CASTING LONG SHADOWS
Phenotyping dementia and the making of the digital ageing subject

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How is the digital ageing subject ‘figured’ through data practices for the early detection of dementia?

FIGURE/GROUND

What is the relationship between this ‘figure’ and the ‘ground’ on which it forms?
DATA SHADOWS

Distortions (good to ‘think with’)

Characterised by what they can do – more than how things are
DEMENTIA ‘DATA SHADOWS’

- Eye movement,
- Navigation skills,
- Gait,
- Tone of voice,
- Verbal fluency,
- Executive functions,
- Tremor,
- Facial movements and expressions,
- Latency, accuracy & speed to complete cognitive tests,
- Interactions with smartphones, such as taps, swipes & clicks.

FIGURE/GROUND
DIGITAL PHENOTYPING IN THE ‘REAL WORLD’

Tracking “lifestyle, including social skills, level of activity and dietary habits…”

THE VALUE OF ‘ECOLOGICAL VALIDITY’

“At the simplest level, [this type of data] has its own intrinsic value. It tells us about what it is to be a human being with this brain interacting with the world. And I think that's very interesting.”
(Senior clinical academic, interview with AC)

“the performance data of a natural person, obtained while operating and moving in a day-to-day environment…”
(Altoida patent).
FIGURE/GROUND
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In the practical application of these technologies: a return to the narrow, casting long into the future...
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NARROW: From ‘ecologies’ to individual biomarkers

… a paradox of scale (cf M’charek, 2016)
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LONG: “you are getting older; you do have a risk of developing a form of dementia. It’s looming larger in your mind”
(phenotyping study participant, interview with NB)
CONCLUSIONS

Thinking with shadows...

Ways of seeing figure/ground in a new light with different distortions.

- Imaginary of capturing totality/"real life"
- Reproduction of the bounded individual
- The promise of present data capture and future prediction
THANK YOU

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