

AI WITHOUT BOSSES

Graduate Syllabus — Fall 2026

Dates: August 27 – December 10, 2026

NMGM 5208, A | CRN 18407

Thursdays, 12:10 PM – 2:00 PM (New York, ET)

Course website: <https://awb-site.vercel.app/>

Readings section password: no-bosses

FACULTY INSTRUCTOR

Prof. Dr. R. Trebor Scholz scholz@newschool.edu

Office Hours

For students residing in New York City, I offer “walk-and-talk” office hours—meaning we can meet outdoors and walk from my office at 79 Fifth Avenue to around Washington Square Park. It’s a great way to discuss course topics in a relaxed setting while getting some fresh air. For all other students, please email me to arrange a meeting time, and we’ll schedule a virtual session that works for both of us.

Scheduled Office Hours, Fall 2026 — add your first name, last name, email, and what you’d like to discuss via the sign-up link next to each date ([all sign-up sheets](#)). These are collective office hours: everyone joins together, there are no individual time slots, questions are taken in the order in which people are listed on the sheet, and participants stay to listen to one another.

- Tuesday, September 1, 2026 — 9:00–10:00 AM ET — [Sign up](#)
- Wednesday, September 9, 2026 — 4:00–5:00 PM ET — [Sign up](#)
- Monday, September 14, 2026 — 9:00–10:00 AM ET — [Sign up](#)
- Wednesday, September 23, 2026 — 4:00–5:00 PM ET — [Sign up](#)
- Tuesday, October 6, 2026 — 9:00–10:00 AM ET — [Sign up](#)
- Tuesday, October 20, 2026 — 9:00–10:00 AM ET — [Sign up](#)
- Wednesday, November 4, 2026 — 4:00–5:00 PM ET — [Sign up](#)
- Wednesday, December 2, 2026 — 4:00–5:00 PM ET — [Sign up](#)

Course Description

As artificial intelligence reshapes societies and economies, who controls its direction—and whose interests does it serve? This course moves beyond legislative fixes to explore practical, within-reach alternatives for developing and governing AI in ways that promote equity and collective well-being.

AI holds genuine promise for supporting local priorities across the majority world—but it can also reinforce inequality and extract resources without consent. AI WITHOUT BOSSES centers grounded, community-based alternatives to the dominant Big Tech model, deliberately expanding beyond the U.S.-focused perspectives that dominate academic and activist tech spaces. We actively work to include majority world voices, even where language barriers, limited internet access, or cultural differences pose challenges.

AI WITHOUT BOSSES is closely connected to the upcoming Solidarity AI Conference in Bangkok this November. Students will engage directly with featured researchers and practitioners, gaining early access to their ideas and joining an international conversation that spans labor, governance, finance, and community development.

This is an interdisciplinary collective learning journey, bringing together students and leading voices from cultural criticism, technical expertise, cooperative practice, sociology, law, political economy, technology studies, ethics, and environmental humanities.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, participants will:

- Understand the historical and current debates around AI, ownership, and equity.
- Grasp how extractive AI systems entrench global inequalities.
- Examine the role of digital infrastructure in maintaining technopower.
- Analyze cooperative alternatives emerging globally, with case studies from Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Indigenous contexts.
- Assess AI's impact on labor rights, platform governance, and the solidarity economy.
- Explore alternative AI governance models centered on democratic decision-making.
- Engage with open-source AI tools and cooperative-led digital initiatives.

Grading and Assignments

Participation & Discussion — Ongoing — 30%

Lead by example in class and on Hylo; pose critical questions, link readings to broader scholarship, and build on peers' contributions.

Reading Responses (3 × 10% = 30%)

1,000–1,200 words each; due **Sunday 11:59 PM ET on September 13, October 11, and November 8, 2026**. Show critical engagement with multiple readings, integrate external scholarly sources, and offer original analysis that connects to broader course themes.

Final Research Paper Proposal — Due Thursday, October 22, 2026

1–2 pages outlining your research question, methodology, and preliminary bibliography. Feedback will guide the development of your final paper.

Annotated Bibliography — Due Thursday, October 29, 2026

Submit an annotated bibliography of at least 10 scholarly sources with brief summaries explaining each source's relevance to your project.

Draft Workshop and Peer Review — Thursday, November 19, 2026

Bring a complete draft to class for structured peer feedback before submitting the final paper.

Final Research Paper/Project — Due Thursday, December 10, 2026 — 40%

Research paper: 4,000–5,000 words with an original argument supported by at least 10 scholarly sources.

Remote Learning Guidelines

- Video on during all sessions.
- Join from a laptop or desktop — no cellphones.
- No multitasking; this seminar requires full attention.
- Use a headset when possible to reduce background noise.
- Arrive on time and mute when not speaking.
- Participate actively through voice and/or chat.
- Treat the virtual classroom as you would a physical one.

Policy on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Generative AI can be a helpful tool for learning—but only when used skilfully. While the temptation to pass off assignments to AI tools is understandable—especially for those for whom English is not a first language, or for whom academic writing is not part of their everyday practice—it limits the opportunity for meaningful learning that this course is designed to offer.

Engaging with lectures, readings, and peer perspectives is central to building the critical thinking and analytical skills needed to articulate your ideas in your own voice.

When used thoughtfully, AI can function as a conversational partner for feedback—helping you test arguments, pose questions, clarify complex ideas, and improve drafts of your writing. It can support your learning, not replace it.

However, you may not submit work that is primarily generated by AI. Submitting AI-written material—especially without meaningful revision or critical engagement—is considered academic misconduct, akin to plagiarism. You are responsible for ensuring that all submitted work reflects accuracy, independent thought, and principled academic conduct. Because AI can generate content that sounds plausible but may be false or misleading, you are responsible for verifying its accuracy and should consult me before using it in assignments if you're unsure.

Course Participants + the Cross Connection Document

This class may be different from any online course you've taken before. It brings together a wide range of participants—graduate students, cooperative leaders in agriculture and energy, computer scientists, PhD researchers, postdocs, junior faculty, municipal officials, and others—with a shared interest in the critical discourse surrounding artificial intelligence.

This is the syllabus for graduate students at The New School.

Add yourself to the [cross connection document](#). It is designed to help you get to know your classmates and build connections, and will serve as a resource for contacting other students for peer-to-peer learning, including exchanging feedback on your writing.

Readings

We're aiming to broaden the conversation beyond the often U.S.-centered networks of scholars and tech activists by including a wider range of perspectives—especially from regions commonly referred to as the Global South or majority world. Graduate students complete a fuller set of required readings each week; suggested readings, films, podcasts, and case studies offer additional paths for going deeper.

This document contains hyperlinks to access the readings, week by week.

Where You Submit Your Writing

This course does not use Canvas. Each matriculating student has their own Google folder, where you upload your reading responses and all other writing assignments. The link to your personal folder will be emailed to you during the first week of the semester.

Discussion

For this class, discussions will take place not on Canvas, but on a cooperative platform called Hylo, which is value-aligned with our course. The private group we've created there will remain active beyond the end of the semester. The discussion space is designed for starting conversation threads, sharing materials, and posting your own writing. Participation in these discussions is mandatory for New School undergraduate and graduate students.

Join the group [here](#).

Pedagogy

This course follows a participatory, co-learning model inspired by Jacques Rancière's concept of the "Ignorant Schoolmaster," which holds that knowledge emerges collectively through dialogue rather than being delivered from a single authority. Rather than centering any one voice, participants read core texts together, pose questions, and co-produce insights. Occasional guest speakers, often affiliated with the concurrent conference, contribute to key thematic sessions.

Community Norms

This course is built on mutual respect, curiosity, and trust. Please engage with others kindly, challenge ideas without attacking people, and keep anything shared in class private unless it is clearly intended for wider circulation. Course materials may not be shared beyond the class. We follow the spirit of the Chatham House Rule: participants are free to use and share what they learn, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of any participant may be revealed or linked to particular comments, ideas, or experiences. Participants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own well-being and to step back, take breaks, or seek support when needed.

Essential Links

- Weekly Class Zoom – <https://NewSchool.zoom.us/j/8986200210>
- Course Website – <https://awb-site.vercel.app/>

Readings Section Password – **no-bosses**

- October 30 Workshop, Cooperativism Beyond Cooperatives for Climate Action (9:00–10:20 AM ET) – [Register here](#)
- Hylo Discussion Group (invite link) – [Join here](#)
- Glossary – [here](#)
- Cross-Connection Document – [here](#)
- Lecture Slides (PDFs) – [here](#)
- Video Recordings of Class Sessions – [here](#)
- Community Agreement – [here](#)
- Terms of Agreement – [Sign here](#)
- Peer Library – [here](#)
- Roles – [here](#)
- Asynchronous Track Sign-Up Sheet (deadline: Sun, Sept 6, 2026) – [here](#)
- Office Hours Sign-Up Sheets – [here](#)
- PDF Versions of the Syllabi – [here](#)
- Week-by-Week Readings – see below

Asynchronous Track

Participants who cannot attend the live Thursday sessions may follow the course asynchronously. Asynchronous participants follow the community syllabus at their own pace, based on the [recorded class sessions](#) and the course materials, and retain access to the course platform, discussion spaces, and scheduled instructor office hours. Participants in the asynchronous track are encouraged to join office hours. Please note that these are collective office hours: several participants may be present at the same time, and conversations are shared with the group rather than one-on-one.

You must decide within the first two weeks of the course. To commit to this track, add yourself to the [Asynchronous Track Sign-Up Sheet](#) **by the end of Week 2 — Sunday,**

September 6, 2026. There are no assignments, no grades, no required written work, and no individual written feedback in this track, and we cannot provide a certificate for participants in this track.

Course Flow

The course normally meets on Thursdays from 12:10–2:00 PM (New York Time). The following sessions differ from the regular schedule:

Friday, September 25 · 9:00–10:50 AM EDT (Optional) — Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures — Workshop 2: Writing Cooperative Futures. Optional public event. Registration is required.

Friday, October 30 · 9:00–10:20 AM EDT (Optional) — Cooperativism Beyond Cooperatives for Climate Action. Optional public workshop led by Sameer Bajaj and Ritvik Gupta (Aapthi Institute). Registration is required.

Thursday, November 12 — No Class. No synchronous session due to the Solidarity AI Conference in Bangkok (November 12–15).

Thursday, November 26 — No Class. Thanksgiving holiday.

Key Dates

All sessions take place on Thursdays, 12:10–2:00 PM ET unless otherwise noted.

- **Aug 27** — Foundations
- **Sept 3** — Unpacking the Myths of AI
- **Sept 11** — Week 3 (topic to be announced)
- **Sept 13 (Sun)** — Reading Response 1 due
- **Sept 17** — Colonialism Reloaded
- **Sept 24** — The Environmental Cost of AI (optional Workshop 2 on Fri, Sept 25)
- **Oct 1** — AI and the Appropriation of Creative Labor
- **Oct 8** — Automation’s Backbone (optional public event “Architectures of Participation” on Fri, Oct 9)
- **Oct 11 (Sun)** — Reading Response 2 due
- **Oct 15** — Regulate, Enforce, Build Worker Power
- **Oct 22** — Digital Independence (Final Research Paper Proposal due)
- **Oct 29** — From Cooperative AI to the Solidarity Stack (optional workshop “Cooperativism Beyond Cooperatives for Climate Action” on Fri, Oct 30)
- **Nov 5** — Applying Cooperative Principles to AI Ethics
- **Nov 8 (Sun)** — Reading Response 3 due
- **Nov 12** — No class — Solidarity AI Conference, Bangkok
- **Nov 19** — What Coops Are Already Doing
- **Nov 26** — Thanksgiving holiday — no class
- **Dec 3** — Movement Building

- **Dec 10** — What Stays With Us — Closing Circle (Final Research Paper due)

COURSE OUTLINE

This course unfolds in four interconnected phases: critique, political responses, building alternatives, and movement building. We begin by examining the power dynamics and systemic harms embedded in contemporary AI—from labor exploitation and bias to environmental degradation and data colonialism.

A note on readings: Graduate required readings carry over the fuller required lists from the previous iteration of this course wherever those texts remain in the 2026 program. Newly added texts appear as suggested readings; a few weeks (marked below) are new sessions with new required readings.

PART I: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM (WEEKS 1-7)

Week 1 • Thursday, August 27 — FOUNDATIONS

This opening session orients students to the course structure, digital workspace (Hylo), and discussion norms. After a walkthrough of the syllabus and expectations, students will participate in breakouts to surface perceived harms of AI and begin co-creating a shared glossary of key terms.

Beyond logistics, the session introduces AI as a socio-technical system shaped by political, economic, and infrastructural forces. Through foundational readings—including Kate Crawford’s *Atlas of AI* and a policy reflection from the Digital Watch Observatory—students begin to examine how AI’s impacts vary across contexts and why people-centered alternatives are urgently needed.

Class discussion: We reflect on how AI and digital infrastructures operate differently across economic, political, and infrastructural contexts.

REQUIRED READINGS

Crawford, Kate. “Introduction.” In *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021, pp. 1–22. (MP3 version)

Digital Watch. “AI That Serves Communities, Not the Other Way Round.” *Digital Watch Observatory*, July 10, 2025.

Hao, Karen. “Disaster Capitalism.” In *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman’s OpenAI*. New York: Penguin Press, 2025.

O’Neill, Cathy. “Civilian Casualties.” In *Weapons of Math Destruction*. New York: Crown, 2016, chapter 5.

O’Neill, Cathy. “Ineligible to Serve.” In *Weapons of Math Destruction*. New York: Crown, 2016, chapter 6.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Monett, D. *A Collection of Books on Topics Strongly Related to Critical AI* (14th ed., 2026).

Week 2 • Thursday, September 3 — UNPACKING THE MYTHS OF AI

This session challenges the myth of AI as a singular, autonomous intelligence. We also establish a shared vocabulary by introducing core AI concepts including foundation models, transformers, inference, training, fine-tuning, embeddings, open-weight versus open-source models, and AI agents. Instead, we frame it as a global infrastructure rooted in resource extraction, labor exploitation, and algorithmic control. Drawing from Kate Crawford's *Atlas of AI*, we examine how these systems function across governance, labor, and surveillance—amplifying inequality through racial, cultural, and geographic bias in hiring, policing, healthcare, and border control.

We also explore how AI undermines creative industries through mass copyright infringement and unconsented data use. From Gaza to Ukraine, Sudan, and Myanmar, we trace its militarization and role in reinforcing power. Finally, we confront the limits of regulation, given Big Tech's dominance, weak U.S. oversight, and Europe's failure to enforce existing laws.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are the foundational myths that sustain current AI development—and who do they serve?
- How do algorithmic, cultural, and environmental harms show up in real-world applications of AI?
- Why aren't existing laws enough—and what stands in the way of meaningful regulation?

REQUIRED READINGS

Webb, Amy. "Mind and Machine – A Very Brief History of AI." In *The Big Nine*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2019, chapter 1.

Webb, Amy. "The Insular World of AI's Tribes." In *The Big Nine*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2019, chapter 2.

"Localizing AI in the Global South." *Nature Machine Intelligence* 7 (2025): 675.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Turner, Fred. "The Texan Ideology: Silicon Valley Looks for Lebensraum in the Bible Belt." *The Baffler*, no. 84, November 2025.

Kerr, Dara. "Trump's DoJ Intervenes to Back Elon Musk in Datacenter Pollution Lawsuit." *The Guardian*, June 16, 2026.

Pope Leo XIV. *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*. Vatican City, 2026.

Kinder, Molly. “Hollywood Writers Went on Strike to Protect Their Livelihoods from Generative AI. Their Remarkable Victory Matters for All Workers.” Brookings Institution, April 12, 2024.

PODCAST

The Radical AI Podcast. “Episode 8: Love, Challenge, and Hope: Building a Movement to Dismantle the New Jim Code with Ruha Benjamin.” May 6, 2020.

FILM

Buolamwini, Joy. “The Coded Gaze: Bias in Artificial Intelligence.” Bloomberg Equality Summit, 2019.

“Les sacrifiés de l’IA.” *Éducation Physique & Sportive* / PeerTube, published February 11, 2025. Video, 1:13:11.

GUEST SPEAKER: Alek Tarkovski — a leading voice in the public AI movement, working to build AI infrastructure that serves the public interest rather than corporate profit.

Week 3 • Friday, September 10, 9:00–10:20 AM EDT — CLASS SESSION

Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures — Workshop 1

Note: This is a public event at a different time from usual. You must register separately as the Zoom URL is only sent to registered participants.

Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures is an ICDE event inspired by Melike Kaplan and Max Haiven’s Worker as Futurist project, inviting participants to reclaim the future through radical imagination grounded in real-world cooperative alternatives. In Workshop 1, Mapping the Seeds of Tomorrow, participants explore existing initiatives such as platform cooperatives, data cooperatives, feminist tech projects, community-owned digital infrastructure, and community land trusts, then imagine the technological futures these seeds could grow into beyond Big Tech and extractive capitalism.

Week 4 • Thursday, September 17 — COLONIALISM RELOADED

This session examines how AI is entangled with extractive systems that echo colonial legacies—particularly in the Global South. Through regional critiques, lived experiences, and artistic interventions, we explore how digital technologies intersect with labor, sovereignty, and cultural power. From new labor imaginaries in Asia to Shav Vimalendiran’s analysis of cultural bias in large language models, we begin to see how global inequalities are reproduced in AI systems.

Supplemental materials deepen this inquiry—covering data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias), governance gaps (Gurumurthy & Chami), and regional case studies from Turkey (Genç) and South America (Rikap). We also explore artistic and geopolitical perspectives, from the Ghana Think Tank’s inversion of North-South problem-solving to Timnit Gebru’s podcast on AI geopolitics.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How does AI reinforce or reconfigure existing colonial and extractive power structures?
- What alternative imaginaries or governance models are emerging from the Global South?
- Who benefits—and who is made invisible—when AI systems are deployed globally?

REQUIRED READINGS

Singh, Deepa. “AI Ethics in and for the Global South: Universal Vs. Situated Approaches.” *Medium*, March 27, 2025.

Vimalendiran, Shav. “Cultural Bias in LLMs.” *Blog*, July 20, 2024.

Couldry, Nick, and Ulises A. Mejias. “The Coloniality of Data Relations.” In *The Costs of Connection*. Stanford University Press, 2019, chapter 3.

Gurumurthy, Anita, and Nandini Chami. *The Wicked Problem of AI Governance*. New Delhi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2019.

Genç, Kaya. “Desperate for Work, Translators Train the AI That’s Putting Them Out of Work.” *Rest of World*, February 20, 2025.

Rikap, Cecilia. “South America’s Sovereignty Is Being Lost in Big Tech’s Clouds.” *openDemocracy*, July 30, 2025.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Du, Michelle, and Chinasa T. Okolo. “Reimagining the Future of Data and AI Labor in the Global South.” *Brookings Institution*, October 7, 2025.

Raval, Noopur. “Interrupting Invisibility in a Global World.” *Interactions* 28, no. 4 (July–August 2021): 27–31.

Arora, Payal. “The Biggest Myths About the Next Billion Internet Users.” *Quartz*, November 2019.

PODCAST

Marx, Paris. “AI Hype Enters Its Geopolitics Era w/ Timnit Gebru.” *Tech Won’t Save Us*, March 13, 2025.

ART PROJECT

[Ghana Think Tank](#)—the collective that flips conventional power dynamics by having think tanks in the Global South tackle problems from the Global North.

GUEST SPEAKER: [Sandeep Mertia](#) — Assistant Professor at Stevens Institute of Technology whose work spans the anthropology of computing, data-driven governance, and technology futures, with a particular focus on South Asia and the majority world.

Week 5 • Thursday, September 24 — THE ENVIRONMENTAL COST OF AI

We retrace every stage of AI's material life—lithium and rare-earth extraction, megawatt-hungry data centers, water-cooled GPUs, and the mounting e-waste that follows each model upgrade. Readings from *Atlas of AI*, Sinem Görüçü's work on humor and meme-making as a way for AI practitioners to critically engage environmental impacts, and up-to-the-minute journalism ground a data-driven audit of energy, water, and mineral inputs for today's leading systems.

We also examine speculative fabulation through an imagined podcast interview set on a North Sea energy island called Atlantis, asking what computing could look like within a community-governed green grid. In breakouts, students apply cooperative principles to draft “eco-manifestos” that set concrete targets for frugality, shared ownership of infrastructure, and transparent impact reporting.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are the full ecological costs of AI, from extraction to e-waste?
- How can cooperative principles reshape the environmental footprint of AI infrastructures?
- What would it take to build truly sustainable, low-carbon AI systems—and who should be responsible for that transition?

REQUIRED READINGS

Hao, Karen. “Plundered Earth.” In *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI*. New York: Penguin Press, 2025.

Bhat, Divsha. “Big Tech Is Building AI in the Desert. The Water May Not Last.” *Rest of World*, August 4, 2025.

Berreby, David. “As Use of A.I. Soars, So Does the Energy and Water It Requires.” *Yale Environment* 360, February 6, 2024.

Parshley, Lois. “The Hidden Environmental Impact of AI.” *Jacobin*, June 20, 2024.

Saitō, Kōhei. *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto*. New York: Astra House, 2024 (selection).

SUGGESTED READINGS

Görüçü, S. “Meme-tivism: Rethinking AI's Environmental Impact.”

Nafus, Dawn, and Laura Watts. “Federated Fair Trade Energy: Speculative Fabulation for a Planet with Limits.” *LIMITS* '26, 2026.

“Water for Data.” *People & Power*, produced by Al Jazeera Media Network, July 3, 2025. Video, 24:40.

Falk, Sophia. “More Than Carbon: The Full Environmental Footprint of LLMs.” *LUMEN*, 2025.

GUEST SPEAKER: Frank Pasquale — Professor of Law at Cornell Tech and Cornell Law School and a leading scholar of algorithmic accountability and the law of AI, whose work brings the concerns of social justice movements to the regulation of ranking, scoring, and automated decision-making systems; author of *The Black Box Society* and *New Laws of Robotics*.

OPTIONAL: Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures — Workshop 2: Writing Cooperative Futures. Friday, September 25, 9:00–10:50 AM EDT (Online). You must register. [Learn more](#) · [Register](#)

Week 6 • Thursday, October 1 — AI AND THE APPROPRIATION OF CREATIVE LABOR

This session examines how generative AI reshapes creative industries by automating artistic work and training on scraped artistic, literary, and musical works without consent. We focus on authorship, ownership, attribution, compensation, and economic survival, asking how creators can have a real voice in AI governance.

From Studio Ghibli-style image generators to lawsuits by authors, musicians, and visual artists, we explore legal challenges, ethical failures, and frameworks from the World Economic Forum and Brookings Institution. Students conclude by drafting policy memos or fair-compensation proposals that address large-scale intellectual property theft and propose enforceable protections for human creators.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— To what extent should AI companies be held legally or financially accountable for using copyrighted material without consent, and what models of compensation are viable at scale?

— Is “style” a form of intellectual property that deserves protection in the era of generative AI? How do current laws fall short?

— What would a fair and enforceable system look like for protecting artists, musicians, and writers in a world where their work can be scraped, mimicked, and monetized by machines?

REQUIRED READINGS

Wang, Judy, and Nicol Turner Lee. “AI and the Visual Arts: The Case for Copyright Protection.” *Brookings Institution*, April 18, 2025.

O’Brien, Matt, and Sarah Parvini. “ChatGPT’s Viral Studio Ghibli-Style Images Highlight AI Copyright Concerns.” *Associated Press*, March 28, 2025.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Lab for AI Ethics & Creative Labor. “F(r)ictions: Creative Work in an Age of AI.” *Horizontal TNS2*.

Camnitzer, Luis. “Artificial Utopia.”

World Economic Forum. *Technology Convergence Report 2025*. Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2025.

Rocha, André, et al. “Worker-led AI Governance: Hollywood Writers’ Strikes and the Worker Power.” *Information, Communication & Society*, June 2025.

GUEST SPEAKER: Marcelo Vieta — Associate Professor at the University of Toronto whose research spans the social and solidarity economy, worker-recuperated enterprises, and new cooperativism, with a particular focus on Latin America, Canada, and Italy.

Week 7 • Thursday, October 8 — AUTOMATION’S BACKBONE

This session exposes the illusion of autonomous AI by spotlighting the hidden human labor behind it—content moderation, annotation, data labeling, and flagging. Drawing on the myth of the 18th-century Mechanical Turk, a supposed chess-playing machine secretly controlled by a person, we explore how modern AI similarly masks the human effort embedded in its operations.

Despite the image of machine intelligence, today’s systems depend on vast, underpaid workforces—often in the Global South—whose contributions are erased from view. Through personal accounts, cooperative alternatives, and critical artworks, we investigate how this invisibility sustains algorithmic injustice and explore pathways toward recognition and accountability.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How does the myth of autonomous AI—echoing the Mechanical Turk—serve to obscure the human labor behind machine learning systems?
- What are the ethical and economic consequences of hiding the labor of content moderators, annotators, and data workers, particularly those in the Global South?
- What would it take to make this labor visible, valued, and collectively owned—and how can cooperative models challenge the extractive logics of current AI development?

REQUIRED READINGS

Muldoon, James, Callum Cant, and Mark Graham. “The Annotator.” In *Feeding the Machine: The Hidden Human Labor Powering A.I.*, chapter 1. New York: Bloomsbury, 2024.

Smith, Robert, and Alexandra Heal. “Spies, Spinners, Solicitors: Builder.ai’s ‘Perfectly Normal’ Creditor List in Full.” *Financial Times*, June 9, 2025.

Gray, Mary L., and Siddharth Suri. “Algorithmic Cruelty” and “Working Hard for [More Than] the Money.” In *Ghost Work*. Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.

Casilli, Antonio A. “Will Humans Replace Robots?” In *Waiting for Robots*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2025, chapter 1.

Crawford, Kate. “Labor.” In *Atlas of AI*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021, chapter 2.

Buolamwini, Joy. “Daughter of Art and Science.” In *Unmasking AI*. New York: Random House, 2023, chapter 1.

Prabhu, Vinay Uday, and Abeba Birhane. “Large Image Datasets: A Pyrrhic Win for Computer Vision?” *arXiv*, July 23, 2020.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Tinn, Honghong. “TSMC and the New Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century.” In *Island Tinkerers*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2025.

Mwema, Esther, and Abeba Birhane. “Undersea Cables in Africa: The New Frontiers of Digital Colonialism.” *First Monday* 29, no. 4 (April 2024).

Echchaibi, Nabil, Samira Rajabi, and Nathan Schneider. *Sacred Stack: The Art of Cyborg Community*. Boulder, CO: Media Economies Design Lab and Center for Media, Religion, and Culture, University of Colorado Boulder; Metalabel, 2023.

GUEST SPEAKER: Kenzo Soares Seto — ICDE Fellow and Resident Fellow at Yale Law School whose research focuses on AI regulation in Latin America, examining how civil society, tech workers, and governments negotiate digital sovereignty, algorithmic justice, and platform economies.

OPTIONAL: Architectures of Participation. Friday, October 9, 9:00–10:50 AM EDT (Online). With Sybille Légitime (Brown), Yuhan Liu (Princeton), Andrés Monroy-Hernández (Princeton), Trebor Scholz (The New School / PCC), and Harini Suresh (Brown). You must [register](#). [Learn more](#)

PART II: POLITICAL RESPONSES (WEEKS 8–9)

Week 8 • Thursday, October 15 — REGULATE, ENFORCE, BUILD WORKER POWER

This session examines how legislation and policy could support a more democratic, people-centered AI ecosystem, one designed not for profit or control, but for public good. We also explore how public procurement by cities, universities, and governments can strengthen community-owned AI infrastructure. At stake is whether laws can meaningfully restrain corporate monopolies and state surveillance, or merely formalize existing inequalities under the banner of “ethics.”

We’ll look closely at initiatives like the EU AI Act and the U.S. Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy AI, both of which reflect a growing consensus that AI requires guardrails. Yet, as Janet Vertesi, danah boyd, Alex Taylor, and Benjamin Shestakofsky argue, meaningful AI accountability requires examining the political economy of AI: who controls the capital, labor, infrastructure, data, and power that make these systems possible. Against this backdrop, the session asks what structurally aware legislation might look like—laws that do not just manage risk, but redistribute power.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What kinds of legislative frameworks could truly enable people-centered AI?
- How do current efforts like the EU AI Act and U.S. Executive Order fall short?
- What are the risks of relying on policy alone in an era of techno-authoritarianism?

REQUIRED READINGS

Jozak, Tom. *2024 EU AI Act: A Detailed Analysis*. SSRN, March 26, 2025.

Cuéllar, Mariano-Florentino, and Aziz Z. Huq. *The Democratic Regulation of Artificial Intelligence*. Knight First Amendment Institute, 2022.

Ramos, Maria Elisabete, et al. “Cooperatives and the Use of Artificial Intelligence: A Critical View.” *Sustainability* 15, no. 1 (2023): 329.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Vertesi, Janet, danah boyd, Alex Taylor, and Benjamin Shestakofsky. “Reckoning with the Political Economy of AI: Avoiding Decoys in Pursuit of Accountability.” *arXiv*, 2026.

Benkler, Y. “Practical Anarchism: Peer Mutualism, Market Power, and the Fallible State.” *Politics & Society* 41, no. 2 (2013): 213–251.

Lazar, Seth, and Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar. “AI Agents and Democratic Resilience: How AI Agents Might Affect the Realization of Democratic Values.” *Knight First Amendment Institute*, September 4, 2025.

“Community-Aligned AI Benchmarks.” Aspen Digital, 2025–2026.

McQuillan, Dan. *Resisting AI: An Anti-Fascist Approach to Artificial Intelligence*. Bristol University Press, 2022 (selection).

GUEST SPEAKER: Dorleta Urrutia Oñate — ICDE Fellow and professor at Mondragon University whose research explores how AI-driven financing mechanisms and trustworthy governance frameworks can help platform cooperatives scale sustainably without compromising democratic ownership.

Week 9 • Thursday, October 22 — DIGITAL INDEPENDENCE

Final Research Paper Proposal due today.

Who controls the digital infrastructure on which our societies increasingly depend? This session examines digital sovereignty in an age when a handful of US-based technology companies dominate operating systems, cloud computing, AI models, and digital communications. Drawing on recent scholarship, we explore how this concentration of power affects autonomy, resilience, and democracy, and why regulation alone is insufficient. We also examine the economics of AI infrastructure, including compute costs,

cloud concentration, venture capital, and economies of scale that make cooperative alternatives difficult to build.

We also consider the rise of AI agents and ask what sovereignty means when systems can act autonomously on our behalf. Through examples ranging from steward-owned and employee-owned enterprises to Indigenous AI initiatives rooted in local languages and cultural values, students will explore alternative models for building digital infrastructures that are accountable to communities rather than investors.

REQUIRED READINGS

Nagappa, A., and D. Angus. “Nearly Everything We Use Online Is Owned by Big Tech. There’s a Better Way Forward.” *The Conversation*, May 20, 2026.

Anthropic. “Statement on the US Government Directive to Suspend Access to Fable 5 and Mythos 5.” Anthropic Newsroom, June 12, 2026.

Broer, S. M. L. “The 28th Regime as a Pathway for Non-Extractive Business Models.” *N-EXTLAW Working Paper Series* No. 5/2026.

Kuslikis, A., and S. Dudley. “TCUs Positioned to Lead a Community of Indigenous AI Practice.” *Tribal College Journal* 37, no. 4 (2026).

GUEST SPEAKER: Phakin Nimmannorrawong — ICDE Fellow and PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge researching the intersection of leftist politics and blockchain communities, with a focus on how solidarity-oriented crypto infrastructures are built and contested in practice.

PART III: BUILDING ALTERNATIVES (WEEKS 10–12)

Week 10 • Thursday, October 29 — FROM COOPERATIVE AI TO THE SOLIDARITY STACK

This session introduces the Solidarity Stack: a vision for AI infrastructure built through alliances among cooperatives, public institutions, unions, climate justice networks, Indigenous data-sovereignty campaigns, and public-interest technology initiatives. Cooperatives alone cannot confront the systemic challenges of AI in isolation. To make a real impact, they must connect with broader movements fighting over labor, climate, ownership, data governance, and democratic control—and reimagine what it would mean for the entire digital stack, from mineral extraction and chip manufacturing to data centers, model training, and governance, to be cooperatively run.

We examine Current AI, Public AI, LaSuite.coop, and other open alternatives to Big Tech, while asking what remains missing when governance is institutional rather than community-owned. Students compare cooperative, steward-owned, nonprofit, foundation, municipal, and public ownership models, asking which institutional forms are best suited to different kinds of AI infrastructure. Cooperatively owned mines already exist in Peru, Colombia, Zambia, and Mongolia; cooperative data centers have emerged in Germany and

the Netherlands. Drawing on the 1880s vision of the cooperative commonwealth and historic U.S. cooperative ecosystems, we explore how solidarity-based infrastructure might be built at every layer of AI's global supply chain.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How do cooperative digital infrastructures—such as member-owned data centers—redefine control, ownership, and accountability compared to corporate platforms?
- What technical and organizational design choices support data sovereignty, democratic governance, and long-term resilience in digital systems?
- Why can't cooperatives alone confront the structural harms of AI—and what does meaningful cross-movement collaboration look like?

REQUIRED READINGS

Hunt-Hendrix, Leah, and Astra Taylor. "Solidarity Beyond Borders." In *Solidarity: The Past, Present, and Future of a World-Changing Idea*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2024.

Wilson, David, and Andrew E. G. Jonas. "The People as Infrastructure Concept: Appraisal and New Directions." *Urban Geography*, May 2021.

Nosengo, Nicola, et al., eds. *AI Models in the Global South*. Nature Collection, May 21, 2025. (Choose one article.)

Bria, Francesca, Paul Timmers, and Fausto Gernone. *EuroStack – A European Alternative for Digital Sovereignty*. Bertelsmann Stiftung, February 2025.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Scholz, R. Trebor, and Mark Esposito. "Building a Solidarity Ecosystem for AI." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, February 5, 2026.

Kawano, Emily, and Julie Matthaei. "System Change: A Basic Primer to the Solidarity Economy." *Nonprofit Quarterly*, July 8, 2020.

Nicole, Sarah, Samuel Vance-Law, Connor Spelliscy, and Jeb Bell. *How Can Data Cooperatives Help Build a Fair Data Economy?* Project Liberty Institute and Decentralization Research Center, January 2025.

Laville, Jean-Louis. "Origins and Histories of the Social and Solidarity Economy." In *Encyclopedia of the Social and Solidarity Economy*, ed. Ilcheong Yi et al. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023.

Zimmermann, Annette. *Democratizing AI*.

Public AI. *Public AI Network*.

Current AI. "Building Public Interest AI Technology Together."

"The Politics of Open Infrastructures" (PDF).

Vieta, Marcelo, et al. "Editorial: The New Cooperativism." *Affinities* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1–11.

EXPLORE CASE STUDIES

OLMo (AI2): Ai2's fully open language-model project, releasing weights, training data, code, and evaluations. Advances research transparency while still relying on centralized compute.

Socialism AI: A chatbot-style educational tool by the World Socialist Web Site that uses its archive to answer questions from a Marxist/Trotskyist perspective.

AImpower.org: Works with people who stutter to make speech AI fairer, more accurate, and less stigmatizing, building community-led datasets and models.

GUEST SPEAKER: Morshed Mannan — Lecturer in Global Law and Digital Technologies at Edinburgh Law School and ICDE Affiliate Faculty, whose research spans blockchain governance and cooperative governance, with a focus on democratizing the platform economy.

OPTIONAL: Cooperativism Beyond Cooperatives for Climate Action. Led by Sameer Bajaj and Ritvik Gupta of the Aapthi Institute. Friday, October 30, 9:00–10:20 AM ET (Online). You must [register](#). [Learn more](#)

The aftershocks of the AI boom make it urgent to understand the logics of the AI supply chain. This workshop explores how cooperative principles can shape community technologies for climate action and AI, while examining five barriers to cooperative alternatives: data, compute, labor, natural resources, and finance. Rather than replicating extractive and unsustainable tech infrastructures, the session asks where cooperative logic and AI supply chains clash, and what community-owned alternatives might make possible.

Week 11 • Thursday, November 5 — APPLYING COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES TO AI ETHICS

Building on Week 10's exploration of the cooperative digital stack, this session asks what it would concretely mean to apply the seven cooperative principles—first articulated in 1844—to the design, governance, and ethics of AI systems. Rather than treating cooperative values as abstract ideals, we examine how they can guide real-world alternatives to extractive, corporate-led tech development.

We begin with READ-COOP, the European cooperative behind the Transkribus handwriting recognition platform, which enables scholars, archivists, and communities to transcribe historical documents at scale while retaining democratic governance, equitable data policies, and a federated ownership model. We will engage directly with Professor Melissa Terras, one of READ-COOP's founding members, and Jose Mari Luzarraga Monasterio, co-founder of the Mondragon Team Academy. Students develop practical criteria for evaluating democratic governance, participation, accountability, environmental impact, and community benefit.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How can the seven cooperative principles be concretely applied to the design, governance, and deployment of AI systems?
- What makes READ-COOP and Transkribus a viable model for ethical, democratically governed AI infrastructure?
- How can federated cooperative systems challenge extractive AI models and scale solidarity-based alternatives?
- How should we evaluate whether an AI system is genuinely democratic, accountable, environmentally sustainable, and beneficial to its community?

REQUIRED READINGS

Terras, Melissa, et al. “The Artificial Intelligence Cooperative: READ-COOP, Transkribus, and the Benefits of Shared Community Infrastructure for Automated Text Recognition.” *Open Research Europe* 5, no. 16 (2025): 1–44.

Srivastava, Lina. “Building Community Governance for AI.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, March 4, 2024.

Scholz, R. Trebor. “The Coming Data Democracy.” In *Own This! How Platform Cooperatives Help Workers Build a Democratic Internet*. Verso, 2023.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Tangen, Nicolai, Carine Smith Ihenacho, and Shilpi Nanda. “Why Employee Share Ownership Matters for Long-Term Value Creation.” Norges Bank Investment Management, 2026.

Mannan, Morshed, Simon Pek, and Vangelis Papadimitropoulos. “The Cooperative Governance of Artificial Intelligence: The Case of READ-COOP’s Transkribus Platform.” In *Global Cooperative Economics and Movements*. Routledge, 2025.

SUGGESTED VIDEO

Oxford Union. “THW End the Private Ownership of Social Media Companies | Full Debate.” YouTube, April 2026.

EXPLORE COOPERATIVE CASE STUDIES

Explore how cooperatives like [LESTAC AI](#), [FrieslandCampina](#), and [Coop Sweden](#) are building ethical, localized AI—from infrastructure and analytics to retail applications. Consider how each engages different layers of the AI stack and reflects cooperative principles in practice.

GUEST SPEAKER: [Melissa Terras](#) — Professor of Digital Cultural Heritage at the University of Edinburgh and a founding director of READ-COOP, the cooperative behind Transkribus — an AI-powered platform for recognizing handwritten historical documents that she argues may be the only AI cooperative of its kind in existence.

Week 12 • Thursday, November 12 — BANGKOK CONFERENCE — NO CLASS

No class this week. Prof. Scholz will be at the Solidarity AI 2026 Conference, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok (November 12–15).

PART IV: MOVEMENT BUILDING (WEEKS 13–14)

Week 13 • Thursday, November 19 — WHAT COOPS ARE ALREADY DOING

AI is reshaping economies, institutions, and everyday life—but its development remains tightly controlled by firms like OpenAI, Microsoft, and Meta. These companies dominate through massive infrastructure, extractive data practices, and profit-driven design, often reinforcing global inequality and ecological harm. This session asks: What alternatives are not just imaginable, but already underway?

We examine how cooperatives—and, more broadly, the solidarity economy—are beginning to intervene in AI's development. Students will also analyze what it actually takes to build a cooperative AI initiative, including governance design, legal structure, financing, partnerships, and technical infrastructure. Cooperatives alone already employ nearly 10% of the global workforce and represent a global movement with real economic and political weight. Through case studies like IFFCO, FrieslandCampina, MIDATA, Pescadata, READ-COOP, and the Gamayyar African Tech Workers' Cooperative, we explore how these models are reclaiming AI for equity, sustainability, and collective ownership.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Where are cooperatives and solidarity economy actors already intervening in the AI space—and what is the scope and impact of their work?
- What structural or legal shifts would enable cooperatives to do more in shaping AI infrastructure, design, and governance?
- Beyond cooperatives, how might broader solidarity economy networks provide the resources, alliances, and scale needed to challenge corporate AI dominance?

REQUIRED READINGS

Scholz, Trebor, and Stefano Tortorici. "5 Ways Cooperatives Can Shape the Future of AI." *Harvard Business Review*, June 25, 2025.

Hubbard, Sarah. "Cooperative Paradigms for Artificial Intelligence." Ash Center, Harvard Kennedy School, November 20, 2024.

REWE Group. "AI Manifesto." Digital Day 2020, Cologne, Germany, 2020.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Scholz, T., and S. Tortorici. *Cooperative AI?* SSRN, 2025.

Free Knowledge Institute. “Cooperative Clouds: How LaSuite.coop Is Building a New Model for Digital Sovereignty.”

Poliks, J., and S. Trillo. “Convergence.” *Carrier Bag*, May 21, 2026.

Co-operative Councils Innovation Network, Wigan Council, and Mutual Ventures. *Co-operative Values-Driven AI: A Guidance Framework*. October 2024.

EXPLORE COOPERATIVE CASE STUDIES

Research [MIDATA.coop](#), a Swiss health data cooperative that enables member-owned, consent-based data sharing for ethical AI development. Focus particularly on how MIDATA uses AI through [AiDAVA](#), its virtual assistant that helps individuals curate, integrate, and manage their health records with human-in-the-loop support.

We also examine unsuccessful or contested initiatives—including failed platform cooperatives, abandoned data trust projects, cooperative cloud experiments, OpenAI’s governance crisis, Builder.ai, and other cases—to understand the institutional barriers facing democratic AI.

GUEST SPEAKER: TBD

November 26 — THANKSGIVING. NO CLASS

Week 14 • Thursday, December 3 — MOVEMENT BUILDING

This session explores why cooperatives alone cannot meaningfully confront the systemic challenges of AI. They will not succeed if they act in isolation—or cling to the illusion of being apolitical. To make a real impact, cooperatives must align with other movements fighting for justice in technology, labor, climate, and data governance.

We bring together tech-worker unions, climate justice networks, and Indigenous data-sovereignty campaigns to explore how cooperative strategies can amplify solidarity across struggles. The session investigates what cross-movement collaboration could look like in practice, and how shared principles—such as democratic governance, mutual aid, and collective ownership—can lay the groundwork for durable, people-centered alternatives to extractive AI systems.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Why can’t cooperatives alone confront the structural harms of AI—and what are the limits of working in isolation?
- What does meaningful cross-movement collaboration look like between co-ops, unions, climate activists, and Indigenous groups?
- How can shared governance, mutual aid, and collective ownership shape AI development beyond capitalist or state-centered models?

REQUIRED READINGS

Hunt-Hendrix, Leah, and Astra Taylor. "Solidarity Beyond Borders." In *Solidarity: The Past, Present, and Future of a World-Changing Idea*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2024.

Kawano, Emily, and Julie Matthaei. "System Change: A Basic Primer to the Solidarity Economy." *Nonprofit Quarterly*, July 8, 2020.

Vieta, Marcelo, et al. "Editorial: The New Cooperativism." *Affinities* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1–11.

Week 15 • Thursday, December 10 — WHAT STAYS WITH US — CLOSING CIRCLE AND COLLECTIVE COMMITMENTS

Final Research Paper due.

In this final class, we begin with a closing lecture and a reflection on the semester as a whole. We revisit the concepts that have stayed with us, examine a few sample papers, and return to the peer library to explore the texts and resources that you have recommended throughout the course.

Looking back on our 15-week learning journey, we reflect on the key insights, questions, and perspectives that emerged along the way. We conclude with a feedback session and an opportunity to express appreciation for one another's contributions, while considering the most important lessons we will carry forward beyond this class.

Required Materials and Expenses

All required reading materials, including PDFs and audio resources, are provided free of charge. There are no costs associated with this course.

Academic Integrity Policy

The standards of academic integrity apply to all forms of academic work and circumstances, including, but not limited to, presentations, performances, examinations, submissions of papers (including drafts), projects, and academic records. Academic integrity includes accurate use of quotations, as well as appropriate and explicit citation of sources in instances of paraphrasing, describing ideas, and reporting on research findings and work of others. Only expressly authorized use of artificial intelligence tools is permitted. Students unsure about acceptable use of any source, including generative artificial intelligence tools, should consult the syllabus or speak with the instructor.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: cheating on examinations; using work of others as one's own original work; copying or appropriating someone else's work; submission of someone else's work downloaded from paid or unpaid sources as one's own; submission of another student's work; submitting the same work for more than one course without explicit approval; unauthorized use of artificial intelligence tools to generate ideas, images, art/design, audio, video, code, or text for any portions of work; destruction or defacement of the work of others; aiding or abetting any act of academic dishonesty; any attempt to gain academic advantage by presenting misleading information; and any form of distributing one's work with the intent to enable students to use it as their own.

Title IX Policy

The New School is committed to creating and sustaining an environment where students, faculty, and staff can study, work, and thrive unhampered by discrimination or harassment. Community members affected by sexual harassment or any other form of sexual violence can seek assistance and education through the university's Title IX resources.

Acknowledgment

The generative AI policy reflects the instructor's own thinking and draws on course policies from the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education program.

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