

Calculating Empires:

A Genealogy of Technology and Power Since 1500

This monumental fresco traces the entanglement of technology and power over five centuries, from the early days of printing with movable type, through the advent of new modes of communication, and into to our age of artificial intelligence. A map, manifesto, historical atlas, and circuit diagram, the work not only offers a critical description of our world but also investigates a defining question of our time: How do we make sense of systems so vast, complex, and opaque that we lose track of how they govern our everyday lives?

Over four years, Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler produced thousands of short texts and hand-drawn illustrations organized around four thematic pillars: Communication, Computation, Classification, and Control. The process involved continually revising, expanding, and reconsidering how they understood current cultural and sociopolitical patterns that were seeded centuries ago. The artists' strategy is to help viewers learn from history. "The aim of our critical cartography," they explain, is "to show the operations of power across terrains, and across time, in order to challenge them. We cannot oppose and transform without the ability to understand and name."