

I. Anticipation

Anticipation means the activity of looking ahead – predicting, imagining, or picturing what is going to happen. It can take three different forms depending on how we represent the march of time. Looking ahead can:

- (1) involve reasoned prediction or forecasting, prompting appropriate adaptation to an uncertain and complex future,
- (2) engage the imagination, and the idea that we can build a future according to some prior representation (innovation, and more radically, utopia),
- (3) posit that not everything can be foreseen, that there is radical uncertainty, and that events in time need not be causally related or constructive.

1. Forecast, foretell, adapt

Anticipation assumes a certain relation to time, itself a historical construction. Its aim is to forecast or foretell the present from information provided by the past, the present and what we think will follow (our interpretation of the past being colored by “presentism”). It means adapting, picturing the outcome of these adaptations, and defining strategies to achieve objectives that may or may not be predetermined.

The aim thus is to reduce uncertainty and tackle complexity. How well does this approach help us explain or discover phenomena of interest to the humanities and social sciences? Does the art of predicting and anticipating require achieving greater control over the environment, with more and more narrowly targeted and increasingly accurate forecasting and prediction tools? Can we give a normative, positive opinion about this evolving relationship of humans with their environment? How should society act to provide a legal, political and ethical framework for these new relationships? The idea of “anticipating” change has become a key concept in addressing phenomena at both individual and collective levels, and group and organization scales in society. Do personal errors and global crises stem from the same failings in anticipation, and consequent failings in adaptation? Are adaptation and anticipation related? Does adaptation to a changing environment require continuity or a break with past models? Do what degree does anticipation derive from invention, creation or habits and social conventions? Is anticipation only voluntary and reflective or can it also occur passively – intuitively, or subconsciously? And can different ways to “anticipate” be judged “good” or “bad”? Or can we study anticipation only through description after the fact? Does anticipation require an implicit or explicit axiology? Moreover, the representational dimension is not the only one that needs to be studied; it is also important to look at the effects of the processes at work in anticipation. For example, to what extent may prediction, like self-fulfilling prophecies, change what it claims to explain?

2. Utopia, fiction, innovation

Utopian aspirations take various forms that most often fall into the same scheme: the presentation of a theoretical model, at the same time political, economic and social, describing an ideal society whose different mechanisms mesh to perfection. The model is associated with a message, a wish or an image, often political or philosophical, that an author seeks to propagate, more or less consciously. It offers an excellent opportunity to ponder the function and creative power of the imagination. These utopian models can take literary forms (novels, from *La Nouvelle Héloïse* to science fiction novels), or more

generally artistic or theoretical forms (e.g. socialist and communist utopias, scientific and technological utopias). This thinking also covers related areas such as counter-utopias, anti-utopias, dystopias, and euchronias.

Where do utopias fit into history, and particularly into the history of social and political movements? What place does contemporary imagination occupy in the anticipation of future societies? What do our representations of the future say about our present? How do we react to new technologies (enthusiastic or anxious when confronted with digital technology), to artificial intelligence, to the massive collection and processing of personal data? What is the role of utopias and dystopias in scientific and technological progress? Have they not fueled many societal and human fantasies (transhumanism)? More generally, how do we experience our relationship to innovation?

3. Events and the unforeseeable

Not everything that happens in the human world, not every "event" is necessarily foreseeable. We can also define an "event" as what has no place in the causal chain – as what resists *ex post* rationality, which would place it in a regime of causality projecting into the future. This seems to challenge the need for rationality in anticipation, for is not rationality always retrospective? Does rationality not deny the event as such, since the event resists by definition any rationalization that seeks to include it in causality? Ignoring overuse by the media, which can create an event out of anything, is an event not precisely that which sets the limits of anticipation? Where does the event come from? What is the origin of the radical uncertainty that characterizes the human world, in opposition to natural reality? How has the concept of "event" been approached in cultures, artistic forms, religious systems, thought systems? How are our societies preparing to deal with events? With the "unforeseeable"? With the unrepresentable?

II. Vulnerabilities

Contact Information

The concept of vulnerability is a measure of how fragile a subject is or may become in a given situation – how sensitive the subject is to what may adversely affect or impair its integrity, identity, functioning, sustainability or development. This concept can be applied to a group, or to objects or systems.

In an ever-changing world, facing multiple transformations, the concept of vulnerability offers a valuable foothold for understanding its uncertain evolution (in relation to the second theme of anticipation). However, this concept, and the recent spread of its use for multiple situations that had previously been described without it, need to be theorized in their historical perspective.

The concept of vulnerability immediately raises several types of question, either purely theoretical or from a more applied perspective, which are linked, articulated or crossed. They concern:

(1) the subject in a situation of vulnerability; (2) forms of vulnerability (including their place in time and space); (3) vulnerability factors likely to reflect a state of vulnerability or a risk of vulnerability; (5) defense, resistance, resilience and prevention measures that make it possible to cope with a threat, and to circumscribe or reduce, or even eliminate a state of vulnerability or a risk of vulnerability.

The reasons why this term is now in such widespread use must also be examined: does it provide an original or useful insight, or does it merely serve to veil or soften realities or situations that were once described differently, more radically – is it only a "politically correct" euphemism?

(1) The subject in question

The nature of the subject in question may range widely: a human person and their life path, an animal, a social group, a population, a territory, a political entity, a culture, a body of knowledge, a historical narrative, a memory, a language, a work (creation or production), a system (sociotechnical, socio-economic, legal, political), an ecosystem, an environment, a landscape, a heritage, an institution, an organization, a way of life, a civilization. The different fields of enquiry in the humanities and social sciences will each readily find their place and their specific angles of approach to research on this topic. But are these divisions, however analytically comfortable they may be, sustainable? Should we not also be questioning them, examining the possible combinations and crossovers? Multidisciplinary enquiry makes full sense here.

(2) The forms of vulnerability

Characterizing forms of vulnerability is an important project, and for the time being is still largely neglected in the humanities and social sciences. What is a vulnerable subject? What criteria say whether a body, a person, a group, an organization, a work or a civilization can be considered exposed to injury or destruction, or possibly or probably targeted for abuse or negligence? Why and on the basis of what findings can a person or organization be considered in need of rescue, support or protection? Does vulnerability affect all subjects and objects in the same way? Are there inequalities in vulnerability situations? What links can be established between vulnerability and risk? Who can and

who should identify vulnerability? What are the relevant political, legal, ethical, psychological and social norms, arguments deployed, projected representations, and material arrangements that define a state of vulnerability?

(3) Vulnerability factors

Vulnerability factors are multiple in nature, and combine their effects, which makes vulnerability difficult to analyze (and hence to anticipate). Each branch of the humanities and social sciences can characterize certain factors, but no single one can ever cover them all. Here is an opportunity to develop an interdisciplinary collaborative approach, to fully articulate the perspectives and gain a better understanding of vulnerability phenomena. In particular, the knowledge generated by the humanities and social sciences would be significantly enhanced by coming closer to the natural sciences – more specifically medicine and environmental sciences – and by addressing virtual reality (the link with the three hubs of the I-SITE ULNE being of particular relevance here).

(4) Vulnerability assessment

Vulnerability is a very complex concept, but can now be better understood thanks to progress in interdisciplinary studies, where new research has been in progress to characterize it more fully. Academic thinking on categories (legal, administrative, conceptual, political, etc.) and indices of vulnerability for assessment and decision-making is not new. Because it is difficult to improve what is not codified and measured, an evaluation approach is required. This will help prioritize actions to be undertaken, anticipate and monitor the impacts of policy, improve our understanding of vulnerability or provide a common base among stakeholders. But can all the different characterizations of vulnerability be measured, and indeed need they be? With what conventions and in what framework should these indicators be constructed? What about the usages and consequences of applying these indicators? Should humanities and social science research and the assessment tools it is developing help to build a framework to describe vulnerability?

(5) Resilience, protection, remediation, resistance

Vulnerability is not merely a risk or condition characterizing a subject or object; it is often associated with mobilization, resistance, resilience or construction features whereby a subject or object demonstrates its ability to survive an assault on its environment or integrity. Are these features natural or constructed? How do they work? How are they evolving? Can they be the subject of public action or policy, or of particular attitudes ("care")? More fundamentally, the concept of vulnerability refers back to the fundamental condition of living beings, to what philosophers have described as essential finiteness (fragility, suffering, mortality), and which many artists have grasped in all periods. Do current technological developments hold the promise of some possible overcoming of this condition (post-humanity, transhumanism, in relation to the theme of anticipation)? To what extent does this possibility modify and/or reshape our current relationship to vulnerability?

DATAnum

Digital technology has generated and given access to a growing quantity of information and data for humanities and social science research. It has also modified practices, uses and methods in the long term. As an extension of the structuring and research actions initiated in the previous agreement, MESHS maintains its intellectual and material commitment to quantitative data collection and processing in the humanities and social sciences. MESHS involvement comes with an emphasis on big data and with the development and appropriation of digital tools and methods for questions in the humanities and social sciences.

DATAnum

The massification of data traffic has prompted much debate in the academic world, opposing enthusiasts and sceptics. Besides the difficulty of clearly delimiting the concept of big data, which ill fits the standard frameworks of survey and administrative data, the production and increasing availability of digital data raises new questions and challenges for the humanities and social sciences.

On an empirical level, profusion of data can allow objective analysis and investigation of topics that were hitherto the province of purely theoretical considerations or near-untestable speculation. This approach ushers in the feasibility of detecting new regularities and patterns of human behavior and social relationships with increased levels of evidence and refutability. Even so, these potential advances rely on the informational quality of the input data in terms of structure and representativeness. There also arises the question of the emergence of a “social physics”, a social structure theory resulting from the encounter of big data and humanities and social sciences with, for example, the objective of extracting the “reality” of data flow of a behavioral nature.

On a theoretical level, abundance of data should enhance knowledge, but it also heralds a profound transformation in the humanities and social sciences.

What path will future research take now that we have sophisticated calculation of correlations between variables of interest using automatic learning, predictability of group and individual actions and behaviors, and structured and causal analysis that will provide explicative schemes for social phenomena?

Given the multiple variables and dimensions, and the massively inductive and hypothetical-deductive methodologies in play, what should be the new paradigm?

Must describing and untangling society rely on data rather than theory?

Replacing sometimes powerless science with algorithms is without doubt a valid issue and is a call to institute a philosophy, an epistemology of data sciences.

At an ethical level, humanities and social science research must take on these questions. Big data analysis, because of its high capacity for prediction, is central to public and private decision-making processes. It represents both potential added value and an undeniable social risk. Big data can also be viewed as both a massively discriminatory control tool for private and public entities, and a virtuous instrument that helps achieve a perfect fit between goods and services and consumer-citizens and their environment.

What legal, political and institutional framework must be set up to channel these massive information flows with their heterogeneous uses, so that socialized individuals remain both contributors to and beneficiaries of their productive endeavors?

To explore these questions and issues, many actions, for instance in the form of training and research seminars are planned: from understanding the nature of big data to IT processing in research projects, without ignoring ethical, legal and epistemological questions:

- What does big data mean? Identification, origins, development, technological implications, new business models, data sourcing,
- Big data specific technologies and tools: Production, management and processing of big data,
- Epistemology of data sciences: Research seminars.

- Legal and ethical points: Training and research seminars.

Specific support for big data and humanities and social science research projects will also be offered.

Digital humanities

For now, our goal is to structure a community of digital humanities contributors in the Hauts-de-France to work in two main dimensions: research and training support.

In research, we wish to:

- Consolidate the development of DHNord, which has become one of the reference symposia for the digital humanities in France. One important step is to strengthen the link with the local community, among both researchers and students (Master and PhD),
- Continue to support projects with different levels of funding and support: this offers the possibility of initiating and monitoring research initiatives in the short, medium and long terms,
- Strengthen links with the TGIR Huma-Num,
- Develop ties with other MSH especially engaged in the field of digital humanities such as MSHB, MSH Val-de-Loire and MSH Poitiers. These structures are undertaking digital humanities projects each supported by a research engineer. More or less formal partnerships have been formed (e.g. with MAE or MSHB). The structuring of such a network offers an opportunity for joint actions, exchange of best practices and a transition to a national or European level for some projects.

In this way, MESHS aims to lend a broader visibility to the activities of the local scientific community and to involve this community actively in structuring the field of the digital humanities at both national and European levels.

Concerning support for training courses, we wish to target different levels of training needs:

- “newcomers” who are discovering the digital humanities and who need to be initiated,
- experienced researchers who need to train on new tools or who are eager to learn new methodologies,
- young researchers who have specific requirements after the Master’s degree.

Without replacing the present training courses, we wish to be associated with the four doctoral schools of the region and the doctoral college in order to offer digital humanities introduction modules for Master students. Students who go on to a PhD will thus have already developed their thinking in the digital humanities and will be able to add on this proficiency in their research project. We also wish to take an active part in the Lille Summer School on Quantitative Methods in Social Science (Quantillille). MESHS can support this type of training course by being involved in its design and providing financial and logistic support. The medium-term objective is to impel digital humanities research via MESHS commitment.

Besides these standard training courses, we wish to support researchers and offer them various collaboration and training opportunities such as workshops for multidisciplinary teams or data sprints for testing research hypotheses.