# The Politics of Algorithmic Modelling

§ - In an attempt to specify the normative regime of what has been called « algorithmic governmentality» (Rouvroy, Berns 2011), this two-day international bilingual (French/English) conference, concluding a four year research project funded by the FNRS, will take the diversity of contemporary quantification practices as a basis for developing a more conceptual and philosophical understanding of the kind of politics algorithmic techniques (re)produce and eventuate. "Algorithmic" refers here to recent advances made in statistical modeling (i.e. machine-learning), which supposedly enable one to exploit the masses of "data" produced through increased capacities for measuring and storing. These emerging techniques give rise to new ways of governing individuals and societies, which can be provisionally clustered under three different regimes: preventing threats, profiling consumers, forecasting trends. The tensions between these regimes involve uncertain and conflicting relationships of subjectification, the specificities and dynamics of which are yet to be fully traced and grasped.

§ - In the interest of ensuring rich empirical groundings, various disciplinary perspectives (e.g. law, history, sociology) are pursued, all the while maintaining philosophical concerns at the forefront of our analyses and confrontations. Three main vantage points will be deployed, with the hope of allowing for new articulations between empirical and conceptual concerns, and of mapping the (dis)continuities of the emergent normative regimes and the subjectivities they perform. The two days will be organized around three interrelated notions: *information, accuracy and performativity*. Each of these dimensions captures algorithmic practices from a different perspective, respectively: the training, the evaluation, and the effects of the models at stake. As such, this conceptual triplet is not the blueprint for different panels or sessions, but should rather be seen as the facets through which a common problem – the modes of subjectification produced through contemporary algorithmic modeling practices – can be approached.

§ - *Information* has shown to be one of the few recurring notions throughout various quantification practices. In contrast to noise, information can be abstractly understood as that which "brings a variation in relation to a form" (Simondon 1956). More specifically, we hope to address the contemporary injunction and the correlative attempts to build algorithmic models able to handle many sorts of disparate – and often non-observational (Boumans 2016) – data, informations, measurements. By calling for contributions focusing on this notion, we seek to emphasize the various ways in which such concerns are instantiated, in specific contexts (Hoffman 2016). We seek here to address two main questions: (1) How does the shift to algorithmic modeling affect the transformation of "data" into "information"? (2) Can philosophy counter this pervasive spreading of measurement with a positive qualification of what has been, up until now, qualified as "unmeasurable" or "incalculable"?

§ - *Accuracy* constitutes another generic feature of these contemporary practices of quantification. Models are necessarily assessed in relation to some external standard; their

performances are always indexed to certain objectives and expectations. The term ultimately implies a meaningful relationship with a certain type of intervention. We would like to work on situating technical accuracy (Mackenzie 1990) with respect to two of its closest terms: the approximations of scientific phenomena (Cartwright 1983) and the precision of actions (Wise 1998). (1) How do these new kinds of models reconfigure the retroactive relationship between "representation" and "intervention" (Hacking 1983)? (2) What are the consequences of an extremely accurate model, folded within a relatively opaque representation ("black box")?

§ - *Performativity*, understood as the manner in which the norm comes to matter within a certain practice, is a central aspect for grasping the effectiveness of norms algorithmic modeling produces. Models are not just technical or epistemic problems, they are always performed within a social context, all the while performing their social context. The task here should be to consider the locus and manner algorithmic models perform. Furthermore, the relationships between information and accuracy, representation and intervention will be reinterpreted in light of differing philosophical and political accounts of performativity (Butler ; Mackenzie ; Derrida) so as to put to work the problematic nature of algorithmic norms and models: (1) How should the performativity of algorithmic operations be qualified (i.e. illocutionary, perlocutionary)? (2) What is it within the algorithmic model that lends it its performative force: its data, its information, its accuracy, its practices?