

THEORISING INTERFACES / INTERFACE THEORIES

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Abstract:

Human interconnectedness with technology has come to be increasingly shaped and constructed in terms of interfaces between technical components, humans, and specific environments. Knowledge about such interfaces is predominantly shaped by disciplines that understand interfaces almost exclusively in technical terms. Information science and engineering designs software interfaces as technical boundaries and points of information exchange between various components of a given technical system. Human-Computer Interaction investigates user interfaces and how they afford certain activities by users rendering technical systems more or less accessible for those users. More recently, fields like bio-medical or neural engineering have started to build ever more intimate and invasive brain-computer interfaces between technology and human bodies. While interfaces are at times discussed with regard to social, political, and ethical issues, our imagination of the interface has remained predominantly techno-centric, for example, as screens or prostheses.

In relation to these emerging materialities and discourses of the interface, we propose to explore ways of theorising interfaces beyond its techno-centric meaning aiming to capture the breadth of social and decidedly political components comprised in interface design and use. In doing so we ask for the analytical potential and limit of possible interface theories in STS. We want to test the very notion of the interface as a theoretical tool to account for new forms of human-machine relations, digital entanglements, and techno-scientific governance. For this, we can rely on existing studies on interfaces, e.g., user interfaces (Cirucci 2017, Halpern 2015, Suchman 2007), software interfaces (Pujadas & Venters forthcoming, Pujadas et al. 2020), or brain-computer interfaces (Mauldin 2013). In addition, we can make use of existing attempts of re-thinking the very notion of the interface as methodology (Marres, Gerlitz 2015), relation (Hookway 2014), effect (Galloway 2012) or process (Lipp forthcoming, Karafillidis 2018).

We welcome contributions that critically reflect or build on these discussions as well as contributions that propose new avenues for theorising interfaces. We invite scholars to

- * investigate different designs of interfaces and practices of interfacing
- * develop new or expand and question existing conceptualisations of the interface, going beyond a techno-centric understanding
- * reflect on the methodological potentials and limits of the interface as analytical trope to investigate Technoscience
- * provide genealogical or comparative accounts of “the interface” in different fields (e.g. computer science, cybernetics, physics)
- * explore the interface as an arena for political contestation and techno-scientific imagination where responsibilities are assigned, negotiated and shifted

Key words:

Interface; theory; human-machine relations