For humans the deep sea is a dangerous environment. If they want to access the world underneath the surface for more than the span of a breath, they need technology to survive. Since the end of the nineteenth century, technological change has constantly made the deep sea more accessible. These new technologies include different types of helmets, diving suits, self-contained breathing apparatus and gas-recovery equipment. Divers, storytellers and scientists discovered, imagined and transformed the depth as a complex space of research, work, leisure, adventure and tourism. Parallel and simultaneously, unintended consequences emerged underneath the surface alongside technological, scientific and medical “reverse salients.” Examples were communication difficulties and heat loss in great depths, the upcoming of hitherto unknown diving diseases and strategic competition about the control and exploitations of resources like natural gas and manganese nodules.

While scholars have devoted little attention to the history of diving, much has been written in popular accounts by divers themselves. Notably they spread—frequently heroic—biographical tales, which reported of the technological conquest of the underwater world in colorfully illustrated stories. We invite scholars to present and discuss their research about diving history. We expect pre-circulated papers that will be at the center of our debates, with the aim of publishing the results in a peer-reviewed volume.

Our workshop explores the history of diving as a multilayered issue. Such dives into the history of the twentieth century are more than narratives of technological progress, of the intrepid exploration of nature, or of visions of a colonial conquest of new spaces. For the ‘Conquest of the deep’ physicians produced medical knowledge about human bodies under high pressure conditions. Together with engineers—and often in collaboration with the military—divers and physicians improved diving equipment and technologies in order to dive deeper and extend the time underneath the surface. Diving became safer and the deep more easily accessible to filmmakers, sportsmen and -women as well as scientists. Subsequently, new sensory “sensations” of the body and new perceptions of the environment developed. In short, diving became a multifunctional activity between technology, the military, medicine, sport, research and the media.

In particular, we aim to mobilize research approaches and historical cases that help problematize these issues from perspectives of the history of science, technology, knowledge, and the environment. The workshop will be based on a variety of empirical case studies, intellectual viewpoints, methodologies and literatures, and will focus on questions such as the following:

- What role did the newly produced knowledge about the deep-sea play in the formation of the environmental age?
- How did different groups of divers or different institutions (e.g. military, navy, scientists, sportsmen and -women, filmmakers, companies) use and modify available technology?
- Is our focus on modernity and innovation an adequate approach to the history of diving? How do we conceptualize more traditional forms of diving within our research, like the history of sponge fishing?
- Which narratives about diving and the underwater world were generated and circulated during the nineteenth and twentieth century? How and when did these stories change?
- How was the human body tested and contested in extreme environments of the sea? What were the associated perceptions of the deep? Do they form a distinct sensuous account of contemporary history?
• How did diving technologies and their use enable and restrict human access to underwater worlds? How were these opportunities and limits discussed?
• Which methodologies, research directions and questions are innovative, relevant and needed in current and future projects on the topics of the workshop? How can we encourage and help initiate and facilitate future research?

The far-reaching aim of the workshop is to initiate and facilitate further research in these directions and questions. We would like to discuss which methodologies, research directions and questions are innovative, relevant and needed in current and future projects on the workshop’s topics. Finally, we aim at explaining the impact of knowledge about the deep-sea on the formation of the environmental age.

Workshop setup & Organization:
The conference will take place at the Technical University Braunschweig, Germany, which is reached conveniently by train and is within easy to access from the international airports of Hanover and Berlin. Thanks to support from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, we are able to cover for expenses for travel and accommodation for scholars without institutional funds of their own.

How to apply:
Please send an abstract (max. 1 page) and a short CV to diving-history@tu-bs.de until 15 March 2020. Upon acceptance, all participants will receive further instructions and be asked to provide a pre-circulated paper of about 8-12 pages until the end of October 2020. The workshop will take place at the Technical University Braunschweig 3-4 December 2020. Full chapters are expected to be send to the editors by 1 February 2021. The articles will be published in a peer-reviewed journal or volume.

Eike-Christian Heine (Braunschweig), Franziska Torma (Munich), Christian Zumbrägel (Berlin)