

Simon Denny

Security Through Obscurity:

Margaret Thatcher, Salesforce, Software Personas and Hyper-Individualized Insulation Objects

In the last year, Simon Denny has acquired a collection of scarves from an auction of the estate of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. A towering figure in the former British colony of New Zealand during Denny's formative years growing up there, Thatcher is synonymous with the neoliberal agenda advocating free markets, deregulation and privatization that is under increasing scrutiny as signs of rampant economic inequality become ever more visible and entrenched. The brand of neoliberal imagining epitomised by her iconic phrases "There's no such thing as society" and "There is no alternative" [to market-based economy] has set the stage for a hyper-individualism that has underscored the conditions that are accelerating further as digital surveillance capitalism endlessly expands.

In a new sculpture, Denny has repurposed one of Thatcher's scarves as a sculptural material to create a knock-off, bespoke Patagonia, Inc. Nano Puff "power" vest. This socio-politically loaded form, designed for individual insulation, has become the de facto uniform of tech and finance culture. This association has caused Patagonia, Inc (with its investment in narratives around sustainable production and a version of ethically-focused capitalism) to pull away from endorsing the "power vest" by recently refusing direct collaboration with finance and venture capital firms. Company-logo edition versions of their nano-puff, once common and popular, are now no longer possible for firms that Patagonia deems as contrasting in public image to their core messaging. Denny's sculpture of the Patagonia Nano-Puff is constructed from secondhand down filling, extracted and upcycled from used sleeping bags and garments sourced around San Francisco – a city where the quilted jacket's symbolism contrasts with the spread of other types of insulated personal items such as sleeping bags, now associated with those who cannot find more permanent forms of shelter.

Salesforce – one of the most prominent software giants in Silicon Valley and the largest employer in San Francisco – once partnered with Patagonia, offering company-logo versions of the Nano Puff to their employees. Denny has acquired one of these now rare hybrid objects – taking the zips, collar and "Salesforce" embroiled logo for the Thatcher Power Vest sculpture.

Alongside this form, Salesforce.com Inc. patents describing software that targets individual users and configures network community protocols are repurposed into hybrid document and sculptural collage reliefs. The patents are printed and layered in stacks of glued paper, assembled and then sculpted using an out-of-date 3D printer tool. The paper Document Reliefs bring the legal language and diagrammatic conventions of patenting – a form of idea enclosure – into poetic layered forms as cloud-like shapes related to network diagrams and resembling the Salesforce logo emerge from the sculpted paper. Technical descriptions of individual personas and community within the found language of the patent are collaged using intricate outmoded machinery into an interpretation of the aesthetics of bureaucracy that encode power and property in an increasingly automated economy.

Salesforce, the largest employer in San Francisco and an active voice in civic conversations about space, has also been recently highlighted by Wired magazine as utilizing patents as part of a common tax avoidance procedure used by many companies to avoid paying any taxes, at the same time that their CEO, Mark Benioff, has been a vocal advocate for increased corporate and private philanthropy.

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The specifically loaded materials and forms of the sculptural objects throughout *Security Through Obscurity* and the ways in which they are gathered together elicit discourse about community, individualism and visibility as it has spread through global capitalism, framed by Thatcher's brand of Neoliberalism and accelerated by digital surveillance capitalism and the kinds of targeted software captured in the Salesforce patents which make up the document reliefs.

Simon Denny is an internationally recognized artist with previous solo exhibitions at MoMA PS1, New York; Serpentine Galleries, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; OCAT, Shenzhen; MONA, Tasmania among many others. He represented New Zealand with their National Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. Denny's work is concurrently on view in *Mine* at K21, Düsseldorf and *Uncanny Valley: Being Human in the Age of AI* at the de Young Museum, San Francisco.

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