



The Church of Scotland

Church and Society Council

Surveillance and Social Justice – May 2017

Section 6. Datafication

6.1 We are living in an age of 'datafication', where more and more forms of social interaction and transactions produce collectible digital data.¹ It is possible to analyse many more different *types* of data using complex, automated algorithms, some of which are designed to be self-learning and refine their processing over time. Commentators are moving from talking about data as being 'collected' to talking about it being 'ingested'.² This opens possibilities for 'predictive policing' where patterns of behaviour can point to *potential* (as opposed to actual) criminal acts.

6.2 Not all databanks are capable of being accessed or cross-referenced by particular corporations or even government investigators. Nevertheless, as sources of data, we become valuable commodities when corporations can monetarise us. Our propensities and tendencies extrapolated from the fragments of our past may be misleading or unrepresentative- but are commercially valuable.³ It could be argued that, whilst workers choose to sell their labour we now have little option about our (digital) selves being sold.

[See the full report](#)

¹ 'Datafication' was likely coined by Kenneth Neil Cukier and Viktor Mayer-Schoënberger, 'The Rise of Big Data: How It's Changing the Way We Think About the World,' *Foreign Affairs* May/June (2013), 28-40. Also, it is important to note that personal information is only one dimension of Big Data because it includes non-personal information such as weather forecasting or environmental monitoring, see House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, *The big data dilemma*, 2016. HC468.

² Louise Amoore and Volha Piotukh, 'Life beyond big data: governing with little analytics,' *Economy and Society* 44: 3 (2015), 341-66 at 345..

³ Louise Amoore and Volha Piotukh, 'Introduction,' in Louise Amoore and Volha Piotukh (eds), *Algorithmic Life: Calculative devices in the age of big data* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-18.