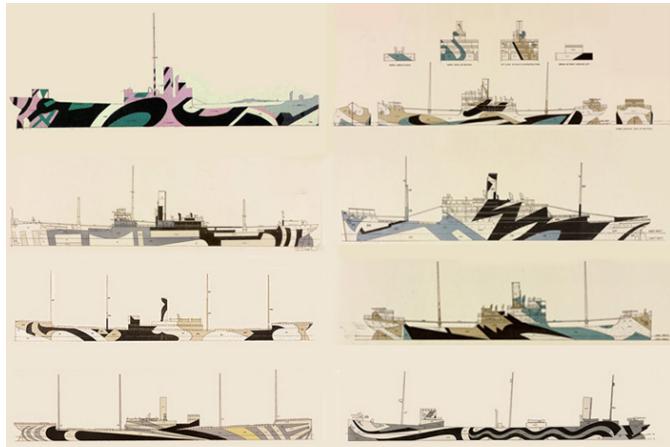


## MyLoki – a daemon for digital dazzle



This project is an *absurdist thought experiment* exploring how it might be possible to devise ‘autonomous agents’ (daemons) that synthesise and propagate additional data – using neural networks and employing techniques such as ‘generative adversarial networks’ – to mask our data traces and transactions across systems. In effect creating a ‘data dissensus’ in the accuracy of our individual ‘shadow profiles’, to undermine their statistical value through massive duplication. Invoking the generation of duplicitous activities that resemble our actions but, in effect, create multiplicities of possible identities. To overwhelm the ‘algorithms of oppression’ with too many statistically

# DAEMONS



of the  
**SHADOW WORLD**

the Internet Archive.  
Catalog: New York Tribune, and Mori Yuzan's Hamonshū (1903) via Images from The Thomas Crowne Affair (1999); US National Archives  
for the "Data as Culture" research theme, Copy That? Supplus Data in Originally developed with support from the Open Data Institute  
an Age of Repetitive Duplication.

Giles Lane  
London, December 2018-January 2020

emerge that we cannot fathom now?  
horizon of the probable, what uncommon insights could If we can think beyond the bounds of reason and the

in our current situation.  
explore things which might indeed be truly unthinkable determining the maternity of a disputed child, I hope to personal data as the judgment of Solomon was for concord for resolving the conundrum of privacy and By proposing something that is as lateral and excessive a

for instance, refugees.  
by virtue of age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or status – in society; anyone who diverges from the norm, whether it discriminates against those for whom fluidity of identity enriches asymmetries of power: in the same way, a feedback mechanism that reinforces itself and to accept socially normative concepts of identity are like of this. The inducements offered in our consumer society and the digital society is merely another manifestation in a predictable and controllable manner – consumerism traditions. These have the habit of making people behave such means as religions and regimes, conventions and There are many ways of enforcing conformity through diversity, divergence and struggle: especially for those upon whom power is exercised by those who wield it. But, of course, the history of humanity is also that of predictability is a desirable quality.

of identity, one that assumes repetition is truth, and that less fluid. We are becoming ever more tightly defined. Each individual is becoming reduced to a singular concept ever more normative society. A social and cultural entropy – the differences that are drawn, the biases that result and the effects which ensue – is propelling us towards an This quantification and measurement of each interaction

## Daemons of the Shadow World

It is my firm belief that my role as an artist is to imagine the unthinkable – to perceive beyond the horizon of the probable and to stretch one's imagination beyond the limits of the normative everyday.

By opening up such vistas it becomes possible to anticipate impacts and consequences of actions and decisions – acquiring *uncommon insights* into potential futures we may come to inhabit.

*Daemons of the Shadow World* is a proposal for an artwork that recasts privacy and the role of individual or personal data; that rethinks how data subjects are commodified; that explores what it could be like to unbalance how power is expressed and exercised through data analysis and use.

Almost every aspect of modern life is now measured, sensed, datafied, transmitted, analysed and transacted. Those transactions bloom like flower banks to encompass not just each individual's data profile and traces, but everything and everyone they are connected to.



### Daemons of the Shadow World

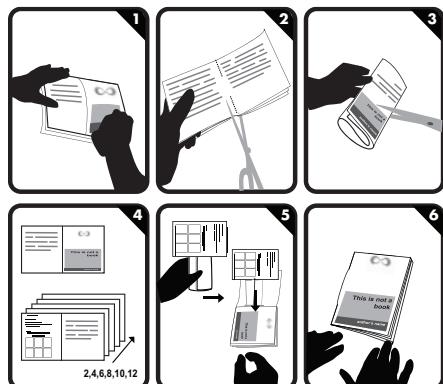
Giles Lane

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<https://bktr.it/35LRxG>

To acquire the opportunity, once again, to lose ourselves in the anonymity of the press of numbers. A pinch of freedom from the everyday atomisation we experience through constant personalisation, behaviour tracking, and through pre-set automated decision-making algorithms.

Or perhaps like a kind of Orphic mystery wherein the exchange of multiple data selves being propagated into the shadow digital world allows us a moment of escape from being subjectified and commodified as nouns and objects.

Olympian Algorithmic gods of our datified society? Are they not the type of gods we might want to align ourselves with against the patriarchal seeing, all knowing

between Protestantism and Catholicism. It also found in secret as religious conformity began to fracture households, especially where there was a need to worship the creation of private spaces (such as rooms) in shared the shifts in domestic architecture from the 1500s on – the rise of mercantilism and the equally modern concept of the individual. It found early articulation in emerging in Europe in the context of the reformation and societies, is itself a relatively modern concept – most likely privacy, as commonly defined in Western industrial cultural values in the West.

indeed different societies and cultures across the world have markedly different attitudes to privacy – as evinced by China's state-sponsored social credit system (itself perhaps less different from Western commercial data capture, monetisations and behaviour nudges than we might suppose). To suppose that either privacy or identity are stable concepts in all contexts and situations may be part of the problem, a reflection of our own hegemonic part of the problem, a reflection of our own hegemonic

## A Conceptual Projection

The above is patently an *absurd* idea. What I am proposing is unlikely to built (from a technical standpoint) and could possibly present unknown dangers if released online (from an ethical perspective).

Therefore this thought experiment requires making a kind of performative conceptual prototype to demonstrate the paradox at its heart. This might take the form of a set of 'blueprints' for the conditions under which a MyLoki daemon might be activated and operate; or a flow chart diagram of the actions and possible consequences for what could happen when an individual's data become pluralities; not just duplicitous but multiplicitous.

Such a set of blueprints or diagrams could then form the focal point of a deliberative forum assembled from people with diverse knowledges and skills, across a range of disciplines and sectors. This group would be charged with exploring the ramifications of – and speculating on just what theoretical frameworks could emerge from – such an unreasonable, improbable and irrational set of possibilities.

Data profiling clearly is having normative effects, reinforcing and entrenching privileges for those who are already best served by society and the status quo. What about those for whom no singular identity is possible or desirable? Those whose identities are fluid, in construction or even in deconstruction. Those who are economically disadvantaged and whose choices are forever circumscribed by poverty and denied access to credit. These are the people most at risk of being excluded, segregated and even criminalised by the impacts of data profiling. The subtleties, quirks and nuances that allow us to defy definition are all too easily captured, measured and sorted into data points which can then be exploited against our own benefit.

Any transparency in data traffic goes only one way. We do not see how the data we share with the big systems (such as search engines, social media platforms or online shopping portals) is used by those who acquire it. Neither how the 'nudge' systems – increasingly adopted by governments and public agencies – use our data to influence our choices and life options. Nor do we have any real understanding of how the scope and scale of the total digital surveillance by the Five Eyes network of intelligence agencies is used, despite the hints and indications revealed by whistleblowers like Edward Snowden.

Often unwitting, collusion in their narrative.  
use personal data to commodity us and profit by our  
interest groups, agencies and governments that seek to  
will of the corporates, the political parties, the special  
god Loki, working on each other behaves to frustrate the  
Each demon would be a personal Trickster, like the Norse  
individual back towards those who seek to manipulate us.  
oppressors, reverse the flow of digital spam from the  
To detourne the techniques of oppression against the  
junk for the profilers, marketers and manipulators.  
enough uncertainty to render the value of the data as  
polluting the value of our data trail by injecting just  
ways – perhaps just a hair's breadth – each one  
to an infinite number of selves, all bifurcating in myriad  
in the digital world? Whereas each would become a portal  
camouflage the data traces of our actions and behaviours  
of statistically probable profiles, endlessly generated to  
each of us, to dazzle the data harvesters with a bazaar  
programmes to act as software agents – demons – for  
“Probability”. How could we devise and use such  
lets call such software “Models for Partial Statistical  
anthropomorphising it with qualities it is far from having,  
instead of referring to “Artificial Intelligence” and  
similar variables which confound their ability to accurately  
predict and shape our behaviours.

What could the features of such daemons be?  
What limitations might need to be placed on their use?  
How might we need to re-think our entire digital economy – not to see data as a commodity, but as condition?

I invoke Loki and the figure of the Trickster, precisely because they are ambiguous – causing mayhem but bringing luck and fortune. Sometimes misfortune. Always uncertain.



the sense of individuality as ours does?  
What might we learn from cultures which do not privilege  
individuals within communities and shared spaces?  
How do, and have, other cultures navigated the duality of  
through rather than a static position to cling on?  
commodity – a dynamic seductiveness of states that we flow  
What if privacy is re-thought as a condition not a  
plurality, a multiplicity of identities – camouflage of a kind?  
measure us as singular commodities by synthesizing a  
of data analysis against those who seek to define us and  
even complementarity, strategy could be to turn the tools  
should be inalienable. But what if an alternative, perhaps  
has for sometime been proposed as a human right that  
To safeguard individuals and their personal data, privacy  
cannot sidestep.  
that humans, our cultures, societies and civilisations,  
ecocide and mass extinction, presents a distinct trajectory  
consumption of finite resources, leading to rampant  
humanity, but all life teeters on an edge. Unbridled  
is also facing its own zero-sum game in which not just  
alongside the realisation that western industrial capitalism  
complete reconfiguration. It is, coincidentally, happening  
of near total surveillance, privacy is on the verge of a  
it should, however, be no surprise that now, in an age  
of

