

Editorial

The Somatechnics of Social Categorisations

Iris van der Tuin and Holly Eva Katherine Randell-Moon

This issue of *Somatechnics* is a combined issue including the guest edited issue ‘Data Matters: (Un)doing Data and Gender in the Life Sciences’ and an issue comprised of general submissions entitled ‘Pharmacological and Carceral Bodies’. In a contribution to ‘Data Matters’, Diana Schellenberg coins the term ‘the somatechnics of social categorisations’ and argues that such practices are entangled with the operations of disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge production. For Schellenberg, the recording and reporting of a respondent’s sex or gender has become habitual in academia. Many conclusions of academic scholarship pertain to certain groups of people, people that, outside the laboratory setting, do not necessarily share characteristics or have a life in common outside participation in a research project or a visit to a hospital, a website, a cultural institution, etc. Although bodies and identities are not reducible to binary notions such as male/female, white/non-white, heterosexual/homosexual, able-bodied/disabled, etc. and with the pluralisation of categories of embodiment and identity entering only slowly into mainstream scholarship, the academic habit of categorisation affects knowledge outcomes and lived experiences.

Understanding the role of (techno)scientific knowledges in designating and categorising bodies, informed by stereotypical assumptions and with particular power effects, exemplifies the somatechnics approach to bodies as constituted in and through technologies. Borrowing from Schellenberg’s generative term, ‘the somatechnics of social categorisations’, we will contextualise the contributions in

this double issue as examinations of the social values that inform the embodiment of knowledge, power, and an array of digital, pharmacological, medical, and carceral technologies.

'Data Matters: (Un)doing Data and Gender in the Life Sciences' comprises six original research articles and an editorial introduction that frames the issue. Guest editors Lotta Fiedel, Lisa Malich, and Sofia Varino convincingly build on the double definition of 'matter' as materiality and meaning ('to matter') to discuss the diverse instantiations of data materialities and the epistemological, social, and lived consequences of their coming-into-being and workings. Importantly, the editors stress how ontology gets repositioned along the way or, better, is inherently always undergoing repositioning. Data practices co-constitute ontologies of matter and meaning, instead of data patterns representing fixed embodied materialities 'out there' in the world and unequivocally constituting meaning. What the editors show is that numerical data generation, metadata patterning, and meaning formation all influence the ontologies with which we do our knowing (biomedical and otherwise) and live our lives (symbolic, structural, and individual). Obviously, such mutual influencing happens in a context that is inherently social, hence they focus on the somatechnics of *social* categorisations in even biomedical research and policy settings. The opening article of the issue, 'The Gender of Biomedical Data: Challenges for Personalised and Precision Medicine' by Mirjam Pot, Wanda Spahl, and Barbara Prainsack, is particularly appropriate, then, as the authors argue that the on-going practice of programming gender bias into biomedical settings needs more concern and care. They have devised six sets of questions that biomedical (data) professionals may use to become literate about their own bias-informed programming and bias-informing use of data so as to open discussion; share knowledge, expertise, and experience; and instigate change. As we see them, the six sets of questions may be used as a 'data ethics tool' alongside local 'codes of conduct' that formalise ethical data practices for specific communities of practice (cf. Franzke and Schäfer 2017, Colman et al. 2018).

The stand-alone articles by Sofia Varino, Margrit Shildrick, Susanne Bauer, and Melike Şahinol each discuss the generation, patterning, and use of data that makes a difference (gendered and otherwise) in a particular community of biomedical practice. Each of the articles speaks to 'the somatechnics of social categorisations' as each reflects upon the uses and abuses of importing and co-constituting gender and other distinctions in research. In 'Active Coeliac: Disassembling Gluten & Coeliac Disease', Varino follows gluten as an active participant in coeliac

cultures across lab and everyday worlds thus connecting science and societal food cultures. The article mobilises gluten's materiality (its 'stickiness and pliability, its gum-like elastic consistency', in the author's words) in order to make sure meaning-making about gluten is informed by, and informs, a fluid ontology that connects seemingly distinct social practices and bodies, and does not stifflingly categorise healthy or ill bodies and types of illness and health. Shildrick's article 'Body Shock: Unsettling the Biosciences Through Postconventional Materialities' zooms in on an equally complexifying matter: heart transplantation. This article uses ethnographic data as to traverse social categories of 'mine' and 'thine', i.e., embodiment inside and outside the skin. The article 'Indexing, Coding, Scoring: The Engine Room of Epidemiology and its Routinised Techno-Digestions' by Bauer diffracts classical and digital epidemiological practices, on the one hand, and, on the other, individual and population medicine in an attempt to both use and conceptualise 'techno-digestion' in a move structurally similar to Varino's treatment of gluten's materiality. A particularly important contribution of the analysis of techno-digestion is that it brings epidemiology to the field of critical data studies and, vice versa, that the concerns of critical data studies are introduced to epidemiology in times of big data. Here, readers should think about population issues such as classification-based generalisation and prediction. Bauer's article is seamlessly followed by Şahinol's piece entitled 'Data Collection and the Status of the Research Subject in BMI Research in Chronic Stroke Rehabilitation'. Brain-machine interface is of course a topic of cyborgian concern, responding to the dualisms between organism-machine and physicality-nonphysicality (Haraway [1985] 1991). Importantly, Şahinol discusses how the integration of data generation and patient care interfere with one another to such an extent that they may cancel each other out when data generation is prioritised and patient care is not.

By way of conclusion, then, while the entire guest edited issue 'Data Matters' breathes cyborgian, integrative concerns, Şahinol's article provides an important reminder. The guest editors as well as most of the authors stress how concepts like data assemblage and fluid ontology are useful for analysing and understanding today's technoscientific practices. Şahinol demonstrates, in the words of Stacey Moran, that 'while the concept of entanglement offers materialism the promise of a conceptually rich field of new "entangled" entities, by itself, entanglement is ill-equipped to contend with the thorny questions of how power is organised among those entities' (Moran forthcoming). This specific concern of the sustenance of power difference and the perpetuation and renewal of social exclusion provides depth to the subtitle of the guest

edited issue: '(Un)doing Data and Gender in the Life Sciences'. Whilst data and gender are done in entangled manners, data generation, metadata patterning, and meaning formation may rely on and cause new forms of gendered and intersectional hierarchy.

'Pharmacological and Carceral Bodies' features four articles and a review roundtable of Jasbir K. Puar's new book, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (2017). Each in turn makes a unique contribution to investigations of the somatechnics of social categorisations. Francis Russell's article, 'Prescriptive Power: Biologism, Biopsychiatry, and Drug-Centred Psychopharmacology' examines the work of psychiatrist Joanna Moncrieff and the critical potential of her 'drug-centred psychiatry' for cultural theory accounts of mental health. Russell explains that Moncrieff challenges dominant biological and psychopharmacological conceptions of mental illness as a neurological defect requiring medication. Rather than viewing mental health according to a disease process, which is resolved through pharmaceutical treatment, the drug-centred approach understands drugs as inducing particular physiological states and effects that help to manage a patient's 'painful subjective experience'. Such an approach is consistent Russell argues with post-structuralist cultural theory, particularly that of Michel Foucault, which views subjects as invested with local knowledge that can contest dominant institutional sites of power/ knowledge. However, Moncrieff's conception of patients as trapped or duped (according to a Marxist ideological account) reaffirms power structures as oppressive and controlling, which leaves patient's little room for voicing their own knowledges and fails to acknowledge how patients may freely subject themselves to dominant biological and psychopharmacological models of mental health in order to receive treatment. Realigning Moncrieff's project with Foucauldian accounts of power enables the possibility of meaningfully locating 'drugs within the social and political world of the patient's life, and to open up psychiatry to the subjugated knowledge of the mental illness sufferer'. Medical knowledge is a somatechnics that subjectifies bodies and readies them for prescribed forms of intervention. Here the social categorisations of a mental health patient's treatment as pharmaceutical or drug-induced is heuristic in that particular prognosis trajectories are made visible and bought to bear on the body's relationship to medication in certain ways and which have implications for how patient's understand themselves and their health.

In 'Broadmoor's Early "Pleasure Women", or The Somatechnics of Maternal Filicide in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', Nikki Sullivan and Cathy Hawkins also bring Foucault to an investigation of the somatechnologies that juridically categorise nineteenth-century British

women found guilty of the murder of their offspring. Using primary sources from the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum patients files as well as secondary newspaper and court reporting, Sullivan and Hawkins posit maternal filicide as productive of an assemblage of juridical, medical, and criminal practices that began to qualify juridical guilt derived from insanity into more precise categorisations, parse reproductive health and hygiene into more specialised fields of expertise, and striate criminal detention and treatment based on these refined juridical-medical designations. The women subjected to this assemblage or dispositif of power were ‘thoroughly saturated’ by discourses of maternal filicide and the biopolitical role their bodies played in generating the normalisation of sex, class, and vitality. This article provides an exemplary explication of the somatechnics of social categorisation and how systematically a subject’s life can be realised through them.

The Foucauldian utility belt is further explored in Dean Ray’s article, ‘Subject, Object, Agent, Other: Zoom, PNP, and Crystal Methamphetamine’. Ray interprets Foucault’s notion of biopower as allowing for the ‘possibility of understanding the mutation of power as it folds inside of the body through pharmaceutical *technés*’. With a slight twist on Foucauldian notions of power as a productive force that penetrates the surface of the body, Ray suggests that biopower constitutes a ‘folding inside of the body as well’. Much like Russell’s article, which argues for a more complex understanding of the body as an assemblage of pharmaceutical and biopsychological technologies in the context of mental health, Ray contends that synthesising psychoanalytic and Foucauldian accounts of the subject-object orientation of social reality can produce a ‘pharmacokinetic vocabulary’ that can ‘extend the range of Freudian psychoanalysis inside of the surface of the body, to demonstrate how power operates through mechanisms underlying recurrence, identification, projection, and inscription’. The specific focus of his study is ‘ethnographic observations of gay men smoking meth through an online meeting software called Zoom’. In this case, the somatechnics of social categorisations (pertaining to drugs, sexuality, and technology) are internalised or folded into bodies to generate (by repurposing biopower’s attention to biology) different forms of connection. Ray make sense of this ‘parliament of bodies’ as follows: ‘The idea of naked bodies presenting themselves before others while administering powerful pharmaceuticals – quarantined and isolated – expresses a recurrence of the HIV/AIDS crisis’.

The final article in this issue, ‘Becoming Fully Present in Your Body: Analysing Mindfulness as an Affective Investment in Tech Culture’, by Jaana Parviainen and Ilmari Kortelainen critically examines how

mindfulness techniques have been utilised by tech companies in the Global North (such as Google and Apple) to increase creative productivity and innovation. Mindfulness training programs and discourse go beyond individual workers and managers' interpersonal dispositions though, and inform the affective atmosphere and design of workplaces in order to ensure work cultures are appropriately attuned to the corporate mission of a company. Drawing from phenomenology and affect studies, the authors suggest that mindfulness training has been commodified from its traditional Buddhist origins and repurposed for late capitalism to signify attention to interpersonal and environmental workplace dynamics. They develop the concept of 'presence' as a new labour practice 'associated with the cultivated performance skill of the managerial body in the era of late capitalism'. Presence as a somatechnic of tuning the somatic capacity of a working body towards acceptance of a particular workplace culture illustrates how social categorisations of work, leisure, repose, attention, and rejuvenation are becoming increasingly blurred under late capitalism's insistence that a working body always be on and aware of its somatic potential.

This issue also includes a review roundtable, 'The Right to Maim: Somatechnologies of Violence, Race, and Disability', featuring contributors Gilbert Caluya, Gerard Goggin, Zsuzsanna Dominika Ihar, Jack Leff, Kelly Sharron, and Meshell Sturgis. The subject of the review is Jasbir K. Puar's new book, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (2017), which brings together critical disability and race studies to theorise how biopower produces racialisation and disability coextensively in terms of economies of incapacitation and debilitation. Where subjects are placed between these two poles relates to the somatechnics of social categorisation in terms of whether the right combination of identities (white, middle class, located in the Global North) signifies one's productive capacity for rehabilitation into liberal democratic polities and neoliberal capitalisms. Contributors draw from themes in the book to create extended discussion on the critical and political possibilities that emerge from an understanding of disability as debility, economic conditions of debt and precarity as biopolitical technologies, how the right to maim supplements Achille Mbembe's work on necropolitics (2003), the environmental biopolitics that contribute to debility, and the colonial dimensions of temporality in biopolitical narrations of Black subjects as out of time and not synchronous with white teleologies of progress and equality.

We hope you enjoy this double-issue bursting with the somatechnical weight of critique anxious for consumption and application to our embodied worlds!

References

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