

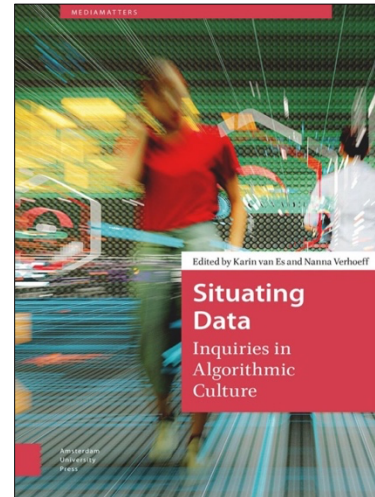
Karin van Es and Nanna Verhoeff (Eds.), **Situating Data Inquiries in Algorithmic Culture**, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023, 290 pp., \$148.00 (paperback).

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The book ***Situating Data Inquiries in Algorithmic Culture***, edited by Karin van Es and Nanna Verhoeff, delves into how media and cultural scholars can provide unique insights into the role of datafication and algorithmization within culture. It specifically examines the intersection between contemporary digital technology and cultural practices in various fields such as art, agriculture, education, and media. The significant contribution of this collection of work lies in presenting the interplay between data and culture, highlighting that data is not solely a technological phenomenon but also a cultural one with the potential to influence our values, ideologies, and social practices.



The book emphasizes the necessity for interdisciplinary approaches across different domains to comprehensively understand the complexity of data-driven cities and how data shapes individuals' lives in society. Consequently, the authors construct a multidimensional framework by analyzing topics such as datafication, algorithmic culture, media arts, digital infrastructure, environmental impacts, governance, metadata, racialization and equality, facial recognition, data imagination, commercialization, and new research agendas for inquiring into a datafied society.

Van Es and Verhoeff first navigate a dual perspective in the introduction to situate the overall position of their research, which examines both the impact of data and algorithms on culture and how these technologies influence academic practices in the field of cultural studies. They employ concepts like "computational turn," "algorithmic turn," and "data revolution" to describe the prevalent "algorithmic condition" in contemporary culture. These concepts are utilized to discuss the social implications of datafication processes, including effects on individuals, society, institutions, and global ecosystems. The authors critically evaluate datafication and algorithmization while proposing creative interventions to understand how emerging technologies shape our culture and society. These interventions involve critiques of phenomena such as "surveillance capitalism," "data colonialism," and the emergence of a "new social order." The authors advocate that cultural studies should pose new questions and challenges regarding datafication and algorithmization while developing novel research agendas.

The book implements a comprehensive analysis of the role of data and algorithms in cultural practices from four perspectives: practice, justice, knowledge, and agendas. In the first section, "Practice," the five chapters explore specific applications and the impact of data across various fields to shed light on critical issues concerning how technology shapes our daily lives. Stauff, Vis, and van Es (chapter 1) explore the integration of computerized data with manual craftsmanship in the context of small-scale coffee roasting, examining the interplay between the application of data technology and human perception. While digitization promises

efficiency and consistency, craftsmanship and sensory experiences impose limitations on data's influence. Müller (chapter 2) employs the concept of data imagination in precision agriculture to enhance the understanding of agricultural productivity. Duignan, Castaño, Geenen, and de Lange (chapter 3) discuss how media architecture can unveil and question controversies within digitization processes. Jancovic and Keilbach (chapter 4) investigate environmental footprints associated with digital infrastructure, video compression techniques, and streaming media services. Van den Eijnden (chapter 5) addresses the issue of how abandoned electronic data should be treated and its enduring existence and impact on digital cultural practices among individuals.

The second section, "Justice," examines how data and algorithmic practices contribute to the production and maintenance of justice, racialization, exclusion, and injustice within society. By comparing historical and contemporary bureaucratic governance, Leurs (chapter 6) argues that datafication serves as a means of "boundary work," influencing the inclusivity and exclusivity of society. Van Schie (chapter 7) explores how datafication tools employ race as an instrumental notion, shape knowledge through colonial politics, and produce race. Wevers (chapter 8) scrutinizes the political dimensions underlying facial recognition technology. Hassler-Forest (chapter 9) situates artistic performances in virtual reality spaces that challenge emerging racial issues in a data-driven society.

The third section, titled "Knowledge," discusses the impact of data and algorithms on knowledge production, dissemination, and acquisition. Van der Tuin (chapter 10) underscores the importance of digital literacy in research epistemology and methodology by using the example of "forgotten" philosopher Eva Louise Young (1861–1939) to elucidate the role of metadata in knowledge creation. Van Gorp (chapter 11) proposes a practical approach to tracking and analyzing metadata in archival search systems. Werning (chapter 12) analyzes the revolution of data and algorithms over time and its rhetorical implications by developing the concept of diachronic affordance analysis. Kerssens (chapter 13) argues that dashboards function as pedagogical tools to influence teachers' instructional practices and students' learning experiences. These studies highlight the crucial need for an extensive understanding of how data and algorithms shape knowledge systems and educational practices in today's digital era.

The last section, "Agendas," establishes in-depth discussions on future research directions, innovative methodologies, and emerging practices within the datafied society. This encompasses entrepreneurial research and Global North–South dialogues, as well as comprehensive deliberations on data commodification. Verhoeff, Merx, and de Lange (chapter 14) develop the application of creative city approaches to effectively address challenges associated with urban datafication while proposing innovative research methodologies aimed at a thorough understanding of these challenges. In chapter 15, Schäfer, van Es, and Muis suggest that entrepreneurial research in a datafied society serves as an efficacious approach to collaborate with diverse stakeholders, such as (local) authorities, NGOs, public media outlets, and companies, to explore the effect of information on social structures and individual lives. Mutsvairo (chapter 16) underscores the necessity for a dialogue with the Global South on big data to tackle global inequalities and related challenges. Helmond and van der Vlist (chapter 17) analyze the process of data commodification to discuss its impact on personal privacy, ownership of data, and market power structures. These studies offer profound insights into future avenues for researching the datafied society.

This collection of work showcases a comprehensive interdisciplinary perspective by integrating diverse subjects to construct a critical framework for analyzing how datafication and algorithmization impact contemporary culture, thereby offering creative explanatory pathways. It is worth noting that the authors explore the intersections between datafication and the pursuit of social justice, developing novel analytical tools to address issues of inequality in the process of datafication. Additionally, the book not only addresses theoretical concerns but also presents practical case studies, which help readers better understand how abstract concepts are applied in data-driven real-world scenarios.

In terms of comprehending data culture, this work can resonate with other recent significant research endeavors, such as *Being with Data: The Dashboarding of Everyday Life* by Tkacz (2022) and *Everyday Data Cultures* by Burgess, Albury, McCosker, and Wilken (2022). Tkacz (2022) thoroughly examines the role of data dashboards in contemporary society, providing a multidimensional perspective on our interactions with data and how they shape our world. Burgess and colleagues (2022) focus on the pervasive influence of data culture across various facets of everyday life and its impact on social, cultural, and personal identities. These three works can be articulated as an umbrella-like framework of data culture used for analyzing intricate and ever-evolving practices within the realm of emerging technology and digital culture.

This book also provides robust guidance for industrial practices, enabling practitioners to critically analyze the impact of datafication and algorithmization on existing data processing practices. It prompts them to consider the social, cultural, and environmental consequences that may arise from such processes. On the other hand, it establishes a practical knowledge foundation for designing and implementing more responsible strategies for data governance, especially when dealing with sensitive data involving privacy, race, and cultural diversity. Moreover, this research inspires artists and cultural workers on how to effectively utilize data in creating meaningful and critical works within cultural and creative practices. The intersectionality between datafication and the pursuit of social justice and equality presents strategies and opportunities for policymakers, social activists, and organizations to promote inclusivity and diversity through the utilization of data.

While acknowledging the significance of incorporating data cultural practices from the Global South into global data governance, this book's limited cases fail to adequately address governance objectives pertaining to global inequalities resulting from datafication and algorithmic processes, including the cultural influence of data in authoritarian regimes. To conclude, this book takes a critical and localized perspective to situate datafication and algorithmization as the central focus of cultural studies, delineating their nuanced practices. The collective contributions presented in this book not only offer invaluable resources for future cultural research and data practices but also impart a deep understanding of our algorithm-embedded society today.

References

- Burgess, J., Albury, K., McCosker, A., & Wilken, R. (2022). *Everyday data cultures*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Tkacz, N. (2022). *Being with data: The dashboarding of everyday life*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.