

THE COMPELLING CHARM OF NUMBERS: WRITING FOR AND THRU THE NETWORK OF DATA

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Remember your old diary, how you tried to catch up Sunday afternoons to explain what you had experienced that week? Remember how you copied from the letters that held the feelings and thoughts events had triggered? How you copied the other way round – those old days when the events in your life summed up to a story of your life, when everything happened for a reason and became a lesson. Almost like the ‘diaries’ of historians, who don’t accept chance but see deeper meaning in everything. Destiny, above all; the labour of reason, as Hegel famously put it. Not many historians still see history this way; combining events into grand narratives. In postmodern times writing is different. And the personal diary? It is back, people say. Back on Facebook and called Timeline – which sounds like a new word for a chronicle. And indeed, it works like those earlier forms of historiography, that shy away from narrating. Let’s start with the past, before we explore Timeline, and compare it to other phenomena in current culture, discussing its meaning as a symbolic form of our time. Those who wish to discuss data in digital networks only from a political perspective of captivation may skip the following text and jump to the last section of this essay.

Order of Time

At the beginning there was the number. This is how the history of historiography could be described if, instead of Herodot, one thinks of the Annalists of the Middle Ages. The annals listed events according to the year they happened, without explanation. Thus, the *Annales Sangallenses Maiores, dicti Hepidanni* of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* presents the following entry for the year 709: ‘Hard winter. Duke Gottfried died.’ The entry for 710 reads: ‘Hard winter and deficient in crops.’ 720 notes: ‘Charles fought against the Saxons.’ (White 1987: 6f.) There are no explanations or speculations about the cause for deficient crops or the war with the Saxons. The import of natural and social events ‘consist in nothing other than their having been recorded.’ (Ibid. 7)

The most remarkable element, however, is the listing of years in the left-hand column without any entry in the right-hand column: 726, 727, 728, 729, 730. In fact, the *Annals of Saint Gall* end recording the circle of years: 1065, 1066, 1067, 1068, 1069, 1070, 1071, 1072. Why such pedantic recording if there is nothing to report? Because, the hero of this kind of historiography is time itself.

The US-american historian Hayden White, who presents the example at hand, puts it this way: ‘the list of dates can be seen as the signified of which the events given in the right-hand column are the signifiers’ (Ibid. 9) The reported events, such as famine and war, only signify the really important event: the fullness of time, i.e. ‘the fullness of the “years of the Lord.”’ (Ibid. 11). No matter whether there are events to report each year, it is important to report the event of each year. Because this is the actual narrative the historian had to witness, a story with a clear beginning and an unforeseeable, but inevitable end: the year of Incarnation and the Last Judgement. The hero of this story was not a person or a country but God.

It is different with another form of historiography, the chronicle. Though time is addressed in the term already, similar to the annals, and serves as the organising principle of the report, the central subject is not God but a person, a city, a region. Similar to the annals, the chronicle lacks closure, ‘that summing up of the “meaning” of the chain of events with which it deals that we normally expect from the well-made story.’ (Ibid. 16). Chronicles lack a conclusion since they report in ‘real time’. Conclusion can rather be found in ‘proper history’, the third form of historiography. White discusses which has a proper narrative: a finalised correlation of events. The principle of correlation translates the law of conservation of energy into history and assumes that every event follows from something and leads to something. The aspect of closure is based on the retrospective mode of this kind of historiography. ‘Proper history’ relates to the Chronicle like autobiography to a diary: it reports from the end, which also means to give meaning from the end.

These three forms of historiography do not progress from each another. If one thinks of Herodot and Homer, it is clear: at the beginning of the history of historiography was the word and the story. However, it was in the second part of the 18th century, when history established itself as an academic discipline, that historians demanded a principal shift in historiography: from the accumulation of insulated events towards a system of interrelated events. The mere collection of events, proclaims Wilhelm von Humboldt in the early 19th century, would mean to stay with an outer, literal, and apparent truth and to miss the actual, inner truth found in causal correlation (Humboldt 1905: 36).

The central issue in historiography is where narration starts. Shall the author, the historian, turn insulated events into a meaningful story or shall the reader do so? Related questions include, how detailed can a description be without applying narrative elements and how undetailed must it be in order to not undermine the narrative at hand? One of the opponents of a mere accumulation of historical data without a correlating story, the German Johann Christoph Gatterer, declares, already in 1767 in his programmatic text ‘*Vom historischen Plan und der darauf sich gründenden Zusammenfügung der Erzählungen*’ (roughly translated: On the plan of history and the composition of narratives), that events that do not belong to the narrative system are now, so to speak, no longer events to the historian (Koselleck 1975: 663).

The neglect of details in favour of an inner truth and the preference of this truth to a mere literal truth can be seen again in the debate on photography and is an important factor in the comparison of the old diary to the new, Facebook. Lets throw the annalist’s quill into the sky and see how things develop a thousand years later. Of course, the computer plays a central role and writes, in both ways, history. Interestingly, the datum, so important to the annalist, is central again, as well: as the given. The chronicle is now called Timeline and is not written by an outside observer but by the observed herself: and the events reported are not wars, plagues, or coronation; it is ordinary life, with all its battles, diseases and parties.

Timeline

When, in September 2011, Facebook introduced its new Timeline feature, it promised, this would change your life. Sure, this is a running gag at every Facebook developer’s conference. However, this time it was true, at least in terms of how people remember their life.

Of course, Facebook had been a live ticker of one’s digital life for a long time. It not only presented your status entries and friends’ comments and all the photographs and videos you uploaded. It also recorded what you visited and liked in other parts of the Internet. However, back then, the records disappeared into the abyss of your website. Now they can be easily accessed via the time-menu at the right-hand side, representing years, months and days. This is not an insignificant difference and, if there were no search engines online, it could be as great as the difference between the scroll and the codex. With this new navigation tool you can easily look things up: graduation day, holiday pictures, comments before and after a wedding, comments on divorce etc.

Timeline has been called the diary of the 21st century. This sounds appropriate and everybody knows it is a metaphor, for a website is not a book and a book can’t contain videos. However, the metaphor is still wrong. Timeline is not a diary but, metaphorically, a photo album; a photo album whose pictures one may have created oneself but not personally put into the album. This is not a small difference and, to remind you, by picture I mean not only images but also text. What does that mean?

Timeline is not a diary in that that it doesn’t describe – or record – experiences at the end of the day, week or month. Rather experience inscribes itself in real time into Timeline. If you share a YouTube-video with a Facebook-Friend the link is sent to the friend and the sharing is reported at Timeline. You don’t write: today I shared that-and-that video for that -and-that reason with so-and-so. Facebook itself reports the action: such-and-such shared that-and-that with so-and-so, as well as the time and link. Since the system automatically reports the given action to Timeline, one should say: it is the action that reports itself. That means: Reality is represented as a kind of technical ‘naturalism’.

Text as Photograph

To provide historical and poetic context: in the middle of the 19th century German critics accused realism in writing of daguerreotypist resemblance and as idolism of pure materiality. This accusation was overhasty, since German realist literature in 19th century was also called poetic realism, as it defended the matter of poetry. The accusation was more appropriate with respect to Naturalism, the writing movement of the 1880's and 1890's. Naturalism aimed at a writing based on a quasi scientific foundation, conceptualising the author as an experimenter who connects certain characters under certain circumstances and analyses and records the results as detailed and objective – i.e. with as little poetic embellishment or expectation induced by the author as possible (Bölsche). Hence, writing became recording and resembled photography, as well as such a different media might.

Naturalism was the target of the criticisms that had been previously addressed to photography. It was accused of a cold mechanical recording without emotion. For many, Naturalism's agenda of presenting the truth in a factual way only represented the loss of deeper insight and objection. Thus, Adorno questioned the aesthetic creativity of mimetic naturalism and notes: 'Artistic products that are nothing but regurgitations of what is happening socially, flattering themselves that this kind of metabolism with second nature passes for a genuine process of copying such products, are smitten with silence.' (Adorno 1984: 327).

Albert Camus even considered the style of naturalism in literature as the expression of nihilism, precisely for its apotheosis of a reality that does not impose any transformation or correction on reality. The artist claims, notes Camus of the poetic principle of naturalism, to give the world unity by withdrawing from it all privileged perspectives, including the perspective of the artist herself. In this sense, Camus holds, the artist

renounces the first requirement of artistic creation: Whatever may be the chosen point of view of an artist, one principle remains common to all creation: stylisation, which supposes the simultaneous existence of reality and of the mind that gives reality its form. Through style, the creative effort reconstructs the world, and always with the same slight distortion that is the mark of both art and protest (Camus 1956: 268, 271).

It should not come as a surprise that in practice naturalism was not as objective and factual as intended in theory. In addition, it is well established that photography is less a display of reality than of a certain relationship to reality, expressed by the theme and moment chosen, the perspective and focus applied and the camera and footage used. However, it is also a matter of fact that a painter must decide how to represent an object that may only exist before her inner eye, while a photographer has the object present itself on the film, which is why photography pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot calls this technology the 'pencil of nature' and why this technology has the name photo-graphy: writing with light. This is also why Charles Sanders Peirce, in his concept of the sign, eventually classified photography as indexical, marking a physical connection between the signified and the signifier. The photograph is as much the direct result of the photographed as smog of fire.

This physical correlation between the signifier and the signified is also true for Timeline. The recorded data of shared links, visited videos and music listened to on the Internet are indexical for they directly result from the action they represent, with such stubborn pedantry that even changes to the menu-language in the account settings is documented on Timeline. From a media ontological perspective Timeline can be considered textual photography (*Textphotografie*), appropriating the sense of the term for linguistic photography (*Sprachfotografie*), coined by German art critic and media theorist Boris Groys, to describe the fact that the computer does not store the *meaning* of a text but every single word. The main unit of the text is no longer the sentence but the word, Groys concludes, and he continues: like in photography the central element is no longer the visual expression ('malerische Ausdruck') but the object (Groys 1996: 385). One can even go further, suggesting the single letter is the actual object of linguistic photography; because not a single one is lost when Timeline stores who shared what with whom and when with what comment.

It is the same 'magical eccentricity of the detail' Jean Baudrillard attested to photography, arguing the details block out the 'view of the world', the "approach' to things' (Baudrillard 2000: 130). This is also true for one's texts, status updates and comments on Facebook. These texts are also documented, word by word, letter by letter. There is no retrospective entry into the diary giving the gist of what you had said, because now the diary is the

same place where you recorded it. The diary is itself what it should report; it is the life. If, with respect to sharing and commenting outside Facebook, we said before the event reports itself to the diary, we can now upgrade: the event is the report.

This shift from a deliberate report to an automatic record has inevitable consequences for how we remember the past. If everything is recorded in a literal way, letter by letter, detail by detail, there is no way to see past events in various shades. That means there is no strategic remembering or forgetting from the perspective – and personal narrative – of the presence.

Siegfried Kracauer, in his essay on photography 1927, considers this constellation as loss of meaning. For Kracauer, photography captures the given as a spatial continuum, while the memory image preserves it insofar as it means something. For Kracauer, therefore, the memory image is a person's actual history. Baudrillard radicalises the announced loss, stating that with photography the object can prevail with its 'discontinuity and immediacy' against the will of the perceptive subject (Baudrillard 2000: 132). If, with Timeline, the diary mutates into a photo album the reported is no longer treated with respect to a certain personal narrative but documented in a factual, naturalistic, photographic manner. Interpretation gives way to raw data, the historiographic concept returns from story to insulated events, from proper history to annals.

However, Timeline provides a niche for narrative compositions. It does so with respect to holiday videos and party reports that compose images and facts in a way meaningful to the author. In addition, Timeline also encourages us to tell little stories in the new section *Life Event* providing five divisions of life events: Work & Education, Family & Relationships, Home & Living, Health & Wellness and Travel & Experiences. Each division contains subdivisions. In the case of Home & Living: Moved, Bought a Home, Home Improvement, New Roommate, New Vehicle and Other Life Events. The division Health & Wellness offers, among others: Overcome an Illness, New Eating Habits, Weight Loss and Broken Bone. Each subdivision contains the prompts for Who, When, Where, Who and With and asks for the appropriate specifics: which bone was broken, amount of weight lost, name, type, breed, and gender of the pet. Of course, one can upload images and: there is a field to complete a narrative.

With respect to cultural studies and narratology, such lists and sub-lists of events are quite interesting. They remind us of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, breaking fairy tales into a range of narrative elements that more or less structure every fairy tale. More obvious, than in the case of Propp, the list in Timeline reveals its arbitrariness. Why is there no Weight *Gain*-section? Why does the Weight Loss-section ask *with* but not *for* whom? Why is there 'Quit a Habit' but no *started*?

There is no doubt why Facebook offers entries for diseases, house sales, and new hobbies and we already know that the entry about my pet has consequences for what advertisements I see on the right-hand side of my Timeline. However, more important to the discussion here is that, distinct to Propp, the various events are not considered sequential but insular. In Propp's morphology the action of a villain is followed by a call for help; the arrival of the hero is followed by combat, victory, return and wedding. In Timeline's morphology of life events there is no option to link between the various episodes. The events are not connected in a narrative but stored as they are in Facebook's database.

This raises the question how close Timeline's *Life Events*-feature actually gets to the traditional diary or how close Facebook wants to get to it at all. The empirical finding that this function for composing narratives is hardly used does not endorse the idea this would be the place where the old technology of writing a diary survives. That the entry of a story is optional does not support the assumption Facebook is really interested in our stories. Rather, one suspects the invitation to accomplish the life event entries with a story is supposed to detract from the fact of additional data collecting. The return to the formalist system of narrative units does not happen on the ground of recounting but counting.

Database

The point of Timeline is not that it is a diary open to the public but that it primarily contains elements that happened in public exactly the way they were reported. Rather than a description or conclusion of events, as in the traditional diary, Timeline is an automated recording in real time. There is no difference between the 'I' that experienced and the 'I'

that reports. In this manner, Timeline enforces Facebook's moral imperative of authenticity and radical transparency. Nobody shall be able to hide, not even in telling her life.

This situation has narratological consequences in three ways. First, the 'writing' of the 'diary' is outsourced to the computer by the algorithm used by Facebook and its partners in order to store the data on Timeline. Second, accounting returns to its etymological origin when it still meant counting. The fact that datasets are not meaningful, with respect to a narrative, guarantees their completeness, since they can't contradict or disturb any narrative. Third, the meaningful reading of the data is outsourced to the reader. This can, with Camus, be called nihilistic or, within the perspective of Web 2.0 participation culture, democratic. The events are not stored in a meaningful story by the diarist, who on Timeline does not write the diary but lives it. The meaningful story has to be composed by the audience or the 'diarist', once she turns into a reader of her own Timeline. Does she do that? Do the others do that? Does Timeline change the way we tell stories about our self? Does it respond to a change already happening? Our exploration must become both more concrete and general.

Let's turn to a peculiar example that has already absorbed much attention of journalists, academics, and curators, Nicholas Felton's *Annual Reports*. Since 2005 Felton collects, with statistical accuracy, the 'mundane moments of his life', as Nick Bilton puts it aptly. For example, how often he used the subway, taxi, bus, airplane, a ferry or a chairlift. How often he visited a museum, attended a birthday party, how many hours he was in the gym, how many books he read and how many book pages, and how many beers he drank and from which countries. Which books he read we don't learn. Nor what affect they had on him. Such information is something for old school diarists – if they still exist. Felton is a computer scientist, he is interested in *numerical narratives*, as the title of one of his talks suggests (Felton).

The twofold appreciation of the mundane in Felton's reports reminds us of modern methods of historiography focusing on the everyday life of ordinary people. Felton too democratizes data and their producer. However, his info-graphics may only display the love of the information designer to information. In an article about Felton and other 'info-chroniclers' a young man 'who tracks everything from his mercury levels to his vitamin D consumption' confesses such love stating: 'There's so much info that it'd be a shame not to track it.' (Brophy-Warren).

Nevertheless, this strange love has a deeper agenda; the self-tracking aims at the better self-understanding provided by technical equipment such as a counters, stopwatches, pedometers, or GPS systems. And, indeed, what does one learn about oneself after a trip to the Himalayas if one doesn't know how many miles one has covered and how many cups of tea consumed? To be fair, the *Quantified Self*-community – gathering in about 40 groups worldwide – conducts tracking in a much more meaningful way. The number of cups of tea may not say much about who you are but the number of tweets you send and retweets you get does. The activists of *selfknowledge through numbers* – as the slogan at quantifiedself.com reads – have reasonable points in arguing that statistical self-tracking replaces diffuse self perception through precise and incorruptible numbers because those numbers are correct, even if they have been manipulated.

Self-tracking seems to be the solution to the old problem of self-knowledge, if gained on a narrative basis, for example in the case of the old diary – that it is not discovered but configured. With numbers it is pure reality that speaks. One can use more chairlifts to raise your annual report's chairlift score. But then one really has been in more chairlifts. Of course, even numbers must be interpreted, which is when they become subject to narrative. Nonetheless, as the term numerical narratives – which should more aptly read as numerical *exposition* – implies, the recount is bound to the numbers among which countless comparisons and assessments might be conducted. Numerical narrative is narration out of the spirit of the database.

Looking from a more general perspective at the phenomenon described – Felton's *Annual Reports*, the *Quantified Self-movement*, and *Timeline* – we may turn to a thesis Lev Manovich offered more than 10 years ago. In his book *The Language of New Media* Manovich speaks of a natural enmity between database and narrative: 'Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world.' (Manovich 2001: 225). While the way a narrative makes meaning out of the world is to 'create a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events)', the database 'represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list' (ibid.).

With reference to Erwin Panofsky's analysis of linear perspective as a 'symbolic form', Manovich calls databases 'a new symbolic form of a computer age . . . a new way to structure our experience of ourselves and of the world.'

The central role of the database reminds us of those early days of historiography when history was treated not as a story but as a list of dates. Even though Manovich does not elaborate on the possible reasons for a return to an earlier form of structuring experience, he throws in three important names and keywords to understand the correlation between the modern history of Western civilisation and its current symbolic form: 'After the death of God (Nietzsche), the end of grand Narratives of Enlightenment (Lyotard) and the arrival of the Web (Tim Berners-Lee) the world appears to us as an endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records, it is only appropriate that we will be moved to model it as a database.' (Manovich 2001: 219).

As an example of this shift, Manovich refers to data-indexing which, back then, could be found at every second website in the form of link-lists. As we have seen, today there are other types of data-indexing, the most popular being Facebook. The fact that Timeline also provides pockets of narration – as the old, now replaced symbolic form – only underlines Manovich's notion that new media 'does not radically break with the past' but 'distributes weight differently between the categories that hold culture together, foregrounding what was in the background, and vice versa.' (Manovich 2001: 229). Besides, not only is the *Life Event*-section secondary to Timeline, the narrative element in these sections is also secondary to their database aspect.

Object-Oriented Philosophy

Manovich's notion on the shift between database and narrative needs to be developed, especially with respect to the keywords and names he drops. The starting point can once more be historiography, as what appears to be a methodological question in the history of science is actually a socio-psychological one. The assumption is: humans need stories, they must give things a narrative home to feel themselves at home. This is true from both phylogenetic and ontogenetic perspectives.

Some representatives of narrative psychology speak of a natural 'readiness or predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form.' (Bruner 1990: 45). This readiness answers to the need to see one's own life as a line of coherent and meaningful events (Randell, Polinghome). This coherence is our own personal law of conservation of energy; it is the metaphysics of our existence. As Paul Ricoeur famously puts it: 'time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of narrative.' (Ricoeur 1984: 3). In this light Descartes' famous equation on identity reads: I narrate, therefore I am.

In both perspectives, ontogenetic and phylogenetic, it is well established that narrative understanding can't escape retrospective construction and that historiographical observation is infected by theory. Postmodern theorists have questioned the possibility of knowledge independent of an individual or collective framework determined by cultural and social factors. There is no access to the world outside a specific vocabulary, value system or disposition. An inevitable target of this scepticism was the illusion of a truthful reconstruction of history. Thus Hayden White rejected the idea that 'a fact is one thing and its interpretation another' and pointed out what Gatterer had confessed already in 1767: 'The fact is presented where and how it is in the discourse in order to sanction the interpretation to which it is meant to contribute.' (White 1975: 55).

Ever since then there have been attempts to establish theories offering direct access to facts independent of interpretation. In historiography this raised the term of the 'individual thing', the fact before its use within any narrative (Ankersmit 1983: 172). In philosophy we are witnessing, in the context of *Speculative Realism* or *Object-Oriented Philosophy* and *Ontology* respectively (Meillassoux, Bryant, Graham, Bogost) the attempt to gain access to the thing in itself, independent of 'correlationism' as Quentin Meillassoux calls the philosophical tradition that insists, since Kant, that objects only exist in relation to human perception.

Against this background the symbolic form of the database may be considered the technical solution to a philosophical problem. The common denominator, overcoming the paradigm of narrative. This paradigm is central to the logic of postmodern thinking and inevitably considered the foundation of all interpretation and claims to truth. Now, there

is the effort to let events and data speak for themselves, before any individual would 'force' data into a narration. The representatives of *object-oriented philosophy* don't conceal their opposition to the anthropocentrism of philosophy and social and cultural studies. Is Timeline the technical response to this philosophical challenge? As a technology designed to achieve and store data produced by humans independent of a human perspective it appears as a technology that promises a new positivism.

Disclaimer

The replacement of narrative by database as the new central form of human culture and the role Timeline plays in this process certainly need further discussion. Given the limited space here I have to elaborate in these questions elsewhere. However, I will at least outline the further elements of the discussion.

Against the supposed achievement of the *quantified self* and *object-oriented philosophy* we need to take into account the importance of narrating as an intellectual practise demanding and performing analytical, synthetic, and linguistic skills. Where is the place to exercise the cognitive skills and psychological competence connected with narrating in contemporary culture? How does Timeline's abandonment of such practise in writing relate to the loss of deep reading resulting from the shift from deep to hyper attention? Does Bernard Stiegler's understanding of this shift as a psychogenetic mutation undermining emancipation and enlightenment apply to Timeline?

Such a perspective, following the old arguments of critical theory on cultural industry, should be confronted with Lyotard's aesthetics of the sublime, turning the crisis of narration into the mystery of being by liberating the event – or data respectively – from the chain of narration. In this concept meaning and narration is replaced by intensity and the absence of deep thinking appears as the depth of the present moment. To what extent do we have to read the rise of hyper attention and the psycho-technology of Facebook as the logical response to the end of narratives in both phylogenetic and ontogenetic perspectives? Is the hyper-active, unfocussed flurry on Timeline the pop-cultural version of Lyotard's high-culture sublime?

It is obvious that the theoretical discussion of the issue eventually needs to be related to empirical studies investigating the role of the diary, before Timeline and since weblogs. How popular are online journals today? What other forms of autobiographical narration can be found in contemporary communication; in letters or emails, conversations among friends, psychotherapeutic sessions? How do Timeline or Facebook, and other social networks in general, affect the culture of narrative diaries? How present are narrative elements in Timeline and other social networks? Above all: To what extent is the database as a new 'symbolic form' of modulating personal experiences making the narrative modulation more and more obsolete?

On the grounds of these considerations and concerns, and regarding the challenges to future electronic writing not in the remote domain of the avant-garde niche but in the most popular district of new media, we should also examine the prospect of counter culture. How can the mode of narration be entered into the presumed realm of database? Technically, Timeline does not prevent making the narrative its central element by posting very long texts in the *status* or *life events* section, and by generating a net of references between different entries. Would this allow the *détournement* of Timeline, the turn or remediation of the supposed diary – that is nothing else than a database – into a real diary fostering self-understanding by practising narrative skills?

Finally, it should be clear that what is discussed in this essay goes beyond the obvious, that Facebook's desire for data illustrates the vectorialisation of 'big data' by 'big software' as John Cayley puts it (in a personal conversation) and the 'infrastructural imperialism' Siva Vaidhyanathan discusses with respect to Google (Vaidhyanathan). It is evident that the critique of the economic and political implications of such desire and vectorialisation is crucial, even though the aim of this essay was to address the additional reasons for and consequences of the obvious that also need to be taken into account in order to understand the complex structure of desires behind the phenomenon discussed.

It is unquestioned that the only narration really important to Facebook's data worship is the one about personal behaviour in terms of consumption patterns. This agenda can also be detected in many of the *Quantified Self* start-ups. It should come as no surprise

that even Felton's *Annual Report* soon proved their economic potential. Felton not only founded a company to help others collect and organize their tracked data, aptly called *daytum*. Since 2011 he also works for another much bigger company to integrate his info-graphic ideas into their business model: Facebook. Such promotion of somebody who appeared in art galleries but also was suspected of obsessive-compulsive disorder was predictable, at the latest after Felton's listing as a keynote speaker for the NEXT Conference 2011.

In the information society, where profit results from faster access to and better analysis of information, everybody experimenting with information or data is a future proofed candidate. Hence, NEXT Conference, that informs the business world about 'how the consumer on the Internet will be evolving', gave its 2011 conference the title *Data Love*.¹ The explanation is instructive in terms of both media philosophy as well as business-management:

Data is the resource for the digital value creation and fuel for the economy. Today, data is what electricity has been for the industrial age. Business developers, marketing experts and agency managers are faced with the challenge to create new applications out of the ever-growing data stream with added value for the consumer. In our data-driven economy, the consumer is in the focus point of consideration. Because his behaviour determines who wins, what lasts and what will be sold. Data is the crucial driver to develop relevant products and services for the consumer.²

The fact that Felton's lecture *Numerical Narratives* was listed as a possible keynote for this conference³ says a lot about the obvious. And we know that the 'new applications out of the ever-growing data stream' not only intend adding 'value for the consumer' but also, and first of all, for the companies. The shift from narrative to database announced by Manovich as a new symbolic form of our culture is symbolic also for the ongoing shift from culture to economy. The 'new way to structure our experience of ourselves and of the world.' (Manovich 2001: 225) may be driven, as claimed by Manovich and elaborated in this essay, by the death of God and the end of grand narratives (Ibid. 219). Nonetheless, the obvious ramifications of the shift from the narrated to the quantified self is undoubted. Its terms are: capita, vectorialisation, infrastructural imperialism, programming industry. The end of the diary as we knew it is not just a philosophical and psychological issue but also an economic and political one. The latter we knew before the former should be considered as well.

¹ <http://nextconf.eu/next11/about/summary>

² <http://nextconf.eu/next11/next11-means-data-love>

³ <http://vote.nextconf.eu/details/numerical-narratives>

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