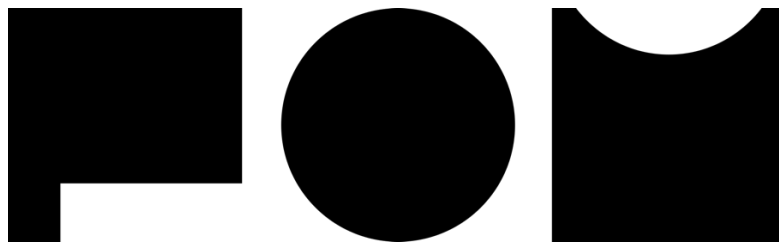


POM Berlin
Politics of the Machines
– Rogue Research



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www.pomconference.org

Preface / POM Berlin

In a state of ontological crisis, all boundaries between human and machine, nature and culture, and the organic and inorganic have been severely blurred. These are times of curious contrivances, novel natures, inescapable automation, and posthuman performances – where human and nonhuman find themselves being entwined, meshed and muddled into new unwitting entanglements. But from biased machine-learning to surveillance capitalism and digital colonisation – what power-structures are implicitly and covertly being embedded into these technologies?

In a demand for more transparency, multiple movements are making a turn toward democratising knowledge and technology. They are exploring the potentials of open data, software, hardware and wetware to battle concealed hierarchies and partisan paradigms – eliciting a practice of counter-coding in a proliferating politics of machines.

Within the Politics of the Machines conference series – following Copenhagen (2018) and Beirut (2019), the third POM conference took place as a hybrid conference on the 14-17 of September 2021, hosted by the chair for Open Science at the Technische Universität Berlin (Einstein Center Digital Future) and the Berlin University of the Arts (Weizenbaum Institute) in Berlin.

The goal of this edition of POM was to debate and devise concepts and practices that seek to critically question and unravel novel modes of science – what roles do academia, researchers, scientists, artists and designers have to take on in times of crisis, how must we re/position ourselves?

What chances or challenges might the democratisation of technology and knowledge elicit,

and what potential do practices such as critical making, community science, trans/feminist hacking or citizen forensics hold to bend the hierarchies of power – how can we work with active matter and technical turmoil to re/act?

‘POM Berlin – Rogue Research’ aimed to probe new methodological approaches from art, design and civic activism within the framework of academia in order to surface an inter- and transdisciplinary terrain that attempts to exceed the boundaries of theory and practice, academia and activism, and science and civil society.

The POM Berlin conference emerged as a collaboration between the Technische Universität Berlin, the Berlin University of the Arts, Aalborg University, Aalto University, and the International University of Beirut. The conference took place over four days, comprising a series of tracks, interventions and a student exhibition.

The conference brought together track chairs, speakers and interventions from 31 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America, representing critical perspectives on technology – decolonial, feminist and sustainable approaches, across disciplines, knowledge cultures and spaces.

Taking place in times of a pandemic and geopolitical crisis, the editors, conference committee and organisational team would like to sincerely thank all of the track chairs, authors, intervening artists and designers, and students involved in this endeavour, for making both the conference and the resulting proceedings possible. It is the profound engagement of all parties, especially the ever-growing POM community, that has allowed this publication to arise.

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Spaces – Encounters, Subjectivities + Environments

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(Micro)biocontrol and Ethics of Care

Mariana Perez Bobadilla, Waag Society
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Open Science/Critical Spaces

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Conference Tracks

Decolonizing the Machine

This track explores black feminist critiques of posthumanism in and through artistic practice and performance research that utilize robots, machine learning, and computation. While robots and cyborgs have potential to figure posthuman forms of subjectivations, in algorithmic societies they often reinforce human-machine, self-other, or abled-disabled binaries, and gloss over the racist and dehumanizing exclusions that uphold neoliberal forms of power and Western conceptions of the human. The track is designed to cultivate and expand upon recent critical race and disability scholarship to uncover how hierarchies are encoded through biased digital technologies that systematically harm persons of colour and elide people with disabilities.

Contributions critically inquire issues of race, gender and disability as they relate to performing machines/technological bodies. We aim at diverse and inclusive scholarship and practice that emphasise decolonial thinking/making, addressing topics such as: Race/gender/disability bias in robotic/cyborg art; algorithmic oppression in robotic/cyborg art; computational racialization; critical phenomenology and histories of race and technology in robotic/cyborg art; indigenous technologies/epistemologies in art and performance; black feminist theory, critical race studies, critical feminism, critical embodiment studies, disability studies, cybertheory, somatechnics and critical posthumanism.

Track Chairs:

Christina Shoux Casey, Aalborg University
Grisha Coleman, Arizona State University
Elizabeth Jochum, Aalborg University
Boris Abramovic, University of Vienna
Marco Donnarumma, Academy for Theatre and Digitality Dortmund

Interferences of the Multitude

In an era of ongoing crises made visible and sensible in the recent global turmoil, the question of 'normality' is increasingly under scrutiny. One can no longer be sure what 'matters' the most, as the normal was the problem in the first place. 'There can be no return to normal' has become the new social and political mantra – we might rather need to give attention to the experimental conditions of our observations. To accomplish this task, artists and researchers search for methods and tools to intra-act with and care for what matters in the realms of a potential future.

We take this call as a chance to feel those who question established disorders – an invitation for people from diverse fields working in theory and/or empirical methodologies and practices for critical (art) making, addressing topics such as: Transfeminist hacking; towards a (new*) method; feminist economies vs gendered commodity chains; eco-feminism and its discontents; de-growth ecologies and possible futures; zero cost, zero waste, zero harm; ethical hardware, tools of the redistribution of the sensible; empirical methodologies and practices for critical (art) making.

Track Chairs:

Patrícia J. Reis, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
Taguhi Torosyan, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
Stefanie Wuschitz, Technische Universität Berlin

Digging Earth – The Politics of the Extractive Industries on Indigenous Lands

From the myth of the El Dorado and the colonial exploitation of earth resources on indigenous lands, to the twenty-first century development of renewable sources of energy, new technologies and the demand for rare minerals, the extraction of earth resources has been strategized to meet the demands of heavily industrialized countries. Deep sea mining is the next frontier for the extraction of rare earth elements, while a lucrative space industry is developing plans for asteroid mining. Relayed by a number of grassroots and activist groups, artists and collectives in various world communities are mounting a growing opposition to the disregard of the extractive industries for ecological destruction and the disempowerment of local communities.

The track addresses issues such as: Politics of the extractive industries; geo-politics, land appropriation, the commons; exploitative mining on indigenous lands; the impact of extractive industries on local and indigenous economies and livelihoods; gender roles in the exploitation of earth and natural resources; feminist justice strategies for the sharing of natural resources; and complex interdependencies between renewable energies and the extraction of minerals.

Track Chairs:

Catherine Bernard, State University New York
Matt Garcia, Colorado State University Pueblo/
Desert ArtLAB

Spaces – Encounters, Subjectivities + Environments

This track aims at re-mapping space of co-agency among living organisms, assembling papers and artistic research projects that observe, question or speculate on a plurality of perspectives that condition or are conditioned by being 'in'. Being – as we, I, they — 'in' something. Being – as everything that there is: Plants, animals, bacteria, sound, light, the planets – are 'in' something. The 'in' is constantly being modified. There is no 'in' as an identity to itself that can contain everything that there is and everything that we are; that can contain everything that there was, as well as everything that we were and wanted to be. The reciprocity among organisms and environments, and the idea that the structural and functional details of organisms are not completely coded by the genome, is explored from a point of view that considers space understood in a broad sense – as a fundamental factor that is intra-active, in continuous formation and in entangled relations of becoming, conditioned – and at the same time – that conditions the becoming of organisms and their behaviour. Space is something constructed and negotiated with and through many agents and agencies. Space hosts both physical and perceptive navigation and occupation.

The question is 'How' to enter a physical-material space that proposes possible entangled modes of being in, becoming, constituting, as well as accepting the invisible and perceiving the immaterial 'in' spaces. The track addresses topics such as: Translating spaces; voices, wordings and non/humans; conversing with immaterial and invisible presences; reading bodies: navigations – occupations – relationalities; organisms and environments.

Track Chairs:

Ingrid Cogne, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
María Antonia González Valerio, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

(Micro)biocontrol and Ethics of Care

Among our commitment to practices that bend the hierarchies of power, biotechnologies and the biopolitical logics they are managed by, cannot stay out of the discussion. The bio/zoe track at POM Berlin assembles proposals critical to biocontrol and biosurveillance. It implies new logics on the distribution of life, death and pain (Braidotti 2013) by questioning human exceptionalism and transforming the relationship with non-humans and connected macro-systems. We are asking for ways of expanding our senses and understanding identity through biotech ventures and experimentations that explore the ramifications of the self. How biotechnological mediated bodies are transformed and what are the implications in terms of temporalities of care.

Carol Gilligan (1982) introduces the notion of ethics of care as a form of interdependence valuing relationship, the importance of everyone being listened to carefully. Care is also fundamental to Anna Tsing's (2017) 'arts of living on a damaged planet' and Donna Haraway's (2016) stitching together of improbable collaborations without worrying over much about conventional ontological kind. This track reflects on working with living matter from transdisciplinary methodological approaches where art and the life sciences, function as material research into alternatives to deal with the challenges of the present. It addresses topics such as: Making kin and the ethics of care; challenging the structures of biocontrol and biosurveillance; adaptive strategies, including feminist making approaches to working with living organisms; composite/distributed identity and forms of non-human perception; and integrated self and applied microperformativity.

Track Chairs:

Mariana Perez Bobadilla, Waag Society
Clio Flego, University of Genoa
Marta de Menezes, Cultivamos Cultura
Joel Ong, York University

Open Science/Critical Spaces

The movement of open science is rapidly expanding, bringing into being critical spaces that challenge established hierarchies of power. Giving communities the power to redefine their relationship to knowledge and production, labs across the globe are bringing together professional scientists, DIY practitioners, hackers, critical makers and activists to make new artefacts, conduct experiments, produce and analyse data, and to incite social and political change. Connecting open science to sustainable development means instigating bottom-up civic-driven approaches to issues such as education, health, gender, environmental sustainability and urban development.

As local knowledge meets open technologies, a possibility to take issue with an unfolding 'technocoloniality' emerges – with the logics of coloniality driven by technology, neocapitalist practices, coloniality of knowledge and a rhetoric of techno-utopia. How do these communities assemble and prototype alternative visions, produce knowledge and initiate practices? What issues are being addressed and what potential do they hold? What are the opportunities and challenges of open science for sustainable development? This track addresses topics such as: Democratizing science and development; DIY tech – open source software, hardware and wetware for development; DIY biology, biotechnology, bioeconomy, open education and environmental activism; making in response to crisis; spaces and practices of techno-decoloniality.

Track Chairs:

Gameli Adzaho, Global Lab Network Ghana
Thomas Mboa, Mboalab Cameroon
Khadidiatou Sall, SeeSD Senegal

Interventions

POM 2021

Beyond Classification: The Machinic Sublime

The gap between current technological development in AI and the complex and mysterious process of human intelligence remind us of the very intersections of the mundane and the sublime in our history. The journey towards machinic sublime might feel long and disoriented yet be a place to find the most important questions of today where hyperobjects of technoscience – such as the internal distribution of the brain or cognitive functioning in multi-species, the networked consciousnesses over social media, ecosystemic developments in mixed reality, edge sensing and smart homes – recast life in general as protean, plastic and ever in potentia.

This intervention took place as an experimental theatric conversation/ performance via webconferencing, a new kind of Turing Test. In a multi-agent roundtable, human interlocutors and machinic partners argued the possibility of a machinic sublime, as these interlinked discussions became an emergent system.

Robert Twomey, Carson Center for Emerging Media Arts, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Eunsu Kang, Artist, Founder Women Art AI
Joel Ong, Computational Arts, York University

The Quantum Biology of Politics

“The quantum mechanics of politics, then, demands from us an understanding that flux is neither good nor bad but inevitable” (Flora Lewis, November 6, 1983, Foreign Affairs’ column for The New York Times).

This intervention invited artists and researchers to jump collectively from one space of possibility – where quantum mechanics asserts, we “don’t know” and “can’t know”; to the next – in which experimental techniques such as time-resolved microscopy, ultrafast spectroscopy, single molecule spectroscopy, or even single particle imaging enable us the precision of observing and measuring infinitesimal dynamics at very small length and time scales. What does quantum biology offer us as multiplicities and alternative realities when considering the attempt to subvert and confront absolute order, stability, and control in the socio-political sphere?

An immersion in live video performances speculating on quantum effects in living systems, using DIY microscopy, data visualisation, machine learning, and other media art techniques.

Clarissa Ribeiro, Art|Sci Collective, UCLA
Mick Lorusso, Art|Sci Collective, UCLA

Making Intimate Tech (M.I.T.)

The M.I.T. (Making Intimate Tech) is an international group of practitioners who are engaged with the realm of intimacy, technology and self-actualisation. This is a community of feminist practitioners working with stigmatised or tabooed topics, including but not limited to: politics, sex, money, physical/mental health and interpersonal communication.

Within this intervention, together with POM conference attendees, the M.I.T. collectively explored and compiled a framework for how to develop more empathic, emotional, and authentic relationships with technology in order to improve the well-being of all bodies.

Kadin Herring, Independent researcher
Marie Dietze, University of the Arts Berlin
Dani Nikitenko, Design Farm Berlin
Alice Stewart, Touchy Feely Tech
Giulia Tomasello, ALMA Berlin
Catherine Wieczorek-Berkes, Penn State University

Training to Deal with Otherness

Artificial intelligence and machine learning promise machines that learn from us. The myth of the machine that meets us as an equal has been with us since, at least, Licklider's 'Man-computer Symbiosis'. It is found in the idea of human-centred design, smart interfaces, and intelligent agents. In contrast, human-computer interaction has always been about how to perform commands and embody interfaces – about learning how to act like a machine.

Acknowledging this, we assume that interaction occurs where technology eludes our expectations, where it needs to be repaired, kept running and performed, or where it develops behaviour that is unexpected and unpredictable. When machines behave in ways that are contrary to our expectations, our relationship to them will be challenged – and it might become apparent how many different actors are involved in their functioning. In these moments, machines become. Others with whom we have to find a way of dealing.

This intervention brought together designers of future machine systems: Practitioners and students from three programs dealing with design and/of technology and the complex entanglement of teaching machines and being taught by them /

Laura Popplow, Code & Context, Cologne University of Applied Sciences
Christian Faubel, Code & Context, Cologne University of Applied Sciences
Lasse Scherffig, KISD, Cologne University of Applied Sciences
Andreas Muxel, Augsburg University of Applied Sciences,
and students of all three programs

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