Call for Papers

Interdisciplinary Conference on the Relations of Humans, Machines and Gender

16th – 19th October 2019 | Braunschweig, Germany

There is growing interaction of humans and machines in numerous fields of science, work, and everyday life – a phenomenon which is not restricted to specific countries but can be observed globally. This interaction changes the way our working life is structured and how science and technology are organized. And what about the human individual? What role does, for example, sex, gender, sexual identity, age, skin color, migration, or cultural background play?

This interdisciplinary conference is organized by the PhD program "Gendered Configurations of Humans and Machines. Interdisciplinary Analyses of Technology" (in short: KoMMa.G; a joined program of Technische Universität Braunschweig, Ostfalia University of Applied Sciences and Braunschweig University of Art.

The conference aims at bringing together international researchers working on subjects in the fields of engineering, technology, humanities, and the social and natural sciences, who are interested in reflecting on interdisciplinarity/multidisciplinarity, on science and technology studies, as well as gender, feminist, queer, intersectional, and postcolonial studies.

The conference is divided into four panels considering the different yet connected dimensions of the conference topic. The first panel aims at reflecting on the meaning of *interdisciplinarity* itself, while the following sessions focus on the *relations of human, machine, and gender* from diverse perspectives.

- Interdisciplinary Analyses as Chance and Challenge
- Humans and Machines in Everyday Life
- Gender and Diversity in Work and Technologies
- Questioning STS – A Postcolonial and Intersectional Perspective

What to send:

The aim of this interdisciplinary conference is to bring people together and encourage creative knowledge exchange. Thus, the conference welcomes a variety of formats such as (but not limited to) oral and poster presentations, workshops, performances, question & answer sessions, roundtables, as well as handing in whole panels.

Please submit abstracts of up to 500 words until the 28th of February 2019 to:
submission-komma-g@tu-braunschweig.de

We are also available for any questions concerning the application process and possible formats.

Panel 1

Interdisciplinary Analyses as Chance and Challenge

In this session we want to discuss problems and opportunities of interdisciplinarity. How fixed are the borders of disciplines? What can disciplines learn from one another – is there synergy? How are disciplines structured in other countries?

The discussion relies on three pillars: (1) an invitation to discuss interdisciplinary research as challenge and chance for science in general as well as from different regional/local and international/global perspectives, (2) a reflection on the interdisciplinarity of our own work within the KoMMa.G-program (see https://www.tu-braunschweig.de/kommag), and (3) an invitation to other interdisciplinary programs (e.g. other interdisciplinary PhD-programs) to share their experiences.

Possible topics could be:

- Opportunities of interdisciplinary programs (for PhD students as well as in academia in general)
- Problems in interdisciplinary structures, i.e. how to plan interdisciplinarity
- The limits of interdisciplinarity (language style, way of publication, and so on)
- Gender/Queer/Postcolonial/Science and Technology Studies as interdisciplinary fields
- Disciplinarity, Interdisciplinarity, and/or Trans*disciplinarity in scientific work today
- Questioning the separation of humanities and the STEM fields
- Reflection on one's own work within interdisciplinary studies and programs
- Disciplinarity in other countries and the challenge of international projects

In this conference session, we particularly encourage interdisciplinary groups to perform and reflect on their work.

Panel 2

Humans and Machines in Everyday Life

This session aims at investigating the interfaces and interactions between humans and machines from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Our everyday life is already to a large degree shaped by technology and we are used to interacting with machines and other technological artifacts. What potential and challenges do these interactions entail? Do we need to consider technology a threat at all?

This session provides room for the interdisciplinary discussion of technical and societal aspects of human-machine interaction in light of the ongoing technological development. Scientists, practitioners, and potential users from diverse disciplines are welcome to submit contributions.

Some of our suggested main issues include:

- Challenges and potential of human-machine interaction
- Human-machine communication
- Interacting with autonomous cognitive agents
- Human-machine interfaces: future technologies and design
- Human-machine interaction in various fields, e.g. mobility and care
- Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in everyday life
- The borders between human and machine - Cyborgs
- Technology Assessment
- Technological artifacts as reflected in culture and gender
- Ethical issues in the development of technological artifacts
- History of technology

Panel 3

Gender and Diversity in Work and Technologies

Globalization and automatization have changed working conditions in various ways. Communication becomes more and more important at the same time as the composition of work teams has become more complex and diverse. As a consequence, taking the expectations and needs of each person in the team into account is becoming an increasingly complex task. How do people belonging to different cultures, genders, and ages work together? What happens if the new colleague is a robot? How do the challenges of balancing work and everyday life change? What doubts and conflicts arise? How do society and politicians react to these? What are the effects on employment levels?

In this session of the conference, we would like to reflect on the salience and importance of gender and diversity in 1) work and 2) technology processes. Pivotal questions are:

1) How does the age of digitalization/automatization change the affordances/specifications of employees? Under which circumstances are stereotypes (e.g., gender, age, origin) (de)constructed at the place of work?
2) Where is gender-specific technology design applied and how does it affect the user? To what extend does design and commercialism lead to the exclusion of specific groups of people and how can it be buffered?

Panel 4

Questioning STS – A Postcolonial and Intersectional Perspective

Power relations, for example with regard to gender or race, are not restricted to national boundaries but are embedded in global structures. Science and technology represent crucial arenas where power is negotiated in society. Since their formation in the 1960s, Science and Technology Studies (STS) have always been concerned with the interdependence of science, knowledge, technology, and politics. As a highly interdisciplinary field of research, STS has the potential to bridge the gap between the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields and the human as well as social sciences. STS serves, therefore, as a meeting point for studying human-machine configurations. But within the field of STS, common research objectives and modes of knowledge production have been criticized and subfields such as 'postcolonial', 'indigenous', 'feminist', or 'queer' STS have emerged.

This session aims to analyse the interplay of global power structures with science and technology from an intersectional perspective. We welcome contributions that deal with these approaches on a theoretical as well as methodological or practical level on the basis of exemplary research.

Possible topics/main issues could be:

1) How are certain technologies, such as the Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), entangled with, and re-shaping, colonial territorialities and histories?
2) How do global power structures in a certain (cultural) space and time impact the participation of certain groups of individuals, e.g. women, in science and technology?
3) What are the potentials and boundaries of research projects that work at decolonizing medicine, science, and technology - or the STS themselves as a discipline? How can an intersectional perspective that is sensitive to dimensions such as race, class, or gender be integrated into established modes of knowledge production without being just an add-on?
4) How can STS be decolonized so that knowledge, technologies, practices, and epistemologies that have arisen from indigenous people around the globe are not marginalized under the label of ‚indigenous STS'? What are the potential outcomes of a possible "clash of ontologies" between indigenous and so-called modern societies?