

Conference Theme: Bodies, health and technology

Conference Session: Intimate technologies: embodying artefacts, remaking bodies, enacting norms

Title: Being a Quantified Self: an examination of the discourses and practices of the London Quantified Self group

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Founded by two influential technolibertarians from Wired magazine, the 'Quantified Self' (QS) movement is a growing international grassroots movement. Its members are a mixed bunch of people who develop and use technoscientific devices (tools and software) to monitor and quantify their bodies. The data they generate is expected to provide them with a more objective form of self-knowledge, a scientific self-awareness, that will then help them optimize self-performance. Underlying this movement is the belief that technoscience will work to 'naturally' reconnect the knowing and acting body (Viseu & Suchman 2010). The QS movement materializes and is driven by (at least) two complementary trends in contemporary Western societies: a scientific paradigm that has seen the exponential growth in data sets (Nature 2008; McFedries 2011), and a desire to blur the boundaries between online, offline, physical and virtual by augmenting the world of matter with computational devices (Viseu 2003a; Mitchell 1999). This paper presents preliminary results of two ongoing and complementary studies - a study of the design and implementation of wearable computing to reflect upon the experiences of users and the visions of designers, and interviews with members of the QS London group - to trace the practices and discourses of QS London members, and examine the shared imaginaries that drive and justify this movement.