

ARTEFACT

DEEP STORY 3A

Sue Beyer, RMIT University



HD Video, sound, 5:01 mins

Keywords: Video art, AI, metamodernism, affect, data

STATEMENT

Deep Story 3a, a looped five-minute video made for social media, is narrated by an AI animated version of Sue Beyer employing a computer-generated voice. The video was made using *Tokking Heads*, an AI face animator app on iPhone, and *Deep Story*, an online AI script generator. *Deep Story 3a* is part of *We Are Data*, an ongoing project exploring what it means to be human through the lens of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data. *We Are Data* uses physical, digital and virtual mediums that reference data gathered from AI and the internet on the topic of 'Sue Beyer'. The gathered information, that may or may not be true, joins to create a biography on Beyer, written and told by big data and AI.

When viewed on a contemporary display the resolution of the video is low, with noticeable compression artifacts and obviously meant to be viewed briefly on a smartphone. The degraded video is reminiscent of early digital selfies and videos that could be viewed on the internet in the early 2000s. However, looking at this video through the eyes of Hito Steryl, the poor image is now the rich image, full of its own history, degraded through the process of creation by a machine learning platform, downloaded from the internet, saved onto an iPhone and eventually transferred onto a desktop computer for processing.

Poor images and degraded video are a direct reflection of the meta-crisis of our times, or ‘the interconnected nature of the many crises’. (Pipere and Mārtinsone, 2022) This digital aesthetic has been described by James Bridle (2013) as The New Aesthetic, and highlights ‘what these images reveal about the underlying systems that produce them, and/or the human viewpoint which frames them’. A Metamodern sign of the times or a glitch in The Matrix, where if you believe in conspiracy theories, machines are secretly running everything behind the scenes.

The machine generated Australian accent used to narrate the video, highlights the alien origin of the video, and induces an uncanny valley effect. In addition, like the automatic writing of the Surrealists, the machine learning platform *Deep Story* is like an oracle conjuring words that mean very little to the uninitiated, only to be understood in hindsight. In this way AI takes on a metaphysical aspect hinting that answers to existential questions are available if you ask the right question and know how and where to look. AI provides answers but it’s frequently hard to tell fact from fiction. *Deep Story 3* embraces AI ‘hallucinations’ (Ji et al., 2023), enthusiastically using the bizarre responses and made-up facts that AI presents as the truth.

REFERENCES

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Wachowski, Lana and Wachowski, Lily (directors) (1999) *The Matrix* [motion picture], Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

PEER REVIEW 1

The video artefact *Deep Story 3a* manifests an A.I generated character that's based from the statements made by the artist addresses two key points of agency which I found quite interesting and prophetic. The first claim made was that the work consisted of two separate elements being the artificial intelligence generated image and the associated text that the video was generated from. Where I find the innovation and significance of this work that is most successful is beneath the aesthetics and instead enabling the wider series of the work titled *We Are Data*, where personified data in a subjective context is held and retained to form a digital archive of human being. Whilst this raises obscenely unethical and nightmarish

scenarios, the fact is the artist has created this work in a way that brings commentary to these discussions and more so highlights a conviction that data, to which I argue is a digital synthetic DNA of every digitally-active human on the planet, therein pertains an argument to be said that the artwork itself is not necessarily significance by image and sound alone but rather by the implications of how the data was obtained in the first place. I'm reminded of Phillip K Dick and other science fiction writers of the mid 20th century that when placed into a postmodern context was indeed phenomenologically attached through to elements of what the artist statements allude to, deriving to a point more so added by way of a deconstructionist level which is where the conversation starts for *Deep Story 3A*. Overall I found the context of the statement engaging, and the artwork both entertaining and also disturbing. It is one of the better AI generated works I have seen where glitches become part of the work but not as a tacky cartoonised approach to aesthetics alone. This is the work of an engaging artist and the statement holds residue in critical convictions. I recommend this statement and video to be published as is and no further attention needed.

PEER REVIEW 2

Deep Story 3A reveals two sub-contexts within the statements and video artefact. The first is an iterative process as an outcome of the wider series we data and the art effect itself built through a methodology based on observational aesthetics. The statement mentions three key points which I will address below. The first is that the image is degraded on purpose built from a static history of the subject. I found this quite interesting as I have not thought of the subjects in terms of history to the likes that the artist has employed to this video. This unfolds to the next key points that the statement claims as a meta-crisis. I would have liked to have seen an unpacking of this key term in a few more sentences as it's quite valuable in the arguments already raised. When interlinking the history of an image with a meta-crisis, the outcomes of this research abate a contextualization that other commentators such as Manovich and even earlier Derrida have dissected that makes me think that this video and the statement if further expanded would situate itself in very late 1990s theory where the archaeology of data was being digressed especially from arguments of Foucault. The third point that the statement makes claims a metaphysics annunciation of the image from what is hidden and what remains unseen. I would have liked to have seen this discussed in greater detail as it's a topic that most certainly is relevant to the inquiry and the artefacts combined. There is nothing in this statement in need of challenging but rather, simply expanding. Nonetheless the key points raised in the statement support the video where there is no difference between the artefact and the statement supporting it. The artist is interlinked in a very clever and intelligent way with all the key points nested within the video. I recommend this statement and artefact to be published as is.

RESPONSE STATEMENT

Reviewer 1 suggests that collected data could be viewed as a 'digital synthetic DNA'. This is an apt description for the sometimes disingenuous and hidden workings of big data's body of information held on every person using the internet. Created by multinational companies, this V2 doppelganger exists online, like a shadow following our meat-space selves. The use of the term deconstruction by reviewer 1, combined with metaphysical aspects suggested by reviewer 2 both exist in this work simultaneously, as a way of examining ideas on esoteric

and hidden knowledge. In a further unpacking of the term metacrisis, suggested by reviewer 2, I will add that the deterioration of society through a series of interconnected problems, is being compounded by recent advancements in technology, the very thing that was meant to make our lives easier. I concur with reviewer 2's statements that Manovich, Derrida and arguments put forward by Foucault are relevant. However, instead of gaps in history that Foucault highlights and the 'compositing, morphing, and navigable spaces' that Manovich (2001, 234) describes, we now have overlapping factual and fictional histories. The use of fiction to embellish history is now emphasised in stark reality on social media, where facts and lies are indistinguishable from each other even when sitting side by side. The Internet and AI can be seen as both hopeful and destructive at the same time. Information and knowledge are available to whoever has access, and more recently it has become evident that it is being used as a tool for misinformation and control. (De Witt 2022) Foucault's ideas on how knowledge is produced is relevant to these arguments, however the oscillation between the extremes of hope and destruction is what makes it Metamodern. All the comments provided by the reviewers ask to look deeper and have confirmed ideas I have been thinking about.

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