

Retained Reports (2019-2022)

In Retained Reports I question the politics of data originated from our private human experiences – which surveillance capitalists gather as free raw material, fashioning them into prediction products, sold in all-revealing behavioural futures markets – and I invite us to imagine alternative socio-economic logics.

I turned the surveillance capitalism's "means of production" against themselves, by training an AI algorithm to hallucinate portraits of imaginary individuals based on an analysis of the public-domain archive of Costică Acsinte, one of Romania's most prolific early-20th-century photographers.

Many of Acsinte's fragile glass plates have sustained damages over the years due to heat and moisture. The delicate silver gelatine emulsion has peeled off, and the glass has cracked or splintered.

Worn down by time and elements, the portraits in the Acsinte's archive are allegories of the impermanence of human artefacts. Their counterparts in Retained Reports, though, are, like personal-data in the hands of the surveillance-industrial complex, permanent artefacts of computational processes and visual antiphrases. It is very hard for citizens to delete all their data, even when they decide to stop sharing them. I am presenting the resulting series of static portraits as images persistently retained on powered-off electronic-ink screens, chosen in lieu of traditional archival photo-paper.

When asymmetries of knowledge between citizens and the surveillance capitalists translate into asymmetries of power, what will be the consequences for democracy? When we lose our private realm, how do we assert our moral autonomy? When predictions of future behaviours are enabled by knowledge and end up with control, what control do we retain over our lives if companies know more about us than we know about ourselves or than we know about them? Or, ultimately, when all our future behaviours are predicted, what does it mean to be human?

