expectation of "solving" a real-world problem within a few months. Expanding this analysis outwardly to the wider curriculum, and interviewing core teaching staff, we see how, for example, solutionism embeds itself in technical education. It presents every problem students face as one which can and should be addressed with technology and leaves no room for critique, or for learning why, when, or how to choose another route.

We invite a discussion from attendees with varied disciplinary and pedagogical perspectives on the pedagogy of refusal, particularly for CS students who might be expected to participate in development or deployment of harmful systems. We ask not just what are the skills and knowledge computer scientists need in order to refuse effectively, but how we enable students to nurture and practice these while they are still in our educational care, and what would it look like to see meaningful modelling of refusal by staff or peers. Must a pedagogy of refusal, to be transformative, inherently include the imagining of alternative paths? What futures of computer science teaching and technology building must we then imagine and embody to invite CS students to want to, and be able to do things differently?

**PANEL**

**SESSION 1**

**Thursday 5th**

**February 11.30-13.00**

## 76, Room: 0.07

*Chair: Marte Henningsen*

Matthew Archer

The Ignorant Schoolmaster: 2.0: Refusal, Resistance, and Resignation in the Neoliberal University

This presentation reflects on three distinct but related acts of refusal: refusing to use ChatGPT (and similar programs) in my own work as a researcher and as a teacher, refusing to allow students to use these programs in their coursework, and refusing to acquiesce to the education industry's disconcertingly unanimous embrace of "responsible AI." Thinking ethnographically about these acts of refusal helps to situate them in a broader politics of resistance and resignation, specifically the ways in which these acts relate differentially to hierarchies within and beyond the university. In the presentation, I will draw on anthropological theories of refusal and resistance (e.g, McGranahan 2016, Sivaramakrishnan 2005) to examine the politics of refusing AI and of neo-Luddism more generally. This perspective highlights the importance of critically examining the diverse conditions and consequences of refusal, focusing on instances in which refusal occurs (intentionally or not) as a means to conflicting political ends.

Pieter van Rees &  
Neha Miglani

Resisting Technologies of Measurement: Co-constructing meaningful education

Educational spaces have increasingly moved from 'adopting' (various) technologies towards 'arrival technologies.' New(er) technologies 'arrive' at schools and universities unannounced, and are utilized without any evaluation, risk assessment, trainings – things that were historically considered indispensable for adoption (Reich & Dukes preprint). How does one imagine technological refusal in this context? How can such refusal be embodied in institutional spaces like schools which are mediated by pressures of policy and public imagination, and moral responsibility of the next generation?

The field of education is replete with contested technologies, both historically and currently. Assessments and monitoring interfaces are among the most influential educational technologies in the contemporary schooling culture, acting as devices of appropriation between policy expectations, institutional performance, and experiences of teachers and learners. In this paper, we start with an empirical case of technologies of educational assessment in the field of citizenship education in the Netherlands. We focus on secondary school teachers who expressed a 'refusal',

and as part of a learning network constructed a framework for more meaningful forms of citizenship assessment.

In the Netherlands, schools mandate citizenship education and monitoring its learning outcomes. While well-intended, the possibility and desirability of assessing something like citizenship education remains questionable (Pike 2007; Author 2021; Daas et al. 2025). The non-compliance of its monitoring is typically framed in terms of incompetence, something to be remedied by clearer guidelines and professionalization. The learning network started from the premise that teachers' experiences and opinions towards assessment technologies matter. In a learning community of seven high Dutch schools, we developed an alternative form of evaluation, informed by a critical review of available assessment methods in the Dutch context. The learning network thus featured both a 'reality of refusal' to use/deploy technologies developed by policy makers, educational scientists and commercial parties, thus asserting the agency and professional knowledge of teachers, as well as the collective formulation of a 'future worth wanting', even though delimited by policy mandates.

We argue that technological refusal might be the most powerful in spaces where the pressures to adopt are the highest. Teachers and teaching profession has been at the crossroads of mounting pressures from various sources. The empirical case highlights the agency of technological refusal by members of a profession under threat and points to its limitations in a policy regulated institution like public schools.

Lukas Seidler

Tending to the unbearably heavy: Doing Academia amid Planetary Ruptures and Techno-Imaginations

Various authors have been writing about the interrelations between empire and changing climates (for instance, Davis and Todd 2017; DeLoughrey 2019; Povinelli 2021). Indeed, depending on one's (racialised, sited, weathered, surviving) perspective, empire, and a changing climate are self-evidently inseparable. And so, Sultana (2022) writes, for many, there is an "unbearable heaviness" to the historical continuities of climate change, that is its climate coloniality.

At the same time, current technocratic solutions to climate change often depart from stressing the latter's unequivocal newness. This not only shifts the burden of proof to those most exposed to the devastations of climate coloniality, but overlooks how complex, evolving endurabilities of the past might also happen through, for instance, greenwashed technologies and innovation discourse (Gray 2023; see also Neimanis et al. 2015).

With this presentation, I wish to contribute a moment for thinking about climate coloniality and how it might structure research about technologies such as agricultural robotics. Specifically, I hope to open a conversation about to whom, how, and where the tangle of empire and planetary rupture becomes salient, all the while writing in and for an institutional (temperate, global north) 'climate' that demands that their connections are proven – evidenced – again and again. That is, how do you refuse techno-imaginings amid climate coloniality while also writing for and through them?

After teasing out this question through my previous work on sea-level rise and swelling horizons, I point to how the problem has been reappearing in various guises while embarking on my PhD project about agriculture and the development of harvesting robots. For this project, I am part of an engineering lab. I will be shaped by and shape how its potential techno-imaginings are enacted, including how people, institutions and other actors may or may not tend to enduring knots of empire and climate. Given the stage of my research, cultivating as critically curious, open, and nuanced ethnographic presence as possible is key. This contribution, then, is a snippet of how certain confusions about planet and site, forcings and histories could structure projects in-the-making.

Mariska Thalitha  
Bosschaert

Refusing Certain Features of Technologies in Livestock  
Farming

Agriculture today faces a profound dilemma: while farmers are tasked with feeding a growing global population, livestock farming in particular exerts significant environmental pressure. One widely adopted response to this challenge is Precision Livestock Farming (PLF) – the use of digital technologies to enhance efficiency, increase productivity, and mitigate climate impacts. However, a broader analysis of digitalization in society and agriculture in particular reveals critical concerns. PLF technologies risk distancing farmers from their animals, reducing animals to standardized data representations rather than living beings of flesh and blood. This shift threatens the erosion of farmers' embodied knowledge, fostering dependence on data systems and further abstracting animals into digital entities. Such developments raise serious animal welfare concerns. For instance, farmers may struggle to interpret alarms generated by PLF systems due to diminished experiential knowledge, or welfare issues may go unnoticed if they cannot be translated into binary data formats.

This paper does not advocate for the wholesale rejection of PLF technologies, which do offer tangible benefits. Instead, it proposes the refusal of specific design features - particularly those that prioritize efficiency at the expense of human-animal interaction. PLF systems should be designed to require human observation of animals. Although such designs may be perceived as inefficient, prompting

commercial developers to pursue more streamlined alternatives, this tendency must be counteracted.

A potential solution involves a combination of legal regulations prohibiting the development of technologies that alienate farmers from their animals, alongside educational initiatives that emphasize the necessity of human observation for animal welfare. The author welcomes further suggestions and discussion on this topic at the conference.

## 80-82, Room: 0.01

*Chair: Tsjalling Swierstra*

Darryl Cressman &  
Massimiliano Simons

Refusing Technology's Historical Narratives

Writing the history of technology is never neutral. Amongst philosophers of technology, historical narratives are used to legitimate the problems that are addressed and those that are deemed irrelevant. Given this, in our presentation today we will subject different historical narratives to critique in attempts to refute them in hopes of opening up new trajectories of philosophical research. Not unlike the critique of technological determinism or the refusal to privilege specific perspectives on technology (states, industry, inventors) at the expense of others (labour, political economy, the environment), in our presentation today we hope to draw attention to the unnoticed historical narratives that shape the philosophy of technology.

First, we examine how a narrative of relentless and disruptive technological change obscures longer histories. Arguing that the narratives of disruptive change favoured by the contemporary tech industry and its boosters amongst government and academia disables effective critique, refusing these narratives can open up ways to use history a mode of refusal and critique. Our second example are those narratives that suggest that a change in technology requires a new philosophy of technology. The most common version of this is a three-stage model, where the history of technology is divided in three periods, with the final period typically being the new age that calls for a new philosophy of technology. Artisanal technologies, followed by industrialization, and then a third stage, often situated somewhere in the recent past, is one that calls for a new philosophy of technology

Andrea Alessandro  
Gasparini

The Power of Rejecting Technology in Modern  
Society When Using Reversed Time

During the last decade, "refusals" to ubiquitous technology have increased in line with higher consumption of energy and water, and recognition of the political power that tech companies have acquired. The refusal of ubiquitous technology is contextual and should not be considered a counter-network that humans can opt for, rather, it should be viewed as a personal quest. Some examples of refusal are emerging, such as digital detox retreats at an old monastery in Italy (*Eremito*, 2025). In Norway, mobile phones are now recommended to be banned in classrooms (Udir, n.d.) In addition, parents are creating barriers against the use of smartphones so they can prioritize family life (Hiniker et al., 2015). In another study, findings showed

that there is an increasing desire to reduce the use of smartphones (Hiniker et al., 2016).

A possible approach to understanding why the addiction to ubiquitous technology is so persistent is *time*. How we think and talk about the past, present, and future may help address technology addiction and support technology refusal.

English speakers typically conceptualize time as a horizontal timeline with the future ahead and the past behind them, leading to a mostly linear representation of time. However, this is not true for several non-Western languages, where different spatial associations with time may exist, including the notion of *reversed time* (Pamies-Bertrán & Yuan, 2020). An example of reversed time perception is observed in an Andean tribe in South America. When speaking in Aymara, they convey the concept of the future as being behind them and past events as being in front (Núñez & Sweetser, 2006).

Using reversed time as an approach, having the past in front may help reflect on the role that ubiquitous technology plays in day-to-day life. Therefore, the knowledge and personal experiences from the past become important values that we might otherwise forget. This aspect is relevant when opting for the refusal of ubiquitous technology and, in doing so, focusing on past experiences like reading a paper book, looking at an old-fashioned album of photos chosen by other family members, or writing a text on paper. Concluding, using reversed time to examine past values as relevant, could help us avoid being overwhelmed by new tech services or artifacts.

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<p>Jose Luis Guerrero Quiñones &amp; Paula Gürtler</p>	<p>(In)direct control, freedom and the democratic imperative to refuse AI</p>
<p>Our main thesis is that the use of AI in public institutions hijacks indirect control over these democratic institutions from citizens and gives control to AI companies developing and selling those technologies. Therefore, we argue that refusing AI in public institutions is justified, and (possibly) a democratic imperative. What we care about is refusing AI control, so democracy can work adequately for the sake of non-domination and the freedom of citizens. Our contribution builds on Amartya Sen's and Philip Pettit's arguments on decisive preferences and control as freedom. Amartya Sen's (1983, 2001) conception of freedom builds on the ability of agents to have decisive preferences. As Pettit (2009) makes explicit, that means that agents have either direct and/or indirect control over outcomes that align with their preferences: "In one, the preference assumes hands-on control, leading the agent to choose appropriately. In the other, it assumes only arm's-length control, operating via the interventions of others." (p. 100) In other words, in the former case, the person actively (causally) has control over the outcomes, whereas in the latter, the person is not causally active to achieve preference-aligned outcomes. For example, while an artisan has direct control over the product being created, the manager of a company is indirectly in control of the product by using workers as <i>deputies</i>.</p> <p>Democracy is essential for protecting freedom, since it gives citizens the tools to control those in power. To that purpose, there are diverse mechanisms that allow people to exercise control over the government and its institutions, i.e., reaction, regulation, and representation (Pettit, 2009). When democratic governments use AI in administrative procedures, these three mechanisms are disrupted and citizens lose their freedom, we argue.</p> <p>Our argument is twofold. First, we argue that AI is a form of indirect control exercised by a group of actors who abide by capitalist, not democratic ideals. When deployed in public institutions, AI systems come to act as deputies of AI developers in optimising certain objectives, encroaching on the power realm of democratic representatives. Second, while democratic governments are within the indirect control of citizens through mechanisms of reaction and regulative control, the AI industry can evade these mechanisms because of i) a lack of transparency, and ii) extensive lobbying. Therefore, the citizenry loses its freedom to the extent that they are dependent on the whims of classification algorithms developed by large AI corporations.</p> <p>Selected Bibliography          Couldry, N., &amp; Mejias, U. A. (2020). <i>The Costs of Connection</i>. Stanford University Press. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503609754">https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503609754</a>          Danaher, J. (2016). <i>The Threat of Algocracy: Reality, Resistance and Accommodation</i>. <i>Philosophy &amp; Technology</i>, 29(3), 245–268. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-015-0211-1">https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-015-0211-1</a></p>	

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Alicia Patterson (& Kelly Bosworth)

When the music stops: the past and present infrastructures of technological refusal

We (a historian + ethnomusicologist and philosopher) are inspired by the work of scholars and journalists who have attempted to read against the grain of how we remember previous episodes of labor resistance. We are interested in exploring moments in history that could be doubly read as "unsuccessful" or "successful" refusal of technology. In this conversation, we will discuss the little-known history of the 1942-1944 American Federation of Musicians' (AFM) recording ban in the United States and its place in histories of refusal. This multi-year recording strike was a monumental collective action amongst union musicians in the US during World War II. By withholding new music from the public, musicians and union leaders were attacked for being anti-progress and unpatriotic. Ultimately, the ban changed the sounds of American popular music and ushered in new protections and royalty payments for working musicians. And yet, this effort is so rarely remembered, celebrated, or included in stories of collective refusal in labor and cultural history.

This historical case study raises important questions about labor, infrastructure, and collective political responsibility. In philosophy, the notion of collective political responsibility is about noticing the ways in which modern economies mean we all participate in structural injustice, and our relationships to others give us a duty to *do* something about that injustice. As artists continue to be exploited by modern technological systems like generative AI and streaming platforms, what are the infrastructures of refusal and how do infrastructures limit or shape our refusal? How do they shape our ability to be collectively politically responsible? Musicians in the age of AI are more superfluous than ever to the process of making/sharing/selling music. Refusing to record music won't make the music stop. What then, could be or should be the modern corollary to a recording ban?

Does trying to opt-out of platforms like Spotify effectively discharge our political responsibility, or do small artists need that infrastructure to survive? What can be learned from the AFM strike about the lenses of "successful" versus "unsuccessful" collective action?

# Room: 80-82, Spiegelzaal

*Chair: Ricky Janssen*

Dominik Schlienger & Oleksandra  
Nenko

We need to refuse the difference between  
technique and technology to reclaim  
technologies as human practices

Many artists, musicians, creatives, makers, crafts people, designers, programmers, and builders will relate: The tools we work with are natural extensions of our bodies and minds – something so intrinsically human, that we feel diminished without them, lost, deprived of agency. Yet, if the term "tool" is replaced with "technology" many of us distance ourselves intuitively from a notion that implies determinism, both dystopian and utopian: For every messianic prediction of what tech can do for us [1], there is a doom and gloom warning to match [2].

For many theoreticians this schismatic relationship with technology is sufficiently explained with Heidegger's description of an essential difference between technique and technology [3]. *But it is this difference that we suggest to refuse.*

Although Heidegger sets out from technology as a human activity, he sees modern technology as ontologically different to skilled craft, as *Gestell*, an *enframing* of our existence that is actively challenging us as a condition for truth, of *revealing* [3]. This material condition somehow external to our own materiality may be why we feel disenfranchised from modern technology. In order to refuse the consequent technological determinism I dare to question if Heidegger's phenomenology can give a coherent account of what technology is:

Phenomenology needs an intention towards an experience, splitting the human condition for an instant through a subject-object divide to describe experience coherently. It is in this instant that it presumes a *Gestell* as an exterior condition *enframing* experience while ignoring that "stellen" could be an aspect of all action *per se*, common to all actants and actors. Instead phenomenology turns experience into Schroedinger's cat, and the *Gestell* into the box containing it.

Yet there are descriptions of technology that overcome the phenomenological necessity of a subjectivity *towards* technology. E.g., Bruno Latour's reading [4] of Gilbert Simondon [5], gives us access to a *technical mode of being* that encompasses entities beyond a Cartesian subject-object divide [4], allowing for a

body-tool-machine spectrum where the question of autonomy is not one of increased or reduced human agency, but one of *distribution* [6].

If this notion of machines and technologies as socio-material arrangements [7] guides our technical action, if we acknowledge the whole network behind a machine, its material and human actants as *constituents* of technology, we can refuse the deterministic conception of technology entirely. We can name the hegemony who profits from such a construct with its fatal consequences, and reclaim the technical mode of being as bodies and minds in distributed agencies and — through ethical negotiations — as sustainable, embodied practices. As reclaimed *human practice*, tools are deeply personal environments, *extrabodies* and *extraminds*.

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Lotte Krabbenborg	Technology Refusal as dynamic practice: studying how citizens respond to new technologies over time
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This paper will present two empirical cases of technology refusal. The first one is public protest, in particular by 'indigenous groups' to telescope siting processes. In order to conduct their measurements, astronomers wish to build their

telescopes on high mountain tops, ideally in remote areas. Recently, at various locations around the world where telescopes are in place or being built, e.g. Hawaii, La Palma, South-Africa, Australia, local communities are putting up road blocks, file court cases, or start (online) campaigns to voice their concerns on how telescopes intrude living environment. More specifically, by placing the construction of telescopes in a longer tradition of unequal distribution of power, they argue that astronomy benefitted from “settler colonialism” by neglecting cultural, historical and environmental heritage of local communities living in these ‘remote areas’. Some of these communities now ‘call upon the scientific community to reject these benefits’, stop the construction of new telescopes and acknowledge their ways of living. Building upon interviews, document analysis and participatory observations, we will show refusal is practiced and embodied over the last 50 years in the case of Hawaii, including the responsiveness of the astronomic community towards concerns of citizens.

The second case to be discussed concerns patients’ refusal to use digital self-monitoring as part of their disease management. While technology developers stress the value of controlling disease with the help of digital tools, we show that for patients good management also implied letting go of control, leading to refusal, or at least selective use, of digital tools.

With the help of interviews and document analysis, we show that patients not necessarily resist digital technologies but that they can be critical about the social changes associated with these technologies, in this case the emphasis these digital tools put on being sick and the effort (‘illness work’) it requires to engage with these tools. Just like the developers of self-monitoring apps, patients are concerned with realising a good life and having good care, but ‘non-users’ seem to have a different interpretation from that of the app developers of the role of technology in this regard.

For both cases, we will show how we, by actively ‘moving in and around’ the ‘different worlds’ of e.g. science, policy and industry, and by e.g. asking questions, challenge assumptions and point out discrepancies between various future visions on the role of technology in society, tried to become an actor ourselves in a technology development and contribute to co-constructing possible other, alternative, futures.

Hannah Fitsch	No means no. AI and a future worth wanting – how to get there
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Decisions made with AI are based solely on whether something will predictably match a comparable object or category with almost one hundred percent probability. This ‘yes’ can be expressed as a 1 or 0.9888, while a ‘no’ or non-similarity

can be expressed as a 0 or something close to zero. In artificial decisioning, there is no maybe or maybe not, every 'no' is understood as an error that must be corrected. Once identified as an error, the 'no' is no longer involved in the purely positivist decision-making process. In this sense, AI does not accept any decision or object that does not fall into one specific category and does not allow for refusal. However, the computer scientist Joseph Weizenbaum critically reminded us already in the 70s, that this kind of deciding in AI 'does not mean choosing', which is a loss of freedom as the musician The Whitest Boy Alive puts it, when singing: 'Freedom is a possibility only if you're able to say no'. For a careful articulation of what needs to change, as well as a vision for a future that allows humans to choose, AI must be viewed as a means of recognizing patterns perfectly, and as a pathfinder in some ways, but not as a decision-making tool.

It is not only the call to refuse and to stop listening to some algorithmically and politically driven narratives, but an active decision to say yes to listen to humans and their experiences and perspectives again. Online social communication consists of categorical affiliations and similarity, but can never represent anything in between. However, subjects are never just one category, nor are they a collection of different categories added together, and experiences are not comparable to one another precisely because they express social power and dominance relationships. This means, that resistance practices do not need identical experiences, but rather connecting experiences in order to create common grounds. To refuse and counteract these digital practices based on the isolation of individual experience, experiences outside the digital realm should be more taken into account again. Breaking with existing narratives and biased representations of the past and gendered, classified and racialized bodies, makes it possible to start a counter narrative, creating shared experiences and developing a common language, and to refuse the general capitalist narrative.

Mariana Fernandez Mora

Lullament as refusal

In this presentation (or dialogue/conversation), I would like to propose mourning as a mode of technological refusal, not as negation or withdrawal, but as an affective and epistemic reorientation that allows us to refuse extractive colonial logics while embracing care-based forms of relationality. Drawing on my practice as both an artist and researcher, and on my work on Slow AI and the PD Entangled Machines at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS), I connect the notion of hyper-bodied technologies with the speculative practice of the lullament—a hybrid between lament and lullaby that aids in the transition between life cycles.

This presentation would be a moment to share my process as I trace a shared genealogy of abstraction that separates life and intelligence from their material, bodily and relational conditions. From cybernetics to cloning to machine learning, technoscience has pursued the dream of replicating life and thought through information, enacting what Silvia Federici identifies as the historical division of body and mind that underpins capitalist modernity. To refuse this abstraction is to re-embodiment intelligence, to recognise the machinic, human, and ecological entanglements that sustain technological systems, and to reclaim the ethical and affective dimensions of thinking.

In this context, I propose the lullament (lament + lullaby) as a speculative gesture of collective mourning for the death of the promise of Modernity and the idea that technology will save us. It is an invitation to acknowledge grief for the worlds, ecosystems, and epistemologies lost to acceleration and extraction, and to nurture the fragile beginnings of other possible futures. Looking at the lullaby as one of the earliest emotional technologies, the lullament might serve as a contemporary practice of refusal, a relational technology of care and re-attunement.

By situating mourning as both an aesthetic and a political act, I will explore how refusal can operate as a restorative practice that reconnects cognition with embodiment, knowledge with care, and technology with the planetary body on which it depends.

## 80-82, Room: Attic

*Chair: Katleen Gabriels*

Lucie Dalibert, Valentine Gourinat & Paul-Fabien Groud

Injunctions, experiences, reappropriations: an exploration of the practices and trajectories of 'refusal' of prosthetic limbs

Prostheses occupy a special place within the medical institution: they are the horizon towards which amputees and individuals born with agenesis must strive. In rehabilitation centres, prostheses are constructed as a necessity, as evidenced by the terms used by medical staff to describe instances when people stop using their prosthetic device(s), such as 'fitting failure' (échec d'appareillage) and 'prosthesis abandonment.' These terms reveal the (techno-)ableist representations and norms (Campbell, 2001; Shew, 2023) that accompany the non-use of prostheses – or, at least, its perception. In such a context, the refusal to wear a prosthesis is often perceived negatively: it is widely regarded as a failure or a defeat.

In this presentation, we propose to examine the 'refusal' of prosthetic limbs by the people fitted with them, whether they are amputees or persons with agenesis. More specifically, we would like to analyse the forms that such refusal takes and can take. While non-use of prostheses is quite common – between 30% and 80% of people fitted with limb prostheses stop wearing them within a year of their fitting (Taylor et al., 2005; Bidiss & Chau, 2007) –, we wish to examine the extent to which refusal, which refers to an affirmative stance, is an operative term for understanding the practices of amputees and people with agenesis.

To do so, we draw on an ethnographic study that we conducted in France from 2019 to 2023 on the use and non-use, appropriation and abandonment of prostheses. This proposal aims to recount some of their stories and practices in order to highlight the individual, contextual, and necessarily situated modalities of prosthesis non-use.

We will first present how normative ableist injunctions around the amputated body pervade the medical field in the context of functional rehabilitation. Rehabilitation can hardly be conceived without (the use of the) prosthesis. Next, we will look at people's practices at home and in public space: while we will show that non-use is not necessarily an assertive refusal but a gradual withdrawal, or even a situation that is endured, we will also examine the extent to which using a prosthesis also means discovering its limitations and ways of doing

without it, which involve other technical aids and/or body techniques without any device. Not using the prosthesis means rejecting it as the only way to do things and choosing other modes of action. In doing so, we will present the nuances and subtleties that exist in non-use and in the way amputees and individuals with agenesis navigate between rejection, disappointment, an reappropriation according to their individual trajectories and situate experiences.

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Marije Miedema	The refusal of a digital death: engaging with personal digital heritage through excess and expenditure
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This paper questions whose future heritage is wasted and whose is preserved through the theoretical lens of excess and expenditure (Bataille, 1949). It specifically looks at personal digital heritage, which consists of personal, born-digital and digitised material that is both consciously and unconsciously preserved. The paper draws on long-term assemblage ethnography in the Netherlands and involves two distinct contexts: (1) community centre visitors experiencing (temporary) socioeconomic difficulties, and (2) industry and public service professionals with whom I explored digital legacy, death, and heritage across different scales, sites, and practices.

Before theory, there were lived experiences. For over a year I was involved with the community centre visitors, as a researcher, volunteer but most of all a confidant with whom they shared everyday life. This resulted in 300 hours of participant observations, 24 interviews and two co-creation sessions. Across these moments, I witnessed the refusal of ratio, effect and efficiency. Experiences of self-perceived insignificance – “why should my personal photos be saved?” – provided a space to think about heritage that dispersed, discarded or allowed to decay. Through the work of Georges Bataille on excess and expenditure, I came to understand these instances standing for a community that through loss, creates, builds and grows (Stoekl, 2007)

After studying from the bottom-up, I spent 6 months from the top-down with professionals working with digital legacy. These professionals were active in commercial organisations – including tech start-ups, funeral directors, and notaries – as well as public organisations, working with digitalisation within archival settings. This resulted in 21 interviews and 20 hours of participant observations. In this context, the “excessive” nature of our digital traces became apparent through collective feelings of “too-muchness”.

This contrast in settings threw into relief important dynamics around refusal. Through the save-by-default settings of everyday technological infrastructures, practices of refusal are disappearing. This in turn leads to long-term thinking that represses waste and wasting as part of future heritage practices. By bringing together plural personal experiences and institutionalised perspectives through the notions of excess and expenditure, I situate the future of our personal digital heritage within the context of ecological limits. Focussing on the circulation of energy and matter and finding the right balance between durability and ephemerality. The larger aim is to bring back practices of refusal and to rethink waste and wasting in the future and wasting through affective experiences of loss in the now.

Thomas Zenkl

Re-assembling (algorithmic) refusals

Despite a growing interest in how prevailing influences of algorithmic systems and artificial intelligence (AI) are being resisted, contested, refused, and even dismantled, debates around algorithmic resistance (AR) remain conceptually fragmented. Spanning various academic disciplines, social domains, and technological applications, refusals to algorithmic power not only have to account for the heterogeneity and instability of their research object and the interlocking and transgression of layers and spheres, but also for the ambiguities in the complicated relationship between resistance and compliance.

Facilitating a new materialist ontology, my contribution is based on an integrative review that traces AR’s multiple conceptualisations across a growing interdisciplinary landscape by understanding scholarly efforts as research-machines: Affective assemblages of theories, methods, technologies, disciplinary norms, and institutional logics that collectively produce particular visions of AR (while muting others).

Reviewing such production of AR in 106 research items, my study analyses how specific notions of resistance/refusal mediate micropolitics: Territorializations of problem spaces that, by configuring actors, problematizations, and locations,

produce specific understandings what algorithmic resistance (and what not), who resists (and who does not), and what resistance can achieve. Seven contrasting clusters of research-machines are identified (e.g., as algorithmic aversion, mundane opposition, or epistemic refusal) according to their shared productions of AR by assembling elements through distinctive economies of affect. Properties of these outputs are understood along six essential axes (intentionality, scale, visibility, materiality, temporality, relationality) and arranged into a provisional topography to map intensities, identify silences, overlaps, and tensions within current AR scholarship.

My contribution highlights how knowledge practices themselves are complicit in the constitution of what can be resisted (and by whom) and, by unravelling the micropolitics of producing resistance, calls for a reflection on and a reassembling of our respective research-machines. It is an intervention that invites to inspire dynamic, situated, and politically generative understandings of (algorithmic) power, its contestation, and refusal.

Donovan van der Haak	Transcendental technology ethics: an ethics of refusal?
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Philosophy of technology and technology ethics went through an explosion in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Philosophy of technology started off ‘transcendentally’ in classical philosophy of technology, which proposed new ways to inquire into the fundamental (a priori) *conditions* of the human being in a *technological world*. Since the empirical turn’s emergence around the 1970s, philosophy of technology and technology ethics have increasingly conceptualized of technology as *technological artefact*, exploring the multifaceted aspects and mediating (e.g., post-phenomenological) role of concrete technological artefacts or ‘things’. The empirical and ethical turn allow for a concrete philosophical and ethical investigation of specific technological artefacts. The focus on *technological artefacts* is, however, relatively confining in what philosophy and ethics of technology can do for the *future* of the *human condition* considered in its *actual* state in the Anthropocene (Stiegler, 2018; Lemmens, 2022). We seek to develop the empirical and ethical turn towards concrete things by arguing that, in addition to recognizing technological artefacts, we must return to the insights of transcendental philosophy of technology. Based on transcendental philosophy of technology, I argue that technology ethics (and ethics more fundamentally) must be accordingly revised with a Transcendental Technology Ethics.

Transcendental Technology Ethics provides a new approach to engaging in technology ethics that helps evaluate not only how technological artefacts should be designed, but whether we should accept or refuse the use and existence of

technological artefacts in the first place. A concrete case-study seeks to illustrate the need for this new kind of ethical thinking. This case study examines how (public) values are put into practice during 'pilot social security' (pilot bestaanszekerheid), a collaboration between the municipality of Tilburg and Smart Start. In the pilot, scientific research, available data, and algorithms are used to analyze the backgrounds of people living on social minima in order to gain insights relevant to improving social security in the city. Two contrasting moral perspectives amongst participants became clearly visible from the data. First, a techno-optimist view is visible under one group of respondents that seek to make data and algorithmic projects possible for the municipality, for instance, by drawing on value-by-design approaches. Second and against this view, some participants were skeptical about whether the use of data and AI for these and similar social purposes was justified in the first place, and wondered whether or not the pilot transgresses municipal boundaries and fails to respect citizen autonomy and trust.

**PANEL**

**SESSION 2**

**Friday 6th February**

**11.30-13.00**

# 76, Room: 0.07

*Chair: Darian Meacham*

Jan Jasper Mathé

Human Says No: A Kierkegaardian Take on Prompt Engineering

From composing emails and planning city trips to seeking therapeutic support and grappling with deeply personal questions, AI is quickly becoming indispensable in our professional and private lives. Beyond mere usage, we are increasingly expected to engage with AI through the logic of “prompt engineering”, a practice that involves crafting human inputs to optimize AI-generated outputs. This paper suggests that prompt engineering signals a deeper shift, where our understanding of life itself is recast as a sequence of AI-solvable problems. We know that the very tools we use to shape our lives shape us in return, subtly redefining our sense of self. The prompt, then, becomes a site where selfhood is reconfigured by the logic of the system, turning us from subjects into informational objects to address and be addressed by AI.

In this context, refusal becomes increasingly difficult. The act of refusal itself often remains trapped within a techno-logic of optimization and control, reducing it to yet another problem to be solved. Hence, rather than interpreting refusal as a matter of screen-time management or the outright banning of smartphones, this paper explores the more fundamental question of why our ways of relating to ourselves, others, and the world are mediated through screens in the first place. There is no technical fix for this, only a conscious act of reclaiming our lives as our own.

Drawing on Kierkegaard’s *Postscript*, written under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, I propose an existential approach to refusal. A figure of “splendid inactivity” in 19th-century Copenhagen, Climacus is swept along by a modern current of technological progress that elevates society toward affluence, comfort, and efficiency. However, Climacus is sufficiently self-reflexive to realize that his lifestyle is less a personal choice than a condition. Kierkegaard shows that when we reduce life’s questions to technical problems with quick-fix solutions<sup>5</sup>, we risk bypassing the difficult process of self-understanding and growth.

In doing so, I contribute to the conference’s exploration of the realities and futures of refusal by reframing it as an existential practice: a reclaiming of the prompt as an existential-ethical space in which we become responsible for our own becoming. Against the technophile claim that refusing technology is denying our humanity, Kierkegaard reminds us that our humanity lies precisely in our relating to technology, and that we must act accordingly. If the computer never says no, shouldn’t we?

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Timon Beeftink

Lessons from a Bittern

The bittern is dead. And we killed him. Taking Rembrandt's 'Self-portrait with a Dead Bittern' as its point of departure, this essay argues that our contemporary society—marked by the use of digital media—hardly offers any place to hide ourselves away. 'Hypervisibility is obscene; it lacks the negativity of what is hidden, inaccessible, and secret,' to use the words of Byung-Chul Han. We are visible everywhere and all at once. To refuse this tendency to expose and show ourselves, or so this essay proposes, we should revive the bittern again. But how?

It begins with the reed. In a famous sketch by Monty Python, 'How Not to Be Seen', this is evidenced by the landscape in which people try to hide. If there is only grass and a few bushes, one is indeed easily seen. Bitterns look like reed and live in reed. Given their camouflage and habitat, they are a traditional symbol of secrecy and mystery. Birdwatchers are very happy to see one or two in a lifetime, if at all. But once the reed is removed, the possibility of secrecy disappears. Using the bittern as a symbol for the human need for secrecy, this essay highlights that digital media flattens the realm of appearances and endangers secrecy.

But is it only the reed? No. It's also the agent who forgot how to hide. Or—more dangerously even, as the Monty Python sketch suggests—is unaware of the importance of hiding away. Hito Steyerl continues this line of thought in her 'How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File'.<sup>3</sup> Camouflage, leaving the screen, becoming a pixel—they all feature in her attempt to withdraw from technology and visibility. Bitterns are masters in this kind of behaviour. In reed beds, one could barely see them. Even in full view. Arguing for the revival of bitterns, then, this essay opens a new way of being in contemporary society—one that invites a digital culture which allows for opacity, slowness, and retreat.

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Ole Thijs

Ahab, Bartleby, and the apple of the Earth: for a planetary post-technological ethos

The oldest surviving specimen of a terrestrial globe, by no coincidence, dates from 1492, when European sailors started trying to circumnavigate the Earth, leading to the colonisation of the Americas. Some three and a half centuries later, in the telling of Herman Melville, one Ahab – descendant of European colonisers – left Nantucket angling for Moby Dick. He spared no means or men in his global chase of the White Whale, bluntly refusing any intervention in his pursuit – culminating the untimely demise of the *Pequod* and all but one aboard. Meanwhile, at his Wall Street offices, Bartleby the scrivener "would prefer not to" engage with any of the menial tasks set before him to keep the machinery of globalised capital running. Without rhyme or reason, he refused to do what was asked of him and remained inactive instead.

In this presentation, I will explore how the literary figures of Ahab and Bartleby – the total refusal of inactivity, and the total refusal of activity, respectively – can help think through the world-figures of the globe and its 21<sup>st</sup>-century successor, the planet. First, I will map 'technology' onto the age of the globe, following Heidegger and other 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers of technology in their mostly negative diagnosis of technology. Then, given the undeniably bad consequences that technology has had upon the planet, and the undeniably insufferable demands that it places upon us to adopt *yet another* novelty time and time again, I will ask what 'post-technology' tailored to planetary flourishing might look like, and how it might be distinguished from the technology that drove the age of Ahab and Bartleby.

Finally, I will invoke Ahab and Bartleby to shed light on the ascendant academic and corporate discipline of ethics *of* technology. What ethics, or rather, ethos, can we articulate instead from their opposed attitudes of refusal? The result, though speculative, will hopefully open some avenues into thinking and imagining a future beyond technology – one that lets go of the globe and is properly planetary.

## 80-82, Room: 0.01

*Chair: Judith Campagne*

Sercan Sever

Getting Out of the Tragedy of  
Technological Promise: Non-use as a  
Chance for Resonance

Technology has the potential to expand our global reach, yet this expansion often disrupts resonance relationships. Resonance, according to Hartmut Rosa, means a mutual relationship between humans and the world, realised through vivid and responsive engagement. It involves living participation and openness to transformation by both sides. Resonance, therefore, may be found not in the continuous engagement with technology, but rather in consciously avoiding it—accepting in turn a loss of global reach and efficiency.

However, this approach of deliberating non-use is seldom considered a practical option in contemporary discourse. When acknowledged, it is frequently dismissed as a culturally pessimistic critique of technology. The possibility of non-technology as a real future alternative has become increasingly unimaginable, as paradigms of technology-driven progress remain dominant and prosperity is widely attributed to technological development. Critics are either accused of technological revisionism or are attributed to simple technological determinism.

In this presentation, I draw a parallel between the tragic element of hamartia (tragic mistake), as described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, and the resonance-enhancing hopes sparked by humanity's use of technology. The expectations and promises surrounding technological development resemble the structural dynamics of hamartia. My hypothesis is as follows: Like tragic heroes, we become entangled in hamartia when we attach resonance-enhancing expectations to technology. Drawing on the current phenomenon of AI companionship, I will illustrate how technology often fails to deliver on its promise of fostering resonance; instead, it tends to prevent it. With Rosa's concept of resonance axes as an analytical framework, I show that the sought-after resonance through technology does not materialise, specifically because technology, as an intermediary, disrupts genuine connection.

The presentation concludes with a less polarizing proposal to promote the practical value of non-use rather than resorting to outright refusal. Desired resonance may emerge when individuals are empowered to consciously refrain from using technology. This freedom of choice regarding non-use often exists—even if it is neither.

Janos Mark Szakolczai	"Resisting Capture: crisis and critique of going 'Offlife'"
<p>The term <i>data</i>, ubiquitous in the Digital and now AI age, etymologically refers to that which is “given.” Yet, as information is increasingly <i>taken</i> rather than offered, the term <i>capta</i>—that which is captured—more accurately reflects contemporary practices of surveillance and extraction. This article approaches the notion of <i>refusal</i> through an ethnomethodological reflection on my own attempt to disengage from such capture. Since 2016, I have pursued what I call an <i>offlife</i> existence—phasing out devices and platforms that covertly collect personal information. Framed as an act of technological refusal rather than mere resistance or withdrawal, this experiment reveals both the promise and precarity of saying <i>no</i> to digital participation. The <i>offlife</i> is not simply a gesture of non-use but a lived negotiation of social norms, visibility, and belonging—particularly strained during the Covid-19 pandemic, when connection became both a moral and infrastructural demand. By situating this personal practice within broader histories of surveillance, datafication, and dissent, I consider how refusal emerges, falters, and transforms under contemporary conditions. The article concludes by asking what forms of life—and what futures—we might cultivate through acts of refusal that seek not isolation, but the reimagination of relationality beyond capture.</p>	
Ludo Gorzeman & Paulan Korenhof	Zen and the art of computer maintenance
<p>We live currently live in a world in which the influence of digital technology is deeply pervasive, and can hardly be overestimated: it is the fibre shaping much of our communication practices, economy, education, logistics, science, and even made its way into mundane households appliances like toothbrushes and vacuum cleaners. Yet, contrary to the increasing pervasiveness of the digital in our lives, our relation to the ‘digital fibre’ is becoming evermore distant: more and more of the digital is hidden behind graphical interfaces that increasingly keep the user at a distance to the internal workings of the computer, software is offered as a service and maintained by distant corporations, and hardware increasingly becomes ‘glued in’ and difficult to repair. This ties in to profit models and power relations: we are ‘users’, we only are expected to consume while the actors offering the tech keep the reigns that control the technology strongly in their hands—and in their wake, us—while promoting an environmentally harmful future.</p> <p>On the level of computer practices, the core of the shift discussed above, is that maintenance has moved away from the people using these technologies in their daily lives. In this presentation, we will draw out the implications of this shift and how it affects the way in which we relate to computers. We will argue that it is importance to rethink computers and their relation to them from a relation of ‘care’ through maintenance. Drawing on principles of permacomputing, we delve into the</p>	

different dimensions of this relation, moving from the daily practices to the societal system-level. We will unpack 'maintenance' as the axis of creation and destruction, and will in particular highlight the role of hacking and collective efforts for sustainable maintenance relations. We conclude that the re-appreciation and reintroduction of relations of computer maintenance in our daily lives can not only function as practices of subversion against the hegemony of big tech, but can offer paths to a different future for digital technology in society.

## 80-82, Room: Spiegelzaal

*Chair: Massimiliano Simons*

Marie-Hélène Pietraru & Jorrit Smit

Refusing industrial capture,  
rediscovering iron with urine. A low-  
tech experiment for degrowth  
metallurgy

Today, the steel industry is one of the biggest emitters of carbon worldwide through its expansive use of fossil resources. Still today, a large part of the chemical sciences is deeply aligned with the needs, expectations and infrastructures of such growth-oriented industries, like steel, but also fertilizers, plastics and pharmaceuticals. Also today, we decided, as researchers in public knowledge institutes, to start refusing this toxic relationship and to work towards a different kind of science, a different kind of relationship with iron technologies, and, by implication, an alternative kind of society.

The production of steel starts by the reduction of iron oxide into metallic iron, a reaction which is in most cases performed with large volumes of coal. Decarbonization scenarios for steel propose to use electricity or green hydrogen, typically maintaining or expanding current scale of production. Instead, we refused these hegemonic socio-technic imaginaries of green growth, that prevail in academic natural science research. In this paradigm, science provides solutions to the climate crisis (Fressoz, 2025) by decoupling GDP growth and detrimental environmental consequences through technological innovation. Degrowth scholars have however questioned the feasibility of this decoupling (Vogel & Hickel 2023), and advocate for reduction of energy and material use, toward steady-state economies. It is however still a rather open question how to rethink and reorganize natural sciences when we refuse economic growth as a driver of research and innovation: how to orient research practices to other sociotechnical systems (Smit, Biliskov & Tsagkari, 2025)?

Our work showed how a low-tech framework (Carrey, Lachaize & Carbou, 2020) is adequate for fuelling reflection on this question, as it encompasses both engineering and sociopolitical facets. We mobilized low-tech and degrowth ideas to re-design processes for iron and steel metallurgy. More in particular, we envisioned the use of solar concentration as a source of heat, and urea from urine as a source of a reducing agent (ammonia), because both process inputs are accessible, equitably distributed, renewable, and independent of centralized energy networks. Moreover, the use of human urine as a source of reducing agent self-limits the production scale of iron through this process (a few kg/y/pers), in line with the materiality decrease called for by degrowth. In this interdisciplinary contribution, we will reflect both from STS (JS) and chemistry (MHP) on the

political-epistemic and socio-technic consequences of our initial political-ecological refusal to align with the hegemonic green-growth paradigm.

Pierre Depaz

Keeping distance: spatial implications of neganthropic dynamics

Our current (industrial) technological condition involves entropic tendencies, by which constant expansion results in eluctable dissolution of nature conceived as natural resources (Stiegler et. al., 2021). Addressing the current climate crisis thus demands a countering—that is, both refusal and proposal—of this entropic tendency. Instead of the global spread of striating technologies, the onus is on finding new local modes of (material and knowledge) production.

Starting from such neganthropic imperative, this contribution intends to elucidate the implications of shifting from a globality to a locality, by thinking through the concept of geographical distance. If technology creates time (Rosa and Scheuermann, 2009), just like the clock creates seconds (Mumford, 1934), technology also erases space, an erasure which can result in global villages (McLuhan, 1962) or non-places (Augé, 1995), depending on the configuration and interpretation of concrete socio-technical assemblages. We will argue that a proactive refusal of techno-globalization involves a shift in how we perceive and value distance. Hitherto limited to being an obstacle that must be overcome (through apparatuses such as supply chain logistics, same-day delivery and near real-time communication), distance can first reappear through *Abstand* (both “standing away from” and “refraining from”) (Depaz, 2025).

In doing so, we show that a refusal of techno-globality necessarily involves an acceptance of distance as a fundamental constraint on productive activities. However, such constraint need not be negative: such a shift can reveal and reevaluate the spatial implications of contemporary technologies, of distance itself and of the places, environments and activities as they shift their networks of dependence from long-distance to short-distance. Ultimately, we argue that seriously engaging with a geographical concept of distance cannot be avoided in the process of setting the foundations of alternative modes of technological, and social relations.

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Ana Buchadas & Valeria Zambianchi

Of balance and transformation:  
unpacking decisions to (not) install  
agrivoltaics

Renewable energy technology (RET) is entering new landscapes. Technological innovation allows solar PV, a type of RET, to expand into the agriculture sector. It does so through agrivoltaics, a RET promising the best of two worlds: agriculture and energy production. At the intersection of two critical and highly political sectors for climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation (i.e., agriculture and energy), agrivoltaics are expected to involve less socio-ecological trade-offs and “redistribute existing costs and benefits” (Seay-Fleming et al., 2025, p. 2). While there is burgeoning research on the social acceptance of agrivoltaics (e.g., Carrausse & Sartre, 2023) and their uptake through a techno-economic lens (Moore et al., 2022), we know little about the (for) who(m), how, and why of (not) installing agrivoltaics (Seay-Fleming et al., 2025; Vezzoni, 2025).

To better understand the lived experiences of stakeholders entering the agrivoltaics space, our research builds on rich work in political ecology. Expanding the work by Seay-Fleming and colleagues (2025), we specifically draw on theories of power relations in land use systems (namely, institutional, structural, actor-centred and discursive power theories) and socio-ecological transformations (Shackleton et al., 2023; Tuckey et al., 2023). Against this backdrop, our work aims to gain a greater understanding of how and why actors in the agriculture and energy spaces decide on the installation (or the refusal) of agrivoltaics.

To this end, we ask the following research question: How do stakeholders in the agrivoltaics space decide on and experience the (potential) installation of this technology when co-siting two land uses, i.e. agriculture and energy production? We examine the case of Portugal, where there is a widespread non-use of agrivoltaics, expect for a handful of projects at demonstration stage. Remarkably, Spain, whose agricultural sector has a similar economic and geographical profile to the one of Portugal, has diffused agrivoltaics. In this context, studying the case of Portugal allows us to delve into the socio-political details of the *how* and *why* of technological non-use. Importantly, we intend to grasp the extent to which this non-use reflects a form of refusal of this technology from the agricultural sector.

Through survey and discourse analysis, we examine how actors in the agrivoltaics space (e.g. farmers, energy companies and policy makers, etc.) decide on the installation of this technology and how their decisions relate to their perception and experience of dual land use between agriculture and energy production through agrivoltaics.

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## 80-82, Room: Attic

*Chair: Tricia Griffin*

Rachel Ankeny

What Kind of Moral Argument Attaches to Claims about 'Food Security'? Seeking More Realism in Agricultural Genomics Publications

Scientists working in agricultural genomics (including using techniques such as genetic modification [GM] and gene editing [GE]) frequently invoke 'food security' as a rationale for their research, particularly in publications. Addressing food security problems is often presented as a moral argument that is unquestionable and then goes unquestioned by scientists and their peers. This paper will use a structured analysis of recent scientific literature in the field of agricultural genomics to investigate claims about food security, including how this term is defined (if at all) and framed in the context of crop production (for a similar approach on the concept of sustainability, see Wenzl, Buddle, and Ankeny 2025).

This topic is critical to explore as it connects closely to the promises being made in agricultural genomics and the rationales provided for certain types of research. In addition, the literature will be analyzed with attention to implicit or explicit moral claims in this literature about food security, as well as any detailed evidence provided about metrics for contributions to food security initiatives including the contextualizations associated with these arguments. Such assessments are important for fostering better communication about agricultural genomics and providing training to early career scientists in this field about public engagement. They also will permit in-depth reflection on current directions in STS and related scholarship on GM/GE by defusing simple arguments about the (im)permissibility of these technologies and developing approaches that permit more attention to the longitudinal processes and evolving practices of scientific research, and the associated moral rationales.

Koen Beumer & Lilya Khachatryan

Agricultural robotics and labour substitution: How responsible innovation closes down pathways to refusal

In this panel presentation, we explore how prevailing understandings of technological change that are embedded in theoretical approaches such as Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), close off pathways to refuse technologies.

We explore this through the case of responsible innovation in agricultural robotization. Recent developments in AI and robotics are currently used to automate an increasing number of tasks that are currently performed by agricultural workers, including planting, monitoring, and harvesting (Mahto et al., 2024).

This is widely expected (and purposefully so) to replace agricultural workers. This often concerns precarious work that is done by seasonal migrants, who now face the threat of losing their jobs to robots. Whereas responsible innovation approaches promote the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in early phases of technological developments, so as to assure the robots are aligned to societal values, this is unlikely to suffice in the case of agricultural robotics. Is it even possible to align robotics to the societal values of workers whose substitution is the key purpose the technology?

Taking a just transition and RRI lens, we systematically investigated this by conducting 26 semi-structured interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders. Our study makes two distinct contributions. The first contribution is empirical: we found that stakeholders perceive agricultural robotics justice in two distinct ways – which we call the economic-liberal and social-democratic approaches. These two coherent but distinct positions highlight different concerns as well as different solution pathways – some of which go far beyond technological redesign and alignment, and some of which include refusal of certain robotics as the most desirable pathway.

The second contribution is theoretical: we analyzed to what extent the perceived justice implications can be addressed through a responsible innovation approach. We found, however, that RRI approaches are mostly able to address justice implications associated with the economic-liberal position, and much less so with the social-democratic position. It is the latter position that includes options of technological refusal, to which conventional RRI approaches turn out to be blind. Our study systematically demonstrates the bias of responsible innovation towards economic-liberal approaches to technological development that pre-empt the refusal of technologies.

Hans Radder

Medical research without big pharma

The paper says no to the patent practices for prescription drugs by big pharmaceutical companies. It says yes to medical research without patents and to a system of drug production in the public interest. The following four facts demonstrate the urgency of creating such a system and, at the same time, which direction this change should take.

First, there is the unsustainable growth of the public costs of prescription medicines. An important cause of this growth are the monopolistic patents granted

to big pharma. Second, high drug prices provide a strong incentive for continuing corruption and abuses in the form of misrepresenting the safety and effectiveness of drugs and encouraging their use in situations where they may not be appropriate. Third, the current system is one in which the (mostly big) pharmaceutical industries make excessive profits (much larger than what is usual in other commercial businesses), while they pay hardly any tax on their profits. Fourth, a substantial part of the entire system of drug production is paid by public tax money, through a range of different contributions by national governments and governmental institutions. The result is that the public pays twice for its medicines: first, via its significant financial contributions to the various stages of the drug production system and, second, for generally overpriced and often excessively expensive medicines.

The conclusion is that these facts require and justify a shift in our policies for drug research and production. In the first section of the paper we demonstrate that abolishing medical patents is scientifically, socially and morally preferable. The second section argues that it is also economically and financially profitable: it will lead to strongly reduced prices for medicines at pharmacies and hospitals. In the final section we introduce and explain a concrete alternative (medical research without patents) that is shown to be organizationally and socio-politically practicable.

In this paper, our primary focus is on medical research in wealthier countries. But of course, the far greater affordability of generic prescription drugs in a system without patents will also be to the advantage of low and middle-income countries. After all, it is the people of these countries who suffer most from the current monopolistic system.

Gemma Milne	Refusing lab to market
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In this paper, I explore the idea of tech refusal not through the refusal to interact with a technology, but rather the refusal to organise its materialisation through harmful means. The 'lab to market' process is a socially constructed manifestation of a long history of neoliberal projects which ideated, promoted and formally legalised the very phenomenon of science and technology commercialisation. It is usually depicted as a linear process which includes various hurdles would-be entrepreneurs need to systematically and successfully leap over – lest they fall into the 'Valley of Death' – in order to transform their scientific discovery into a material product which can be bought and sold in global markets. Steps include patenting, business model design, market validation, company formation, regulatory approval, raising finance, customer acquisition, manufacturing scale-up, and product marketing.

The lab to market process is the status quo and the Gold Standard: it is seen as both the most efficient way to 'make science real' through the vehicle of the market, and it is also considered the 'only way' to materialise science given the 'realities' of

high funding requirements, inefficient universities and bureaucratic public systems. There is, however, increasing interest in actively 'refusing' the lab to market process through alternative organisational forms, modes of governance, and ownership structures. One example is the emerging model of the Focused Research Organisation (FRO) – a non-profit organisation designed to address the organisational-design gap for managing scientific projects that are bigger than an academic lab can undertake, more coordinated than a loose consortium or themed department, and not directly profitable enough to be a venture-backed startup or industrial R&D project. FROs pursue prespecified, quantifiable technical milestones within a finite time (~5 years), and actively deploy public goods (e.g. open-sourcing data, spinning out nonprofits and mission-driven ventures, or partnering with existing institutions). While FROs have gained some momentum in the US, their development in Europe remains nascent. As such, Convergent Research (a US non-profit which promotes and funds the early stages of FROs) has recently expanded its incubation and launch programme in the UK. Building on early insights from research examining the launch of this first UK FRO cohort and the dynamics of FRO early-development, I explore the realities of refusal: what it looks and feels like to engage in 'another way' and try to materialise science without succumbing to the harmful status quo.

**PANEL**

**SESSION 3**

**Friday 6th February**

**16.00-17.30**

## 80-82, Room: 0.01

*Chair: Maud Oostindie*

Chris Hesselbein & Sahar  
Tavakoli

Paratechnology: From Refusal to Repair,  
Innovation, and Critique

In this paper, we examine acts of technological refusal surrounding non-ionizing electromagnetic radiation and frequencies (EMR/EMF) found in wireless technologies such as 5G and related systems. Enacted by communities claiming to suffer from electromagnetic hypersensitivity (EMH), such self-termed 'electrosensitives' not only challenge commonly accepted safety assurances regarding EMR/EMF through acts of rejection, but do so in a manner that enables the (re)assertion of their own, medically contested, sensitivity claims. Beyond engaging in the more obvious (but also less viable) solution of limiting proximity, electrosensitives produce and consume wearable, portable, and domestic technologies designed to mitigate exposure—devices that adopt the vocabulary and rhetorical structures of technoscience, even as they construct narratives incongruent with scientific consensus, espousing goals and principles that should not be feasible or possible according to current scientific knowledge.

From the perspective of Science and Technology Studies, electrosensitives, and the devices and techniques they rely on, present a case study in how refusal or resistance to a particular technology is enacted, and the conditions under which this occurs. In this paper, we explore how these 'anti-EMR' devices might be conceptualized as 'paratechnologies': devices whose feasibility or functioning are explained by epistemologies outside of or on the fringes of scientific consensus. The notion of 'paratechnologies' is itself a further development of 'pseudotechnologies'—'irreparably dysfunctional devices' that nonetheless come to be imbued with meaning and authority by their users (Hansson, 2020, 692). What distinguishes paratechnologies from pseudotechnologies is that the former are intentionally framed as functional within an alternative epistemic framework, rather than – as would be the case in the latter – misguided, broken, or fraudulent.

Importantly, introducing the concept of paratechnology offers a means of expanding what constitutes the act of refusal. These devices are meaningful not only for their purported ability to mitigate EMR/EMF, but for how they enable and materialize refusal itself, making rejection of mainstream

technologies both tangible and performative. In turn, acts of refusal highlight the epistemic work such 'alternative' technologies perform, showing how workability is constructed within alternative frameworks. In this way, the study of paratechnologies opens a wider range of epistemologically interesting objects, revisiting technology as a form of knowledge as well as the more often discussed forms of object or practice. Finally, the concept of paratechnology connects with broader debates on the (non)uses and impacts of emergent technologies, such as AI or longevity medicine, a connection that offers, in turn, a distinctive form of critique grounded in both practice and belief.

Tanja Ahlin

Re-theorizing resistance to social robots

Over the past two decades, significant public and private investment has been directed toward the development of social robots – not only in Japan, which is frequently framed as exemplary in this domain, but also across Europe, North America, and beyond. Yet, despite repeated promises, social robots have largely failed to achieve the mainstream societal uptake anticipated by policymakers and industry actors. High-profile humanoid robots such as SoftBank’s Pepper have even been discontinued. By contrast, animal-shaped social robots – most notably the robotic seal PARO, in circulation since the late 1990s – have demonstrated comparatively greater longevity and acceptance, particularly in care contexts. Empirical studies consistently report that PARO can contribute to improved mental health outcomes among older adults, including reductions in anxiety, depressive symptoms, and loneliness. Yet even PARO may be rejected by its potential users.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a dialysis unit of an Austrian hospital using the therapeutic seal robot Paro, I present an article co-authored with Anna Mann, which offers a more nuanced account by foregrounding ambiguity rather than opposition. We argue that the ontological ambiguity of Paro—an animal-like machine that blurs species, emotional, and technological boundaries—elicits conflicting responses among carers. These ambivalent reactions are not merely individual or psychological but are shaped by professional norms, institutional hierarchies, and tacit notions of what constitutes ‘good care’ and who should do which part of it. We show how Paro’s deployment disrupts existing care relations, leading to tensions not only between humans and machines, but among staff members whose care practices and professional identities are unequally affected. Furthermore, we introduce the concept of “arbitrary care collectives” to account for the often-overlooked influence of non-significant others, such as fellow patients, whose reactions shape the robot’s use. In doing so, the article theorizes resistance to new technologies as a productive site of negotiation over the meaning, boundaries, and sociality of care.

This article is a starting point for my Veni-funded project “Paw Support”, which ethnographically explores technological adoption and resistance in long-term care in the Netherlands. The project advances understandings of technological relationality by conceptualizing how social robots join and transform “care collectives.” It further examines the dynamics of technological resistance as a meaningful social practice, offering both theoretical insights and actionable recommendations—including non-technological alternatives—for more personalized and contextually sensitive elder care.

Elöise Soulier & Jason  
Branford

Relational autonomy and technological refusal:  
The case of genAI

The familiar narrative of inescapable technological progress has reached fever pitch with the last generations of AI technologies. The very same actors who develop these technologies simultaneously present them as inevitable while also, somewhat paradoxically, warning against their immense dangers<sup>1</sup>. In this context, strategies of technological ‘refusal’ (cf. Cifor, et al. 2019; Ganesh & Moss, 2022; Gangadharan, 2020; Plaut, 2023) appear at the same time essential and bound to fail. If refusal is intended to meaningfully transform the current state, then legitimate concerns arise that such activities will either prove ineffective or accessible only to the very privileged.

We argue that the problems of technological refusal can only be meaningfully addressed if we envisage decision-making relationally. We propose that relational conceptions of autonomy (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Oshana, 2014; Westlund 2009; Mackenzie 2019) constitute a useful framework for both identifying the pitfalls of particular acts of refusal and for recognizing the characteristics that render other instances more productive. Indeed, a decision to refuse a technology is not made by atomistic individuals, but by individuals taken in networks of interconnections and interdependences: it has to do with our ability to decide who we rely on as well as what we depend on. Accordingly, there is a need to acknowledge and reflect on the extent to which acts of refusal emerge from, feed into, and attain meaning in socially conditioned and institutionally structured spaces. Acts of refusal should be made sense of in terms of how much we are able to structure our dependences differently or in terms of how we enable others, by our acts of refusal, to do so. This, therefore, requires us to account for the economic, social, and institutional power asymmetries that structure what it takes for each of us to be able to depend differently.

We illustrate this understanding of refusal by way of the, for many, increasingly troubling case of generative AI use in the academic context. We examine different

instances of refusal in a relational framework, to investigate the circumstances under which refusal of generative AI technologies supports an emancipatory restructuring of our dependencies.

1 See e.g. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/30/technology/ai-threat-warning.html>

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# 80-82, Room: Spiegelzaal

*Chair: Dani Shanley*

Hugo Idarraga

Fugitive Traces

This presentation arises from a practical experiment that failed. In attempting to train a YOLOv8 neural network to detect and track small songbirds feeding in my backyard, I confronted the limits of artificial neural networks (ANNs) not as mere technical shortcomings but as epistemological thresholds. Despite careful training, tuning, and dataset design, the model consistently collapsed when faced with the birds' erratic, multidirectional, and discontinuous movements. Detection was achievable, but prediction and continuity failed. That failure—rather than the success of the model—became the true site of inquiry. From it emerged a series of questions about what kinds of experiences, phenomena, and worlds escape the computational logics of legibility, prediction, and control.

While deep learning architectures are celebrated as "universal approximators," my failed experiment demonstrated the fragility of this assumption. The birds' trajectories exposed how ANN systems depend on the presupposition that the world unfolds as a continuous, computable function, flattening ambiguity into certainty and discarding uncertainty as error. Drawing on Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* and Lauren Bridges's notion of "unbecoming," I interpret this breakdown as a moment of epistemological refusal—an interruption that unsettles the colonial and positivist epistemologies embedded in machine learning. The birds' unpredictable flight, though not intentional resistance, performs a nonhuman refusal: a refusal of legibility, of capture, and of reduction to statistical pattern.

Through this failure, the presentation situates itself within broader histories of classification and control, where both humans and nonhumans were rendered calculable, extractable, and surveillable. The algorithm's rejection region—the space of uncertain values beneath the confidence threshold—becomes the central figure of this analysis. It is within this zone of discarded data that alternative ontologies and epistemologies dwell: the ambiguous, the indeterminate, and the uncomputable that dominant systems exclude. Rather than optimizing these failures away, I treat them as openings to think otherwise their computational possibilities.

This presentation thus argues that failure is not a deficit but a method to find what refuses to be captured and patterned under the colonial logic of the excluded and included. It demonstrates how an empirical experiment's collapse can generate theoretical insight into refusal as both an epistemological and political act. In the

untrackable trajectories of birds—and in the model's inability to predict them—we encounter the limits of computation and glimpse the possibility of other, fugitive worlds taking flight.

Ryan van Nood

At home with the non-human, at home with the human:  
philosophy of health after techno-modernism

If the coherence and normative character of the concept of biodiversity depends ultimately on a sense of what nature as a whole is like, and therefore also a sense of our place in that whole, then 'biodiversity' requires a philosophical anthropology (Grey 2019). And if 'biodiversity' might provoke human self-awareness to general solidarity with the living, it is worth exploring certain manifestations of our most intimate engagements with the natural world, namely in agriculture and medicine, that insist on decentering technology in ways that pair the centrality of biodiversity with an expansion of human self-understanding. The domain of agroecology centers biodiversification and its reliance on local cultures of ecological discernment as a ground of social justice and food sovereignty. Empirical results regarding the therapeutic effects of biophilic design testify to the extinction of biodiverse experience at the hands of the functionalist sterilization of the lived environment. Analogously with 'biodiversity,' agroecology and 'biophilia' variously attract frustration for their fundamental resistance to technical standardization (and so, e.g., to 'innovation' frames). Given recent work tying agroecology to an ecological anthropology and ethics (Whelan 2025), related work employing Hans Jonas' philosophical biology toward reframing the life sciences and the Anthropocene debate (Grey 2023; Chernilo 2017), we might say that doing justice to 'biodiversity' requires seeing the instinctual appreciation of flourishing biological variety as an essentially human, essentially moral sensibility. The sheer specificity and possible alternatives within a given ecology require local deployments of human discernment that are never final or perfected, but the spontaneous basis (and cultures) of that form of human attention can be covered over by the prevailing technological shapes of our endeavors to grow food and be whole. And if it belongs to human natural history that our most paradigmatic images of ease and sustained human habitation just are biodiverse, then recounting the above discussions might expand the moral imagination we bring to conversations about 'planetary health.'

Zoë Robaey & Mariana Hase Ueta	Imagination as a collective capability for resistance as refusal
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When discussing transformations to sustainability, one is brought to employ a variety of foresight methods to create different versions of future worth striving for. In part, these are anchored in data gathered in the past, realities of today, that together form trends. Sustainability transformations, however, require going beyond descriptive accounts of the future and require a reflection of the good life to help transform ways of doing. The challenge is that these visions of the good life are plural (Swiestra 2008), and often a dominant view de facto leads the transformation. Should we accept this diversity and asymmetry of futures, or should we strive to find new devices to help us flourish? We hope we can still find flourishing.

When speaking of human flourishing and the good life, we see the capability approach as an ethical theory that can provide grounds for a normative reflection in transformations. Specifically, we examine the capability of imagination. In this paper, we discuss the capability of imagination by investigating the case of protein transition in the dairy sector with the advent of precision fermentation. This allows us to further define the capability of imagination, and evaluate its transformative potential for foresight exercises in sustainable food systems.

We contrast mainly two contributions on the capabilities approach to our empirical case. While Nussbaum often refers to imagination, she does not see it as a basic capability. Indeed Fletcher (2016) mentions that imagination might be a complex capability instead of a basic one. For capabilities, basic or complex, functionings can be formulated. Fletcher provides categories of functionings for imagination as a capability. We start by contrasting these to our case, and exploring whether there are more functionings relevant to imagination. In a first step, we find that identified functionings of imagination are in fact grounded in people's memories and current experiences of the world, thus drawing a continuum between horizons of memory and horizons of imagination (Hase Ueta et al. manuscript in preparation). In a second step, we observe that these functionings require a collective. This brings us to question whether and how imagination is a collective capability. Using Rosignoli's (2018) distinctions, we motivate that imagination can be conceived of as a collective combined capability. Collective capabilities cannot be exercised by one individual alone and the environmental crisis we face, underpinned by dominant frames of doing, provide external conditions that require the development of this capability. Collective capabilities help resist structural injustices. In this presentation, we suggest that in contrast to using imagination to predict dominant narratives, we should instead see collective imagination as a way of resisting dominant narrative. We do so by formulating an approach we call coalition of imaginations. Coalition of

imaginations is a concept anchored in feminist ethics (see Lépinard and also Lugones), looking to develop resistance as refusal to dominant narratives by bringing disadvantaged actors together. In that sense, we present a concept and a method of resistance as refusal.

Michael Kibedi

The spirit of Bartleby

**The Spirit of Bartleby:** In defence of refusal is an art-led talk that reflects on the generative and creative possibilities afforded by Black refusal, in response to systemic harms that are too often accepted as necessary milestones of technological progress.

Equitable access to digital technology is an overriding concern for political, corporate, and civic reasons. Exclusion from, or an inability to master digital technologies is suggestive of geopolitical or economic disadvantage.

Remedial strategies are often additive, concerned with innovating within digital ecosystems that are transactional, extractive, and exploitative by nature while overlooking the data regimes, ecocidal material impacts or racial capitalist imbalances of digital labour supply chains underpinning technological growth and profitability.

In response, Black refusal is presented as a counter-practice. Using Tina M. Camp's *Black visibility and the practice of refusal (2019)* as a scaffold, the positionality of Blackness becomes both subject and object. Black refusal is shown to be part of a continuity of emancipatory acts which are in equal parts protective, dignified, and joyful.

While still at the early stages of contending with Afro-skepticism set out in the DISCO Network's *Technoskepticism: Between Possibility and Refusal (Stanford University Press, 2025)*, Black refusal becomes a gateway that reintroduces care and playful experimentation as a path towards refusal as design — transforming a word with such obstructive connotations into one that is freeing — stepping closer towards liberatory technological futures that evade our imaginations.

By naming Bartleby (a reference to the titular character of Herman Melville's short story), we conclude by inviting the possibility of refusal as a subtle reclamation of agency — asserting our intolerance of the dominant cultural, gender, and racial norms embedded in our technological ecosystems.

## 80-82, Room: Attic

*Chair: Flora Lysen*

Dylan Orchard

Mapping Accessible Resistances to Artificial Intelligence and their Motivations

The focus of my research is on practices of everyday resistance to AI mobilisations. Engaging with both the cultural imaginary of AI and its practical realities I look at both specific tactics of resistance that emerge and the various 'layers' they may fall into. From the simple resistance of rejection, where discomfort, disdain or necessity draw out a desire to negate, break or undermine both generative and predictive AI implementations. To craft forms of resistance which draw upon the uniquely human engagement with technology that creates both spaces of conflict with and cultures of opposition to AI technologies.

I also draw a line from often, by necessity, covert and oblique acts of everyday resistance through to more organised forms of action, primarily through destituent organising and culture building - focusing especially on the need for the everyday as a primer for any wider action. While any individual act or challenge may not lead to broader organising and action, a sense of resistance is essential for those movements to grow. The everyday both breaks the narratives of inevitability and omnipotence and reinforces individual and communal agency against seemingly unassailable hierarchical impositions.

As a foundation for my work I also assert that whilst AI represents a novel mechanism for the assertion of power from a central point of authority it doesn't do so under any new structures of power. Instead it represents a reiteration of perhaps contemporised but still familiar models of oppression similar to (and drawing heavily from) the dehumanising and marginalising natures of colonialism, class and racism.

Ultimately I suggest that the everyday represents a much neglected but still essential starting point for resistance to AI and its current mobilisations. One which, when recognised, draws out both a sense of agency and a capacity to challenge what is presented as inevitable.

Naomi Wynter-Vincent	Bartleby and the Mimetic Embrace of AI in the Age of DOGE
<p>'The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration.'</p> <p>Bartleby, the scrivener, refuses to write, copy, or check his own and others' work for inaccuracies. Indeed, the title character of Melville's 1853 tale refuses – though not in so few words – to do anything at all: he <i>prefers not to</i> do anything asked of him.</p> <p>The character of Bartleby has been previously theorised from many angles: as portrait of mental illness, or hero of passive resistance, a 'quiet quitter' <i>avant la lettre</i>. He has been described as a stimulus to the educative instincts of the kindly lawyer-narrator who wavers between patience and exasperation, and as a more general principle of refusal, grit in the machinery of capitalism, obstacle to the maximisation of value.</p> <p>This paper addresses an overlooked aspect of Melville's story. In a suggestive afterword, the narrator hints that Bartleby may have worked previously in a 'dead letter' office, handling undeliverable mail. While previous readings (by Derrida and others) have taken up this point with enthusiasm, they have neglected the further detail that Bartleby may have been dismissed suddenly from a public role due to a change in government administration. Re-reading <i>Bartleby, The Scrivener</i> during the second Trump administration brings to mind the contemporary predicament of those government workers summarily dismissed by DOGE, the 'department of government efficiency', which has used the advent of workplace AI to justify mass redundancy.</p> <p>I propose a new reading of <i>Bartleby</i> that builds upon this contemporary resonance, finding the logic of the large language model in Melville's tale. As a copyist, Bartleby operates in a world of words he does not author. After initially producing an 'extraordinary quantity of writing' with 'no pause for digestion', his industry breaks down at the point where he is asked to check for discrepancies in his own or others' work, perhaps refusing to be discovered in human error against a machinic standard. The linguistic token of Bartleby's refusal – his 'preferring' – begins to appear unselfconsciously in other characters even as he prefers not to (and perhaps cannot) offer a 'reasoning model' for these. This mimetic account resituates Bartleby's behaviour more specifically as a refusal of the technology that replaces human endeavour.</p>	

At what point do the errors of AI become moral grounds for rejecting its further development rather than attempting to perfect it? Numerous AI-related controversies reignite this question in public conversations. As projects such as the AI Incident Database or the Awful AI document demonstrate, the range of consequences is vast: denial of loans and welfare benefits, misrecognition and further detention, or inability to cross borders. While some see these fallibilities as manifestations of fundamental limits of AI that are beyond repair, others remain hopeful that at least some of these mistakes will be eliminated in the future.

Thus, the imagination of AI fallibilities—and the interrelated politics of defining them that come along—has become a discursive node that connects people with contrasting visions of technological futures. This paper problematizes the relationship between the fallibility of technologies—mundane and routine errors, breakdowns, and glitches—and the cessation or abandonment of technology through the intentional act of refusal. While all technologies are fallible (in the broad sense of the deviation from someone's expectations or not fulfilling their function), not all of them are rejected because of that. Respectively, refusal can be motivated in cases where technologies work exactly as intended, precisely because the intentions behind them are what is being refused.

Yet, there is a space where refusal and technology's various mundane breakdowns intersect. That is, scenarios of refusal are motivated by situations in which the qualitative or quantitative extent of technology's mundane failings becomes intolerable. My contribution highlights how technical normativity—materially and historically specific ways through which concrete technologies err and break down—comes to matter in reflecting on the relationship between technological errors and refusal. Relying on philosophical and historical accounts of AI and machine learning's technical lineage, I argue that its technical normativity implies that the errors are recursively incorporated and productively internalized for models' development, rather than being ruptures to technology's functioning, understood in terms of mechanical, linear causality.

This epistemological shift from seeing error as a deviation to be eliminated to a source of information (in a cybernetic, algorithmic conceptualization) is politically relevant for thinking about refusal and the fallibility of technologies insofar as it changes what counts as 'success' and 'failure' in sociotechnical systems. Keeping this shift and its political implications in mind also helps normative reasoning about errors and refusal.

Berta Galofré

The robot's face: Toward a Non-Dehumanization for  
Relating to Artificial Intelligence

Levinas's notion of face has recently been used by the academic community to address specific issues confronting contemporary challenges related to technology and artificial intelligence. One of the most recurring debates concerns the possibility of applying Levinas's concept of face to digital face. Likewise, discussions have also focused on the ethical consequences that arise in the interaction between digital profiles/faces, as these relations exceed the parameters of traditional human interaction.

Emmanuel Levinas, who did not witness the advent of the new technological era, could never have asked about the new forms of faces humanity must confront – nor, consequently, their ethical implications. Nevertheless, much of the existing academic literature seeks to address the encounter with the robot's face through Levinas's major texts, especially *Totality and Infinity* – a book that focuses exclusively on the human face – speculating on what Levinas might have said about the robot's face. Although the philosopher never explicitly addressed this specific issue, he did explore different ways in which the face might appear, particularly to help us discern what, though it may resemble a face, is not one. A clear example of this can be found in his reflections on the relation with the animal “face” and, more pertinently for the present discussion, in his considerations of artistic practice, especially concerning the ways in which the “face” is, whether intentionally or not, represented as a human-created artifact. My view is that Levinas's reflections on the relation between art and the face offer a more pertinent lens through which to approach this challenge.

Building on Levinas's reflections on the capacity of art to give or simulate the face – assuming that the artistic and robotic artifacts are distinct phenomena, even though both are human creations aimed at achieving maximal resemblance to the human – I intend, in this proposal, to explore not only the consequences of a mere robot or machine, at its highest stage of intelligent development, appearing to act as human, coming to be considered a moral face, while remaining a non-human, but also to interrogate how a subject, aware of its non-human nature, can nevertheless engage with it ethically. This means that this contribution will also consider the risks of dehumanization and discrimination that may arise from potentially abusive and dehumanizing interaction with AI and will seek to address these risks through Levinas's meditations on how to resist or refuse the effects that relating to a non-face might entail.

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