



Colloquium on the Biographies of Artifacts and Practices

Dear colleagues,

we cordially invite you to join the Biographies of Artifacts and Practices (BOAP) Research Colloquium. Based on a collaboration of researchers from the University of Edinburgh, Aalto University, and the Technical University of Berlin, this bi-monthly colloquium provides an open platform for an international network of researchers interested in BOAP and related methodological and analytical approaches. Its main goal is to contribute to strengthening the robustness of research designs in STS and the sociology of technology and innovation. Each event features the presentation and discussion of one research project that traces the biographies of complex sociotechnical systems across multiple locales and extended timeframes, often linking multiple studies and scales of analysis.

The colloquium will take place online on **November 1st, 4pm** (CET). It will feature a talk by **Dzifa Ametowbla**, of TU Berlin. Dzifa will present insights from a biographical study of standardized organizational software in surgical planning.

About the talk:

Organizational scholars and sociologists of technology have long been stressing that the material properties of software exert profound influence on the practices of use (e.g., Orlikowski und Iacono 2001, Leonardi und Barley 2010). In spite of this, studies of software use typically consider these material properties only in an abstract fashion, if at all. One of the reasons for this is that software artefacts are not easily transparent to social researchers. In my talk, I propose an approach that allows social researchers to study software properties systematically and illustrate this approach with results from a case study about the use of standardized organizational software in surgical planning. I claim that all software contains multiple and potentially inconsistent models of sociality, only some of which become performative during software use. I show how researchers can identify the performative models in their research projects by combining data about use practices and their systemic conditions with information about the biography of the software.

Software consists mainly of standardized components which are recombined to generate new functionality. Software components embed models of sociality mirroring the purposes and perspectives of their creators and the dynamics of the social systems they come from. Software-embedded models can therefore be regarded as attempts to control user behaviour and thus uncertainties of the social. In addition, information on software use feeds back into software evolution and shapes future versions of the product (Pollock et al. 2007). Here, too, purposes, perspectives, and system dynamics shape practices and thus the models influencing software evolution. Software contains many such models, but only some become performative in each social process. I show how to identify such performative models and reconstruct their logics. To this end I investigate how actors attempt to control relevant



uncertainties in strategic organizational games (Crozier & Friedberg 1979) during software use and retrace the models used in these attempts.

The talk relates to the biography of artefacts perspective in two ways: Firstly, the presented case study integrates empirical research on the biography of SAP (Pollock und Williams 2009) and thereby indicates how existing results from BOAP studies can provide a knowledge base for future research. Secondly, the analytical frame extends the methodologies used in the BOAP so far with a systematic focus on power relations in social systems.

About the speaker:

Dzifa Ametowobla is a computer scientist and sociologist. After her Diploma in computer science, she worked as IT-consultant and quality assurance engineer. When the social conditions of software development and use began to fascinate her more than programming and testing, she returned to university to study sociology and technology studies. Dzifa holds a PhD in sociology from Technische Universität Berlin, where she currently works as a research assistant at the chair for Working World's Digitalization. At present, she is focused on digital platforms research and on advancing a sociology of software. Her general research interests include organizational sociology and a variety of theoretical as well as methodical aspects of sociological research on digitalization.

Zoom link and contact:

<https://tu-berlin.zoom.us/j/66823552077?pwd=QXdUitUaFN1TWFVcHNucy9TODY4dz09>

Zoom PW: 725631

If you are interested in the activities of the research network, or would like to present at the colloquium, get in touch at david.seibt@tu-berlin.de .

Next dates in the BOAP Colloquium

(all colloquium sessions start at 4 pm, Berlin time)

01.11.2021, **Dzifa Ametowobla** (Technical University of Berlin): Organizations, Software Components, and Performative Models of Organizing

10.01.2022, **Antti Silvast** (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) & **Mikko Virtanen** (University of Helsinki): On Theory–Methods Packages in STS

07.03.2022, **Neil Pollock & Robin Williams** (University of Edinburgh): tba

02.05.2022, **David Seibt** (Technical University of Berlin): The Socio-Material Construction of Users: 3D Printing and the Digitalization of the Prosthetics Industry

04.07.2022, **Alin Ake-Kob** (Nord University): How to do Qualitative Longitudinal Studies? From BOAP to BOPA.