

Call for Papers for SOPHIA colloquium

21st of October 2011, Brussels

From Cyborg to Facebook: Technological dreams and feminist critiques

Women and technology don't sleep in the same bed. The relation between technological possibilities and gender is tense. 'Technology', the use value of science, embodies power relations. Some see technology as a tool for liberation, others see it as a trap of enslavement. SOPHIA, the Belgian Bi-community Network for Gender Studies is organizing a colloquium to investigate the latest developments in theory and research on the many aspects of gender and technology from a Feminist angle.

Donna Haraway's vision of the Cyborg (1985) was a water shed. The idea of the thinking but bodiless human has been a subject of wide ranging debate for feminists, theoreticians and feminist activists ever since. The cyborg makes us question the pure boundaries of gender and the human as opposed to the animal and the machine. What does the body mean if we can transcend the body? Would body-linked inequalities disappear? Today, the bodiless and sexless voice is a reality thanks to the communicative but commercialized possibilities of social media. In Facebook people create their own (gender) identities. In the web world of games and interaction, the cyborg can be a reality.

From a feminist perspective there has always been a love-hate relationship between technology and feminist projects. Technology seems to promise liberation from the confines of the corporal and the duties of the everyday. The female body is often the basis of inequality (bearing children, weak, and marked). Technology offers freedom from reproduction, controlled reproduction, strength and transformation. But at what price comes a cyborg liberation of the mind from the body? While the debate is not new, ongoing technological advances pose new issues. Technology 'frees' us from our sexed bodies through reproductive technology, and through the faceless communication of the internet. Yet at the same time it enslaves us in an ever more incomprehensible net of global relations and consumer requirements. You can't leave home without your mobile, but you don't know how to fix it. Technology empowers, but excludes.

Sophia's colloquium welcomes papers on the relations between gender and technologies from both theoretical and empirical standpoints and will focus on the following themes:

1. Feminist visions on science and technology: The state of the art in thinking about the role of science and technology in gender relations, global relations and the shape of feminist goals for the future.

2. The enhanced body after Haraway's Cyborg? Thanks to the development of biotechnologies, the 'cyborg' is no longer science-fiction but a clinical reality. The question of enhancement is one of the

most acute in feminist bioethics. It is oriented towards a negation of the so called 'natural body' and towards a Transhumanist overcoming of human vulnerabilities, linked to biological determination. What are the critical perspectives from a gender point of view? Can they be articulated in the perspective of political care?

3. Biology, bodies, technology and the nature-nurture debate: Does technology let us go beyond men and women? Does technology erase borders between the sexes or strengthen them? This theme aims to explore the role of technology and science in the debate about nature and nurture and the differences between men and women as well as in-between, considering the issues of trans- and inter-sexuality. Particularly interesting for this theme are the implications of data obtained by high tech methods including brain differences and genetic codes for arguments about the biological origins of gender relations. Bodily transformations and reparations, new gender identities, extended reproduction capacities, are all available, but raise many issues for research, feminist ethics and policy. Who decides about reproductive and medical technologies and for whom are they developed?

4. Technology and gender in everyday life: The role of technology in the transformation of daily life, and of work- both paid and unpaid and the impact on gender relations will be explored here. Communication, transportation, care, cooking, cleaning, and housework have all been changed by new technologies such as the microwave, GSM, and internet. Technology is now an intimate part of everyday life in households and interlaces with the workplace. Has this produced more gender equality and new gender relationships in terms of paid and unpaid care and work? Do the extended technological everyday potential of the rich world lead to gender liberation globally or increasing inequality. How does the increased 'control' and 'information' impact on expectations? Do the developments provide more gender liberation or not?

5. Communication, technology and gender: (New) media and gender: What is the gender landscape of Facebook, Wikipedia, blogging and other participatory new social network media? While the cyborg was a theoretical idea, the social media are primarily a commercialized bodiless potential. What do gender scholars make of the alleged democratization of visual media through YouTube and other participatory media? How gendered are video games and the online games and what are their implications for gender relations?

6. Technology and the expression of Gender in culture: The cyborg is no longer fiction. Film, art, literature, music and culture go 'beyond gender' as technology creates increasingly 'real' gender blends in film with Avatars, Arthur and minimoyss, in strips and games that over-sex their figures. Technology and thinking about the potential of technology has changed gender relations in music, literature, film, popular and media culture, and art production and distribution. Papers in this section examine the latest developments.

7. Technology and gendered power: Does technology keep women out of power? What do the heteronormative technological developments mean for gender relations world-wide? To what extent are the continued lack of skills in the technology a contributing cause to the under representation of women in management, the economy; and global economic governance? How does the absence of women contribute to the choices of what technologies are developed? What is the role of high technologies in creating and maintaining new forms of gender inequality? What impact do scientific women have on technological choices and what new technologies come from women? The range of contributions for this subject is wide.

8. Technology policy and the academy: What impact has the policy to increase women in science had? Do different gender relations in laboratories change technological research decisions? What is the role of educational approaches in changing the position of women in the hard sciences and the decisions made in science policy? European policy aims to increase the presence of women in science. What difference would this make?

9. Technology, heteronormativity and the erotic: What about the erotic fascination of technological toys for technosexuals? To what extent is the heteronormativity in technology responsible for choices men make in research topics and technologies that get developed or not (fast cars but no good vacuum cleaner, phallically formed rockets)? What is the role of new media and new social media in expanding (violent) sexual repertoires?

Abstracts of 300 words with an indication of the choice of theme section should be sent to info@sophia.be for the 15th of June 2011. They should include name(s) of author, affiliation (university or organization) and contact information (e-mail, phone, post address). Abstracts may be submitted in English, French or Dutch.

All questions can be addressed to info@sophia.be. Telephone contacts during office hours at 0032 2 229 38 69.

Scientific board: Mylene Baum-Botbol (UCL), Sander De Ridder (CIMS, UGhent), Nathalie Grandjean (FUNDP), Stéphanie Loriaux (ULB/Sophia), Marta Roca I Escoda (Université Autonome de Barcelone/ULB), Sarah Sepulchre (UCL/Sophia), Femke Snelting (constant vzw), Patricia Vendramin (Fondation Travail-Université/UCL), Alison Woodward (VUB/Sophia).