

Call for Papers

**Bodies, Arts, and Media: (Re)Configurations in the Digital Era**

*International Conference*

*December 5-6, 2024*

*Maison de la recherche (4, rue des irlandais 75005 – Paris, France)*

The **IRMÉCCEN** (Sorbonne Nouvelle University) and **LabSIC** (Sorbonne Paris Nord University) laboratories, **research committees 14** (Sociology of Communication, Knowledge, and Culture), **37** (Sociology of the Arts), and **54** (The Body in Social Sciences) of the **International Sociological Association (ISA)**, as well as **research committees 38** (Socio-anthropologie Politique: Médias et Cultures) and **33** (Sociologie de la Communication et du Numérique) of the **Association Internationale des Sociologues de Langue Française (AISLF)**, the **Cité du Genre**, and the **Groupe de Travail “Genre et Espace Numérique”** of the **Centre Internet et Société (CNRS)**, are jointly organizing the bilingual (French and English) international conference entitled *“Bodies, Arts, and Media: (Re)Configurations in the Digital Era”*.

The body is both a physical and symbolic entity that characterizes the human being (Le Breton, 2008). Although it is a private possession where the most intimate biological and psychological activities of social beings are expressed, it also serves as an artifact through which individuals interact with the world and their peers. From this perspective, the body is influenced and shaped by social norms and cultural discourses (Butler, 1993). These factors play a significant role in society by setting specific expectations for the human body, encouraging the construction of certain body types over others, and shaping the relationships individuals are expected to maintain with their own bodies. Thus, the body is subject to permanent norms and injunctions, which vary according to different forms of marginalization (gender, class, race, sexuality, age, etc.), contributing to the formation of bodies that are considered more or less legitimate<sup>1</sup> (Larochelle and Bourdeloie, 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> Illegitimate bodies can be those that carry a stigma (disabled, trans, fat, skinny, sick, etc.); in other words, any mark of difference likely to discriminate against an individual. These bodies tend to be invisibilized in contemporary societies (Botta, 2000). However, the same cannot be said of dominant bodies (white, thin, able-bodied, heterosexual, etc.).

Unlike other concepts such as 'patriarchy' or 'gender,' which have sparked considerable debate in gender studies, the notion of the 'body' was long neglected by researchers in this field (Canning, 1999). Although often implicitly present in studies related to subjects such as reproduction, beauty, prostitution, and witchcraft, the body only truly emerged as a subject of study in the 1980s (Turner, 1996).

As a site where power is exercised and manifested, but also contested and resisted (Foucault, 1975), the body has been the subject of much reflection and debate within gender studies (e.g., Ahmed, 2006; Alcoff, 2006; Bartky, 2020; Bordo, 2004; Davis, 1995; Haraway, 1991; hooks, 1992; McRobbie, 2008; Mulvey, 1975; Rich, 1980; Showalter, 1997; Wolf, 1991). It participates in the ritualization of femininity (Goffman, 1959) and the construction and mediation of masculinities (Connell, 1995), playing an essential role in gender performance and its deconstruction (Butler, 1990, 1993; Halberstam, 1998, 2011; Halperin, 2002; Jagose, 1997; Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1990; Lorber, 1993; Rubin, 2006; Wilchins, 2002). Feminist studies have long examined representations of bodies in the arts and cultural industries, highlighting how these representations contribute to the normalization of certain bodily norms such as beauty, thinness, youth, and validity. They also underscore the objectification of individuals, particularly women, which often impacts how individuals perceive their own bodies (Clark, 1972; Davis, 2003; Gill, 2006; Gill and Scharff, 2011; Gimlin, 2002; Grogan, 2016; hooks, 1995; Kilbourne, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Paasonen, 2018; Thompson, 1994). However, it is important to emphasize that representation constitutes a site of conflict between dominant and subaltern actors (Macé, 2006). From this perspective, several case studies of bodily representations confirm that the media are both instances of *invisibilization* and *visibilization* (Voirol, 2005) of “illegitimate” bodies (Koch-Rein et al., 2020; McLaren et al., 2021; Capuzza and Spencer, 2017). It also emerges that the body constitutes a site where gender norms are destabilized (e.g., Atkinson, 2014; Preez, 2009; Kalogeropoulos Householder and Trier-Bieniek, 2016; Lapeyroux, 2023).

The analysis of bodily representations through the arts and cultural industries is a profoundly political undertaking. The body, especially that of people marginalized by prevailing social relations (e.g., gender, race, ableism), often falls under specific forms of knowledge that legitimize prevailing social norms (Foucault, 1975). It becomes the object of medicalization and pathologization in the public space (Bartky, 2020; Showalter, 1997; Stoll and Egner, 2021). This is particularly evident in the cultural

industries, which then reinforce the existing power relations (Farrell, 2011; Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Moreover, the body serves as a physical vector through which individuals express their political identities or challenge established norms (Waskul and Vannini, 2020). In this way, the body becomes a site of political struggle (Turner, 1996). Far from being immune to political and social ideologies, media representations of the body can be instrumentalized to influence public perceptions of political issues (Grimes et al., 2008; Gamson, 1998).

Beyond representations of the body in the arts and media, the body plays a central role as both a medium and site of artistic performance (Goldberg, 2011; Jones, 1998; Jones and Stephenson, 1999; Jones and Warr, 2006). Various art forms, such as dance, fashion, and theater, have long been arenas where gender is both performed through the body and challenged, offering spaces of resistance against oppressive gender norms (Banes, 1987; Geczy and Karaminas, 2023; Halberstam, 2011; Hausman, 1995). Although the body is today a widely explored object of study, the rapid evolution of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI), as well as the changes they bring to the arts and cultural industries, present numerous challenges that require in-depth reflection by researchers in the humanities and social sciences.

Digital technology, a double-edged sword (Bourdaloie, 2021), contributes to amplifying and multiplying hegemonic discourses, particularly regarding body standards (Tiggemann and Slater, 2013), yet it also helps counteract them (Larochelle and Bourdaloie, in press). Digital platforms cannot be considered neutral; they are often biased by algorithms that favor the propagation of images conforming to dominant beauty ideals, thus perpetuating the marginalization of bodies deemed “outside the norm” (Ekström, 2021). Exposure to such discourses significantly affects the social subjects who encounter them. Existing literature demonstrates that exposure to idealized body images on digital platforms negatively impacts the body perception of social subjects, particularly women (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2016; Holland and Tiggemann, 2016; Rodgers and Melioli, 2016). At the same time, these platforms provide a space for the dissemination of pathologizing discourses about the body (Barker et al., 2018; boyd, 2014; Yeshua-Katz and Martins, 2013). However, digital platforms also offer a space where injunctions to normativity can be contested, as

evidenced by self-acceptance movements (e.g., body positivity<sup>2</sup>, skin positivity<sup>3</sup>, hair positivity<sup>4</sup>) and trends such as #whatIeatinadayasafatwoman<sup>5</sup> and #celebratemyself, which have proliferated online since the 2010s (Sastre, 2014).

Digital technologies also reinforce body self-monitoring, notably through the proliferation of digital platforms, wearable devices, and other digital tools (Almalki et al., 2017; Ford and De Togni, 2021; Lupton, 2016; Sharon and Zandbergen, 2017). Empirical studies have shown that self-monitoring apps reinforce body stigmas (Ward et al., 2017) by propagating conventional standards of appearance and well-being (Ruckenstein and Pantzar, 2017). These apps impact self-image and individuals' relationships with their bodies (Fletcher, 2023). Conversely, empirical studies have also demonstrated that social subjects develop resistance strategies against the body surveillance imposed by digital technologies (Goodyear et al., 2017).

From an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective, this conference aims to bring together researchers from diverse disciplines such as sociology, information and communication sciences, gender studies, cultural studies, anthropology, history, computational sciences, political science, and others. It seeks to explore reflections on bodies in the arts and media in the digital age. We strongly encourage research that adopts an intersectional perspective and intersects various social relations of oppression (e.g., gender, sexuality, class, race, ableism, ageism). Papers may focus on (but are not limited to) the following themes:

### **Representations and discourses**

Research in this area aims to analyze representations and discourses about the body in the arts and media in the digital age. In addition to traditional arts and media, this area also explores the transformations brought about by the development of digital cultural

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<sup>2</sup> The movement in question aims for the acceptance and appreciation of all human bodies. Its origins lie in the *Fat Acceptance* movement, which emerged in the United States in the 1960s. This movement advocated respect for the rights of overweight people (Wann, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> The "skin positivity" movement promotes acceptance and appreciation of all skin types.

<sup>4</sup> The "hair positivity" movement promotes acceptance and appreciation of all hair types.

<sup>5</sup> What I Eat in a Day" content contains normative messages about diet and weight (Pfender et al., 2023), often encouraging dieting and body monitoring, as well as idealizing bodies that conform to prevailing beauty standards (e.g., "what I eat in a day as a model", etc.). However, in an effort to subvert the stigma attached to corpulence, larger content creators produce content such as "What I eat in a day as a fat woman". Such content seeks to offload the moral aspect often associated with foods labeled as "bad", as well as the guilt that accompanies their consumption. The aim is to shed light on everyday eating practices that depart from diet culture (Larochelle and Bourdeloie, in press).

industries and technologies. Areas covered include information media, *mediacultures* (Maigret and Macé, 2005), the arts, fashion, and popular culture. Similarly, proposals may examine the construction of discourses and representations in digital media and institutional settings, such as the medical profession. Specifically, proposals may explore how these discourses and representations contribute to the pathologization of minority and dysmorphic bodies—bodies that deviate from prevailing bodily norms—and to the perpetuation of bodily normativity and normalization.

### **Reception/uses**

This area focuses on studying how representations and discourses about the body are perceived and appropriated by audiences, broadly including users (followers, etc.) of digital platforms, audiences of so-called traditional media, and digital communities. The aim is to explore the effects of these representations and discourses on individuals' self-esteem and body image, as well as the tactics and strategies of resistance, reversal, or circumvention implemented by audiences and users to question and deconstruct discourses related to the body. In particular, we are interested in studies focusing on the ways in which bodies can be vehicles for political and subjective statements.

### **Platform design and the co-construction dynamics of bodily norms**

This area focuses on the analysis of technological devices as sites where bodily norms are produced, constructed, and contested. In particular, it examines how the design - architecture, interface, functionalities, visual appearance, accessibility, power dynamics, discrimination bias, and technological transparency - of digital devices (such as mobile health/wellness applications, platforms, social media, and websites) contributes to producing and reproducing bodily norms. It involves interrogating the co-construction of devices and norms by considering the reciprocal interactions and dynamics between humans and “non-humans” in this process (Boullier, 2018).

### **Performance in the digital age**

The body plays a central role as a tool for performance, with the notion of "performance" encompassing both artistic and identity-related aspects. This approach aims to examine how individuals perform and/or deconstruct social identities through their bodies and subversive practices (e.g., drag) and how these performances manifest

in a digital context. Additionally, this approach examines transformations in performance art. For example, some musicians plan to perform on stage as holograms, thus perpetuating the musical experience despite their aging (Guibert, 2024). This development raises questions about the influence of technological tools on artistic performance and how it is experienced, appropriated, and interpreted by the audiences it reaches.

### **Epistemology, methods, and ethics**

This line of inquiry focuses on the analysis of the body as an epistemology, a method of investigation and inquiry, an observable and a reflexive “tool” in ethical matters. Bodies reflect moral and hygienic norms but are also sites of power—subject to legislative, moral, social, and health concerns—and thus serve as instruments for analyzing social phenomena (Canning, 1999). The body therefore serves as a method for analyzing social change in the public arena (ibid.). We are also concerned here with the epistemological, ethical, and methodological issues involved in analyzing the social aspects of the body.

### **Submission guidelines:**

Paper proposals should not exceed **500 words (excluding bibliography)** and should be submitted in English or French by **June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024** to [bodiesartsandmedia@gmail.com](mailto:bodiesartsandmedia@gmail.com)

Responses to paper proposals will be sent by e-mail on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

### **Format:**

The file should be sent in doc or odt format and entitled  
NAME\_Firstname\_TitleOfTheCommunication\_CONUM2024.

This document will contain the following: names, last names, emails, affiliations, title of paper, abstract.

Conference dates: 5 – 6 December, 2024

Conference venue: Maison de la recherche (4, rue des Irlandais 75005, Paris - France), “Claude Simon” room

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