
SOCIETY FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES
OF QUANTIFICATION.
3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE AT UCLA

DATA DELUGES
HISTORIES, PAST AND PRESENT

SSSQ
3rd meeting

UCLA Royce 306
14th & 15th September 2022

Co-sponsored by :       

Meeting will take place on **September, 14th and 15th, 2022, at Royce Hall, room 306, UCLA.**

Organizing Committee: Theodore Porter tporter@history.ucla.edu, Emmanuel Didier edidier@ehess.fr, Camille Beaurepaire beaurepaire.camille@gmail.com, Wendy Espeland, Andrea Mennicken, Mary Morgan, Richard Rottenburg.

Conference – “Data deluges. Histories, past and present”

The history of quantification has been and is written with a series of metaphors conveying a meaning of very abrupt, massive, and often geological events. For example, Ian Hacking has famously written about an “avalanche of numbers” in the mid-nineteenth century, Michael Power identified an “audit explosion” in the 1990s, and in the last ten years we have been hearing about a “data deluge” (in natural sciences, in digital infrastructures, etc.).

The conference will question these images and the reality that they capture. How can we understand the inner structure of these metaphors? Do they appear in certain specific situations? What drives them? Are they linked to macrohistorical crises; and if so, is the current Covid-19 pandemics paving the way to a “big data State”? Are they linked to the history of specific institutions or professions and their search for objectivity?

What happens in between two such moments of turmoil? Can we identify other quantitative “deluges” throughout history? Is it possible to account for and even count the number of elements (numbers, audits, statistics, data) that surge during these moments? What does it tell us about the nature of these data? More generally, the conference will bear on these images to question the inner historical forces of the quantitative within societies. It will also try to characterize the present so-called “data deluge”: when did it began, in what sense is it a “deluge” and how does it differ from previous “deluges”?

Conference programme

Wednesday, 14th of September

9:00-9:30 Opening / Welcome: Theodore Porter and Emmanuel Didier

9:30 – 10:30 **Bruce Carruthers Northwestern University**

The Economy of Promises, 2022 is a far-reaching study of credit in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America.

10:30-11:30 **Andrea Mennicken, LSE**

Lost in Numbers - Quantification in the Regulatory State: Dynamics, Boundaries, Capacities

11:30-11:45 Coffee

11:45-12:45 **Emily Klancher Merchant, UC Davis**

Building the Population Bomb, 2021. The story of the twentieth-century population crisis by examining how scientists, philanthropists, and governments across the globe came to define the rise of the world's human numbers as a problem.

12:45-2:30 pm Lunch

2:30- 3:30 pm **Dan Bouk, Colgate University**

[*Democracy's Data: The Hidden Stories in the US Census and How to Read Them*](#)

3:30-3:45 pause

3:45- 4:45 **Rebecca Emigh, UCLA**

Antecedents of Censuses From Medieval to Nation States: How Societies and States Count (Volume 1) and Changes in Censuses from Imperialist to Welfare States: How Societies and States Count (Volume 2). (with Dylan Riley and Patricia Ahmed) 2016.

4:45 – 5:45 pm **Zachary Griffen, UCLA**

“Causal Inference”. How the ability of economists to access new sources of data has transformed the field in recent decades (the so-called "credibility revolution" in microeconomics). This connects to a broader shift toward empirical work away from economic theory and is tied to the emergence of "data science."

Thursday, 15th of September

8:30-11:15 – discussion of draft papers and research project abstracts, presented by young members of the Society.

***Lukas Engelmann**, U. Edimburgh : *Configurations of Plague. Spatial Diagrams in Early Epidemiology*;

***Ziang Lieu**, LSE, *Quantification and fiscal governance in China, 1400-1800*;

***Siyu Li**, ENS, *Quantification of effort in the preparation of the Chinese Gaokao ranking*.

11:15-11:30 – Coffee

11:30-12:30 – session “Trust and Mistrust in numbers”

12:45-2:30 pm Lunch

Lunch provided to those who RSVP to cbellwilson@g.ucla.edu

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This conference is co-sponsored by :



UCLA Dean of Social Sciences

UVLA center for history of science and medicine