

# Snapchat Research Stories

JILL WALKER RETTBERG  
UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

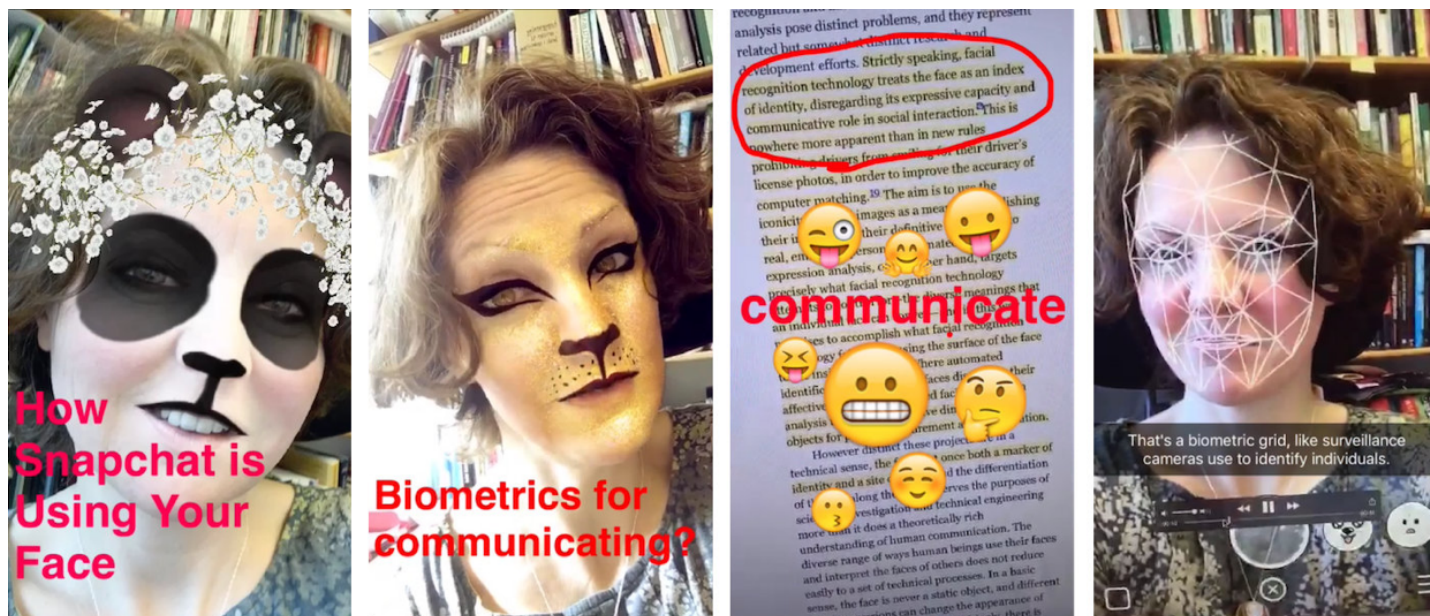
**Citation:** Rettberg, Jill Walker. "Snapchat Research Stories." *Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures*, no. 21, 2019. doi:10.20415/hyp/021.m01

**Abstract:** In this wry commentary, Jill Walker Rettberg uses Snapchat, and its various facial filters to create a video essay that problematizes the use of facial recognition software even as it explores its potential for increasing facial expressivity.

**Keywords:** facial recognition, Snapchat, social media, selfie, selfie lens, self representation, filters, machine vision.

## INTRODUCTION

In April 2016 I launched a series of Snapchat Research Stories: short videos created and shared on Snapchat, that addressed topics within digital culture, and often about Snapchat itself. This is the first video I made for the series. I designed it to both use selfie filters and to be about selfie filters. Until Snapchat's selfie filters made biometrics fun, facial recognition technology was largely used for surveillance and identification. Snapchat's live video filters are completely different – they are playful, letting people see videos of their face with dog ears or a flower crown or with an eye where the mouth was supposed to be. Does this shift to playful uses of surveillance technology mean that we're becoming used to it, that we'll be more acquiescent when faced with less frivolous and perhaps more sinister uses of biometrics?



In 2016, Snapchat Stories was an interesting platform for sharing research on. Snapchat was rapidly growing in popularity, with a younger demographic than other established social media platforms. The ephemerality was enticing; private messages disappeared immediately after being viewed, while Stories were posted to friends or to the general public, and remained visible for 24 hours. I made my Research Stories public and tweeted when I had made a story, and quite quickly worked up to a regular audience of a few hundred Snapchatters who would watch the stories. Making stories about Snapchat in Snapchat was a very productive way of learning how the platform worked, and recording ten second bursts of video again and again until I was happy with what I said really helped me practice expressing myself clearly. Often, I found the format itself helped me to think about the phenomena I wanted to explore. Making the Snapchat Research Stories was an explorative process more than simply a way of sharing a message that I already had decided upon before beginning to make the story. In the time since I began making the stories, Snapchat has become a more visibly commercialised platform. It would still be possible to make this kind of research stories, but the feed has been through several rounds of rearrangement since 2016, now hiding stories like mine behind the stories of celebrities and advertisers, making the platform feel less amenable to research.

## VIDEO ESSAY: HOW SNAPCHAT IS USING YOUR FACE



A selection of video recordings of the stories can be viewed on YouTube in my Snapchat Research Stories Playlist.

---

## ABOUT

### JILL WALKER RETTBERG

Jill Walker Rettberg is Professor of Digital Culture at the University of Bergen, and Principal Investigator of the ERC-funded project *Machine Vision in Everyday Life: Playful Interactions with Visual Technologies in Digital Art, Games, Narratives and Social Media* (2018-2023). Rettberg co-authored the first scholarly paper on blogging in 2002, having been a research blogger herself since 2000, and her book *Blogging* was

published in its second edition by Polity Press in 2014. Her book *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves* was published by Palgrave in 2014, and is available as an open access download as well as a print monograph. Jill is active on many social media platforms as jilltxt, and still blogs at jilltxt.net.

ORCID iD

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2472-3812>