

CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS OF THE SSSQ (SOCIETY FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES OF QUANTIFICATION), FEBRUARY 2022

DATA DELUGES THROUGHOUT HISTORY: IN WHAT SENSE IS THE CONTEMPORARY “DATA DELUGE” A DELUGE?

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 (1990) has famously written about an “avalanche of numbers” in the mid-nineteenth century, Michael Power (1994) 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 seminar 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 (Desrosières, 2014); and if so, is the current Covid-19 pandemics paving the way to a “big data State” (Henneguelle, Jatteau, 2021)? Are they linked to the history of specific institutions or professions and their search for objectivity (Porter, 2020)?

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 seminar 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”?

If you want to contribute to this thematic cycle and propose a presentation for the SSSQ seminar, feel free to contact us at this dedicated mail address: sssq.seminar@gmail.com

If you want to learn more about the SSSQ, you can visit its webpage: <https://www.cmh.ens.fr/programmes-de-recherche/seminar-of-the-society-for-the-social-sciences-of-quantification-sssq/>

Bibliography :

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Henneguelle, A., & Jatteau, A. (2021). *Sociologie de la quantification* (p. 128). La Découverte.

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