



## 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 **May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4pm** (CET). It will feature a talk by **David Seibt** (Technical University Berlin). He will present insights from a biographical study on the construction of user roles in the prosthetics industry and their transformation following the introduction of 3D printing. To conceptualize his findings, he will introduce the notions of action nets and production devices.

### About the talk:

In this talk, David Seibt draws on insights from a five-year study of the digitalization of the prosthetics industry to develop an action net approach to user construction. He starts from the proposition that industries construct their users and that the ongoing digitalization of manufacturing changes the ways in which they do so. To grasp this transformation, an analytical framework needs to capture the link between the reorganization of industrial design, production, and distribution, and the changing practices of technology use. To this end, David develops an action net framework that conceptualizes how spatially and socially distributed processes combine to give rise to new user roles. As part of this framework, the notion of production devices captures the crucial role of manufacturing technologies in mediating between technology supply and use.

Based on this theoretical foundation, David traces the construction of user roles along the innovation cycle, comparing the action nets that form around different manufacturing technologies, including hand tools, industrial machines, and 3D printers. This allows for a critical examination of the promises held out by digitalization in several key areas. The talk attends to new forms of user inscription (e.g., mass customization) and the promise of a more diverse user landscape. It also examines decentral digital distribution infrastructures and related attempts to deliver prosthetic devices to hitherto marginalized recipients. Finally, it zooms in on attempts by both industrial manufacturers and charitable innovation communities to deploy 3D printers to more quickly re-inscribe unexpected usages into new design iterations.



In concluding the talk, David introduces the notion of ‘modes of user construction’ to demonstrate how the action net approach may be generalized to biographical studies of user roles in other fields. Weaving together insights from the previously examined areas, he suggests that each ‘mode’ represents an ideal typical configuration of action nets that span processes of representation/inscription, intermediation/circulation, and reinterpretation/reinscription. As these configurations co-evolve with the mediating capacities of new production devices, they gradually give rise to distinctively patterned user landscapes.

### **About the speaker:**

David Seibt is a postdoc at TU Berlin’s institute of sociology. His research focuses on the relationship between the digitalization of production and the emergence of new actor roles and forms of social organization. This includes work on user construction as well as platformization. Conceptually, David likes to combine insights from STS, sociology, and organization studies, as demonstrated in his extension of the action net approach. In terms of methods, he has been trained as an ethnographer, but also enjoys developing more collaborative approaches such as makeathons.

David received his MA in sociology from TU Berlin, and his PhD from the Munich Center for Technology in Society at TU Munich. In his dissertation, he studied the digital transformation of user construction in the prosthetics industry. The results of that work will be published as a Routledge monograph under the title ‘The Sociomaterial Construction of Users: 3D Printing and the Digitalization of Prosthetics.’

### **Zoom link and contact:**

<https://tu-berlin.zoom.us/j/66914246453?pwd=REY2MEhHQnVMb3NJRO1uNk9LSm5jUT09>

Zoom PW: 703199

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](mailto:david.seibt@tu-berlin.de) .

### **Next dates in the BOAP Colloquium**

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

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

04.07.2022, **Neil Pollock & Robin Williams** (University of Edinburgh): tba

05.09.2022, **José David Gómez-Urrego** (University of Edinburgh): Following the life of Yachay, the city of Knowledge: the rise and fall of Ecuador’s largest and most controversial infrastructural project

07.11.2022, **Mats Frank** (University of Edinburgh): tba