AIAS WORKSHOP

The Quantified Self and the Rise of Self-Tracking Culture

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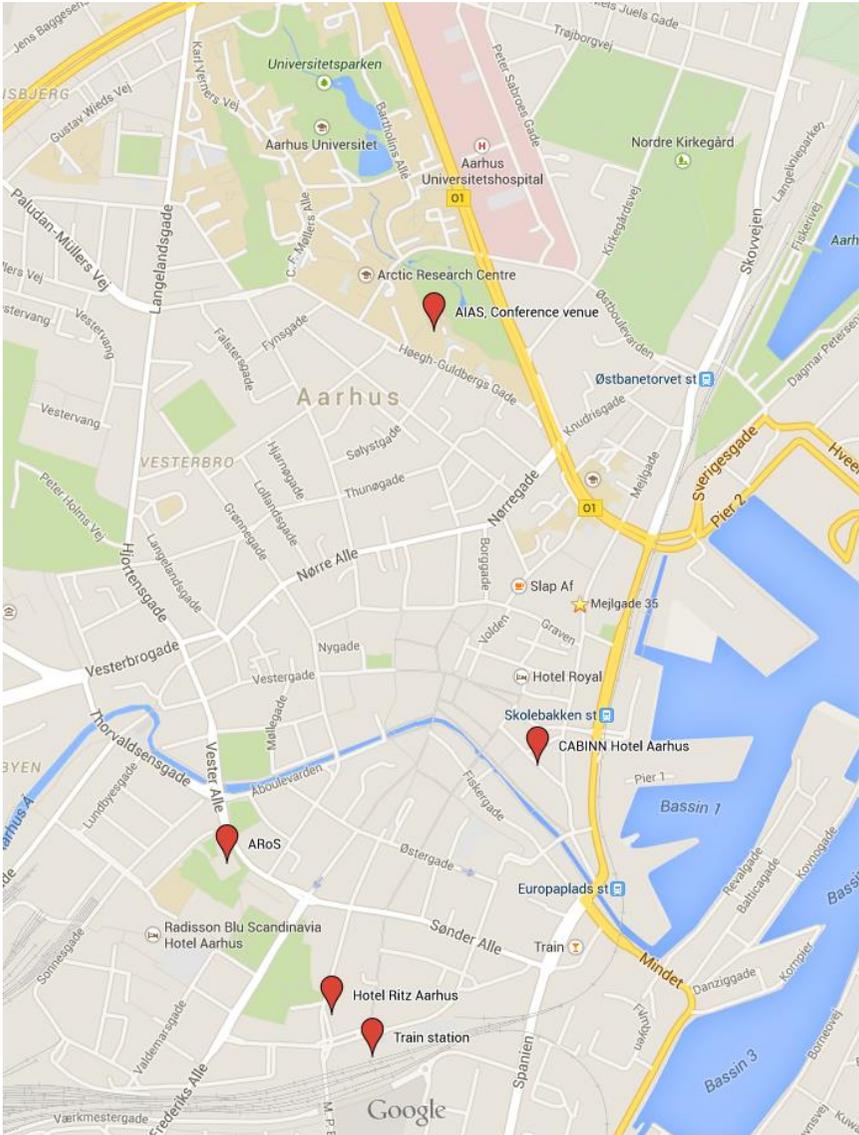
WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Practices of self-tracking and self-measurement are currently on the rise. Spurred by movements such as the Quantified Self, a growing number of people across the globe are embracing this "metric culture". As the world is becoming increasingly ruled by data and numbers, we are becoming ever more reliant on technologies of tracking and measurement to manage and evaluate various spheres of our lives including work, leisure, health and even sex.

The aim of this one-day workshop is to cast a critical eye on these emerging practices of self-tracking and quantification as they manifest across different domains of life. By bringing together relevant scholars to debate the various facets of the Quantified Self as well as its wider social, political and ethical implications, the workshop seeks to enable a deeper understanding of this rising phenomenon and how it is reshaping our relation to our bodies and their vital aspects.

More at: http://aias.au.dk/events/the-quantified-self/

ORGANISER

Btihaj Ajana, AIAS Fellow
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WEDNESDAY, 15 JUNE

09:30 - 09:45   Registration and coffee

09:45 - 10:00   Welcome and Introduction

10:00 – 11:30   **Session 1: Hybrid subjectivity and the gamification of self**

Paolo Ruffino, University of York, UK
Games to live with (and die for): speculations on Nike+

Jill Walker Rettberg, University of Bergen, Norway
The Machine as Confidante: How Quantified Self Apps Invite Us to Confide in Them

Discussant: **Christian Ulrik Andersen**, Aarhus University, Denmark

11:30 – 13:00   **Session 2: The Quantified Self at work**

Chris Till, Leeds Beckett University
Working bodies: work, exercise and the valorization of productivity in neoliberalism

Phoebe Moore, Middlesex University, UK and
Lukasz Piwek, University of Bath, UK
The Quantified Workplace Experiment: Agility, Work and Employees' Dashboard Experience

Discussant: **Btihaj Ajana**, AIAS and King's College London

13:00 – 14:00   Lunch, AIAS Hall

14:00 – 15:30 **Session 3: Mediatization, representation and the Quantified Self**

Rachael Kent, King's College London, UK
Digital Health Technologies and Self-Representation

Joeb Høfdinghoff Grønborg, Aarhus University, Denmark
Calibrating the body – the lived experience of people using fitness trackers

Discussant: **Stine Liv Johansen,** Aarhus University, Denmark

15:30 – 16:00 Coffee break

16:00 - 17:30 **Session 4: Making sense of the Quantified Self data**

Dorthe Brogård Kristensen, University of Southern Denmark
"The self as a laboratory": optimization and self-tracking practices in daily life

Keith Spiller, Open University, UK
Data value: ambivalences toward privacy in the collection and use of Quantified Self personal data

Discussant: **Phoebe Moore,** Middlesex University, UK

17:30 – 17:45 Closing note

17:45 – 18:15 Workshop debriefing (for speakers only), Room 203

19:30 – Dinner (for speakers only), ARoS, Aros Allé 2, DK-8000 Aarhus C

ABSTRACTS

Session 1

Paolo Ruffino (University of York)
Games to live with (and die for): speculations on Nike+

In this contribution I will describe, analyse and critique my own experience after almost two years of wearing the Nike+ wristband. This presentation will be a self-reflective speculation on the effects and influences that both myself and the wristband have produced on each other. It will also provide an excuse to debate some of the most common discourses around gamification and the quantified-self movement. I will propose an alternative way of looking at technologies for self-tracking, in their relation with new forms of digital entertainment, mobile and wearable technologies. My proposal will be to think of those technologies as *games to live with*, rather than to use for the improvement of one's own performance. I will argue, possibly counter-intuitively, that gamification and quantified-self technologies are not necessarily tools that we use for a specific purpose; these are technologies we carry around with us and live with.

Gamification and quantified-self technologies have been seen for their performative potential and their capacity to control and inform our bodies (Whitson 2014). From a Foucaltian perspective, quantified-self technologies are attempts to rationalise the practices and movements of living organisms, as forms of biopolitical control (Foucault 1980, Schrape 2014). Indeed, the Nike+ wristband is a 'thorn in flesh': a power that is at the same time repressive and productive, and that frames the individual who wears it through specific practices of production of the self (Foucault 2005). Nike+ is a system that is designed to receive and record already predicted signals; it rewards precise events that are expected by the simulated environment, according to the principle of cybernetic systems (Crogan 2011). The runner/player of Nike+ is encouraged to comply with a regulatory frame of rules, where only specific events are saved, calculated and evaluated. Through this practice of compliance, the runner/player of Nike+ is normalised, and regulates him or herself in order to maintain and progress in a process of constant self-normalisation. Failure to comply with the rules of Nike+ means not following up on the request to produce information. Nike+ is not a game to play, where one can win or lose, but mostly to update.

Thus, I argue that Nike+ can also be seen to complicate our models for thinking about our relation with the technologies around us. Quantified-self technologies are not exactly things we use for a specific purpose. These are things we carry around with us, we come to terms with, we live with. I have been living in symbiosis with Nike+ for almost two years, and it is now becoming difficult to understand who is the real 'parasite' (Serres 1982). In the presentation I would like to draw some conclusions about the constant negotiations me and Nike+ went through since we first started living together.

Jill Walker Rettberg (University of Bergen)
The Machine as Confidante: How Quantified Self Apps Invite Us to Confide in Them

Gathering data about ourselves over time provides us with a diary of an aspect of our lives. Historically, people have kept diaries to understand themselves better, to improve themselves, to explain or justify themselves to others, or to share their secrets with a safe, inanimate confidante, the "dear diary". The first three of these motivations are explicitly part of the quantified self movement, but little has been written about the last. This presentation explores ways in which the human is invited to treat the machine as such a confidante when using apps or devices for quantified self. To examine this question, I look at how apps are marketed to users and how apps address the user, and at artwork that thematises this relationship, such as Erica Scourti's Bodyscan (2015). Posthumanist notions of subjectivity as distributed between humans and our devices will inform the analysis.

Session 2

Chris Till (Leeds Beckett University)
Working bodies: work, exercise and the valorization of productivity in neoliberalism

This paper will explore the conceptual and ethical impact of self-tracking on the relationships between exercise and capitalism through empirical analysis of corporate discourses and user experiences of workplace wellness programmes. Many producers of self-tracking devices and apps present their products as means to a particular kind of healthy life which is consistent with the demands of neoliberal capitalism. The body is increasingly seen as a tool of productivity and as being integrated within assemblages of machines and data which can variously

reveal, increase or decrease its capacities. I propose that exercise is coming to be aligned with work (both in terms of how exercise is judged to be successful and what are its goals). The lifestyle which devices such as *Fitbit* are purported to enable are not only healthy ones but productive ones. "Activity" (broadly defined) thus becomes the dominant means to a better life. A good life is one filled with activity (exercise, appointments, work, uploading and analysis of data). Although the language of work (in terms of physics) has previously been applied to exercise its use outside of the scientific and professional sports communities is recent. The use of terms such as "work", "power output", "fatigue" and "productivity" to discuss amateur exercise and the priorities which are implied by their use are demonstrative of a conceptual shift in the approach to exercise amongst mainstream exercisers. Exercise activities are thus deemed to be successful ones because they are efficient and productive of healthier bodies, data and network connections (through the sharing of personal data). The integration of the corporate with the corporeal thus occurs through companies increasingly seeing the health of individuals as within their ethical remit and as benefitting from the application of neoliberal logics to individual fitness regimes with bodies monitored and analysed like a portfolio of shares. The ways in which employee/users work with and benefit from workplace wellness programmes might ultimately be dependent upon their willingness to align with the spirit of 21st century capitalism. Existing health inequalities could be exacerbated as particular understandings of health and exercise are pushed by corporate intervention and through tacit exclusion of workers who are not amenable to neoliberal values.

Phoebe Moore (Middlesex University) and Lukasz Piwek (University of Bath)
The Quantified Workplace Experiment: Agility, Work and Employees' Dashboard Experience

Agile production was introduced in 1991 by software developers whose Agile Manifesto focused on principles for more frequent, simplified, self-organised team-based development and delivery. 'Agile' has often used as a replacement term for 'lean' production, but it differs in that it is considered a necessary response to the complexity of constant change in unpredictable environments and requires a commitment to upskilling. The agile work design model has been implemented in an increasing number of sectors since the Manifesto was written. This paper asks, alongside the CIPD in 2015, how appropriate and effective is it outside of IT? Furthermore, we ask, precisely how has the model been implemented and what

are employees' responses to it? Funded by the British Academy and Leverhulme Foundation, our project analyses one branch of a large real estate company whose in house agile method has included the integration of individualised employee dashboards whereby sensory technological and embedded time monitoring software demonstrate employees' productivity, wellbeing, stress and 'billability'. Through interviews and surveys over the course of one year, we identify employees' responses to the agile method, asking questions about privacy, work/life integration and impact on work itself. The next stage of research looks at the legal issues surrounding such data gathering exercises and surveillance implications for such electronic monitoring activities that are seen in an increasing number of enterprises.

Session 3

Rachael Kent (King's College London)
Digital Health Technologies and Self-Representation

Alongside the rise of mobile, digital technologies has been the uptake of digital health technologies and social media by users. These converged social media platforms enable health self-representation, and extend self-monitoring and managing health practices into digitally quantifiable formats (Lupton, 2012). Whereas lifestyle used to be concerned with traditional identities, conceptualisations of the self are now identifiable by 'signs' and self-representations of consumption (Lewis 2008, Mennell et al 1992, Featherstone 1991, Miller 2007, Bourdieu, 1984). In neoliberal societies, consumption is a reflexive one whereby "consumption is equated with participation" (Adam and Raisborough, 2007: 1171). Therefore, ideologically we no longer simply identify health as an opposite to functional pathology, but health has become representative of lifestyle choice; an involvement to make the 'right' consumptive choices positions the citizen and consumer, as actively making the 'right' ethical decision for the management of their individual health self-care. Like the discourses which surround social media and the Internet more broadly, digital health technologies promise connectivity, and increased knowledge about users bodies, enabling 'health' optimisation (Wolf, 2010). These technologies are celebrated as 'revolutionising' health care (Wolf, 2010), and promise to optimize individual health through reflexive self-regulating practices. The functions and affordability of social media and these converged digital health technologies

enable such health, lifestyle and consumption self-presentation and performance of the self.

This paper critically examines how users practice such health self-representations via social media through ethnographic research, and asks how digital health practice and converged social media (*Facebook* and *Instagram*), are used as health self-representational tools, and with consideration to the feedback (real or imagined) from the online community, how and if this influences offline self-representation. This includes, online data collection, guided reflexive diaries, and interviews, triangulated with discourse analysis of verbal (interviews) and written (online data and reflexive diaries) language use. The research critically examines discursive assumptions of community sharing, and health self-representation afforded by social media and digital health technologies to explore how these technologies contribute to users health self-representation on (*Facebook* and *Instagram*), and offline. Particularly in consideration to how the choice architecture, design and regulation of these devices and converged social media may enable and encourage neoliberal individualised health practice.

Joeb Høfdinghoff Grønborg (Aarhus University)
Calibrating the body – the lived experience of people using fitness trackers

The paper addresses the lived experiences of recreational athletes using wearable fitness trackers (E.g. Endomondo and Strava) as a part of their exercise routine. With practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002; Couldry 2010) as my point of departure I show how recreational athletes try to interweave tracking, music, clothes etc. in order to *calibrate* their (bodily) experiences of physical activity to their wants and needs. My contribution to the workshop is a preliminary outline of some practices with self-monitoring of exercise that have rational as well as emotional goals.

Session 4

Dorthe Brogård Kristensen (University of Southern Denmark)
"The self as a laboratory": optimization and self-tracking practices in daily life

In modern consumer culture the term optimization has been popularized and has entered the microphysics of everyday life; it now also refers to a mode of living, as a strategy of "making the most" of life, on a physical, economic, social, mental and

spiritual level (Rose 2007). The goal is continuously to improve, enhance, manage, develop and transform the self. On this background the aim of this paper is explore the concept of optimization and analyse how the concept that originally emerged from a public and scientific domain increasingly characterize strategies for making the most of life. To this end we explore the optimization of the self in in practices of self-tracking (Ruckenstein 2014; Lupton2014a, 2014b). The overall methodology of the empirical project involved ethnographic studies of experience and everyday practices from 2012-2016 among member of the Danish Quantified Self, by combining phenomenology (Ipde 2000, Verbeek 2008) and assemblage theory (Marcus and Saka 2006).

More specifically the focus in the paper is the human/technology assemblage, and how it is experienced and practiced. In this context the process of optimization becomes a laboratory of the self. We analyse the mutually constitution of a kind of mechanical objectivity and the subjectivity of the self-tracker (Verbeek 2008, 2011). Furthermore we analyse the interplay between what the data says and what the subject is as part of another constant negotiation of which values and parameter is worthwhile optimizing that is always in the making. Consequently in the process of responding to data and by reflecting on the goals of tracking, the values of human life is projected, reinterpreted and turn into lived experience.

Keith Spiller (Open University)
Data value: ambivalences toward privacy in the collection and use of Quantified Self personal data

The quantification of personal activities is enjoying unprecedented levels of engagement, for example logging personal data through what has been called the Quantified-Self (QS). Indeed, the logging of personal data has been shown to offer many benefits for those wanting to get fitter, stronger or better. In this paper we concentrate on the values attributed to QS data, especially the value of the data in terms of encouragement and also in terms of the privacy of this data (or not). Using evidence taken from video analysis interviews with QS users the paper reviews privacy and transparency in relation to personal data and offers an empirical perspective on how QS users view and value the data they collect, and often display publically, as well as their attitudes toward the handling of their data by the manufactures of QS technologies.

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