



Computable Bodies: Instrumented Life and the Human Somatic Niche (Bloomsbury Advances in Semiotics)

By Josh Berson

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Data. Suddenly it is everywhere, and more and more of it is about us. The computing revolution has transformed our understanding of nature. Now it is transforming human behaviour.

For some, pervasive computing offers a powerful vehicle of introspection and self-improvement. For others it signals the arrival of a dangerous 'control society' in which surveillance is no longer the prerogative of discrete institutions but a simple fact of life.

In *Computable Bodies*, anthropologist Josh Berson asks how the data revolution is changing what it means to be human. Drawing on fieldwork in the Quantified Self and polyphasic sleeping communities and integrating perspectives from interaction design, the history and philosophy of science, and medical and linguistic anthropology, he probes a world where everyday life is mediated by a proliferating array of sensor montages, where we adjust our social signals to make them legible to algorithms, and where old rubrics for gauging which features of the world are animate no longer hold.

Computable Bodies offers a vision of an anthropology for an age in which our capacity to generate data and share it over great distances is reconfiguring the body–world interface in ways scarcely imaginable a generation ago.

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Editorial Review

Review

What algorithm scans, slices, peels away and reincarnates shapes this groundbreaking work into the cybernetic human carcass. (John R. Stilgoe, Orchard Professor in the History of Landscape Development, Harvard University, USA 2015-05-14)

This dazzlingly original, beautifully written text explores fundamental issues of the body's imbrication with data and instruments. Exploring the variety of ways in which we have rendered ourselves computable, it offers a richly social understanding of selfhood and the body. (Geoffrey C. Bowker, Professor of Informatics, University of California at Irvine, USA 2015-07-01)

Berson brings readers along on a detective-like journey through the contemporary terrain of pervasive computing, probing its effects on the interface between body and world. What, he asks, does a world saturated by human data feel like? Drawing our attention to the uncanny ease with which computing insinuates itself into embodied existence, Berson illuminates the new kinds of entrainment, rhythms, instrumentation, and experiential modulation that result. At once playful and profound, his original admixture of auto-ethnography, critical analysis, and semiotic theorization produces an analysis that is sure to galvanize the current conversation around technology and its intimate effects. (Natasha Dow Schüll, Associate Professor of Science, Technology, and Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA and author of 'Addiction by Design' and 'Keeping Track' 2015-07-09)

[A] fascinating reflection on what a body is and how we hold and move and feel and are aware of it ... [*Computable Bodies* is] recommended for anyone interested in technology and in what it means to have/be a body. (*Centre for Medical Humanities, Durham University, blog* 2016-07-20)

About the Author

Josh Berson directs the design research studio Assemblage, leads the project Cartographies of Rest at Hubbub Group, London, UK, and is visiting researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany

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