

BRINGING STS UP TO SPEED? THE DIGITAL AS PRACTICE

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Abstract:

Whereas the “digital” has become a habitual term in STS, to “digitize” remains relatively absent. This discrepancy hints at a disparity in analytical attention for digital (data) forms on the one hand, and their production on the other.

Presented as essential to “progress”, different forms of digitization (of objects, information, processes) are currently undertaken in fields ranging from transportation and policing to museum collections. Mobilizing discourses of optimization and acceleration, digitization is presented as a necessary speeding up of and keeping up with rapidly changing technologies and societies (Wajcman and Dodd 2016). Furthermore, digitization is tied up with the notion of “transformation” and thus suggests a break from the past.

In this panel we seek to bring digitization, practices of “making digital”, into the spotlight. Aware that digitization may take on highly diverse forms, we want to bring into conversation practices from a wide variety of fields. Seeking to learn what is at stake in digitization, we invite in particular contributions that critically examine its entanglements with speed and temporality. For if digitization is a means of speeding up, what kinds of futures are we racing towards? And what are we attempting to leave behind? What do we seemingly risk to lose lest we cannot keep up? With this panel, we aim to explore how STS can help understand the digital as practice.

Key words:

digitization; speed; temporality