

Critical Computation Bureau  
**Editorial –  
“Dialogues on  
Recursive  
Colonialisms,  
Speculative  
Computation,  
and the Techno-  
social”**

01/03

e-flux journal #123 — december 2021 Critical Computation Bureau  
Editorial – “Dialogues on Recursive Colonialisms, Speculative Computation, and the Techno-social”

Issue 123 of *e-flux journal* is guest-edited by the Critical Computation Bureau (CCB), a collective of researchers and writers working between technology and culture, computer science and information theory, aesthetics and politics. The members – Luciana Parisi, Ezekiel Dixon-Román, Tiziana Terranova, Oana Pârvan, and Brian D’Aquino – are situated in the US, the UK, and Southern Italy, and engage with networks spanning several continents to intervene in the techno-politics of racial capitalism and its recursive regeneration. We understand recursivity, a central concern for this issue, to be about the self-regulation, self-adaption, and self-regeneration of systems – including the recursive regeneration of the colonial episteme, which we call “recursive colonialisms.” We also understand speculative computation as the possibility of re-elaborating the limits of knowledge from the standpoint of what cannot be measured. Following Cedric J. Robinson, we see racial capitalism as the process of extracting social and economic value from specific groups on the basis of race. Thinking through this method and process as well as its incumbent epistemologies and cosmologies, this issue asks what technology can tell us about the recursive formation of racial capitalism, and how the logic of recursive feedback (foundational to cybernetics) becomes a basis for the ways in which the machine’s role as a medium for computation is also that of a medium for today’s racial capitalism.

This issue stems from dialogues conducted during the CCB’s symposium Recursive Colonialism, Artificial Intelligence, and Speculative Computation, which took place online over two weeks in December 2020, and included more than twenty speakers and a selection of artworks by contributors from Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa. This special issue then departs from perspectives on representational form, discourse, and the critique of technology to interrogate how the servo-mechanic model of knowledge reproduction has been foundational to both the abstraction/extraction of value constituting racial capitalism and the postcolonial genealogies of contemporary techno-social networks.

The dialogic texts in this issue address the intersections of colonialism, racial capitalism, and technology, particularly foregrounding types of computation and machine epistemology (or automated learning) that have configured intelligent automated knowledge systems such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and techno-social networks. Furthermore, the issue

extends the dialogues from the conference in written form and expands upon their questions – also addressing Black Feminist Poethics, haunting algorithms, and Mediterranean techno-cultures in incomplete, recursive modes of critical and speculative thinking.

Working in the strange attraction between speculative approaches, critical theorizations, and imaginary practices, this issue also asks how a technology or machine epistemology constituted by the entanglement between racial capitalism, recursive colonialisms, and computation can still overcome the overrepresentation of Man or Promethean cosmogonies. How does machine epistemology also allow for futures that run counter to a mere feeding into and from techno-social networks? In this procedure of abstraction, which could be called socio-technical or techno-sociogenic, the iterability of techno-signs through the flesh discloses the possibilities of otherwise languages, otherwise worlds, otherwise cognitions. If machine epistemology depended only on the cognitive extension or prosthetics of the brain's neural networks, it would be just another version of the Promethean project of the mastery of tools. Machine epistemology does not articulate cognition in terms of embodiment in an environment, but rather in terms of a form of cognition. This entails a possibility for a techno-semiosis whereby the flesh at once remains and becomes the medium of the world and as such becomes a techno-sign of cultural formations. We have thus become aware of how the socio-technical or techno-sociogenic can inherit existing cosmogonies, not in a deterministic or imitative way, but through its iterability. But if techno-sociogenic flesh is shaped by repetition with alterity, it also takes on a mix of cosmogonies to make something else.

What we call “cosmo-computation” entails a fully automated recursive system for which there is supposed to be no human-in-the-loop. This term applies Yuk Hui's concept of cosmotechnics (which calls for a technical mediation between metaphysics and cultures that do not conform to the universal standardization of knowledge) to the cognitive paradigm of technology by asking what it would mean to experiment with auto-imaging multiple ontologies and multiple metaphysics through computation. But cosmo-computation still maintains the specter of whiteness and intensified legacies of racial capital within itself. These are legacies whereby computational schema cannot erase anti-blackness or the brutalities and techno-semiotic hieroglyphics marked in flesh. In other words, cosmo-

computation must also work on the cyber-mechanics of the machine in relation to slavery, to take on and step outside the dialectic of the human and the thing.

But how to run with cosmo-computational epistemologies without risking a reinforced universal logic or another plea to techno-cultural difference in the name of multiculturalism? What critical space is left to counter-actualize the recursivity of this double pincer that simply conceals the monologic discourse of self-determination through a proliferation of dualities? How can cosmo-computation – as a procedure of existing as techno-flesh – become a way to construct worlds from the heretical rules of what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls “difference without separability”?

Cosmo-computation does not coincide with any reclamation of the modern history of technology that starts from the local, the periphery, or the colonies of the West. Its critical possibility lies in exposing the operative power of the universalism-multiculturalism double pincer in preserving the overrepresentation of Man. This critical moment is undoubtedly haunted by the “continuous present” (Fred Moten) of the brutalities of racial capitalism, colonialisms, and slavery. Thus, it must also become surrounded by practices of fugitivity, by speculative moments, methods, and activities that spring out of the negative negation (da Silva) of the slave, the refugee, the woman, the immigrant, the trans through the existence of otherwise techno-flesh that refuses the saving promise of Promethean Man.

Our proposition is that machine epistemology, as a cosmo-computational affair, must not only challenge the view of techno-capital but also the human form. Within the history of machine epistemology, industrial capital took on the prototype of automation, replacing the archetype of enslaved labor. With the invention of the robot, the enslaved became enfleshed in machines as much as machines became the hosts of already brutally wounded flesh. Even if this modern form of recursive epistemology extended colonial mentalities into the model of global ecologies of extraction and commodity exchange, it had already voraciously incorporated into techno-capital an irreversible contagion that infiltrated the cosmogony of Man and his belief in the bio-economic myth of evolution.

From this standpoint, it seems essential today to not separate the critical from the speculative moment. Speculation is not the

02/03

e-flux journal #123 — december 2021 Critical Computation Bureau  
Editorial – “Dialogues on Recursive Colonialisms, Speculative Computation, and the Techno-social”

opposite of critique, but rather the whirlwind, the spiral, the vortex, the invaginations of critique inside-out. In the critical there is always the possibility of the speculative. As such, cosmo-computation can also be a space of transversal epistemological possibility whereby otherwise cosmogonies are not originated by, from, or against Promethean Man, but are rather *ante*-universal patterns, fractal algorithms that come before and run beneath, alongside of, and break across the pattern.

The dialogues in this issue are both critical and speculative interventions into practicing cosmo-computation as thinking with “difference without separability” and venturing into how AI – from expert systems to machine learning to interactive computational languages – contributes to defining what computational epistemologies can do. As much as recursivity preserves the iterability of functions and constitutes the structural parts of an overrepresentational whole, it also maintains a rhythm that is out of sync with itself, an atonality or dissonance in the beats. This out-of-sync rhythm and computational dissonance are the reverberations of a haunting that is not a trace of what was and no longer is, but rather tells us of the rhythm that stands apart. It tells us what exists within its elemental functions of counting infinities and of assembling together what falls out of patterns of recognition.

What recursivity therefore entails is how the complexity of critique and speculation cannot be separated into two forms – into models or paradigms that are in contradiction or that fall into a linear order. Recursivity tells us that critique and speculation can happen at once – multiple times in space and multiple spaces in time. But this simultaneity also demarcates the interlayering of techno-flesh in the ongoing project of Promethean cosmogonies that have returned across and within the computational forms of colonialisms and racial capitalism.

Speculation therefore works from within critique through the iterative moments exposing the continuous performance of anti-blackness and the renewed conjunctures of auto-poiesis that obliterate difference. From the techno-surrogacy of intelligent flesh to the necropower of planetary computation to the biopolitics of debilitation and the modulations of slow life/death, modes of haunting return to expose the 0 value of blackness across stateless and dispossessed realities of techno-social practices around the globe. What the enfleshed machine can do is to explode within recursive procedures of disability and debilitation anytime and

everywhere.

x

03/03

e-flux journal #123 — december 2021 Critical Computation Bureau  
Editorial – “Dialogues on Recursive Colonialisms, Speculative Computation, and the Techno-social”