Curating the Self: Augmented Capitalism and the Ghost in Machine Intelligence

Abstract

This thesis, part of a practice-based PhD, examines how platform culture reshapes the production and value of the self. Identity is constructed in two ways: as image-based content that people curate and share, and as data from which systems infer who people are. Taking Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle as a point of departure, the research argues that platforms extend mediation beyond representation into operation, so that a person becomes something a system can decide about and derive value from.

The thesis introduces *augmented capitalism* to describe a phase in which platform systems automate the commodification of the self. Whereas Srnicek (2017) analyses the platform as a business model built on extracting data, and Zuboff (2019) shows how surveillance capitalism claims human experience as raw material for prediction, augmented capitalism shifts the focus to the model of the person that data makes possible. This is an identity that systems infer, retain and act on, and that people increasingly co-produce as they curate themselves.

The research addresses two questions: (1) What are the defining characteristics of augmented capitalism? (2) How can this condition be critically interrogated through creative practice? The thesis answers the first. The second is explored through the practice, *Persona in Machina,* and the reflective commentary.

It adopts immanent critique, examining augmented capitalism through its own logics of inference and classification. It draws on Marx, Lukács, Debord and Benjamin, alongside Fisher's concepts of the weird and the eerie, and is informed by the practice.

The thesis makes three contributions: it advances augmented capitalism as a conceptual framework; it distinguishes the data platforms return from the models they retain and act on; and it offers an account of how a person becomes readable to computational systems, and what that reading cannot hold. The self the system generates is the ghost in machine intelligence.