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Editorial

Introduction to the Proceedings of the Workshop “Habits and Rituals” at IS4SI-2017 Gothenburg, Sweden, 15 June 2017 [†]

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Habits and rituals play a fundamental role in human life [1] and are worthy to be considered also because they represent a form of embodied knowledge. According to Dubray [2], habits can be studied in general, but also with the focus on their physiological, psychological, ethical, pedagogical, philosophical and theological aspects. They have been analyzed mostly by disciplines like anthropology, sociology and psychology. Nowadays, the importance of habits is recognized in the development of robotics, where the problem is to help elderly or sick people to continue their ordinary life and practices. Philosophy as well offers interesting analyses from different perspectives, from Aristotle to Bourdieu. Aristotle relates habits to virtues, while Peircean habits connect to the life of symbols in relation to their embodied grounding. They transcend the dualism of culture vs. nature, as the habit by which symbols are interpreted is conventional or natural. Habits in Peirce thus bridge the dualism of the conventional and the innate, as he postulates that the habit, which determines the symbol, is an “acquired or inborn” disposition, according to Nöth [3] (pp. 84–85).

Habits and rituals are part of our everyday lives in different forms. Of all human belief systems and practices, religions are strongest connected to habits and rituals in form of prayers, meditations, sacrifices, sermons, services, trances, initiation rites and more.

The debate on rituals is very lively in contemporary thought Schilbrack [4], and it shows how habits and rituals are important to understand human nature also in relationship with non human beings. The disruptive cultural change caused by the process of digitalization invites for discussion of induced changes in habits and practices. How would it influence the emerging civilization embedded in the growing infosphere with computational ecology as much as engaged in the interaction with the biosphere and the rest of the material world? How will big data, internet of things and cyber physical systems (including robotics) change our habits?

Habit can be seen as a key notion connecting science and religion. Søren Brier presents Peirce’s cosmogony where change and the “Firstness” refer to the nature of the universe that has the tendency to take habits and time therefore has an arrow and is irreversible. Moving from selected Peircean ideas, Lorenzo Magnani introduces the concept of “manipulative abduction” to stress the role of some external artifacts (symbols, instrumental tools) that originate habits and can be seen as “meaning mediators” of the origin of actions they transmit. Robert Lowe finds it instructive to compare human instrumental reasoning and animal cognition, showing the differences. In study of animal cognition the use of the notion of habit describes instrumental reasoning as inflexible (slow to change), unconscious, insensitive to reinforce devaluation. In human cognition habits are seen as a form of behaviour; re-execution without explicit deliberation. Erik Billing contrasts it with explicit anticipation and mental simulation. Referring to a kind of common logic or mechanism of repetition, Raffaella Giovagnoli aims at showing the common ground of habits and rituals, even though they have different functions according to the context (individual sphere and society). Habits are

executed in the I-Mode while rituals are habits performed in the We-Mode. The nature and effects of advertising practices on individual ordinary life are at the center of Yogi Hendlin's contribution. He contrasts notions of the vis-a-vis (un) consciously created environments as humans increasingly live in advertising—saturated surroundings. Finally, Magnus Ramage recognizes the importance of religion in the lived experience of the majority of humanity. He explores information in ritual contexts in a variety of settings, as well as touching on work done regarding other uses of information by religious communities.

We find the results of the workshop very interesting and stimulating and plan to continue exploration of the role of habits and rituals in the contemporary and emergent future society.

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