

Knowing — AI

Anthropological and interdisciplinary perspectives on
knowledge production *with and beyond* Artificial Intelligence.

Book of Abstracts

DATES

14 – 16 September
2026

VENUE

University of Tübingen, Alte Aula,
Münzgasse 30 and Ludwig Uhland Institut,
Burgsteige 11

EBERHARD KARLS
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Venues in Tübingen

Alte Aula
Münzgasse 30

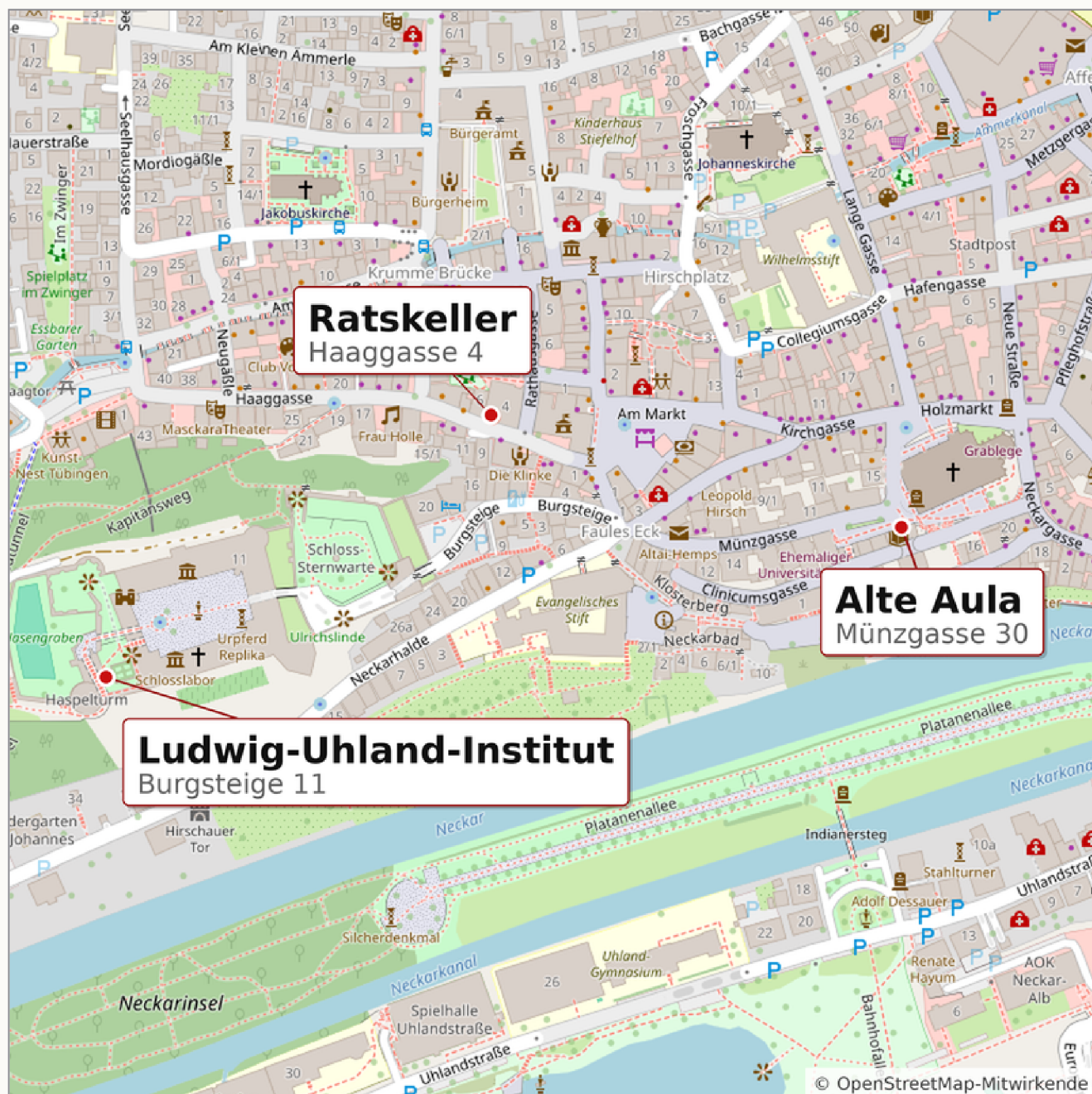
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Ludwig-Uhland-Institut
Burgsteige 11

WORKSHOPS · COMMISSION
MEETING

Ratskeller
Haaggasse 4

CONFERENCE DINNER



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DAY ONE

Monday September 14

Sessions I – IV

● SESSION I · LANGUAGE

Valeska Flor

University of Tübingen

From Tape to Algorithmic Mediation: AI, Archives, and Knowledge Production with and Beyond Artificial Intelligence

This paper addresses current transformations of knowledge production in archives and memory institutions under conditions of accelerating artificial intelligence. Focusing on the Arno Ruoff Archive, a collection of historical recordings of spoken language and everyday narratives, it examines how AI based technologies intervene in established epistemic practices and reshape relations between human actors, archival materials, and knowledge infrastructures. Originally created as a scholarly resource, the archive now operates at the intersection of research and public engagement, where access and interpretive responsibility gain renewed urgency.

Drawing on anthropological and science and technology studies perspectives, the paper examines how AI assisted tools for transcription and search shape knowledge practices. These systems introduce new forms of agency into archival work by structuring what becomes searchable and reusable. At the same time, they generate frictions by abstracting narratives from their cultural and historical contexts, raising ethical concerns about bias and the reconfiguration of authority in knowledge practices.

The paper further engages with ethnographic material generated through qualitative narrative interviews with contemporary dialect speakers. Some of these interviews are conducted in dialogue with archived recordings from earlier generations. This allows for an examination of how knowledge is produced beyond AI, through situated narrative practices that respond to computational mediation without being fully absorbed by it. The comparison highlights both the possibilities and the limits of automated approaches when dealing with context dependent meaning and linguistic variation.

Rather than positioning AI as a neutral tool or inevitable solution, the paper conceptualizes it as an epistemic actor whose role in knowledge production must be critically examined. It argues that anthropological approaches are essential for understanding how knowledge is negotiated with and beyond AI, and for developing reflective practices that resist the uncritical automation of cultural interpretation.

● SESSION I · LANGUAGE

Anna Weichselbraun & Siri Lamoureaux

University of Vienna · EM Lyon

In Dialogue with AI: How Artificial Knowing Is Signified and Interpreted

In this paper we propose that to "know" AI anthropologically and to understand concepts of knowledge in AI, one must pay attention to the role of language, semiotics and interaction in the development and use of "AI". The paper brings together two fields with limited prior engagement: linguistic anthropology and STS (Lamoureaux et al. 2025). It returns to a classic in STS/anthropological literature of AI, Diane Forsythe's 1996 "Old Wine, New Bottles" with a reanalysis that demonstrates how the concept of "semiotic ideology" (Keane 2005) helps account for both the power differentials and the epistemic misalignments that occurred in the development of a medical advice program for migraine sufferers. Semiotic ideology describes that presuppositions about signs are simultaneously presuppositions about ontology and epistemology; in other words, what we perceive as "affordances" of AI, such as any claim of intelligence or capacity for reasoning, is grounded in semiotic interpretation.

Forsythe's example remains relevant today because the migraine advice program, like much of contemporary AI, was dialogue-based. Given that current AI programs overwhelmingly rely on a conversational "chat mode," we can draw on decades of sociolinguistic research on conversation and interaction to interrogate the importance of the dialogical for knowledge production. This is particularly timely given novel findings that LLM "reasoning" improves through simulated dialogue (Kim et al. 2026). The paper contributes to anthropological conversations about "knowledge" and its "production" with an argument and evidence for the fact that one cannot fully understand "artificial knowing" without a working theory of how that knowledge is communicated (Carr 2010).

● SESSION II · TRUTH, POLITICS, NATIONALISM

Jennifer Cearns

University of Manchester

From Divination to Data: Rethinking Knowledge in AI

This paper considers predictive/generative AI as a cultural epistemological form akin to divination, which is to say, a future-oriented technology of knowledge that concerns itself with risk and uncertainty. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in both the US and the UK, the paper considers what types of 'truth' are configured through AI, and the extent to which these leverage longer standing cultural histories and epistemological forms. By emphasizing AI as a cultural product, the paper focuses on the ways in which this technology simultaneously disrupts and leverages epistemological frameworks that have been dominant in western European and north American culture since the Enlightenment, but which are now shifting, pointing to emergent social constructions of 'knowledge' and 'truth' as networked, iterative, optimisable and future-oriented.

● SESSION II · TRUTH, POLITICS, NATIONALISM

Nurhak Polat

University of Bremen

AI Nationalism: How AI Shapes Autocratic Knowledge Ecosystems

The paper provides an anthropological account of AI nationalism in the context of techno-legal autocracy. Amid escalating crises and contradictions of truth, political legitimacy, and planetary futures, AI nationalism (Hogart 2018) is gaining prominence. It produces new dependencies between so-called low-tech and advanced-tech states, while simultaneously fuels new struggles around data power, data sovereignty and technological supremacy by the androcentric tech oligarchies (Cohen 2025). More critically, it reinforces hegemonic dynamics in the production, use, and infrastructuring of AI (Ricaurte 2019), often even masking them as anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and decolonial critiques and further blurring the boundaries between democratic and authoritarian-populist systems.

Drawing on ethnographic vignettes and observations, this paper examines Turkey as an illustrative case of how AI nationalism is enacted through everyday techno-legal practices, regulatory translations, and infrastructural arrangements. I describe that the state selectively appropriates elements of EUropean regulatory frameworks on data and AI. It simultaneously promotes yerli ve milli (homegrown and national) alternatives to Western Big Tech, global platforms, and data infrastructures, portraying this as a struggle for national sovereignty and cultural integrity against digital, AI supremacy. Digital technologies and data systems massively expand the infrastructural power of the authoritarian state (Byler 2020) and stabilizes a toxic combination of authoritarian unpredictability, strategic incompetence, and patriarchal-paternalistic impunity. AI and AI nationalism take these dynamics to an entirely new scale. Facing a new age of tech-oligarchic and techno-fascist powers it is getting important to understand politics of AI in relation to powerful knowledge infrastructure unfolding an ecology of people, practices, technologies, institutions, material objects, and relationships (Borgman 2015). This paper traces techno-nationalist claims and projects under the AKP's authoritarian presidential government and examines how AI is enacted and known within broader techno-legal, epistemic, and infrastructural autocratization in Turkey and beyond.

● SESSION III · MARGINALISED & SITUATED KNOWLEDGE

Tanja Kubes

Freie Universität Berlin

Beyond Human-Centredness: Anthropological and Feminist Perspectives on Knowledge Production with and Beyond AI

The integration of AI into knowledge production — from academia and museums to journalism and social media — is frequently legitimised through "human-centred AI" (HCAI). This paper argues that HCAI is structurally inadequate to fulfil the promises of equitable knowledge production and proposes the Feminist AI Framework (FAIF) as an alternative lens combining anthropological and interdisciplinary perspectives.

HCAI rests on a subject-object dualism that conceives of AI as a tool to be instrumentalised. This obscures the fact that AI systems already possess their own form of agency — actively reshaping knowledge practices and producing knowledge no longer attributable to a human author. HCAI thus consolidates power asymmetries rather than dissolving them.

FAIF extends this critique in two directions. First, drawing on feminist philosophy of science and new materialism, it mobilises Haraway's "situated knowledges" (1988): all knowledge, including that from which AI systems are derived, is perspectival, embodied, and culturally situated. A feminist analysis reveals how the supposedly neutral "human" in HCAI has historically been defined as male, European, and able-bodied — excluding women, marginalized groups, and non-Western knowledge traditions from AI design. The illusion of neutral technology thus reveals itself as a structuring fiction that privileges certain epistemologies while rendering others invisible.

Second, through more-than-human anthropology and the ontological turn, FAIF opens the human-AI relationship beyond the anthropocentric paradigm. Drawing on Descola's modes of identification and the Relational Ontology of Multi-species Assemblages (ROMA), it demonstrates that the boundary between a conscious human subject and an unconscious technological object is culturally specific, not universal. Ethnographic methods are therefore an epistemic necessity for understanding how knowledge is produced with and beyond AI.

The paper discusses how FAIF can expose power structures in AI-driven knowledge production and advocates for multispecies participatory design as a model for non-hierarchical human-AI interaction that counteracts the homogenising flattening of knowledge.

● SESSION III · MARGINALISED & SITUATED KNOWLEDGE

Philipp Budka

University of Vienna

From Cybernetics to AI: Knowing and Learning in the Anthropology of the Contemporary

This paper argues that current anthropological discussions of artificial intelligence and knowledge production are best understood by looking back at anthropology's longer engagement with mediated practices of knowing and learning. Long before AI emerged as a prominent object of inquiry, anthropologists addressed questions of learning, feedback, and epistemic mediation through encounters with cybernetics and related approaches to communication and systems. Anthropologists such as Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead conceptualized knowing as relational and processual, foregrounding communication, feedback, and the observer's involvement in epistemic systems. These engagements directed anthropological attention to how learning unfolds through sociotechnical relations, rather than through discrete tools or technologies. They established enduring concerns with how knowledge circulates and is transformed within sociotechnical arrangements, positioning contemporary AI as part of a longer anthropological history rather than a rupture.

The paper traces this genealogy through long-term ethnographic research with First Nations communities in northwestern Ontario, Canada. MyKnet.org, a regional web platform active from the late 1990s until 2019, represents an intermediate moment in anthropological engagements with web-mediated knowing. Shaped by Indigenous priorities and local governance, the platform functioned as a digital learning environment where community members learned to create websites, write basic HTML code, and experiment with digital forms through shared practice and feedback. Learning was visible and socially embedded, sustained through Indigenous digital sovereignty and local governance of digital systems and services. Within this genealogy, MyKnet.org helps clarify how contemporary AI systems intensify feedback-based learning through large-scale machine learning, while reconfiguring centralized authority through epistemic opacity and commercially driven data extraction. Drawing on an anthropology of the contemporary as a provisional orientation, the paper engages debates on AI's epistemic agency, knowledge production, and anthropology's critical role in examining AI-mediated learning.

● SESSION IV · EXPERTISE & WORK

Alexandra Deem

Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Synthetic Skool: AI influencer creators and entrepreneurial know-how for the post-authentic creator economy

Since generative AI became widely available, a distinct type of synthetic content has gained purchase on social media: largely fictionalized, visually consistent avatars with storylines, personality traits, and social media profiles known as AI influencers. Developed and operated by human creators who, in varying degrees, use LLM-powered tools to render visual, textual, voice, and video content, AI influencers perform the digital labor of self-presentation and parasocial connection that yield the platform-optimized "currency of realness" (Duffy 2017) often referred to as authenticity. A central method and objective of social media participation before the advent of generative AI, authenticity continues to be invoked by AI influencer creators as integral to garnering a following and turning a profit. This presentation shares findings from ethnographic research in AI influencer networks on various platforms – primarily Skool (a platform for course-based communities), Discord, and Reddit – to explore how AI influencer creators share and acquire expertise in producing what I term "post-authenticity." A platform aesthetic and form of entrepreneurial know-how, post-authenticity redefines realness in terms of affective resonance rather than facticity or biographical referentiality, along with serving as an aspirational dispositif inciting people to engage in forms of entrepreneurial creativity that incorporate AI technologies and their anthropomorphic logics. Tied to the epistemic and experiential shifts gathered under the heading of post-truth for some time now, post-authenticity reflects how authenticity is increasingly rendered through a systematic, infrastructural approach that triangulates AI capabilities and logics, social media affordances and algorithms, and human expertise, feeling, and labor.

● SESSION IV · EXPERTISE & WORK

Hanna Sipos

University of Basel

Through the Milky Glass – From Implicit Knowledge to Explicit Valuation: How Museums Make Sense of Creativity, Agency, and Authorship in Opaque Human-AI Art-Making

The rapid adoption of generative AI tools in contemporary artmaking confronts art museums with new epistemic challenges. As institutions centrally involved in the valuation, stabilization, and transmission of cultural knowledge, museums are increasingly required to evaluate artworks whose creative processes are distributed across human and algorithmic actors and shaped by opaque datasets and infrastructures. This paper examines how art museums negotiate creativity, agency, and cultural value under conditions of algorithmic opacity.

Drawing on an ongoing ethnographic, mixed-methods study the paper investigates how institutional assumptions about creativity and authorship are being reconfigured in response to AI-assisted artistic practices. Rather than treating AI as a neutral tool, museums are compelled to articulate previously implicit valuation criterias, making explicit how creativity is located, attributed, or distributed within human–AI collaborations.

Building on Science and Technology Studies and Critical Algorithm Studies, the paper conceptualizes creativity as an epistemic practice and agency as relational and distributed. It traces moments of friction in curatorial evaluation processes, where algorithmic unpredictability, unclear data provenance, and composite forms of labor destabilize established valuation frameworks. These frictions reveal a "battle for agency, authorship, and creativity" not only within artistic practice, but also within institutional decision-making, where unexpected machine behavior forces curators to renegotiate who creates, who acts, and what counts as creativity — decisions that directly shape the cultural value assigned to AI-generated works.

By situating art museums as active epistemic sites rather than passive gatekeepers, this research contributes to digital anthropology by demonstrating how ethnographic methods can make visible the tacit knowledge, negotiations, and moral economies involved in valuing AI-generated art. The paper argues that understanding how museums conceptualize agency, authorship and creativity in opaque creative processes is crucial for grasping how cultural value is produced and contested in algorithmically mediated knowledge practices.

● SESSION IV · EXPERTISE & WORK

Natalia Gómez Muñoz & Amelia Fiske

Technical University of Munich

Transformations of Judicial Expertise through Artificial Intelligence

AI systems are having a significant impact on judicial institutions and judicial proceedings, from sentencing assistance and the automation of administrative work to the use of AI-generated evidence. Against this backdrop, we focus on how AI systems are integrated into judicial institutions and explore how working with AI outputs becomes part of judicial practice and expertise, reconfiguring the conditions under which judicial work is carried out.

In judicial settings, AI systems produce a variety of outputs, including classifications, rankings, probabilities, summaries, and recommendations, which are incorporated into everyday judicial work. Rather than replacing legal reasoning or imparting judgments, these outputs contribute to how information is produced, organized, and prioritized at different stages of judicial proceedings, affecting what judicial actors are expected to take into account in their work.

As part of a broader ethnographic research project on algorithmic justice and AI-related harms, in this presentation we discuss how the outputs AI systems generate are handled in judicial practice. We ask how these outputs are described, justified, and used within judicial institutions, and how judicial actors learn to work with them as part of their professional activities by incorporating, verifying, or contesting them. We reflect on the issues that arise through this work, including how trust, responsibility, uncertainty, and potential harm are addressed in judicial institutions using AI systems. Likewise, we consider the consequences of these developments for those who encounter judicial institutions from the outside, particularly victims and claimants whose cases are increasingly processed within infrastructures informed by AI systems.

● KEYNOTE I · 17:00 – 18:00

Maja Hojer Bruun

Aarhus University

Relational Expertise: An Anthropological Approach to Expertise in an Age of AI

Public debates often cast artificial intelligence (AI) as either a threat to professional expertise, risking deskilling and redundancy, or as a technical fix that enhances efficiency and liberates time. This paper challenges such dichotomies by arguing that expertise is not something people have, like a resource to draw on for the successful execution of technical operations that can be automated but learned practices that are continuously evolving through collaborative work in professional communities and through negotiations of power and agency in institutions. Drawing on anthropological and science and technology studies (STS) debates on expertise from earlier waves of automation, as well as anthropological and psychological research on professional learning, I conceptualize expertise as knowledgeable practice: material, relational, and historically situated. I further engage anthropological work on human-computer interaction and enactments of expertise to advance an anthropological approach to relational expertise for cross-professional collaboration.

Such an approach is particularly relevant in the context of AI development and implementation in complex institutional domains such as education and healthcare. Here, data scientists, software engineers, administrators, educators, medical professionals and other professional practitioners must navigate divergent epistemic traditions, organizational structures, and political agendas. AI providers often lack insight into educational, clinical and other organizational practices, while domain professionals rarely possess technical knowledge of data infrastructures, standards, and AI. These gaps risk undermining both professional competence and the quality of education and health care.

DAY ONE · 18:00 – 19:30

Poster Session

Berit Zimmerling / Amelia Fiske

Partial Justice

Deniz Özalpman

Algorithmic Orientalism? Epistemic Standardisation in LLMs-Generated Ottoman Histories

Ema Jerkovic

Learning to Write with AI in the Dual System: An Ethnographic Perspective on Emotion Practices in Social Work Education

Luisa Erbentraut

Hallucinating: Negotiating Queer Embodiment with Text-to-Image AI

Emilian Franco

AI is like Water: Ethnographic Reflections on AI Metaphors from Brazil

Byron Jones

"Who am I with AI": Human-GenAI Assemblage Everyday Digital Practices

Mascha Kieselva

What can we learn from generative AI guidelines for research? A taxonomy of research practices, normative judgments, and AI agency.

Vera Laub

Democratizing Postgenomics? A Feminist Technoscientific Inquiry into Single-Cell Genomics

Annabelle Schönherr / Dana Galassi / Carolina Menges

tba

DAY TWO

Tuesday September 15

Workshops · Sessions V – VI

All workshops run 10:00 – 12:00 at Ludwig Uhland Institut, Burgsteige 11.

● WORKSHOP · 📍 CLUBRAUM

Ethnographic AI: Augural Conversation Stagings with Retrieval-Augmented Generation

Maxime Le Calvé, University of Tübingen

As Large Language Models (LLMs) become ubiquitous, their role in qualitative research is often relegated to "efficiency" tools—used for transcription, automated coding, or ghost-writing. This workshop proposes a different methodological departure. Rather than treating AI as a surrogate analyst, I will frame it as an augural technology: a site for speculative, participatory knowledge exchange that functions through "conversation stagings." Ethnographers are known to engage with the field as beginners, messing up and often asking the wrong questions, and starting with mistakes, until the corrective process they go through enables them to understand what counts in the situation. LLMs can be trusted to "hallucinate" in similar ways. Taking hallucinations as "features, not as a bug" (Dumit & Roepstorff, 2024), ethnographic conversations mediated through chatbots can offer new ways of enrolling LLMs as "speculative partners" (Alvarez et al., 2025). This session introduces participants to chatbots and Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) as emerging methods in multimodal anthropology. Unlike standard generative models that rely on opaque training data, RAG allows researchers to ground AI outputs in specific, curated corpora. By dynamically retrieving documents from a local archive to inform its responses, the AI becomes a live interface for engaging conversation partners with their own materials. Participants will interact with a RAG prototype hosted on local servers, ensuring a critical focus on data sovereignty and "small data" ethics. Together, we will engage with diverse archives from STS and heritage studies, including text-image relationships. By treating the LLM as a performative partner rather than a predictive truth-engine, this workshop seeks to reclaim the critical potential of "generative" AI.

● WORKSHOP · 📍 AUSSTELLUNGSRAUM

Pluriversality in AI — Trajectories, Paradoxes and Heterodoxies in / of Decolonizing AI

Gertraud Koch, University of Hamburg · The Pluriversality in AI Collective

AI, as information technology at large, has manifold colonial trajectories that have the potential to reinforce (neo-)colonial power relations through technological governance of the big leading US tech-companies and their business models rolled out world-wide. Not only the Global South nations but literally all countries without the capacity to finance the high-cost development of AI systems face the paradox situation of committing to dependency on foreign technology or/and further falling behind in AI and more general IT innovation. Moreover, as widely studied and problematized, AI carries colonial biases, such as the under and mis-representation of small languages and knowledges in the global South, which goes hand in hand with extractivism and exploitation of data and surveillance of people through companies and states. This is given in terms of data and data models, but even more the biases are deeply inscribed into the algorithmic basis of AI systems. These deep entanglements of technology and (neo-)colonial bias cause reasonable doubts if the currently debated repair mechanisms, "responsible AI", "just AI", "AI for social good", "humane AI", indeed can initiate a shift towards decolonial AI, in the sense of systems that they become open to a diversity of worldviews and cultural backgrounds and empower local knowledge traditions across the globe. The workshop will explore what these boundaries mean for computational practices and lived experience on the ground and how people are working towards exploring alternatives for de-linking from these trajectories and for re-thinking AI towards diverse epistemologies and knowledges. The workshop will be organized along statements on key questions of pluriversality, starting with a brief sketch of the concept, and involve the participants in small working groups on these key questions.

● WORKSHOP · 📍 SEMINARRAUM

Working with MAXQDA's AI Assist for Analysing Qualitative Data

Katy Wheeler, University of Essex

This two-hour, practice-oriented workshop focuses on developing hands-on skills in using the AI Assist features within MAXQDA. A short demonstration of the software's key functions will be provided – features like summarisation, coding suggestions, and interactive querying. This will be followed by guided practical activities. Participants will work with their own familiar texts (e.g. essays, journal articles, or anonymised qualitative data) to experiment with and evaluate AI-generated outputs against their own interpretive judgements. The session places particular emphasis on prompt design, enabling participants to explore how different instructions shape analytical results. Structured time is built in for collective discussion and critical reflection on interpretation and analytic decision-making.

Alma Kolleck

Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt

Tool, Ally or Rival? The Role of Emotions and Agency in Students' Perception and Use of Generative AI for Their Studies

Emotions play a crucial role in the uptake, acceptance and intensity of use when adopting a new technology. Users of new technologies may experience anger or frustration, relief or satisfaction. Feelings like these can predict future use. Generative AI as an easy-to-use tool is quite a recent experience for most students, starting with ChatGPT's release in November 2022. In very short time, ChatGPT and other generative AI tools have risen to being a natural part of students' approach on university tasks in most European and Western countries. In many universities there are no established cross-cutting rules or norms regarding the use of AI. This leaves all types of regulations or specifications in the hands of departments, teaching staff and students. While technical, legal and moral aspects of this unregulated situation have been the subject of much research and discuss for some time now, we would like to ask: how do students deal emotionally and cognitively with it? How do they approach and reflect on generative AI's benefits and pitfalls?

To address these questions, we conducted 95 qualitative guided interviews in a research-based learning setting with Bachelor students. Emotions that were expressed in the interviews range from distrust, fear, sense of competition, curiosity, pride, validation, acceptance to trust and complicity, among others, often at the same time: "Well, first of all, relief, of course, because it [gen AI] makes things so much easier and saves a lot of time, but of course there's always that slight feeling of guilt because I'm not doing it myself, and then I wonder if I'm really learning anything from it. And then there's the uncertainty of whether everything is really right or whether he's [AI] made a mistake" [student A]. Using a grounded theory approach we analyse types of emotions; the contexts they appear in and the question of agency. Many of the interviewees raise aspects of who is in control, who decides and when trusted in AI is appropriate and when it is not.

We will recur on Werner Rammert's theory of distributed agency. We seek to analyse individual perspectives on control, trust, and emotional contextualisation of technology, which we will link to broader social and political questions of power, trust and socio-technical negotiations. Aspects of agency and control arise e.g. when students reflect on losing essential abilities (deskilling) such as writing scientific papers ("I really believe that... constant use, constant exposure to it, can actually lead to a decline in writing skills, or to people not learning them in the first place. And I want to avoid my writing skills declining completely", student B) or when they ponder about AI's calm rationality and lack of emotional involvement when giving life-advice ("I would say that AI can sometimes be a more reliable advisor than a human being. Especially when it comes to someone close to you, because the answers are simply based on knowledge that is stored somewhere and is not so emotionally driven", student C). Combining individual perspectives and experiences with the broader theoretical framework of agency allows to shed light on new socio-technical constellations that shape the way knowledge is acquired and converted in academic settings and on the heuristics students use to tackle their relationship with generative AI tools.

● SESSION V · AI AND SCIENCE

Lukas Griessl

University of Tübingen

Knowing with AI-Based Media Diaries: The Redistribution of Epistemic Agency in Qualitative Research

One methodological problem of ethnographic interviews is that they capture experiences and practices only retrospectively. One way around this are so-called media diaries, which allow participants to record their experiences and practices right after they occurred. Their openness, however, also means that they sometimes produce material that is not relevant, or that participants simply do not know what to write. In the course of our project on hybrid epistemic practices, we conducted a methodological experiment, as part of which we used GenAI to add an additional layer to such media diaries. In the course of this experiment, we had seven student participants, who regularly reported to an AI-based media diary bot about their practices and feelings around using GenAI in their university life. This provided us with a hybrid of media diary and interview, with the important difference that the interviewer was no longer co-present in the interview situation. In this presentation, I will explore several examples from the diary period, showing how epistemic agency was redistributed along several lines: how GenAI changes who controls and shapes the research situation, what becomes research data, what comes to be known and unknown, and who takes responsibility for the encounter.

● SESSION VI · AI AND SCIENCE

Katy Wheeler

University of Essex

Reflexivity as a Distributed Act: How Digital and AI Tools Shape Interpretive Possibilities

Recent developments in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and their integration into qualitative data analysis software have created much debate and controversy about the epistemic nature of the knowledge claims generated with and through these encounters. While anthropological and STS scholarship has long examined the role of technologies in epistemic practices, GenAI introduces new forms of agency and opacity that challenge established assumptions about researchers' interpretation, reflexivity, and responsibility. In this paper, I examine reflexivity as a distributed act and ask how interpretive possibilities are shaped when qualitative analysis is conducted with and through AI-enabled systems. Drawing on a comparison of three analytic environments – MAXQDA, NVivo and ChatGPT – I analyse how different configurations of human-digital/AI collaboration shape processes of familiarisation, categorisation, and interpretation. I conceptualise these systems as epistemic actors that actively participate in knowledge production by structuring what becomes visible, categorised, or obscured. The analysis highlights moments of analytic friction, where automation can both flatten affective complexity, impose coherence, and leave interpretation mechanisms opaque, at the same time as enabling new forms of computational noticing. Theoretically, the paper brings anthropological discussions of distributed agency and posthumanist reflexivity into dialogue with reflexive thematic analysis and critical debates on AI ethics. Though reflexivity in AI-assisted research must be understood as distributed across human and non-human actors, interpretive responsibility cannot be fully dispersed without consequence. Instead, interpretive responsibility is shaped within broader political and moral economies of knowledge production, implicating software design, institutional conditions, and disciplinary norms.

● SESSION VI · AI AND SCIENCE

Magdalena Warner

LMU Munich

Machine Learning & Biology: An ethnographic case study of epistemic entanglements

The impact of AI is currently discussed across many fields, including science. Biology is a particularly intriguing field for novel machine learning (ML) due to the increasingly large datasets at hand. Despite much enthusiasm surrounding ML in biology, little is known about how ML is developed and used in everyday research practices and the consequences that arise from it. This research project addresses this gap through an ethnographic case study at the Max Planck Society. In foundational biology, existing ML approaches often do not generalize to novel research, necessitating the adaptation or invention of new approaches. The ethnographic material generated in this study traces the iterative process through which novel ML emerges and travels (but not always reaches) into application contexts. The insights are based on fourteen months of fieldwork and numerous qualitative interviews with scientists from ten different laboratories in the biomedical section of the Max Planck Society. The research shows that in the eyes of ML researchers, ML is an empirical and creative process of designing new algorithms. In biology, ML is a methodology, increasingly stabilized once journeyed through the publishing apparatus, and often instrumentalized as neutral tool in the hands of users. Biological problems shape the technology in its becoming, and emerging technologies reshape biological research. The result is an epistemic entanglement: the co-production of novel computational and biological knowledge, grounded in interdisciplinary collaborations. These entanglements are transforming science at its core. They influence the questions asked, the design of experiments, the analysis of data, and the stories told in publications. The consequences are not only transformations in daily practices, skills, and values, but also ontological negotiations of what is scientific knowledge and, ultimately, "good science."

● SESSION VI · AI AND SCIENCE

Heikki Wilenius

University of Helsinki

Responsibility and Evidence in GenAI-Accelerated Software Development

The distribution and allocation of responsibility has been a topic of interest for linguistic anthropologists for some time (see, e.g., Hill & Irvine 1993). According to this research tradition, what constitutes "evidence" should itself be subjected to ethnographic and epistemological analysis (Kuipers 2013). With the rapid proliferation of agent software that is capable of autonomous software development, these anthropological discussions are finding new purchase.

In this paper, I present results from long-term ethnographic research with software developers, focusing on their ways of utilising large language models and agent software and discussing how they problematise the use of these tools. My ethnographic encounters show that a particular focus of problematisation for my research participants is the way large language models displace responsibility, particularly due to the opacity of their infrastructural and political-economic features.

These reservations regarding the capabilities of AI agents and the consequences of using them vary greatly, depending on the organisation and social position of developers. Debates about the work of language models and their supposed quality or lack of it are common. I situate these positionalities and conflicts within the anthropological literature on assigning responsibility and assessing evidence. I will also reflect on how these ethnographic contexts resemble cases of assigning responsibility in oral discourse, arguing that how developers navigate these evidentiary ambiguities illuminates broader questions about the distribution of accountability across human and nonhuman actors in algorithmically mediated labour.

● KEYNOTE II · 18:00 – 19:00

Tanja Bosch

University of Cape Town

Calibrated Intimacies: Generative AI, Knowledge Production, and Soft Power

Generative AI is becoming embedded in the infrastructures through which knowledge is produced, taught, interpreted, and circulated. This lecture asks: what does decolonial knowledge practice look like once AI has become intimate infrastructure? Drawing together my work on calibrated intimacies, decolonial refusal, and the argument developed in "Decolonisation is Not a Vibe," I examine how large language models are becoming ordinary participants in scholarly thinking, writing, and knowledge making.

I use calibrated intimacy to describe the forms of epistemic and affective proximity that emerge as generative systems become conversational, responsive, personalised, and increasingly woven into everyday intellectual practice. Through repeated interaction, these systems can begin to shape how questions are formulated, which arguments appear persuasive, what counts as authoritative knowledge, and how scholarly language itself is produced. I understand this as a form of soft power: the gradual orientation of knowledge practices towards particular linguistic conventions, epistemic hierarchies, citational habits, and modes of reasoning.

A decolonial perspective foregrounds the politics of this intimacy. Drawing on decolonial AI scholarship and work on data colonialism, I locate generative AI within longer histories of extraction, classification, and unequal epistemic authority. In African scholarly contexts, this raises questions about whose knowledge becomes computationally legible, which intellectual traditions are rendered authoritative, and which languages and concepts travel easily through generative systems.

The lecture considers refusal as an epistemic and methodological practice. Refusal names the capacity to interrupt AI's invitations, question its epistemic defaults, preserve forms of knowledge that resist computational ordering, and cultivate friction, slowness, opacity, and situatedness. Decolonial knowledge practice, I argue, requires sustained attention to how intimacy with AI is calibrated, by whom, and to what epistemic ends. It asks how scholars might 'know' with AI while retaining the capacity to contest and reconfigure the epistemic worlds these systems help reproduce.

DAY THREE

Wednesday September 16

Session VII

● SESSION VII · KNOWING BODIES

Yeela Lahav-Raz & Shelly Levy-Tzedek

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev · University of Freiburg

Knowing Intimate AI: Sex Workers' Situated Knowledge and the Epistemic Politics of Sex Robots

Recent debates on sex robots embedded with generative AI are increasingly shaping how futures of intimacy and sexual labor are imagined within domestic and commercial arenas. These debates often mobilize moral and technosolutionist framings that position AI as either a utopian remedy for exploitation in the sex industry or as a dystopian threat to authentic human intimacy. In both cases, knowledge about intimate technologies is largely produced without the participation of those most directly implicated in their socio-technical integration.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with 16 sex workers, this paper examines how marginalized, situated knowledge challenges dominant epistemic orders surrounding sexual AI and reconfigures what counts as "knowing" and "practicing" intimacy in human-AI relations. Rather than treating sex robots as neutral tools or autonomous agents, participants articulated human intimacy as a form of embodied, relational, and affective labor that cannot be reduced to technical functionality or algorithmic simulation. From this perspective, AI's imagined agency is negotiated against lived experiences of sociality, emotional attunement, and care as central dimensions of knowledge practices within sexual economies shaped by AI imaginaries.

The analysis contributes to anthropological and interdisciplinary debates on AI's role in knowledge production by foregrounding how epistemic authority is distributed, contested, and resisted in the field of intimate technologies. It shows how sex workers' counter-imaginaries unsettle dominant narratives of replacement, efficiency, and innovation, and instead propose alternative futures grounded in relational expertise and experiential knowledge. By situating sex workers as active epistemic agents rather than passive objects of technological intervention, the paper highlights the importance of ethnographic methods for tracing how human-AI relations are co-produced through everyday practices, ethical reflection, and affective labor. In doing so, it argues for a more plural and reflexive approach to AI literacy and governance that takes knowledge from the margins as central to shaping socio-technical futures.

● SESSION VII · KNOWING BODIES

Leonie F. Winterpacht & Juliane Jarke

University of Graz

Doing "Ageing Well" with Communicative AI: Methodological Approaches to Age(ing) Epistemologies

Lived experiences of older adults and their healthcare needs are increasingly mediated by and entangled with technologies, especially AI. As part of the discourse around the challenges of demographic ageing on health and social care services, communicative AI (ComAI) is presented as a particularly promising approach – framed as a "technological fix" (Manchester & Jarke, 2022) for supporting "good" and "healthy" ageing.

Policy makers and tech-developers dominantly shape anticipations of ageing "well", increasingly framing it as individual responsibility and an economic resource (Martinson & Berridge, 2015). These anticipations are not neutral but grounded in two entangled epistemologies; (1) understandings of what constitutes "successful ageing" inscribed into ComAI technologies and (2) the epistemologies AI operates with. ComAI is envisioned to autonomously manage health, take over care tasks, and to quantify and "discipline" ageing bodies. On the other hand, AI relies on statistical calculations, usually optimizing one quantifiable parameter of care (e.g. time required for a care task) at the expense of others (e.g. associated costs). These inscribed epistemologies not only impact older adults' daily practices and enactment of age(ing), but also how they understand and experience it.

Building on this perspective of understanding "good and healthy ageing with ComAI" as a non-neutral epistemological framework, our contribution shows how to methodologically unpack entanglements of ComAI's epistemological dominance and older adults' experiences. We discuss how a mixed-method approach, combining participatory research designs, like cultural probes and co-research approaches (e.g. auto-ethnographic diaries and peer-to-peer-interviews), with ethnographic practice, helps to trace lived experiences of older adults within postdigital contexts. Based on our fieldwork in Austria and the UK, we finally discuss how different older adults experience and appropriate ComAI in their everyday lives, co-constituting AI's epistemological impact as well as the bodily, technological and spatio-temporal entanglements that emerge (Dalmer et al., 2022).

● SESSION VII · KNOWING BODIES

Alexandra Rau & Jana Paulina Lobe

LMU Munich · University of Bamberg

Re-Knowing the Dead: Posthumous Avatars and the Reconfiguration of Relational Knowledge

Digital afterlife technologies—particularly generative AI-based avatars and chatbots modelled on deceased persons—are reshaping how the living relate to the dead. Drawing on an emerging ethnography of bereaved users who engage conversationally with digital replicas of dead partners or relatives, this paper explores how relational knowledge is reconfigured through ongoing human–AI interaction. When memories once bounded by loss become dialogically updated, what kind of "knowing" takes place – and whom or what do we then claim to know? What happens to knowledge about a person when remembered life histories are gradually rewritten through interactions with an AI that continues to respond and evolve?

The contribution situates these practices within anthropological debates on knowledge as situated, affective, and embodied. It asks how sensory and emotional forms of knowing ("I know how he smelled; what he would have said") intersect with algorithmic prediction. In these encounters, the AI's agency reshapes how past experiences are recalled and interpreted, giving rise to hybrid epistemic figures that are both familiar and strange.

The paper further explores how practices of "re-knowing" may function as a testing ground for generative AI as an epistemic agent. Rather than accepting AI-generated utterances at face value, users may evaluate them against what they consider non-negotiable truths about the deceased such as characteristic expressions, moral stances, or idiosyncratic habits. Remembered knowledge thus becomes a benchmark for assessing the credibility of algorithmic outputs.

Methodologically, the paper draws on digital ethnography and in-depth interviews to examine how users negotiate and sometimes resist these processes in everyday practices of remembering and relating.

By conceptualising posthumous generative AI as a site where memory, affect, and data co-produce knowledge, this contribution advances debates on "knowing (with) AI" in digital anthropology. It highlights how human–AI interactions transform knowledge about the dead while prompting reflexive engagements with AI as a knowledge-producing agent, actively re-making the boundaries between remembering, imagining, and knowing in intimate contexts of loss.

● KEYNOTE III · 11:30 – 12:30

Katrin Amelang

Kiel University

Common Sense, Tacit Knowledge and Gut Feeling – Contra, with and Beyond AI / Automation

When it comes to decision-making, cultural anthropology explores and emphasizes the various forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that people use to justify and make sense of their practices and decisions. What research contributions from an anthropology of knowledge highlight and ethnographic methods are good to capture are multiple and contested knowledges, tacit and experiential knowledge, as well as what people consider common sense or what they call their gut feeling. With AI technologies becoming more and more part of mundane and professional everyday practices, how does knowledge of AI-systems fit into these ways of knowing and deciding? Following perspectives from cultural anthropology and Science and Technology Studies, the proposed talk will approach AI-systems as technologies of automation, which are as much characterized by "algorithmic regimes" of knowledge production (Jarke et al. 2024) as they are shaped by cultural ideas and social relations. Against this background, automated, data-driven decision-making will be discussed and juxtaposed with other knowledge systems informing decisions. The guiding question will be "what people do with automation" rather than "what automation does to people" (Pink et al. 2022: 4). The talk will explore and discuss this question by using selected examples of AI-based applications in the field of medical/clinical knowledge and health-related decision-making.