

Searching for the Real in Automated Self-Presentation: James Coupe's Today, too, I experienced something I hope to understand in a few days

Maria Walsh, Chelsea College of Art & Design

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James Coupe's online project Today, too, I experienced something I hope to understand in a few days seems to operate between the modalities of Western capitalist disciplinary societies and societies of control. The final artwork comprises of three elements, which engage with and operate within the readymade data banks of information and images that circulate in virtual space. The first element is a series of video portraits of volunteers, some shot by Coupe in Seattle where he is based, the rest shot in Barrow, using poses and actions loosely based on Danish experimental filmmaker Jorgen Leth's 1967 film *The Perfect Human*, Coupe's title being a line from the film. The videos are uploaded to a database where a programme automatically edits them in the style of Leth's film. The second element of the work uses text from status profiles submitted by Facebook users based in Barrow who voluntarily signed up on Facebook to participate in Coupe's project. A software application automatically matches the Facebook profiles with the demographic of the video portraits, the Facebook profile texts serving as subtitles to the portraits, e.g. Male 22 refers to a portrait of a fresh-faced grinning young man whose subtitle reads 'I am a bomb terrorist'. The final component of the project involves software that searches YouTube for videos that link to code words in the subtitles, the final works being shown on YouTube as split screen videos, the video portrait on one screen, its paired YouTube video on the other. The question I want to address in this paper is whether his video portraits express something 'real' about their protagonists, which is Coupe's claim, or whether they are of the same ilk as the informational machines that track our movements and channel our desires in societies of control.