**Synopsis – Biometric Data**

Biometric data is becoming more and more prevalent in every day technology such as smartphones, social media and computers. Once we thought of fingerprints as something mostly used by the police, but now most of us use them every day to unlock our phones. Facial scans were something we saw in Bond-movies, but now we use them to send humorously transformed selfies to our friends. This growing use of biometric data and its consequences in a societal context is what this entry will explore.

**Defining Biometrics**

To begin the exploration of this subject first I will have to define biometric data. This will start by exploring the history of biometric data and how it has evolved. I will try to include both the technical history of biometric data and the cultural societal history of biometric data. The technical history will focus on the actual uses of biometric data while the cultural societal history will focus on how society’s perception of biometric data has evolved and what has caused this. Going through the history of biometric data will naturally list the different kinds of biometric data that is currently used or has been used. A lot of this knowledge is available in the book “Biometric Recognition” that was published by the National Academic Press. Exploring these kinds of biometric data will make it easier to try and reflect upon the future of biometric data later in the entry.

**Current Use and Cases**

After this historical account of biometric data I will focus on current use. I will do this by selecting a few cases where biometric data is being used in different ways and try to analyze what significance it has in these situations. What does it bring to the situation and how does it compromise it. One of these situations will be how biometric data is being used as a way of authentication regarding Syrian refugees. This case is very interesting because it both involves iris scans and fingerprints. In Jordan refugees can register for aid by scanning their iris. Upwards of 1.6 million refugees have been registered this way in the area.[[1]](#footnote-1) Another case of biometrics in use regarding refugees is how they use their fingerprints when they register in Europe. This case is especially interesting because in some cases the refugees choose to mutilate their fingerprints so they cannot be registered.[[2]](#footnote-2) This case is interesting because it shows how in some cases biometric data can be undesirable for some users. It also shows how going against biometric data can have dire consequences. These refugees use methods such as burning or battery acid to remove their fingerprints but how would someone who wants to avoid having their iris’s scanned protest? Resisting this kind of biometric data would seem to have more dire consequences. I hope choosing a controversial case like this will expose some of the more critical aspects of the use of biometric data. In these cases I will try to analyze whether it is possible to look at biometric data as only utilitarian or it has some inherent political or societal values in it. One example of this could to explore if it is possible for biometric data to register the sex of the user and explore the complications that this would cause. Aside from this case I will try to find some other less obviously controversial cases and explore if these cases share some of the same elements.

**Questions for Reflection on Biometric Data**

An obvious question regarding biometric data is whether it is innate in the biological body or it is created in its interaction with technology. The text “Algorithm” by Andrew Goffey has an interesting perspective on algorithms which could perhaps be relevant in the case of biometric data. It describes algorithms as independent of the machines that employ them, in that they exist in and by themselves. Could the same be said of biometric data like a fingerprint? The structure of the fingerprint is embedded in the DNA of the human, so it seems obvious that this exists in itself, but what about facial or iris scans? Do they also exist as data without the technology?

Another question regarding biometric data could be how it changes interaction between technology and humans. In David Berry’s text “Real-Time Streams” he describes the internet as ecology of data streams and that term “ecology” is something that most associate with biology. It is interesting to think of how the addition of biometric data changes this thought. It might make this ecology even more biological in that we are adding something biological to this digital ecology. It is also interesting that in using biometric data we are adding something biological to something digital, while in contrast we for the last decade have been adding more digital elements into our biological everyday lives. Regarding the interaction between humans and technology biometric data is often added with the intention of making it safer and sometimes also easier to use. I want to explore why biometric is seen as a marker of safety and whether experts think it is one.

Another question regarding biometric data is that of authorship. If someone scans my face and constructs a model of the scan are they the author and do they own it? Or are they the author but I have the ownership? This question seems especially relevant when it comes to apps like Snapchat and Instagram where the user can scan their face and apply effects to it. It seems very likely that these apps have a saved version of their users faces. Do these companies own these scans or do the users? When trying to explore this question it would be obvious to use the text “The Author as Producer” by Walter Benjamin

**Purpose of the Entry**

The purpose of my entry is simply to give a brief but precise description of biometric data. In 12-15 pages it is obvious that I cannot cover every simple aspect in detail, but I believe I can cover the most important aspects. In short these are the history of biometric data, the use of biometric data and reflections on the future use of biometric data. Hopefully this means, that someone who does not have knowledge on the subject but interest can either find what knowledge they are seeking on the subject or knowledge on where they can find it. Another it will also explore whether or not users should be concerned when using biometric data, since this discussion is seemingly absent in common media. When the iPhone X’s impressive ability to differentiate between different users just by their face is published, there is a lot of focus on the convenience of it but not a lot on the possible down-sides. This entry will therefore also try to explore these down-sides.

1. http://www.computerweekly.com/feature/How-technology-is-helping-deliver-aid-to-Syrian-refugees-in-the-Middle-East [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/900339/ive-burned-off-tips-of-my-fingers-to-get-to-uk/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)