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A creative study on data portraits: the visualisation process of self-surveillance as an indicator of datafication of social life

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Abstract of a thesis for a Doctorate of Philosophy in Design submitted to
The University of Newcastle, Callaghan, Australia

This research is a practice-based speculative design enquiry into the emerging field of data portraiture. Humans' use of the networked digital environments that are now so much a part of life leaves a massive data trail of individuals' everyday interactions with these environments. An increasing quantity of this data trail remains invisible. Although we spend a significant amount of time participating in digital network activities, we have just started to discover the potential of visualising personal data as a graphical representation. The term "data portraiture" was developed by Donath (2014) to describe the practice of "artists" turning these data "pictures" into visible "portraits:" "Data portraits are depictions of people made by visualising data by and about them" and "their aim is to humanize the online experience" (187). Data portraits can reveal individuals' preferences, skills and talent, yet also record their mistakes, failure and history.

As a consequence, data portraits can indicate society's collective engagement in

self-surveillance and empower the public to debate the current datafication of social life. Data portraits can appear in different forms; some are graphs, while others are typographic displays that reveal recorded conversations, and some even take a sculptural figurative shape. These data trails can shape depictions of online behaviour, experiences and interests. Traditionally, "pictures" that depict individuals' physical likeness and infer their behaviour, experiences and interests are labelled "portraits" and created by artists. Network technology enables humans to share personal data on a large scale, thereby facilitating a global dialogue in a telematic society. This research into the emerging field of data portraiture seeks to understand the role of the "artist" as creative practitioner in interpreting qualitative data into image experiences, and to offer insights into the behaviour and interests of individuals engaging with such work. Through a number design iterations, this research investigates a potential visual format by initially using manually collected

quantitative data, before shifting to an automated process to record qualitative photography data of selfies shared on Instagram to successfully demonstrate what a “global image scenario” in a gallery has to offer.

Further, it reveals the importance of participant contribution to the “datafication” of social life and the emergence of “surveillance capitalism.” This study’s original contribution to knowledge focuses on the continuum of aesthetics and functionality, and,

throughout the implementation of prototyping, the exegesis reflects on the research’s case study and provides knowledge to the emerging field and design practice.

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Big Gubba Business: The making of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, First Nations resurgence and the Australian connection

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Abstract of a thesis for a Doctorate of Philosophy submitted to
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Incorporating a significant component of Yarning-based oral history, Big Gubba Business investigates the making of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) from an Aboriginal Australian standpoint. This study examines the dynamics of the global Indigenous resurgence and interrogates the evolution of the Indigenous/UN relationship. First Nations engagement with the UN system and participation at the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights are explored in detail. Big Gubba Business also unravels the ongoing self-determination debate and the rise of the CANZUS bloc of resistant States. Having established the political context and surveyed the cultural

landscape, this study identifies and analyses the actions and achievements of Indigenous Australian representatives in the drafting, elaboration and eventual adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Big Gubba Business finds that the principal value of the Declaration derives from its role as a rallying point and common cause for First Nations activists and theorists. The legacy of the Declaration project includes the building and embedding of a worldwide network of Indigenous organizations and an enhanced First Peoples political and intellectual presence on the world stage. It is hoped that Big Gubba Business will serve to direct academic attention to this neglected domain of political activity