

Editorial

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a digital
Labyrinth

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We're standing in front of the second edition of the Atlas of Databodies. What do we see?

The Atlas is stretching out in different directions, forming an architecture and dynamic landscape at once, a labyrinth that continues to grow. In the first Atlas, we laid out the initial coordinates of this cartography of databodies, using the compilation of positions from different disciplines as a way of conceptualising our method. The first Atlas was also overshadowed by the pandemic, which seeped into both the production and the text corpus itself. This reactivity to outside impulse is likewise woven into the Atlas method. It gains momentum from outside stress and incentives while meeting a need to diversify current knowledge systems arising from these same dynamics and impulses. We use the metaphor of a labyrinth to highlight the connection between method and output, the structure being the manifestation of the authors' explorations.

The publication in your hands is divided into the sections Bauhaus as Interface, Body Politics, and Body Mysticism. Rather than a determined route, the sections have provided a direction for the authors that have answered our appeal to make and create around the theme of the digital body. This cartographic approach and continuous making align with the core of the Atlas, a concept that otherwise might deceive with its associations to an overarching comprehensiveness. Far away from the humanistic tradition and unlike its historical predecessors, the Atlas decentralises and questions the notion of the human subject and attached body images. Cary Wolfe speaks of a »normative subjectivity« associated with the humanism which post-humanist approaches commonly aim to overcome (S. 16 - 17 2009). In the context of the Atlas, this includes the acknowledgment of incompleteness. When working actively with the incomplete, the indecisive, the unfulfilled, the Atlas of Databodies instead makes use of the fragmented and elastic properties of our digital reality and current world. The body is both the subject matter of this exploration and serves as the potent link between the physical origin of any human enterprise and the theme of digitalisation.

What kind of knowledge system emerges from this approach? Openness, entanglements of different knowledge spheres and body concepts are important aspects of what the Atlas does. The labyrinth as a theoretical trope again helps to incorporate the ›thingness‹ of the object you have in your hand with the greater ambition connected to the project, that is the motion and method of the Atlas. The labyrinth alludes to logic, but also to the unfamiliar, evoking concepts such as quest and exploration, and, most importantly, getting lost. For Umberto Eco, the labyrinth represents a way of organising knowledge be-

yond conclusiveness and defined borders. This way of employing cartography and visualisation is also reminiscent of Donna Haraway's thoughts on storytelling and the becoming-with and thinking-with that she presents in relation to human and non-human interdependencies (Eco 2222; Haraway 2016). The Atlas also places itself in the intersection between the organic and the virtual world, between science and art. In this junction, we find new ways of understanding and visualising the body, as well as seeing new body concepts appearing.

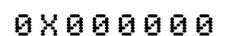
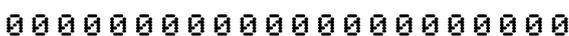
Bauhaus as Interface

In 2020, the idea for the Atlas of Databodies emerged within the PhD program at the Bauhaus University Weimar for artistic and design research. The Bauhaus also holds particular significance for the Atlas book series. When Marlene Bart and Johannes Breuer first conceived of the Atlas, they were inspired by the intersections of their own research projects in design and artistic inquiry at the Bauhaus University Weimar and also by the historical Bauhaus, a place where different forms of art and expression were allowed to merge. The authors of the section Bauhaus as Interface are also continuing this tradition, creating new unconventional pathways through the realm of art, design, and technology.

Adriana Kapsreiter skillfully constructs the introduction to this section, exemplifying historical and contemporary connections and interfaces within the Bauhaus. She demonstrates to what extent Bauhaus as Interface can be understood as an extension of elements from the historical Bauhaus, while also providing a sensitive entry point into the section by specifically referencing the following contributions (p. 22).

A distinguishing feature of the contemporary Bauhaus is the opportunity for artistic and design research. Providing insight into the field of design research, Michael Braun, Niklas Hamann, and Natascha Tümpel share glimpses of their current projects. Braun discusses the shifts in design and manufacturing processes in the digital age (p. 28). Hamann outlines a research project addressing pertinent questions about the use of 3D printing methods and design processes in medical care, making them practically applicable (p. 54). Tümpel in her contribution, on the other hand, translates Don Ihde's considerations on the technique of music-making into graphical image production (p. 22).

The contributions demonstrate the diverse landscape of design research at the Bauhaus today, especially within the



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context of digital embodiment. It is important to emphasise, however, that design and artistic research can indeed take on very different forms and methods. A notable contribution in the field of artistic research in this section is Teresa Mayr's piece. Mayr takes us on a poetic cartography as a visual artist and artistic researcher, using speculative, science fiction-like narrative structures to approach the works of the artist Hilma af Klint in relation to Mayr's own artistic work (p. 62).

The section closes with Mats Werchohlad's contribution. He describes the stage experiments at the Bauhaus as »synthetic realities« and draws parallels with contemporary social TV regarding experimental self-awareness, media performance, and the role of the stage (p. 78). Kapsreiter summarises: »Damit schließt die Sektion Bauhaus als Interface und eröffnet den Raum für zukünftige Auseinandersetzungen mit Mensch, Körper und Technologie« (p. 27).

Body Politics

The body is both the beginning and the end of the political projects and inquiries presented in this section. The body is here understood as a space, an actor, a mediator, as well as the product of changing societal conditions, not the least of those of our present digitalised world. However, with the collection of body data also comes responsibility, and history is full of misuse and exploitation connected to this topic. After the first Atlas issue had been published, and seeing the great interest in the

cartographic approach of the project, the critical perspective was something we wanted to further highlight in a second issue. Especially in a German context, the collecting of body data has a dark past with infamous figures like the medical doctor and SS-officer Josef Mengele. Many other individuals and phenomena could be mentioned. The HeLa cells, for example, became the first immortalised cell line and have contributed immensely to biomedical research, but they were also cultured without the consent of the patient, the African American woman Henrietta Lacks, who died of cervical cancer in 1951. Coming from different directions, the authors of this section show how the body and the political converge.

The sick body

Georg Dickmann explores the intersection of pharmacology and politics, showing how the concept of the body as such is also evolving with the agents used to treat and modify it. As the boundaries between body and active substance dissolves, so does the dichotomy of human versus technology, leaving behind a highly political mesh of interdependencies with the material world (p. 90). The sick body is also the theme of Christoph Engemann's exploration of media-technology in the context of the COVID and AIDS pandemics. The creation of social graphs and their entanglements with political agencies raise questions about governance and governing of the technology being used (p. 132). Both contributors call for an increased sensibility and attention to the institutionalisation of human health through pharmaceutical industries and the medium of data.



Body images and marginalised bodies

Body images and marginalised bodies are another recurring theme of the section. Swantje Martach places the slim body in the contemporary social media landscape and uses this as a starting point for theorising on the form and framing of human bodies today. The thin and the fat body are conceptualised in relation to the figure of the Iron Maiden, a mythical torture instrument, the rigidity of it serving as a symbol for limiting bodily regimes (p. 96). Evke Rulffes explores the female body in relation to another object, the corset, presenting us with a historical exposé while also referencing contemporary lingerie artist Michaela Stark in whose hands the corset becomes imbued with radical potential (p. 104). Katharina Otto points at another kind of potentiality in marginalised bodies. The *Códices* and *Casta* paintings of the 16th and 18th centuries serve as paradigmatic examples of the Indigenous in visual culture. The author averts reducing the imagery to stereotypes, instead highlighting how the contradictory images of the natural barbarian and dangerous cannibal generated an ambivalent force and meaning, thereby assuming the role of mediator between Creole and Christian-Spanish interests and cultures (p. 112).

›More than body‹-bodies

Hybrid Space Lab explore the relationship between the body and its environment by presenting an interactive and immersive architectural vision of the ethnographic museum Humboldt Forum in Berlin. The proposal embodies the idea of the interwovenness of nature and culture and presents a multi-dimensional project that moves from the physical into digitised dimensions (p. 140). Alexander Wagner likewise explores the notion of heritage. Eastern Germany is conceived as a different kind of body body, a virtual one in a dataspace; a partly speculative approach that enables the author to circle in on the experience and collective memory embedded in East German biographies. This polyphonic and visionary investigation not only epitomises the East German experience but demonstrates the presence of futuristic potentiality enmeshed in a historical space (p. 122).

Body Mysticism

Mysticism encompasses the pursuit and encounter with a divine or transcendent reality, often characterised by spiritual rituals, personal evolution, and a sense of unity with the divine. Explored across various academic fields such as theology, religious studies, philosophy, and psychology, mystical experiences are typically subjective and may involve altered states of consciousness or encounters with the ineffable (Uhde 2011: 66). While deeply rooted in religious customs, mysticism can also be approached from a philosophical angle, which aligns with the focus of the section in our *Atlas of Databodies 2*.

One might speculate that in the 21st century, our understanding of bodies has largely been demystified due to the accumulation and analysis of data, coupled with advancements in artificial intelligence. Nonetheless, with the introduction of this section, we are also addressing this apparent comprehensiveness. Similar to the original term, »Body Mysticism« not only connects with the familiar but also allows exploration of uncharted territories within the *Atlas*.

In the face of new technology, »Body Mysticism« serves once again as a motivator for generating new cartographies. The section demonstrates that mapping our labyrinth, in combination with imagination and pushing the boundaries of the explainable, might be seen as an anthropological constant. A fitting example of this is provided by Jack Hartnell in his book *Medieval Bodies*, which describes the phenomenon of the Blemmyae, headless giant beings guarding the borders of the known world. He notes, »Even today, with modern migration and technology, our knowledge can similarly blur at the brink: the little green men that some think we will encounter beyond the bounds of our solar system are governed not by scientific truth but by the same very human impulses that form these monstrous medieval races. The Blemmyae, then, sit at an intersection between medieval bodily fact and bodily fiction...« (Hartnell 2018: 31). Elements of mysticism combined with the power of imagination can be crucial components and precursors to methods of cartography deemed objective, simultaneously expanding our imagination fundamentally. Contributions from the »Body Mysticism« section not only map but also shape partially hidden territories.

Mapping the virtual

For instance, Dagmar Schürer und Vanina Saracino, in their contribution »Dreaming is the Mind Left to Itself«, explore delving into the unconscious through an artistic-scientific collaboration with augmented reality technology (p. 224). The use of these technologies brings about a new

ding the prevailing understanding of the body in medicine. A key artistic and theoretical focal point is the consideration of a symbiosis between body and technology through artificial organs, as well as the development of an architectural analogy concerning quantifiable corporeality. In the project »Memoria – Between Matter and the Immaterial«, Manuel Ahnemüller presents a profound and artistic contemplation of the relationship between physical objects, identity, and memory culture (p. 162). He intertwines areas of design, art, and »body mysticism« to explore mental and physical metamorphosis. Ahnemüller emphasises that memories can also be viewed as data bodies and that cartography can represent an ongoing, constant alteration.

Modern Mysticism

While Maria Rogg devotes her essay »Twists of the Smart Body: Biohacks of Biometric Existence« to the question of what it means to exist as a human being in a highly digitalised society (p. 192), Paul Heinicker discusses various aspects of dealing with data in modern society. He explores the notion that data significantly influences various facets of life and how this notion is expressed through terms such as »data-driven«, »Big Data«, and »Artificial Intelligence«. The text examines the expectations and aspirations associated with data usage and how they shape our perceptions and handling of data. Furthermore, the text delves into the impacts of mythologising data and neglecting their historical and sociocultural contexts (p. 218).

What do we see?

Our authors, employing both scientific and artistic methods, delve into the peripheries of comprehending technologies, wrestling with questions regarding their enduring influence and possibilities. Boldly and critically, they interrogate the cartography of virtual and physical realms within this knowledge labyrinth, as well as all that lies in between. They contribute to the Atlas method by collectively underscoring that new territories are only attainable through boundary crossings, yet emphasising the necessity to redefine the act of crossing itself.

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Marlene Bart

Marlene Bart is an artist and researcher who completed her PhD at the Bauhaus University Weimar. Her work combines elements of natural history, anatomy and the visual arts. Bart explores how a common visual language can be used in art and science to address broad themes such as the importance of systems of order. She uses a variety of multimedia techniques, including printmaking, artists' books, sculpture, taxidermy, installation, and XR technologies. In addition to her publishing activities, Bart exhibits in international solo and group exhibitions.

Johannes Breuer

Johannes Breuer studied design and medicine in Münster and Berlin and completed his PhD (with distinction) on the subject of digital pain assessment at the Bauhaus University Weimar. He works, teaches and researches in the field of medical design with a focus on user interface design, visualization of body data as well as participation and co-design methods.

Cecilia Falkman

Cecilia Falkman is a writer and visual artist. She holds a Bachelor's degree from Lund University in Sweden and is currently studying European Literature at Humboldt University in Berlin. Her studies have focused on literature, architecture, and languages, and she has also researched these topics at Korea University, the University of Helsinki and Aarhus University.

