ENVISIONING CODED FUTURES: ALGORITHMICALLY SHAPED PRESENTS AND FUTURES OF HUMAN-MACHINE-RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract:
Interacting with the world today increasingly means dealing with sociotechnical systems that fundamentally rely on binary code. Computer code shapes ways of communication and travel, the very bedrock of the global economy and related infrastructures. While code (at least today) is written by humans or human collective practices, there already exist attempts to build AI systems that take over coding themselves, moving today's discussions on coded sociotechnical assemblages and human-machine relationships to the next level. At the same time these practices of envisioning influence and shape today's politics of the future.

With sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff/Kim 2009) not only questions of what is possible, but also visions of "how life ought, or ought not, to be lived" (Jasanoff 2015: 4) are being discussed. In the center of this we find questions on what human-machine relationships should look like and how decision-making power should be distributed across these sociotechnical systems. Expert think-tanks, venture capital, industry, lobby groups or consulting agencies play important roles in steering today's debates of the future coalescing with buzzwords such as digital capitalism, industry 4.0, algorithmic power and surveillance capitalism.

The prevalence of coded sociotechnical assemblages raises important questions on human-machine-relationships and responsibilities of the future for STS research, such as: How does computer code shape the inter- and intra-actions of a world in constantly becoming and how will algorithms vice versa be shaped by our own viewpoints and actions? What does this mean for negotiations of human-machine-relationships of the and for the future? How do we and will we interact with code-based and algorithmic nonhuman actors? These collaborations and entanglements give rise to changing responsibilities and obligations. How are human biases reproduced (or even reinforced) within human-machine relationships and more-than-human coding practices? Which power relations as well as formal and informal ethics are in play here and how is decision-making and control distributed across sociotechnical systems? On the material level questions of what relevance do (digital) infrastructures of heterogeneous materiality have in these settings arise. Which socio-spatial configurations will be engendered and how will human and more-than-human actors move through them? And finally, regarding methodology as well as ethics, how can STS scholars research these infrastructures, spaces and entanglements?

The panel will focus on the envisioned, sometimes speculative human-machine-relationships of coded futures. It aims at carving out the possibilities and pitfalls that more-than-human collaborations engender within these relationships. We invite contributions ranging from case studies to theoretical considerations of the future politics and imaginaries of coded human-machine relationships.

Key words:
human-machine-relationships, computer code