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# Political Theory of the Digital Constellation

Sebastian Berg · Daniel Staemmler · Thorsten Thiel

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**Abstract** The introductory contribution to this special issue on “Political Theory of the Digital Constellation” addresses the conditions and possibilities of political theory’s engagement with digital developments. The motivation for this inquiry is the growing interest in questions of political theory arising from the digital transformation, as well as the acknowledgement that digitalisation not only changes politics, but conversely that politics also shapes digitalisation. The article identifies three pitfalls of previous engagement: The narrowing of the subject of “digitalisation” to the topic of the “internet” and, thereby, to the aspect of communication, the disregard for the technicality of the digital, and the insufficient recognition that (digital) technology is political. To avoid these pitfalls, the research perspective of the digital constellation is presented. The digital constellation serves as an epistemological guide that helps to structure theoretical reflection on the interrelationship between digitalisation and political questions. Ultimately, the outlines of the political theory in the digital constellation become clear in the fourteen contributions of the special volume, which are presented in conclusion.

**Keywords** Political theory · Digitalisation · Digital constellation · Technology · Epistemology

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## Politische Theorie der digitalen Konstellation

**Zusammenfassung** Der einführende Beitrag zum Sonderheft „Politische Theorie der digitalen Konstellation“ widmet sich den Bedingungen und Möglichkeiten der politiktheoretischen Auseinandersetzung mit digitalen Entwicklungen. Das wachsende Interesse an politiktheoretischen Fragen im Kontext der digitalen Transformation und die Erkenntnis der politischen Gestaltbarkeit von Digitalisierung, bilden den Anlass für die Beschäftigung. Der Beitrag identifiziert drei Fallstricke der bisherigen Auseinandersetzung: Die Engführung des Gegenstands Digitalisierung auf den Aspekt des Internets und damit der Kommunikation, die Missachtung der Technizität digitaler Phänomene und die mangelnde Anerkennung der politischen Aspekte von (digitaler) Technik. Um diese Fallstricke zu vermeiden, wird die Forschungsperspektive der digitalen Konstellation vorgestellt. Diese dient als erkenntnistheoretische Handreichung, um die theoretische Reflexion des Wechselverhältnisses von Digitalisierung und Politik zu strukturieren. Die Umrisse politischer Theorie in der digitalen Konstellation werden in den vierzehn Beiträgen des Sonderbands deutlich, die abschließend vorgestellt werden.

**Schlüsselwörter** Politische Theorie · Digitalisierung · Digitale Konstellation · Technik · Erkenntnistheorie

### 1 Digital transformation and political theory

Digitalisation changes politics. It changes how political decisions are made, for example when policies are decided upon solely on the basis of complex model calculations, as exemplified by the measures to contain the Corona pandemic and the fight to limit climate change. It also changes how policy is implemented: Think, for example, of the promises of administrative automation in the *smart city*, in which citizens' behaviour is responded to more and more closely, and there are attempts to measure and steer it. Of course, it also changes how politics is communicated—responsively, through which channels, at what speed and in what tone, how and to what extent it is tailored for an audience. From the perspective of citizenship, too, politics becomes visible in a different way, and above all, is open to a different kind of discussion. Citizens are less dependent on a fixed corridor of mass media that prepare and evaluate information and opinions for them. By means of digital infrastructures, collective action can be organised and documented more efficiently and shared with others—even across borders. We practise these changed possibilities of reacting to political events, of acting ourselves, but also of being governed, every day anew. Often in banal routines that have nothing to do with organised politics, such as when we communicate with friends or acquaintances through various channels, take a position or decide things; then again in explicitly political contexts in which we engage or articulate ourselves, in which we erect barriers or join forces.

The analysis and evaluation of this change, which transforms almost every spheres of social activity, is giving rise to a gigantic field of research. Political science is called upon to respond to digitalisation in its theories and methods, to understand

it better and to explain its consequences. This challenge is also one for political theory: not so much due to the threat of theory becoming obsolete in view of the dominance of inductive procedures, as has been claimed in the context of Big Data and artificial intelligence (Anderson 2008; Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier 2013); nor (only) because the data-like constitution of the digital tends to privilege quantitative and inductive research approaches. But rather because central concepts with which political theory is concerned are also affected by this change: democracy and the rule of law, the public sphere and sovereignty, freedom and solidarity.

So far, political science and especially political theory have been relatively slow to reflect the changes taking place, especially in comparison to neighbouring disciplines such as sociology, media studies or communication studies.<sup>1</sup> There are many reasons for this hesitancy, including a longstanding neglect of research on the relationship between technical infrastructures and political action, as well as the weak structural presence of political theorists in the interdisciplinary research structures that shape the field of digitalisation studies nationally and internationally. Recently, however, interest in the topic of digitalisation has been growing, which can be attributed to at least two aspects.

It is increasingly being recognised that digitalisation is not simply a fashionable topic, but indeed raises new perspectives and questions. In this respect, the scientific discourse on digitalisation is similar to the two other major transformation discourses of the last decades: globalisation and climate change. Dealing with digi-

<sup>1</sup> This finding applies internationally as well as with regard to Germany. For a comparative overview of the structures and focal points in the international political science research landscape, see Kneuer and Milner (2019). International political theory is still hardly concerned with questions of digitalisation, even though essays have been published more frequently in relevant journals recently, see e.g. Runciman (2017) or the debate on the role of algorithms and data in political theory (Panagia 2020; Bowman 2021; Koopman 2021). In political theory, the profound transformation of the public sphere through digitalisation is being addressed in particular, such as recently in a comprehensive anthology on digital democratic theory (Bernholz et al. 2021). Especially in the context of deliberative democratic theory, digitalisation is a recurring topic (cf. for example Ercan et al. 2019; Chambers and Gastil 2021). Other theories of democracy have less often directly addressed questions of digital transformation, although exceptions prove the rule, see for example Asenbaum (2020) for feminist democratic theory and Cammaerts and Mansell (2020) for radical democratic approaches. Accordingly, political theorists are seldom represented in the strongly interdisciplinary research on digitalisation—empirically working political scientists are somewhat better positioned here.

The German-language research landscape differs slightly, even if the overall rating is similarly restrained. An overview of the political science orientation as a whole is provided by Kersting (2019); see also the anthology *Politik in der digitalen Gesellschaft* (Hofmann et al. 2019), which collects central research perspectives. In German-language political science, a more normative framing is characteristic compared to the international discussion as a whole, which focuses on the topic of the internet, democracy and the public sphere (cf. for example Oswald and Borucki 2020; Kneuer and Salzborn 2016). The topic of the state and the internet has also become a much-noticed research topic in recent years, especially in the context of the discussion on digital sovereignty (Buhr et al. 2018; Borucki and Schünemann 2019, Pohle and Thiel 2020).

In the narrower field of disciplinary political theory, the study of the internet and democracy has a surprisingly long tradition (Buchstein 2002; Schmalz-Bruns 2001), which has been increasingly and explicitly taken up again in the last five years, see for example the anthology by Jacob and Thiel (2017). Articles that seek to systematically reflect on the relationship between digitalisation and democracy in political theory are currently in vogue (cf. for example: Schaal 2016; Thiel 2020; Berg and Hofmann 2021) and are also increasingly being taken up in specialist journals (Berg and Thiel 2019; Schulz 2021a)—as evidenced not least by this special issue.

talisation also requires not only a “supersizing” of theories, the expansion of known approaches and models with a view to enlarged and accelerated problem situations, but also “theory 2.0” (Earl and Kimport 2011, p. 24 ff.), i.e. the fundamental reformulation of theoretical assumptions, models and explanatory approaches. Just as globalisation led to a change in thinking about the demos and national borders in democratic theory, digitalisation and its new infrastructures inspire thinking about the possibilities for action and forms of democratic institutions.

On the other hand, the growing interest can be explained by the fact that it is now much better understood that digitalisation not only changes politics, but conversely that politics also shapes digitalisation. The technological determinism of the early public and political discourse on digitalisation was recognised and criticised as deficient early on in political science (Hindman 2009), but the consequences were not integrated systematically. Talking about the social and political shaping of technology, or even recognising it as a central task of politics across all social fields, has only been taken seriously politically and academically in recent years.

Current research approaches, such as those collected in this special issue, take the co-constitution of technology and society as their point of departure and, to this end, also take up approaches from disciplines such as the philosophy and sociology of technology or cultural studies, which have long been concerned with technology as an irreducible aspect of the procedures and institutions of political orders (cf. Seibel 2016, p. 26). Thus, they cultivate a reflexive, political-theoretical capacity to speak about technopolitical contexts.<sup>2</sup>

This leads us from the question of *why* political theory should engage with digitalisation to the even more important question of *how* this can be done. To this end, we offer some reflections in this introduction. First, we discuss three pitfalls of political theory research on digitalisation before introducing the epistemological perspective of the digital constellation that guides this special issue and its contributions.

## 2 Three pitfalls of political-theoretical research on digitalisation

The first pitfall is the narrowing of the subject of “digitalisation” to the topic of the “internet”—and, thereby, to the aspect of communication. Digital structural change goes far beyond the change in (public) communication structures and practices and is only incompletely captured if it is addressed solely in terms of individual or social communication behaviour. Digitalisation also refers, for example, to the challenge of democratic and state rule-making (Pistor 2020), to changing forms of political governance—starting with Lawrence Lessig’s (2006) canonical formulation “Code is Law”, to Mireille Hildebrandt’s (2015) work on the transformation of law through preemption and automation, to the complex transformation of norms such as trans-

<sup>2</sup> The concept of technopolitics aims to reflect the hybridity of politics and digital infrastructures. Approaches inspired by the sociology of technology in movement research or the sociology of work conceptualise the relationship as a contested field in which the concrete design of the technical structuring of social and political orders is fought over (Kurban et al. 2017; Milan and Gutierrez 2018; Schaupp 2021). It is precisely this politicisation of the design of digital infrastructures that is increasingly echoed in political theory (see, for example, Berg and Staemmler 2020; Forestal 2021).

parency (August 2019) or practices such as anonymity (Thiel 2017). Digital society not only increases communication and coordination, it integrates individuals in many more ways and from many more points of reference, often with great relevance for political theory: topics include surveillance (Hoye and Monaghan 2018), data protection and privacy (Helm and Seubert 2020; Schulz 2021a), the quantification of the social (Fourcade 2016; Beer 2016; Mau 2017), mechanisms and forms of social and political representation (Gerbaudo 2019; Manow 2020) or the transformation of participation practices and interfaces (Berg et al. 2021). Notwithstanding the importance of work on the public sphere and its transformation (Seeliger and Sevigani 2021), digitalisation should therefore not be reduced to the internet—or even more narrowly: social media. Only comprehensive engagement shows how far reconfiguration through digital infrastructures and artefacts has progressed—and what this means for society and politics (Greenfield 2017; Stalder 2016; Floridi 2014).<sup>3</sup>

Pitfall number two can be seen in the theoretical engagement with the technicality of the digital. Political theory does not have to be a science of technology, but it must explicate the understanding of technology on which its argument is based to such an extent that the argumentative entanglement with the political-theoretical interpretation of the overall context becomes clear. For only this explication enables a conceptually coherent discussion, which is denied to contributions with arbitrary use or implicitly relaxed argumentation. In this context, political theory can draw on a rich tradition of intensive and reflective theoretical engagement with technically induced transformations, such as those found in Adam Smith, Walter Benjamin or Karl Polanyi. At the same time, however, it is important to keep up with the times and to keep an eye on the current state of research in technology theory as well as the peculiarities of *digital* technology. The specifics of digital technology, be they at the level of “hardware, software [or] runtime” (Passoth 2017), have consequences for the interpretation and evaluation based on them. For it makes a difference whether the digital is accessed phenomenologically via datafication or automation (van Dijck 2014), structurally via the notion of architectures (Bratton 2016) or as a media practice (Couldry and Hepp 2017). The term and conceptualisation of technology in general, and digital technology in particular, quickly become crucial in this context. They function as discursive “boundary objects”: from algorithms to data to networks, there are numerous interfaces in which political theoretical perspectives

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the problem of a too narrow definition of the subject matter, which appears in the equation of digitalisation and the internet, it should also be noted that the study of digital phenomena always implies a challenging recourse to a complex discourse history outside one’s own discipline. Terms such as “internet”, “algorithm”, “big data” or “AI” are by no means clear and fixed. If, as is often the case, they are simply invoked as an empty signifier under which different strands of discourse are subsumed, this can also inhibit connectivity instead of expanding it. Such generalisations miss the fact that the terms transport content and references from specific debates and are subject to conjunctures (see Hösl 2019). The internet, for example, has not only lost its function as the semantic fixed star of the digitalisation debate since around 2010, it has also been associated with very different things (from protocols to the *world wide web* to social media), especially in public discourse. Semantic shifts can also be registered in the conceptual field of data and its social role, to which theory-building should be sensitive: Big Data, for example, has recently been replaced by the terms artificial intelligence or machine learning, although these terms invoke different ideas and questions (Ulbricht et al. 2018; Bareis and Katzenbach 2021; Natale 2021).

can be brought into conversation with and enriched by interdisciplinary conceptual understandings.

The third pitfall is the insufficient recognition that (digital) technology is political. Digitalisation is not a force of nature that sweeps us up in its wake, but a product of human practice. It is just as accessible to economic innovation as it is to state regulation and can also be the object of civic design. Recognising this requires a politicising contrast to the politically agnostic slant of prominent interpretations of the digitalised society, such as those advocated by Armin Nassehi (2019) or Dirk Baecker (2018) in sociology (see Berg et al. 2020a). Such a procedure can include the conscious reflection of technology's political nature in individual case studies, as demonstrated by science and technology studies in their deconstructive-analytical practice (classically, e.g., Winner 1980; Latour 1990; more recently, for instance, Dickel 2019): What political logics find their way into the design of technical artefacts and assemblages? How are social relations reproduced or destabilised in the course of technology use? In considering how technology design and use is political, it is not just the political effects of technical materialisations that becomes clear. In addition, there is a need for an overarching theoretical debate on how societies are shaped by the design of technology (e.g., Feenberg 2017; Rieder 2020;) or how political governance can be institutionalised through and with technology (Noveck 2015; Gastil 2016; Landemore 2020).

Taken together, these three pitfalls contribute to the fact that a political-theoretical engagement with digitalisation turns out to be demanding: in order to take the problems raised seriously, political theory must not only project its questions into the thematic field of digitalisation, but also reflect on its own presuppositions against the backdrop of the interrelationships between digitalisation, society and politics. Both the micro-level of technology and the macro-level of social contexts must be included, while the recognition of the contingency and politicisability of (digital) technologies prohibits squeezing them into one's own analytical grid as an external force.

### 3 The digital constellation as a research perspective

We therefore propose the concept of the *digital constellation* to provide orientation for a political-theoretical discussion of the digital transformation (Berg et al. 2020a). The concept helps to avoid the pitfalls of digitalisation research in political science just discussed and to formulate a perspective that is broadly coherent for the discipline (Hofmann 2019).<sup>4</sup> The digital constellation is explicitly not to be understood as an elaborated research programme or even an independent theory. Rather, it serves as an epistemological guide that helps to structure theoretical reflection on the interrelationship between digitalisation and political questions. We are concerned with “reflecting on the conditions under which politics takes place in a society that is characterised by the use of digital technology” (Berg et al. 2020b, p. 17).

<sup>4</sup> Compare approaches of a different nature, such as the science-theoretical discussion in Fleuß et al. (2019) or the social-theoretical discussion in Kaufmann and Jeandesboz (2017).

The starting point for this approach is an understanding of the relationship between digital technology and politics as a historically contingent and gradually changing interplay of technical and social—or political—developments. Social relations are always also technically mediated relations. The political forms of society, be it power structures, the institutions of order formation or their justifications, are also constituted in a co-productive way adhering to technical conditions. Thus, a dynamic ubiquity can be observed with regard to digital technologies, whereby the digital as a “meta-medium” (Manovich 2013, p. 45) transforms and intertwines other media forms. The socio-technical ensemble of modern societies is undergoing a fundamental realignment. The research perspective of the digital constellation emphasises that and how digital technologies acquire their meaning and dynamics in their diversity as infrastructures, media, protocols, artefacts, etc. first and foremost in relation to social and political practices. It thus offers a hand to grasp the specificity of the techno-political “creolisation of the social” (Knorr Cetina 1997, p. 6).

But how can this analytically sophisticated perspective on the interaction of society and digital technology be made useful for the concrete investigation of political theory issues? Here, we refer to the concept of constellation as it was applied in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. For Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, the term constellation served in particular as a philosophical instrument of discursive circumscription and argumentative montage (Adorno 1970, p. 542; cf. Lehr 2000). With a slightly different note Jürgen Habermas afterwards employed the concept for the socio-historical analysis of institutional design in relation to multiple processes of change in his interpretation of globalisation (Habermas 1998, p. 94, cf. 1990, p. 148). In this way, the term is also instructive and coherent for the *digital* constellation.<sup>5</sup> In the context of digitalisation, sedimentations of social practice and institutions previously assumed to be fixed are placed in new social relations, which necessitates the adaptation of analytical and normative patterns of thought. At the same time, the relational perspective allows for the focusing and expansion of questions.

For subsequent studies, the perspective of the constellation can then be enriched by technology theory and used as a heuristic that helps to structure and formulate the techno-political contexts. Three levels are crucial to understanding the interactions of society/politics and (digital) technology: the level of the properties of digital technology, the level of perceived spaces of possibility or practically realised affordances, and the level of socio-political configuration. While the “properties” are located at the micro level of concrete technological applications or principles—in relation to digitalisation, for example, archivability, processability or distributability can be mentioned (cf. Lenk 2016)—socio-political configurations are located at the macro level.

However, the middle level is of particular relevance, precisely because it is ignored in most political science work, yet it fulfils a central hinge function. The concept of affordances describes technology in terms of its effect as supply structures that shape the possibilities for using specific technologies in the perception of

<sup>5</sup> Habermas (2021, p. 498) is also agreeing in the context of the re-evaluation of the concept of public sphere under the conditions of the digital transformation.



social actors (Dahlberg 2011; Deseriis 2021).<sup>6</sup> The enabling, restricting, or shaping of actions through technology is to be understood as an expression of this network of relationships. The focus is on the respective modes of use, their conditions and consequences. As these modes may include proper use as well as resistant appropriation, the performative effect of digital affordances can only be precisely determined analytically in individual case studies (cf. Dickel 2017, p. 174). Now, instead of ontologising these individual cases or falling back into a technically influenced structuralism in reaction to them (Bossetta 2018), observations of concurrent performative effects can also be summarised as a set of practically realised affordances: as a generalised statement about collectively established forms of action that have emerged from the perceived spaces of possibility of digital technology (cf. Berg et al. 2020b, p. 19). On the one hand, this recognises the possibility of appropriating technology as needed, even contrary to the modes of use intended in the design, but on the other hand, it takes on established effects and modes of action as social routines of action.

In this respect, the digital constellation offers an epistemological model for understanding and examining the contexts and dynamics of the digital transformation. It opens up starting points for different political-theoretical interventions without itself being normatively determined or limited to concrete objects and technologies. In this way, it makes an offer that is coherent and productive for different schools of theory and epistemological interests, which is why it is the guiding perspective for the discussions in this special issue.

#### 4 The contributions to the special issue

The special issue brings together a total of fourteen contributions that examine the interactions between digital transformation and politics. In the overall view, the outlines of political theory in the digital constellation become visible. It becomes clear that digitalisation is a cross-cutting issue that can be addressed with a variety of political theoretical approaches and in very different research traditions. For the structured presentation of the contributions, we will apply a rough categorisation in three dimensions in the following, knowing that many of the contributions could be classified in more than one of these dimensions and that other thematic groupings would also be possible. We sort along methodological approaches, policy fields and normative questions.

In the *first dimension*, we include the contributions that focus on the methodological approaches of political theory to digitalisation in the field of politics. We

<sup>6</sup> Beyond political science, the concept of affordance, which is attributed to Gibson (2014), is now very widely used (for an overview, see for instance Evans et al. 2017 or Hopkins 2016; for communication studies Katzenbach 2018, p. 225 ff; Nagy and Neff 2015; in social theory, Ettlinger 2018; for *design studies* Norman 1999 and the *science and technology studies* Blewett and Hugo 2016 or Leonardi 2011; in social science, already early on Hutchby 2001; cf. also the phenomenological conception of technical scopes in Waldenfels 1991). In political science, too, the term has repeatedly been proposed for analysis (Dahlberg 2011), but the adaptation of the concept as well as the recognition of the interdependencies captured by it in the broader disciplinary discourse remain restrained (cf. König 2022 in this issue).

ask, for example, what the contemporary historical and intellectual backgrounds are against which digitalisation-related developments get described and theorised, which assumptions about technology or society underlie various political or theoretical positions, or how conceptual changes can be reconstructed or theorised. These contributions are concerned with (often implicit) presuppositions regarding the development of norms or concepts in the digital context, as well as reflection on different ways to theorise digitalisation, their origins and consequences.

*Daniel Schulz* (2021b), for instance, deals in his contribution with availability heuristics in the technology sector and its roots in the history of ideas. Through a look at the history of utopia and an exemplary examination of B. F. Skinner's behaviourist approach, Schulz reveals the notions that underlie digital thinking about order under the auspices of Big Data. His contextualising view contradicts the closed self-conception of the digital present as something new and completely different. *Wolf Schünemann's* (2021) contribution also shows that a recourse to older theories can be productive for the analysis of the digital constellation, albeit with a completely different focus and object. Schünemann takes what is at first glance a surprising persistence of the national in a networked world to be a starting point for examining the explanatory power of theories of nationalism when applied to current questions of digital policy. *Vincent August* (2021) once again more comprehensively argues ultimately for an interpretative approach in digitalisation research, which he illustrates by examining the spread and use of the concept of the network. In this way, he makes clear what competing rationalities shape our conceptions of digital society, how these can be located historically and conceptually, and what conclusions can be drawn from them. *Tim König's* contribution (2022) is a more conceptual intervention. He deals decisively with the (implicit) presuppositions of theory formation in the context of the digital constellation. Following Christoph Hubig, a concept of technology is developed that emphasises the media dimension of the digital. According to König, theories of digital public spheres in particular must allow themselves to be asked which epistemologies they take as the starting point for their approaches, models and mechanisms.

*Secondly*, digitalisation can be examined as an object and structural element of current policy fields. To what extent are classical basic assumptions—for example, regarding the media, social or technical conditions—of political theory challenged by digitalisation and what implications arise from this? The aim here is to systematically reflect on the epistemological intervention that takes place at the theoretical level as a result of digitalisation. Such a reflection addresses conceptual and methodological aspects, but can also be applied to different fields of politics.

With regard to the development of international relations, *Jürgen Neyer* (2021) traces the ways in which digital innovations have contributed to the current crisis of global governance. He places internet governance and global governance in a common context and, from their interplay, diagnoses a return of thinking in terms of territorial sovereignty. As the title "After Global Governance" already reveals, technological development becomes an important explanatory factor for the decline of global governance here. *David Fischer* (2022) follows on from this, but focuses in his contribution on deconstructing the re-emerging discourse on state sovereignty from the perspective of actors from the Global South. For them, the promise of

digital sovereignty turns out to be a sham, as the structural dependencies that result from digital capitalism are even reinforced. *Niklas Ellerich-Groppe's* contribution (2021), which deals with the transformation of the welfare state in the digital constellation, is more strongly related to a classical political field. Along the lines of self-tracking and the gig economy logics, the change in solidarity is discussed in terms of ambivalence. This leads to a conclusion that explains the risks of desolidarisation by way of outlining possibilities for shaping solidarity technologies. *Felix Maschewski* and *Anna-Verena Nosthoff* (2022) have a related subject but take a different focus. They show for the field of health policy how health markets are being restructured by the actions of leading technology companies in interaction with state authorities, insurance companies and research institutes. Following Deleuze, Foucault and Zuboff, they discuss the enforcement of surveillance capitalist biopolitics characterised by quantification and the control of collectives. *Ronja Kniep* (2021) deals with the separation between national and international politics in questions of digital surveillance by secret services. Bourdieu's field theory is used to show how the intelligence services position themselves as part of a self-legislated transnational order of surveillance. The contribution impressively demonstrates that the misrecognition of domination contributes to its maintenance.

*Thirdly*, we can ask what *normative* implications arise from the conditions of the digital constellation. Here, it is particularly important not to interpret digital technology a priori or implicitly as a positive or negative force. Instead, its embedding in the socio-technical context should be reflexively grasped in such a way that, building on this, potentials for the realisation of political relations in harmony with normative reasons can be formulated as well as critical reflections on structures of domination. Digitalisation, datafication or algorithmification are thus interrogated in terms of the possibilities and obstacles for political action.

*Markus Baum* (2021) discusses datafication as a functional element of neoliberal societies. His contribution reconstructs conceptual overlaps as well as divergences of this form of political order formation and, via a republican reading, opens up a targeted political-theoretical problematisation of the processes of social order that accompany it. Such considerations are further substantiated in the contribution by *Eva Odzuck* and *Sophie Günther* (2021). They discuss how political competition and, in particular, election campaigns can meet normative standards under the condition of comprehensive digital datafication. Based on Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, they interpret political parties as mediating actors whose legitimacy can also be assessed through the use of their communicative repertoires, from data analysis to microtargeting. *Irina Kalinka* (2022) looks at the processes of algorithmic personalisation. She reconstructs personalisation in discussion with Jacques Rancière as soft forms of intervention that enable platform operators to “divide the sensual” and thus influence the distribution of democratic power. *Bernd Bösel* (2021) also turns to the forms of digital intervention and addresses the digital automation of psychic processes. Through an examination of Bernard Stiegler's concept of psychopower, he reconstructs how this manifests itself in the psycho-technological arsenal of the present. He sees implications for processes of political deliberation and judgement formation as a neuralgic point of normative debate. *Ann-Kathrin Koster* (2021) reconstructs algorithmic systems as epistemic procedures that operate on the basis

of ontologising symbol processing. She finds it nevertheless plausible that the possibilities for contestation lie precisely within the hybridity of the socio-technical embedding of these procedures, and it is these possibilities that democratic societies in fact know how to use productively as self-questioning collectives.

Work on this special issue of the *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* already began in 2019. At that time, a working group of the same name at the Center for Advanced Internet Studies Bochum (CAIS) gave us the opportunity to exchange ideas on the relationship between domination and resistance in the digital constellation. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the original working group, from whose contributions, among others, this issue has benefited greatly. The fact that we were able to realise this publication project along our own ideas is also thanks to the support of the editorial staff of the *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, in particular Arno von Schuckmann, whom we thank especially warmly for the wonderful cooperation. In addition, we would also like to thank the large number of anonymous reviewers, who did a central but unfortunately never visible job on such an extensive special issue.

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