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# Lifelogging and Vital Normalism

## Sociological Reflections on the Cultural Impact of the Reconfiguration of Body and Self

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In 1890, the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde speculated on the further development of society and social statistics. In case it were possible to maintain the progress of the last years, he assumed, “a time may come when upon the accomplishment of every social event a figure will at once issue forth automatically, so to speak, to take its place on the statistical registers that will be continuously communicated to the public and spread abroad pictorially [...]. Then, at every step, at every glance cast upon poster or newspaper, we shall be assailed, as it were, with statistical facts, with precise and condensed knowledge of all the peculiarities of actual social conditions” (Tarde 1903, pp. 133f.). In the end, this scenario might lead to a development in which “every sensation—colour, sound, taste, etc.,—is only a *number*, a collection of innumerable like units of vibrations that are represented collectively by this single figure.” (Tarde 1903, p. 135, emphasis in original) And by looking at the curves which ultimately illustrate the conjunction and intertwining of those numbers and collected data, it would be nearly impossible to withstand the impression that they “are at times as strange and picturesque as mountain profiles, more often as sinuous and graceful as living forms.” (Ibid., p. 114)

It might be confusing to start an essay focusing on the relatively new phenomenon of *lifelogging*, with a reference to an opus written more than 120 years ago. But Tarde’s utopian view emphasizes two aspects that seem to be crucial to this sort of digital self-documentation: On the one hand, Tarde fundamentally ascribes data

the function of orientation and guidance in daily life. More than other sociologists at that time he notes the practical and mundane usage of data, hence directing the attention to the pragmatic dimensions of quantification. On the other hand, he was picturing a scenario in which data possess some kind of animated quality. They not only derive dynamically from daily life activities, they are instantly recorded and connected during production. Subsequently, these two aspects lead to another important characteristic of *lifelogging*: due to its dynamic and simultaneous quality, this kind of self-quantification is becoming increasingly recursive. Even if collecting data may be first and foremost an instrument of representation and documentation that accumulates and combines social “facts”, ultimately it tends to be far more than just sheer registration. At last, as can be argued following Tarde, it amounts to a widespread *datafication of life*, in which the acquired data instantly function as a guideline and landmark for individuals and their further actions and performances—a fact that seems to be more and more important in the light of progressing digitalization.

Subsequent to these preliminary remarks on Tarde, our main thesis is that *lifelogging* must be understood as an expression and emblem of this recursive datafication of *life*. Furthermore, we will argue that *lifelogging*, as a prototypical technology of self-constitution, is linked to a specific model of social control we call *vital normalism*. With this concept we propose to expand and complement the notion of *normalism* as defined by Jürgen Link (2004a, b) in a way that it should be able to address the fusion of a so-called “flexible-normalistic” type of sociation with the rise of a “culture of life”<sup>1</sup>. Therefore we will first discuss *lifelogging* as a phenomenon of the recursive datafication of life (chapter 1), followed by a short outline of the characteristics of the specific modern and essentially vitalistic concept of life, unfolding itself at the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although it is already grounded in the drastic cultural changes at the turn of the century, this concept is still crucial for the modern biological sciences (chapter 2). Following these general but necessary considerations we will distinguish between three forms of normalism. Our aim is to provide a basis to assess different and chronologically alternating ways and practices of constituting the self (chapter 3). In the end, this typology should help to outline *lifelogging* as the twofold enterprise of being an expression and a proliferation of vital normalism at the same time (4).

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1 This is basically a foucauldian approach which focuses on the centrality and regulatory power of normalization for modern societies.

## 1 Lifeloggng: Setting the self in motion?

*Lifeloggng* assembles various practices of life-protocolling such as self-monitoring, human or self-tracking, e-memory and forms of digitalized and digitalizing self-control (sousveillance) that are mainly grounded in the quantified self movement (cf. Selke 2014, pp. 13ff., 73ff.).<sup>2</sup> Although up until now, many different and specialized ways to log life coexist and the vast bulk of equipment is still not applicable in everyday life (even though it is progressing technically and becoming less expensive) (ibid., p. 78), these practices seem to be unifiable in the vision “that digital data help in making the biological body healthier and having a better life in general” (ibid., 33). Ultimately the core of the ideologies of the *lifeloggng* movement is the idea of “creating a better human” (ibid.).<sup>3</sup>

Besides this ideological sediment surrounding and related to the technological progress, *lifeloggng* is rendered possible through developments in the research fields of ubiquitous or pervasive and wearable computing and of augmented reality.<sup>4</sup> Another factor is the internet itself, since it is a major accessory for decentralization.<sup>5</sup> This change addresses the individual more and more in its everyday, and therefore “normal activities”, thereby fostering communications to become increasingly independent of time and place. This development culminates in the expansion of mobile technologies of communication since the turn of the millennium and its merging with personalized internet structures, especially of the so-called web 2.0. On the one hand, we are facing a fundamental integration of digitalization media into everyday life, while on the other hand, *lifeloggng* indicates how the quality of data has changed. After a first wave of digital self-publishing by disclosing any kind of intimate and private details of life and practical knowledge,<sup>6</sup> there is now a second wave whose focal point is mobile data and which indicates a turn to the *moving* body. Regarding this new quality and quantity of self-datafication, it

2 The term emanates from a Pentagon project, which was stopped in 2004 (cf. Selke 2014, p. 33f.).

3 All translations from German are by the authors.

4 For an overview of different visions and developments in quoted research fields, see Matern 2007; for pervasive- and wearable-computing: <http://www.pc.inf.ethz.ch/>. Accessed 10 July 2015. <http://www.wearable.ethz.ch/>. Accessed 10 July 2015. For augmented-reality, e.g., the venturi project: <https://venturi.fbk.eu/>. Accessed 10 July 2015.

5 By that we do not mean to insinuate some power-free or “noncoercive” zone, but to highlight the fundamental change in the forms of communications. Further considerations regarding the relation between decentralization and recent forms of power and governance can be found in Dorer 2008 and Reichert 2013.

6 cf. i.e. 2008; Mönkeberg 2013; 2014.

seems appropriate to assert that the amount of all lifelogs ideally produces “a sort of a digital double of the experienced life” (ibid., p. 73).

This thesis marks the vantage point for our following argumentation. Therefore, we do not focus on specifics of different practices of *lifelogg*ing, but try to generalize them under the following question: *Which cultural meaning lies beyond the desire to create a digital copy of experienced life?* This perspective is not restricted to those superficially athletic or fitness-oriented practices of *lifelogg*ing, which, for instance, use pedometers or pulse monitors while jogging or to measure someone’s sleep. We are interested in the extensive use of mobile technologies of connection and digitalization which aim to dataficate everyday activities and daily movement. Certainly this can be something that is individually motivated by sports and fitness. But from our perspective, this would merely be an expression of a general tendency, in which mobile digitalization not only enables more freedom of movement and higher mobility, but also aligns itself to the concept of movement as such—and the mobile data you log. “Thermostats, for instance, controlled via smartphone to regulate the room temperature from distance. Wristbands registering body-functions and saving them in the cloud. [...] Cams transferring their photos through the internet” (Graff 2014)—all these achievements of wearable internet not only allow mobility but they produce dynamic data, too. It becomes increasingly evident that these new forms of datafication are above all geared towards physical activity when you look at *Apple’s* and *Google’s* patent applications in the past years. In 2013, the United States Patent and Trademark Office approved a patent for *Apple* to control three-dimensional objects on a touchscreen by using special gestures (cf. Campell 2013); *Google* designs *Glass* explicitly “for those who move”<sup>7</sup> and will use the so-called “Heart-Shaped Gesture” to take photos—and simultaneously like and share them (cf. Desat 2013).

In summary, we consider it to be crucial to view *lifelogg*ing as much more than just a continuation of well-known forms of recording and protocolling life and self-performance that are merely changing their looks and foci or are expanding into contemporary cultural practices. Instead, in focusing on the *live* quality of lifelogs, we try to claim that this can be understood as the emerging point of a new cultural technique that leads to a novel configuration of body and self. Although *lifelogg*ing obviously depends on the development of specific technologies, from a perspective of cultural sociology it is important to emphasize that it still has to be embedded in social practices that are necessarily entangled with specific and historically changing logics of sociation and culture. Below we will try to trace this

7 <http://chipsetforum.blogspot.de/2014/09/google-glass-designed-for-those-who-move.html>. Accessed 10 July 2015.

transformation by distinguishing between three forms of *normalism*. Following Link, we interpret them as (different) forms of dynamic stabilization of the “productive chaos of modernity” (cf. Link 1997, p. 313). Because *lifeloggging* consists primarily of documentation and (normalistic) datafication of *life*, we will initially turn our attention towards the development and transformation of the modern concept of life.

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## 2 Idiosyncrasies of modern life: a short outline

The recent rise in discussions regarding the concept of life as well as related biologisms are not just a result of the newest developments in the natural sciences (cf. Breidbach 2012, p. 3). The “gradual naturalization of perception forms” (ibid., p. 14) can be traced back much further. It had already begun to replace the moral concepts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which were lost due to the process of secularization—a development which can be seen as a breeding ground for the ascent of the life sciences to become the leading science of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (ibid., p. 11). The proliferation of the underlying bio-scientific *weltanschauung* is based on a specific concept of life, which became crucial at the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—as Georg Simmel (1997), Helmuth Plessner (1975) und François Dagognet (1988) have pointed out.<sup>8</sup> This concept articulates a particular understanding of life, which, despite all the differences and transformations since then, still seems constitutive for the present datafication of life activities. Ultimately, the boom of the concept of life around 1900 has to be understood as a twofold response: (1) to an alteration in the medical-scientific understanding of life and (2) the tremendous proliferation of artifacts in daily life.

(1) The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century can be seen as the starting point for a novel scientific engagement with the concept of life. Grounded in a vitalistic understanding of life, it generally “rejected two metaphysical interpretations of the causes of organic phenomena: animism and mechanism” (Canguilhem 2008, p. 122). On the one hand, this concerns the assumption of an extra-sensual and animated soul, inherent to human beings. On the other hand, it contains the refusal of the idea that the organization of life is determined by some goal or regulated through general

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8 See Plessner (1975, p. 3): “Every time finds its salvific term. The nomenclature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century culminated in the idea of reason, the one of 19<sup>th</sup> century in the idea of development and the present [1928] in the idea of life.”

principals, external to life as such.<sup>9</sup> Not only the above mentioned Tarde, even his successor on the chair at Collège de France, Henri Bergson, was inspired by this concept of life. Georg Simmel refers to these developments in vitalism, too, insofar as he interprets the dynamics of sociation and culture as forms that are created by life (cf. Simmel 1997, p. 76). Although each of these positions has to be understood as a response and alternative to the dominant contemporary evolutionary concepts, Simmel is especially interesting since his concept of life as well as his diagnosis of modern culture as such refer to a self-referential model of life. He describes how external and metaphysical explanatory models are gradually replaced by vitalistic views, founded on the idea that the essentially creational motion of life can only be understood in its own (vitalistic) terms. In this manner vitalism does not rely upon any sort of external substantiation or any explanatory model that refers to abstract functions or final goals—for life serves no purpose besides itself.

The idea that life can no longer be understood as a static principle, but rather as something that generates its own forms (more or less stably) through its dynamics, can particularly be traced in the writings of Bergson. His notion of life similarly entails a fundamental “critique of mechanism and finalism” (Vrhunc 2002, p. 99), since he mutually and generally deems both incapable of measuring the reality in which we live (Bergson 2010, p. 1). Classical metaphysics fail these requirements, for they have replaced “a full and mobile experience” (ibid.) with a “system of abstract general ideas” (ibid., p. 7) with the result of a “more or less artificial arrangement of concepts, a hypothetical construction” (ibid.). From Bergson’s point of view, life itself contains duration and creation and does not need to be fulfilled by an external explanation or complementary scientific interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the analysis of life should not focus on the identical and immutable in advance. A perspective which merely focuses “on generalized structural principles will be at risk to ignore the historical moment of structural developments and their functions” (Vrhunc 2002, p. 123). Although life is not only familiar with forms and structures, but is constituted by them, they should not be viewed as if they were somehow preexisting, generating entities on an independent, emergent level.

Since these ideas of an autonomous molding of the fundamentally active life have to get by without a causative explanation of this movement and because they denominate this as characteristic of life, they facilitate the process of datafication.

9 For a discussion on vitalism with respect to Nietzsche, Tarde, Bergson, Simmel, Deleuze, Foucault and Negri, see Lash 2006.

10 The notion of life in the works of Bergson does not only go against metaphysical thinking in general, but also more precisely against the way Spencer (and Darwin) conceptualizes time and biological evolution (cf. Delitz 2014, p. 45).

In doing so, they leave a void that can be occupied by the practical life sciences. The fact that even Darwinism can only describe the evolution of species instead of explaining it (Breidbach 2012, pp. 10ff.) results in attempts to save the forms of life positively “as data, independent of any interpretation” (ibid., p. 16). In a striking accordance to the ideas of Tarde the sciences are trying to count and measure similarities of motions.<sup>11</sup> The clearest expression of this logic can be found in the idea that life itself is information and data so that “nowadays we have to approach the DNA if we want to know what life means” (Liebsch 2012, p. 470), since the genetic code has become the epitome of life (cf. Deleuze 1988, p. 131).

(2) But the dissemination of the vitalistic concept of life does not just pave the way for an increasing datafication of life. Up to a point where technology and artificiality enables nature and the living, it evokes a fundamental critique of the separation of naturalness and artificiality. Vitalism understands life as fundamentally artificial. When Bergson, for example, emphasizes that there cannot be “any life without form” (Vhrunc 2002, p. 123), this is by no means restricted to an epistemological or scientific way of thinking. Instead, it is the operating mind as such that forms “matter according to the requirements of our life” (ibid., p. 111). This argument is of crucial importance since this continuous action of appropriation, molding and production frees mankind of the mercy of the laws of nature (cf. ibid.). Thus, life forms itself in the artificial, through technologies and culture: “It is life itself [...] with its impetus and dynamism, its transformation and differentiation, which provides the driving force behind the entire process, but which, being itself formless, can only manifest itself as a phenomenon by being given form.” (Simmel 1997, p. 77) Plessner’s perspective is similar to this. Here human life is artificial by nature because, first and foremost, “man has to turn himself into what he already is” (cf. Plessner 1975, p. 309).

With this in mind, it is appropriate to assume that the constitutive “rejection of essential or even antagonistic discontinuities” (Balke 2009, p. 153) can be understood as one of the “most prominent symptoms of the emergence of a complex concept of normality which starts its career in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at first in medicine” (ibid.). While capturing philosophy it reinforces the increasing datafication of life. However, the desire for autonomous self-datafication that is manifested in *lifelogging* still has to be explained, since it cannot be understood solely based on this general change. In fact, even though (or because) the modern scientific exploration of life is only possible through technical instruments and the proliferation of artifacts, there is a fundamental discordance between the described philosophical concepts and the prevailing day-to-day semantics around 1900 concerning the

11 For this logic of scientific explanation, see Tarde 1903, p. 5f.

notion of life and its entanglement with the artificial. The latter is characterized by separating both and portraying them as two antagonistic principles; it tries to defend natural life against its absorption over the course of technological progress. Therefore, the importance of the concept of life here differs from the philosophical notion of vitalism: it is first and foremost a response to the proliferation of artifacts since the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Eßbach 2011).

Given the cultural prevalence of the idea of a fundamental separation of life and the artificial, the approach of a philosophical vitalism, associated with Bergson, Simmel, Tarde and Plessner, remained a marginal position in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A noteworthy change occurred only several decades later as the increasing technical possibilities and the rise of the life sciences further promoted a concept of life that turned the (scientifically sterile) search for the specific form of life into a question of its formability. Thereby, the difference between the living and technology becomes less distinct, making life and nature more and more accessible. This development, to which Paul Rabinow refers to with his concept of biosociality (Rabinow 1996a), can also be understood as a cause of the revived interest in philosophical vitalism and the authors mentioned above. Essentially, it amounts to a situation in which nature has become technologically accessible, a state that can be described as an expansion of the “sense of possibility” (Musil) unto the biological condition of life. Although this entails a continuity with some vitalistic concepts at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it nevertheless implies a crucial break—as we will argue below.

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### 3 Normalism as a form of life

The starting point for our argumentation is the assumption that the social centrality of the concept of life is deeply related to the implementation of a specific mode of social control, characterized as normalism by Jürgen Link (1997; 2004a, b). The concept of normalism does not only apply to the tendency of modern societies to gather data on society and life, but also emphasizes that these data are increasingly used as instruments for self-assurance, self-reflection and self-definition.<sup>12</sup> The normalistic mode of control is based on a (statistical) datafication of society and tends to establish a dynamic and flexible conception of the “normal”. This does

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12 Normalism is defined as “the totality of discourses, procedures and institutions, through which modern societies fabricate those ‘normalities’ that eventually have risen to the status of ultimate foundations and absolute certainties” (Gerhard et al. 2001, p. 7).



not only mean that the measurement and regulation of order rest upon a statistical notion of normality (in contrast to a normative, i.e., moral or religious one) but that the acquisition of this normality also happens more and more self-referentially. Normality is less and less based on extra-statistical fixation or absolute principles.

Despite (or even because of) this general tendency to self-reference, there are different models or strategies of normalistic sociation. At the beginning we mentioned a trisection of normalism as an analytical framework for the phenomenon of *lifelogging*. In this regard, Link pointed out that the “normalistic archipelago” (Link 1997, p. 13) can already be differentiated in two types, functioning as several strategies to process the normalistic datafication of society and life: a *protonormalism* and a *flexible normalism* (Link 2004a). Even though both forms intersect, they nevertheless are linked to a substantial historical transformation of modernity. While protonormalism dominates through early and classical modernity, flexible normalism overlaps with postmodernism (cf. *ibid.*, p. 81; Link 2004b). To further clarify these different concepts, one can refer to Foucault’s distinction between *normation* and *normalization* that has played an important role in the discussions on the non-disciplinary power of governmentality (cf. Foucault 2007, p. 57, Schrage 2008).<sup>13</sup>

Protonormalism (as defined by Link) and normation (as defined by Foucault) can be understood in analogy to Foucault’s concept of discipline (cf. Foucault 1995, pp. 135ff.). Here, the distinction between the normal and the abnormal is made on the basis of prescriptive norms and normality is not only the endpoint of statistical aggregation: “Disciplinary normalization consists first of all in positing a model, an optimal model that is constructed in terms of a certain result, and the operation of disciplinary normalization consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model, the normal being precisely that which can conform to this norm, and the abnormal that which is incapable of conforming to the norm. In other words, it is not the normal and the abnormal that is fundamental and primary in disciplinary normalization, it is the norm.” (Foucault

13 The distinction between normation and normalization must be seen as a stopgap referring to the German terms Normierung and Normalisierung (see footnote 16 for more clarification). It has the merit of formulating a conceptual opposition and it allows two further accentuations: on the one hand, it emphasizes the tendency of normalism (in general) towards the concept of normalization (in contrast to the less self-referential concept of normation) and, on the other hand, it clarifies that vital normalism must be seen as a specification of the concept of normalization (i.e. flexible normalism)—and not its replacement or overcoming.

2007, p. 57)<sup>14</sup> The centrality of prescriptive norms enforces a certain standardization and implies a rigid application of the a priori set norms. The result is that the zone of the normal tends to be compressed in a stable manner (cf. Link 1997, p. 78). Pertaining to effects on the self and the body, this model implies and demands adaptation, too, since the act of subjectivation orients itself towards a priori norms. One crucial consequence is that the self is at once disconnected from and enclosed in the body; as the conscience, the soul or the inner core.<sup>15</sup> “Due to the primacy of the norm in relation to the normal, to the fact that disciplinary normalization goes from the norm to the final division between the normal and the abnormal, I would rather say that what is involved in disciplinary techniques is a *normation* rather than normalization. Forgive the barbaric word, I use it to underline the primary and fundamental character of the norm.” (Foucault 2007, p. 57)<sup>16</sup>

Subsequent to these different roles of the norm or the difference in priority between norm and normality, it is thus possible to further distinguish between the two modes of normalization. Whereas *normation* (German: Normierung) operates with the fixation of an (ideal) norm and, for that reason, implies a comparatively severe grasp on deviation, the primary focus of normalization lies on forms of self-control and self-positioning. In lieu of a relatively strict demarcation between the normal and the abnormal, normalization entails permeable and dynamic boundaries with more tolerance to ambiguity and biographical breaks. Accordingly, Link characterizes flexible normalism by a solely statistical measurement of normality that goes along with a fluid (cybernetic) model of feedback and adaption. Complementary to protonormalism (or *normation*), this strategy aims at the maximum expansion and dynamization of the zone of normality (cf. Link 1997, p. 78). It

14 Here, Foucault still uses the term normalization to describe what he will later call *normation*. At this point, the conceptual distinction has not yet been made; it follows immediately after this passage. Given the context it should be clear that it is the concept of *normation* he describes.

15 This is a central topic in Norbert Elias’ writings on the civilizing process. According to him, a great consequence of modernity is the perception of individuals “that their own ‘self’, their ‘true identity’, is something locked away ‘inside’ them, severed from all other people and things ‘outside’” (Elias 1994, p. 475). As Charles Taylor has pointed out at great length, this “modern inwardness” must be understood as “the sense of ourselves as beings with inner depths, and the connected notion that we are ‘selves’” (Taylor 1989, pp. 389f.).

16 In the German version of this text we replaced the cumbersome term *normation* with the term *Normierung*. Unfortunately, neither the English nor the French language offers a similar distinction. Instead of using the German term we follow the English translation of Foucault’s lecture: we will speak of *normation* instead of the often used term of standardization.

is generally motivated by the assumption of a “fundamental continuity (not: identity) between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ or pathological phenomena” (Balke 2009, p. 154). Ultimately, it represents a mode of (re-)production of normality and societal order, which is dynamic and malleable and in which fixed qualitative demarcations tend to disappear—being replaced by a concentration on solely quantitative calculations. Inasmuch as boundaries are still set, they are “on principal just a shiftable marker on a continuum” (Link 1997, p. 339).

Here, a conceptual analogy can also be found in Foucault’s writings. While the model of discipline correlates to protonormalism, a more flexible concept of normality is discussed alongside the model of governmentality and in addition also in the corresponding model of control by Deleuze.<sup>17</sup> This becomes most obvious in the matter of subjectivation. In this regard, Foucault and Deleuze emphasize the enforcement of a culture of self-adjustment, self-governing and self-normalization that can easily be related to the idea of a flexible-normalistic subjectivity. Here, “an adaption-generating norm is replaced by a sort of norm-generating normality” (Castel et al. 1982a, p. 305; see also 1982b), with the result that the work on the self and the body increasingly becomes one’s own responsibility instead of being primarily guided through disciplinary institutions (ibid.).

According to this discussion, there are far-reaching consequences regarding the form of sociation. First of all, the model of normalization (in contrast to normation) attributes the subjects with greater participation and increases the area of their responsibilities to a point where cooperation evolves into an institutional expectation. Under the conditions of flexible normalism, the subject has to take care for its (own) normality. The comparison with the curves of normality has been passed over to the subjects themselves, so that it is up to each individual to position within the spectrum of the normal. This aspect can be illustrated by the semantical change from *health* to *fitness*. To live along the model of health is by and large coherent and steady, since its primary goal is to conserve the (normal) status quo. In an attempt to confront each individual with accurately defined parameters of health, it defines a threshold above which any additional change becomes undesirable and unnecessary (Bauman 2005a, p. 198; 2005b, p. 93). In this regard, the idea of health is characterized by a quasi-external reference, building up an external guide to consult, evaluate and define conditions of the self and the body. Fitness, however, is characterized by the absence of this sort of orientation. “As such, ‘fitness’ knows no upper limit; it is, in fact, defined by the absence of limit; more to the point, by its inadmissibility. However fit your body is—you *could* make it fitter. [...] In the search for fitness, unlike in the case of health, there is no

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17 See Deleuze 1992 and with regards to this reading of Foucault, see Gertenbach 2012.

point at which you can say: now that I've reached it I may as well stop and hold on to and enjoy what I have. There is no 'norm' of fitness you can aim at and eventually attain. [...] Each dose is to be followed by a larger dose. Each target is but a successive step, one in a long string of steps already taken and yet to be taken." (Bauman 2005b, pp. 93f.)

This passage points to a crucial argument that cannot be given too much importance. For Bauman, fitness is not an extension or prolongation of health, but an antipode for it consists of a fundamentally different mode of operation. This is why it corresponds to flexible normalization: it does not only manipulate the conditions of illness but the conditions of health, too. In the case of fitness, the former concept of health as a reachable and stable status disappears until it even becomes impossible to refer to a norm as such (Castel et al. 1982a, p. 317). Living under the imperative of fitness implies permanent change, it requires "developing all individual and social abilities, overcoming fixations and obstacles, eliminating archaisms, leaving illusions behind, and getting freed from alienation" (ibid., p. 318).

Up to this point, we have basically argued in accordance to the general concept of normalism and the tendency towards the more flexible and less rigid form of normalization, as described by Link and Foucault. With the notion of a *vital normalism*, however, we try to go beyond these concepts in asserting another crucial cultural transformation. For us, this term seems to be able to outline the combination, or, to be more precise, the deformation of flexible normalism with a *culture of life*. Thus, we try to capture a type of normalization primarily geared towards vitality which occurred alongside an alteration in the form of sociation, namely from a "logic of the social" to a "logic of life" (cf. Rabinow 1996a, p. 99; Knorr-Cetina 2005). Its main implications concern different technologies of the self: whereas modern and, at least to some extent, postmodern forms are mainly focused on the mind/psyche and, in this spirit, aimed towards a mainly mental concept of self-knowledge, recent technologies of the self revolve to a much greater extent around the somatic dimension of the self, and therefore a more vitalistic notion of self-creation. However, this does not imply a dismissal of the main characteristics of normalism, i.e., the importance of subject profiles, data comparisons and the (self-)localizations within normality and its various curves and charts. Instead it alters the ways data are extracted, presented and compared without abandoning basic premises, impositions and modes of subjectivation of a normalistic form of sociation. Still, it is not about the conditioning of subjects to preassigned and fixed responses, but the installation of a flexible and adaptable dispositif within themselves, which enables them to compare themselves to aggregations of data, curves, mean values, i.e., various calculations of normality in general (cf. Link 1997, p. 338). This transformation, which is already implied in the transition from health

to fitness, marks a direction *lifelogging* can dock onto. This shift from healing the sick to optimizing the healthy, from reactive medicine to preventive care, requires not only more personal initiative and responsibility: It enforces a more body-related self-perception and the rise of such forms of sociality that are solely based on biological data and/or gathered around biological phenomena.<sup>18</sup>

As a result, *lifelogging* is far from being just a renewal or intensification of established social and cultural techniques. It might rather be the most enigmatic point at which a novel *culture of life* connects with established technologies of normalization, focusing on fitness, optimization and prevention. In combination with the characteristics of mobile digitalization to enable the collection of data that focusses on the self and body in motion, it seems fair to assume that *lifelogging* is a paradigmatic practice for a mode of societal control that is primarily concerned with life. Although protonormalistic strategies were also aimed at the collection of biological data, this was neither a process of recursive datafication, nor did it occupy the self-perception and practice of the subjects as it is the case nowadays. Bound to the idea of health, it immobilized the self and the body, keeping life in an orderly fashion. Here, an intervention only became necessary in the case of a specific incident, so that medical and therapeutic practice was fundamentally reactive. Fitness, on the other hand, emphasizes self-construction and focuses less on past events or diseases already in existence. Instead of being reactive, it is proactive and prophylactic. Combined with the notion of improvement, it follows the logic of prevention and demands constant work on the self and the body. This is exactly what can be found in various technologies and practices of *lifelogging*. However, it is crucial for vital normalism to address life in motion, for it is accompanied by a *model of movement*, constantly enforcing new forms of self documentation which function as a mode of comparing and locating oneself within a dynamic normalistic field.

Overall the constitution of subjects still occurs through normalistic distribution curves as such, but in this process it increasingly rests upon dynamic biosocial data

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18 This is exactly what Paul Rabinow has in mind with his concept of biosociality: "I am not discussing some hypothetical gene for aggression or altruism. Rather, it is not hard to imagine groups formed around the chromosome 1 7, locus 16,256, site 654,376 allele variant with a guanine substitution. Such groups will have medical specialists, laboratories, narratives, traditions, and a heavy panoply of pastoral keepers to help them experience, share, intervene, and 'understand' their fate. Fate it will be. It will carry with it no depth. It makes absolutely no sense to seek the meaning of the lack of a guanine base because it has no meaning." (Rabinow 1996a, p. 102) Hence, it becomes clear that this shift is to a far lesser extent a biologization of the social than an indication that biology itself "has become a cultural technique" (Böhme 2004, p. 76). For a discussion about the distinction between biosociality and the biologization of the social, see Wehling 2007.

instead of stable values and rigid norms. Furthermore, a crucial criterion of vital normalism, already indicated in the shift from health to fitness, is that the comparison with the manifold reference points of normality tends to lie upon the subjects themselves. This particularly concerns the ways in which data are attained, assembled and fed back. Instead of being solely collected in a centralized manner via aggregated population statistics, it is to a much greater extent embedded in various micro-politics of the self and emphatically focused on vital data. Henceforth every connection to the internet can be a contribution and for that matter helpful in evaluating what it means, “to live in the right direction, with the right tempo etc.” (Link 1997, p. 339) Thus, in the end, the lifelogger becomes a somewhat dubious character. On the one hand, he is a documentarian of vital normalization, actively disclosing his data and, for this reason, constantly contributing to the construction of the normal. On the other hand, he is a voyeur, using the data of others as a standard, observing the deviation of his own data from that of the others. As such, he is an example for the fact that voyeurism and exhibitionism intertwine inseparable (cf. Schroer 2010).

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## 4 Conclusion

In this article we have pointed out that modernism is tied to a peculiar notion of life, aligned with a mode of societal control that Jürgen Link described at length under the term *normalism*. In contrast to his dualistic model, we made a distinction between three types of normalism, evoking different ways to normalize the body and the self. We argued that *lifelogging* can be understood as an expression of the third type of normalism. By means of the possibilities of mobile digitalization, this vital normalism is a mixture of flexible normalization and a *culture of life*, thereby profiting from “the dissolution of the category of ‘the social’” (Rabinow 1996a, p. 99) and defining it even further, insofar as data are obtained mainly via measurements of vital parameters. However, in vital normalism datafication not only emanates primarily from the subjects, but also tends to become their own responsibility. In the end, the subjects are not only enabled to localize themselves within the curves of normality, they may very well become obliged to do so. Since vital normalism data are mainly data on life that are obtained through various digital devices, the task of comparing oneself with generalized others of normality can be placed in the hands of the subjects themselves and is decreasingly depending on the authority of professionals (i.e., doctors, teachers, fitness coaches). This change implies a certain logic of growth of the biosocial. Life can no longer be imagined as something independent or ‘natural’, for it has transformed into an

object of constant intervention. The advent and proliferation of mobile devices fortifies vital normalism's idea that life is not something to be discovered, but rather something to be seized and optimized. On a similar note, "nature will be known and remade through technique and will finally become artificial" (Rabinow 1996a, p. 99). Whereas the first proliferation of the artificial around 1900 caused a discovery (at first glance paradoxically) of the idiosyncratic forms of life, the idea of its formability nowadays "almost offers an 'invitation' to artificiality" (ibid., p. 108). *Lifeloggging* is part of this movement for which life is not artificial by nature but naturally artificial. Given this development, the rebirth of vitalism, the occasional demands for a "vital-turn" and the recent renaissance of Tarde, Bergson, and others become understandable. In contrast to the culturally dominant notion of life around 1900, articulated as a strict antipode to the artificial, they offer an alternative that proves to be highly topical given the current interlacing of the biological and the artificial, life and technology.

However, at least one crucial question remains: How can we account for the widespread desire for recursive datafication of life and where does it come from? According to Link, in addition to the difference between normal and abnormal, the constitution of subjects is associated with a characteristic fear of normalistic societies: the fear of denormalization. In this regard, "the (often secretly and silently asked) question 'Am I still normal?' became the question of fate in the past two centuries" (Link 2004a, p. 27), with the consequence that "the fear of denormalization establishes the average with an overwhelming power of attraction and the margins of abnormality with the power of repulsion." (Link 2004c, p. 42) In the light of the current increasing demand to account for one's own localization within the various fields and curves of normality, this fear should even gain more importance. Within *lifeloggging*, it seems to have merged with digital culture's basic anxiety of invisibility, since being invisible has become nearly synonymous with social exclusion (cf. Schroer 2013). Hence, the interplay of the practices of *lifeloggging* with the various technologies of normalization functions as an assurance for the subjects and provides them with the necessary means to take this matter into their own hands. Within the context of this development, permanent active and passive observation as well as its documentation "become democratized and omnipresent" (Schroer 2010, p. 416). So wondering "if you're alive? If you're reading this, you probably are (...) but you can never be too sure!"<sup>19</sup>

In the end, maybe *lifeloggging* is just about trapping and holding the ongoing process of reference—momentarily. Now, every data, no matter how irrelevant and

19 <https://ting.com/blog/app-of-the-week-runtastic-heart-rate/>. Accessed 10 July 2015. (emphasis in original).

marginal, can be an event for change, pushing movements in a certain direction and yielding data at the same time and so on. This digitalized process of life (re-) assembles itself with each and every log, constantly and precariously. However, the question is: Who is moving whom? Does life move data or does data move life? If the former statement is the case, digital forms of life might actually be as ambiguous and gracious as Tarde assumed. If the latter is the case, they might rather be as monotonous as an ECG, precisely reproducing the rashes and their in-betweens and always preparing to interfere if a deviation occurs.

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