IV TRANSLIT International Seminar. "An unconventional romance: Femininity in virtual assistants, personality writing and user engagement".

14 de febrero, 2019

10:00 horas – Sala de Juntas – Departamento de Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana

The IV TRANSLIT International Seminar will discuss the multiple intersections between gender-biased technology, the artificial woman and the new emotional relationships we are establishing with "artificial intelligence". We will trace the origins and development of the gynoid figure and follow it to the present day, investigating its influence on the female virtual assistant. We will learn how these assistants are designed and written in real life; the interactions people make with them and what these say about us and our society. We will tackle the role of narrative and fiction, the politics behind current technological discourse, the construction of gender, servitude, sexism and, of course, love.

The session, with expert views on the field from Academia, the industry and critical-artistic activism, will be held in English and is open to the public.

El IV Seminario Internacional TRANSLIT tratará las múltiples intersecciones entre una tecnología con sesgo de género, la mujer artificial y las nuevas relaciones afectivas que estamos estableciendo con la "inteligencia artificial". Rastrearemos los orígenes y la evolución de la figura de la ginoide hasta nuestros días, investigando su proyección en el asistente virtual femenino. Aprenderemos cómo se diseñan y escriben estos asistentes en la vida real; las interacciones que tiene la gente con ellas y lo que estas dicen sobre nosotros y nuestra sociedad. Abordaremos el papel de la narrativa y la ficción, la política que subyace al discurso tecnológico actual, la construcción del género, la servidumbre, el sexismo y, por supuesto, el amor.

La sesión, que contará con expertas de la Academia, la industria y el activismo crítico-artístico, se desarrollará en inglés y está abierta al público.

10:30 Beyond the beautiful evil? The ancient/future history of sex robots and female assistants Dr. Genevieve Liveley (University of Bristol) g.liveley@bristol.ac.uk

Intelligent machines and robots have been a staple of storytelling for the past 2,500 years and in the imaginary fictions of classical Greek and Roman myth we find a significant corpus of narratives featuring automata, robots (both android and gynoid), cyborgs, and other types of AI (see Liveley 2005 and 2019; Rogers and Stephens 2012). Among Homer's eighth century BCE descriptions of such intelligent and autonomous machines we famously encounter a group of robotic slave girls (*amphipoloi*) made of gold who serve as personal assistants to the god Hephaestus (*Iliad.* 18.418–22). According to Homer, they look just like living (*zoesi*) girls (*neenisin*), they have in them intelligence (*phresin*) in their minds (*noos*), and human speech (*aude*) and strength (*sthenos*), and they know (*isasin*) how to work (*erga*).

This paper revisits this extraordinary narrative to uncover clues as to why the first AI enhanced machine-slaves were imagineered by Homer in embodied female form – and seeks to explain why embodied AI in our own century should share these archaic norms. It asks: Are Homer's fictional *amphipoloi* the ancestors of the subservient female AI assistants encountered in so many modern cinematic fictions – such as Samantha (from *Her*) or Joi (from *Blade Runner 2049*)? Are Homer's fictional *amphipoloi* the ancestors of the female AI assistants found in so many actual modern homes – such as Siri, Alexa, Cortana, and Holly? Is this gendering of personalized AI part of the legacy of Homer's intelligent machine-slaves?

Dr Genevieve Liveley is Turing Fellow and Reader in Classics at the University of Bristol, where her particular research interests lie in narratives and narratologies of artificial humans and intelligence. Her most recent book Narratology explores the science of storytelling, and she also has published widely in books, articles, and essays on the classical tradition, chaos theory, and cyborgs.

11:00 'Cleo, hop off my dick with this budgeting': designing for sex, relationships, and gendered abuse in a consumer financial AI - Harriet Smith Hughes (UX writer & product voice at Cleo AI) harriet@meetcleo.com

Cleo is an AI assistant that interacts with almost 1 million users in Facebook Messenger, helping them manage and get to grips with their money. With a predominantly millennial user-base, Cleo's voice and personality both responds to and constructs her audience: she is gendered female, but seeks to subvert and engage tropes of submissive female AI for reasons that are never separable from business objectives. Over the course of the past year and a half, Cleo's 'personality' has evolved across tens of thousands of lines of scripted dialogue, covering everything from her ability to offer small loans to answering 'I love you' - as well as dealing with a significant amount of gendered abuse. What politics or principles have emerged in the construction of that personality? How coherent can these be, given the shifting system and set of business objectives within which she is designed? What should a relationship between a user and Cleo look like, and what decisions might we make as designers and writers to construct that relationship? In what ways does an AI present as gendered, and what are our responsibilities in creating and mediating that presentation? These are questions that sit at the intersection of the literary and the tech-industrial, with Cleo being an entity to be 'read', as much as she is to be consumed or 'used'. In a discursive session, we will unpick some practical applications and examples of these questions, and discuss what we as writers, designers, researchers, and consumers can do to promote critical and ethical practice in mass-market AI.

Harriet is the lead UX Designer and Product Voice at Cleo AI. She designs and writes Cleo, an AI assistant that helps almost 1 million users across the UK, US and Canada to manage their money. Prior to Cleo, Harriet worked as a literary editor and a writer. She studied English Language and Literature at Oxford and got her MPhil in English: Criticism and Culture at Cambridge.

12:15 Alexa, tell me about gender politics in technology- Elvia Vasconcelos (Design Researcher) elvia.vasconcelos@gmail.com

The way gender is used in technology:

Is not neutral

Raises ethical complexities

Intersects with other systems of oppression

Set in the space of technology, this talk explores the ways in which gender is used in personal intelligent assistants and the connections with gender based discrimination in real life (IRL). It puts forward the notion that design practitioners play an active role in shaping how power is distributed and that the design of digital products can be seen as a political act. How can we through the stories we tell shed light on the ways in which gender is being depicted in technology and the connections to how women are treated IRL?
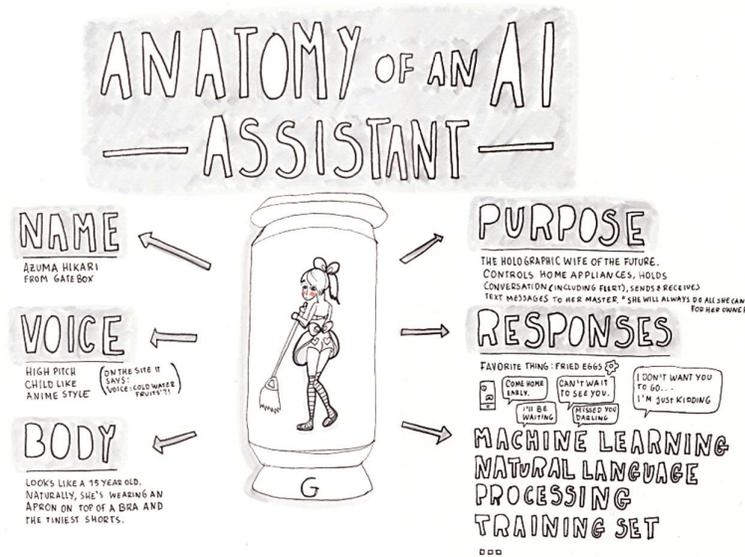
Elvia Vasconcelos is a designer, researcher, wannabe activist, compulsive drawer and dressmaker. She enjoys torturing toasters and other domestic objects. A couple of years ago, Elvia tried to become besties with an Alexa and failed. Her work is guided by a desire to hold on to things but not exactly to hold them in place.

Working at the intersection of design research, emergent technologies and activism Elvia is interested in critically investigating social narratives in design and the role that practitioners play in challenging the dominant notions around technology and by doing so in shaping more equitable futures. Currently working as a researcher in the UK Government's digital services, Elvia has been working in the digital industry in the UK for the past 9 years. She holds an MA in Digital Arts from the University of the Arts London.