

International Conference

**“Humans • Digits • Transformations:
Datacizing the Organic“**

**10 - 12 September 2008
Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany**

Organizer:

Graduate Research Group “Gender as a Category of Knowledge“ of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in cooperation with the Institute for the History of Medicine (Charité) and the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst e.V.

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Plenary speakers, i.a. (confirmed):

- Barbara Orland, ETH Zürich (Switzerland)
- John Dupré, University of Exeter (UK, to be confirmed)
- Cathy Waldby (University of Sidney, Australia)
- Christine Hanke, Potsdam University (Germany)
- Nina Lykke, University of Linköping (Sweden)
- Gabriele Werner, University for Applied Arts Vienna (Austria)
- Faith Wilding, School of the Art Institute of Chicago (USA)

Call for papers / submission of abstracts

Authors should submit an electronic abstract (total word count up to 500). The abstract submission deadline is **March 15, 2008**. Please submit to: datacizing@googlemail.com. PhD students are especially encouraged to submit. Please include your affiliation, research interests and the title of your targeted panel. A reimbursement of travel expenses in special cases and on request can not be guaranteed. However, a respective request for third party funding to cover such costs is pending.

Schedule

- March 15, 2008 – Deadline for abstracts
- May 1, 2008 – Notification of acceptance
- August 1, 2008 – Deadline for final paper (to be forwarded to commentators)
- September 10-12, 2008 – Conference dates

Datacizing the organic: Concept and panels

As used in conceptualizing this conference, “datacizing the organic” refers to all intra- and interconnections, as well as transformations between the organic, the data and the machine in scientific (laboratory) practices. Paying tribute to historic but also to most recent

developments regarding humans, digits and the organic, we envision at least four intertwined steps in this process, each to be examined in separate panels: Measuring practices, biometric processing, imaging and the (re-)generation of the organic from the digital.

Measuring practices (panel I)

Measuring is a basic operation in datafying the organic. It reduces qualities to discrete parameters, produces data and provides the primary material for diverse practices of visualization. The panel focuses on post-1800 material techniques for measuring the organic and on their feedback-effect upon the represented object: How does the organic become a product of the laboratory (Canguilhem)? How is the body reconfigured as an epistemic object of a measuring curiosity? Which paradoxes and ambivalences flow from datafying and from digitalizing our modern knowledge of the body (Chedarevian, Brain)? Historic case studies of biometric procedures of the past 200 years will serve to carve out the basic epistemic configurations and their subsequent effects.

Biometric processing procedures (panel II)

This panel focuses on the transfer of knowledge between procedures of measurement and interpretation. The avalanche of numbers (Hacking) hits the body and generates, through calculation, a data-body, which informs concepts of identity and society. It carries strategies of the normalization and regulation (Foucault) of bodies, body parts, and organs. The transformation of the body also offers up points at which manipulations, disturbances or ascriptions act (Richard). Which criteria and aims direct the input of the body into the machine or technology? What are the technical conditions of number, code, and machine which are traversed by the specific (knowledge of) bodies?

Digits in the (re-)generation of the organic (panel III)

This panel investigates the productive pathway from data, from the electric, to the biotic. On the one hand, contacts between the organic and the machine, between hard- and wetware serve their quasi symbiotic articulation. On the other hand, genomics and proteomics generate enormous amounts of data-applying bioinformation, which in turn is used for the regeneration of biotic material, e.g. in tissue engineering or stem cell research (Franklin, Dupré). Which exclusions are productive in this contact, which new (?) thinkabilities (Ariès) of the material-semiotic in gender- and body theories can be used and questioned to deal with these effects?

Calculated body-images (panel IV)

Statistics visualize data in ways that make use of the iconographic effects of well-learned viewing habits, of the pre-viewed (Silverman). The notion of representation seems to be much overused (Lynch). However, its relationship to issues of identity and the social have not been sufficiently investigated, although still vitally relevant. Therefore, the panel focuses on the epistemic status, on the mediality and on the applications and effects of technical

images of the body in order to analyze the construction and powers of these (post)modern body-images. Which normalities of physicality, sexuality and gender flow into the process of representation and by which pathways, with which instrumental limits? How can they be dealt with beyond the mere image?

Datacizing the organic in contemporary STS, history and philosophy of science

The conference pays tribute to the fact that the role of organic data, while being historically traceable, is becoming more and more relevant in contemporary society, especially in the relationship between subjects and the state (Desrosières). Biometrics, medicine and computer sciences take on a crucial function as articulators. Our overall idea is that standardized and statistical body data interact with different local and contingent effects. Normal values (Canguilhem) in signifying structures establish possible relations between the elements (Saussure) and the processes of translation and subjectivation (Foucault). In contrast to current analyses of statistical (bio-) politics aimed at populations, this conference addresses configurations of knowledge which are central to them but still under-researched. The interdisciplinary and international conference deals with the productivity of numbers and digits in the scientific-technical processes and practices in translations between the organic and the machine. The organic itself mediates between the laboratory (Canguilhem, Hess), the Vor-Gesehene (pre-viewed, Silverman) and the technologies of the self (Foucault).

Over the course of the conference we will follow the digits along the different pathways from the conversion of organic, raw data to their normative re-form(ul)ation. We distinguish practices of measuring and representing bodily data, their statistical averaging and translation into formulas, as well as the data-based processes of the production of biomaterial. The conference focuses on translations which serve the quasi symbiotic connection between hardware and wetware and which also enable sanitized laboratory processing of biotic elements (Franklin).

The conflicts between the hitherto partial perspectives on 'datacizing the organic' comprise our point of departure: The concept of datacizing the organic differs from other more common terms, such as digitisation or datafication. These terms have been understood in the context of data, IT and the internet as holding a fundamentally dominant position of power, which determines economic, social, political and cultural developments (Wang). According to other accounts, the use of digital data involves the collection and processing of individual-related information and is part of population based security- and health technology (Linder, Feyerabend, Link); media theory assesses data use in relation to passive users of computer technology (Schneider/Otto), while others invoke subversive cyberfeminism.

Our conference, in contrast, considers datacizing in the mathematical and natural sciences. It doesn't understand datacizing of the organic to be a one-way street. Instead, datacizing

involves a dynamic field of *intra-* and *interorganic* change, especially between standardization and individualization, between heteronomy in norm-setting and appropriation. The conference inquires into the function of the digit as a platform and turntable between different disciplines, times and spaces. Datacizing shares a pivotal similarity with modelling: Like models – including those being data-bound in formula – organic data enable transgressions of space and can be utilized at different places and at the same time (Rheinberger, Giere). The conference challenges the usual approaches by exposing the limits of, as well as the instrumental and material resistance to the semiotic (Haraway, Barad), just as much as it exposes the contradiction between emancipation and expansion (Anderson, Deuber-Mankowski, Bock v. Wülfingen).

In Gender Studies, much academic attention has been paid to information technology and to the 'dry' reconstruction of the features of living 'wetware' in artificial intelligence and artificial life (Bath/Weber). The major topics in our conference, in contrast, will be the transmission of the organic into the digital for the reconstruction, restitution and replication of the biotic, as well as for the communication with the machine itself. Datacizing the organic has traditionally been theorized in (cyber-)feminist theory, fiction, and the arts (Braidotti, Grosz, Draude, Kuni), much less so in the analysis of function and effects of the digital in the production of knowledge, as well as in its effects within science and technology. Also, critical reevaluation and update of gender theory's analysis of the return of the body, long thought to have vanished into the digital, is overdue. It is necessary to acquire ideas about the altered form and structure of the organic in its interlinkage and translation with instruments. The conference seeks concepts and a language that grasps this shift towards material practices in scientific knowledge production.

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In cooperation with the *Institute for the History of Medicine (Charité)*; *Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst e.V.* and the *Hermann von Helmholtz-Centre for Cultural Techniques*

Working group 'Datacizing the Organic' at the Research Training Group "Gender as a Category of Knowledge" with the following projects:

Dr. Bettina Bock v. Wülfingen (epistemology), Daniela Döring (digital body writing), Claude Draude (interface between Cultural Studies and Computer Sciences), Hannah Fitsch (gender in biomedical visualization), Johanna Hartmann (gender and the history of mathematics), Prof. Volker Hess (history of standardization), Nanna Lüth (artist/Cultural Studies, queer theory and diagrammatics).

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