

12 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

Panel 17. From Efficiency to Entanglement: Rethinking Technology, Work, and Organisation

Convenors:

Francesco Bonifacio, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

Cherry Jackson, Royal Holloway

Keywords: Entanglement, Labour, More-than-human, Quantification, Technology

What mattered most during the Industrial Revolution was not the mere introduction of new machinery but how that technology fundamentally reshaped social relationships. This transformation spurred movements like Luddism, where both people and things were no longer allowed to simply "matter" but were made to "count." As philosopher Jacques Ellul later argued, efficiency became the dominant value in modern life, prioritising quantitative measures over qualitative ones. This focus on efficiency and measurement has only accelerated since Ellul's writings, extending even to aspects of life like happiness, altruism, and relationships. Today, nearly everything and everyone can be quantified and categorised.

This panel interrogates how the quantification of human and more-than-human life has restructured work, technology, and organisation from the Industrial Revolution to the present. We seek to explore how humans and more-than-humans alike are increasingly embroiled in hidden entanglements with technology, work, and organisational practices. As a result, things and people no longer belong; they are owned and managed. This social reconfiguration has disproportionately benefitted some while marginalising others.

The panel invites contributions that rethink our normative approaches to technology, work, and organisation, offering alternative ways of designing, building, and collaborating. In particular, we are interested in submissions that:

- Explore experimental or qualitative methods for engaging with technology and work;
- Investigate more-than-human perspectives and how non-human entities shape technological practices;
- Draw on feminist technoscience, indigenous knowledge systems, posthumanism, or ecofeminist approaches to rethink labour and organisation;
- Address ethical considerations in technoscientific practice, asking what technoscience can be good for, and for whom, while paying attention to who gets to define these terms.

Contributions can be methodological, philosophical, or empirical, and we welcome papers from all disciplinary perspectives. By reframing technoscience as something that "matters" and resists the drive toward efficiency and quantification, we aim to explore new ways of thinking about technology, work and organisation in the Anthropocene.

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ID 137 - Automation Technologies and Machines in the Changing Workplace: A Social-Scientific Review

Yavuz Ülker, Universität Freiburg

Keywords: Automation, labour, technology, STS

This research provides a review of the Science and Technology Studies (STS) literature on how machines and automation technologies change the landscape of workplaces and human work. While STS scholars have increasingly emphasized including inequality and sociotechnical issues in their studies, the study of work and workplaces remains a relatively neglected research topic. This research strives to pinpoint specific debates in the discourse, intending to holistically bring perspectives from the literature. With this, the diverging proclivities of the examined journals in terms of research are also acknowledged and commented



upon. The research method is that of a semi-systematic review. Literature from the following journals is investigated: *Osiris*, *Technology and Culture*, *Social Studies of Science*, and *Science, Technology, and Human Values*. The discourse is divided into four thematic clusters. The first one focuses on the historical study of labor. The second cluster covers the debates on technological determinism. The third one looks at work and labor in the post-industrial context. The final cluster concentrates on human-machine interactions.

The main argument developed in this research is twofold: First, the literature is fragmented and aligns largely with the High- and Low-Church distinction in how STS scholars research and teach. Second, considerations of power struggle and disempowerment appear as underlying elements throughout the literature in different forms. A large-scale replication of this research could yield more detailed results on the High- and Low-Church divide as well as debates on disempowerment. Along with STS scholars, this research could contribute to the studies of labor relations, organizational sociology, and machine ethics. This research could possibly assist in future attempts at theory-building.

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ID 289 - Playing by the rules, bending the rules: pragmatism in platform labour

Camilla Volpe, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale

Keywords: Platform, pragmatism, content creators, precarity, labour, platform labour

Precarity, a structural feature of post-Fordism, has progressively accustomed young adults to a system of economic, occupational, and social insecurity. Socialized within a neoliberal context, these individuals have internalized the idea that stability is an exception rather than the norm, developing coping mechanisms to navigate an increasingly uncertain landscape. They often accept precarious conditions with resignation, struggle with social comparison, and engage in underpaid or unpaid labor. This pervasive sense of impermanence extends beyond employment, shaping their social relationships, time management, and future outlook. In this context of uncertainty, digital platforms have emerged as key tools for connection and communication, while simultaneously fostering informal digital economies characterized by high labor intensity and low capital investment. Instagram and TikTok, in particular, have become fertile environments for monetizable digital labor, with content creators leveraging these platforms as a means of economic survival. However, platform labor is subject to algorithmic governance, which operates in an assertive and unidirectional manner. Algorithmic feedback loops reinforce visibility mechanisms that reward specific behaviors and content, compelling creators to engage in continuous self-optimization and strategic adaptation.

This study aims to examine the impact of such dynamics on the platform labor of content creators on Instagram and TikTok and to explore the strategies they employ to mitigate its negative effects. Methodologically, the research is based on digital ethnography and qualitative interviews with a selection of micro-influencers.

The findings reveal that uncertainty and instability are central to the experience of platform labor, contributing to widespread anxiety and burnout. The unpredictability of algorithmic changes, the constant need to sustain audience engagement, and the pressure to produce a steady stream of content result in an intensified and often stressful work situation. To counteract these negative effects, content creators develop adaptive strategies that can be understood as a form of vitalistic platform pragmatism. This manifests primarily through two key practices: consistency and creativity. Consistency is perceived as essential to maintaining visibility and ensuring a degree of economic stability, while creativity serves as a tool for differentiation, allowing creators to navigate platform constraints and experiment with new forms of engagement. In this sense, the work of micro-influencers represents an ongoing negotiation between the opportunities afforded by digital platforms and the challenges imposed by their socio-technical structure.



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ID 720 - Workplace Care in the Age of Iatrogenic Harm.

Ingrid Holme, University of Galway

Alexander Stingl, University Of Galway

Brendan Flynn, University Of Galway

Paula Tumulty, University Of Galway

Alexander Kladaakis, University Of Galway

Shane O'Donnell, University College Dublin

Susi Geiger, University College Dublin

Pat O'Connor, University of Limerick

Richard Lombard Vance, Irish Research

Jane Calvert, University Of Edinburgh

Conor Douglas, York University

Keywords: Academic Ecosystem, Iatrogenic Harm, Postdoc Staff, Care

The concept of 'Iatrogenic Harm', commonly thought of as harm from medical treatment or healthcare, has been enthusiastically embraced by medical schools and healthcare institutions. For Ivan Illich, this misread his intention to examine enterprises which claim, "to abolish the need for the art of suffering by a technically engineered pursuit of happiness", leading to the "total management of the person, now transformed into a system" (Illich 2002, page ii). Following this vein, our paper focuses on the concept of 'the academic ecosystem' based on our ongoing research study comparing the lives of postdoctoral researchers in Ireland, Denmark, and Singapore*. We explore the growth of the technological assemblies of doctoral schools, professional development courses and Human Resource 'charters' and how they form production sites of misery and Iatrogenic harm. Spoken of as 'precariousness' by news media, politicians, and employee unions, this concoction of harms can seem an inherent requirement of the current system and structure of university employment. However, we end by questioning to what extent considering 'arts of suffering' enables a radical rethinking of care within the university workplace.

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Tension points in the talent pipeline: exploring postdoctoral journeys along the talent pipeline in Small Advanced Economies (2024-2026). Funded by Research Ireland.

Illich, Ivan. Limits to medicine: Medical nemesis. M. Boyars, 2002.

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ID 758 - Faster, better, fairer: How AI job interviewing companies conceptualise algorithmic fairness

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Keywords: AI ethics, algorithmic fairness, hiring and recruiting, human resources

Artificial intelligence (AI) supported job interviewing presents itself as a new mainstream solution in the human resources (HR) industry. One-sided structured behavioral interviews are recorded in front of a computer camera, without human recruiters present, and analysed by an AI system that generates assessments and rankings on which human recruiters can base further decisions. Given the ubiquity of job interviews in conjunction with the time, cost, and effort that go into them, automating this process has disruptive potential; but the technology has also been publicly criticised for a lack of accuracy and potentially producing biased results [1][2]. In light of such scrutiny, this contribution analyses how automated interviewing companies communicate their commitment to AI fairness to the public.

A central claim of (semi-)automated hiring is that AI systems are less prone to bias than human recruiters, whose decisions might be influenced by stereotypes or prejudice. But given that these systems depend on



human input, AI applications can reproduce existing biases and automate them [3]. Automated interviewing could thus perpetuate existing job market discrimination toward women, racial minorities, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups. The term AI fairness or algorithmic fairness describes statistical methods intended to mitigate or eliminate these kinds of biases; fairness concerns linked to the development and use of automated interviewing have been discussed from ethical and legal perspectives [4].

This ongoing research is based on a mapping of 50 companies offering AI-assisted HR technology. Starting from this mapping, the websites of selected video interviewing companies are analysed to assess available material (e.g. white papers, blog posts, explainability statements) communicating how the businesses conceptualise AI fairness and related terminology. The aim is to assess how "fairness" is framed, both to attract customers and to mitigate concerns by applicants and the wider public – how and to what extent is the term used? How does its framing relate to operationalisations in the available literature on AI ethics? Can different kinds of conceptualisations be discerned - and what implications do they hold for the future of applying for jobs? At the time of the conference, the analysis will be concluded and the results of the research can be presented.

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ID 789 - Platform workers without platforms: worker agency and platform engagement in platform-based property management

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Keywords: platform labor, Airbnb, workplace organization, agency

In the gig economy, platform organizations are often critiqued for implementing algorithmic management tools, which not only evaluate work in the absence of human managers, but also optimize extracted data to induce more intensive, flexible ways of working. In this way, the datafication of work can be seen as a uniquely powerful process in allowing platforms to dictate the terms of labor. These critiques of the organization of platform labor assume that workers and platforms have a one-on-one relationship; nevertheless, work on platforms like Airbnb increasingly takes place in more conventional work contexts, as hosting labor is largely carried out by property management companies. Within such organizations, work is organized both by the Airbnb platform and human managers, who mediate workers' relationship to the platform. This arrangement raises questions about how workers engage with the platform and its non-human systems of management in the presence of human managers. Using participant observation data from a case study of one such property management company operating on Airbnb in Prague called SmartStay, I argue that it is the workers without any relationship to the platform, such as cleaners, who are made to work in the most intensive conditions yet have the least agency over their work. In this paper, I highlight three reasons for this; first, SmartStay's cleaners are dependent on coworkers to relay time-sensitive, platform-derived information, second, they are unable to turn down jobs on the platform, and third, their lack of platform literacy makes it difficult for them to contest human managers' decisions. Thus, rather than emphasize datafication as a site of precarity, I demonstrate how, for certain workers in the platform economy, the experience of domination can still come from human management. In this



way, I show how workers can be abstracted from the platform—as cleaners' relationship to the platform is entirely mediated by human managers and co-workers who reinterpret and reimagine its values— and that this distance from the platform makes workers more vulnerable to mistreatment. Thus, I contend that the entanglement of human and platform-based systems of management can both extend and distort how platforms shape labor. I therefore demonstrate how certain platform entrepreneurs can take advantage of unequal platform relationships within their company to reinforce conventional workplace hierarchies. In doing so, I present a more complex picture of platform power, as one that does not unambiguously transform labor, but one in which certain on-the-ground actors can shape to their advantage.

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ID 843 - The Inscrutability of Digital Artifacts – Rethinking Human Creativity and Vulnerability in AI-Mediated Spaces

Irene Olivero, Università degli Studi di Genova

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, creativity, human vulnerability, epistemic manipulation, metaphysics

Imagine asking a text-to-image AI model like DALL-E to generate an image of a quiet street in Paris at dawn. Your expectations might include soft morning light, empty roads, and Parisian architecture. Yet, the AI-generated results are often unpredictable—some surreal, some distorted, some eerily precise but containing unexpected (and likely not desired) elements. The unforeseen (to a certain extent) outputs produced by these digital technologies—often eluding direct user control—position them as a potential bridge between human faculties and technological artifacts. This underlines the need for a broader discussion on the shifting boundaries of human uniqueness in the face of rapidly advancing AI capabilities.

Generative models like DALL-E, Midjourney, and ChatGPT produce outputs that users cannot fully anticipate—these digital artifacts display behaviors that mimic human-like unpredictability and creative expression (Young and Terrone, 2024). This unpredictability does not seem merely a technical glitch but rather a fundamental aspect of how AI algorithms interpret and execute tasks based on their training data and design structure. This peculiar but inherent feature of AI-driven generative technologies raises pressing questions: If creativity becomes a collaborative or even contested space between humans and machines, should AI be granted authorship rights? How much control can humans exercise over the outputs of these digital artifacts? Do these technologies subtly shape aesthetic preferences, reinforce dominant cultural narratives, or even obscure accountability in creative labor?

In this talk, I aim to investigate these issues while addressing how AI generative technologies challenge traditional metaphysical classifications of artifacts and natural objects by exhibiting behaviors typically ascribed to humans. While AI remains a product of human design and, as such, an artifact by definition (Hilpinen, 1992), its creative outputs suggest a level of autonomy that complicates its status as a mere tool. I will argue that these digital artifacts function autonomously within their operational environments, demonstrating forms of creativity and randomness that challenge the notion of imagination as an exclusively human faculty. Furthermore, AI's increasing role in institutionalized creative practices (e.g., art, design, journalism) raises ethical and ontological concerns regarding epistemic manipulation, authorship, and the evolving boundaries of human uniqueness.

By engaging with these issues, this talk contributes to the broader discourse on AI's role in reconfiguring relationships between humans and technology. The inscrutability that seems to inherently characterize AI-driven generative technologies challenges traditional assumptions about imagination and creative authorship; it blurs the line between human and artificial creativity while also introducing new forms of human vulnerability -- issues that warrant extensive discussion in more experimental contexts.

