

Not too long ago, I was on the telephone calling the State of Pennsylvania's Department of Commissions, Elections and Legislation trying to buy some voter registration data for a project. Surprised that a human voice responded after the second ring, I made my request. She answered "It is available, Honey. You can have it all: name, address, gender, date of birth, ethnicity, the party affiliation, affiliation for last ten years...". The only item that was off limits was a person's telephone number. Data came at a cost of \$20 per thousand records. I balked (I felt required to

balk at something) and asked if, in the name of research, I could get a discount. I was transferred from person to person, until I ended up speaking with the man directly below the Director. When I asked for a discount, he declared, "I am the Data Caretaker. You'll have to speak with the Director. He is the Data Owner."

This is where my search ended. Today, data is something we take seriously: we collect it, we organize it and we take good care of it. Many people want it and others own it-- and it is almost always for sale. And it is this data--of different origins, types and qualities--that has become the perfect material for painting contemporary portraits.

What is a portrait after all but a representation of the individual for public consumption? Everyday worldwide databases recreate my image with increased resolution documenting my every move and working to define future ones.

# data body

Portrait of BROOKE SINGER  
by the Compass database  
maintained by National Decision Systems

Companies nationwide pay to use this database to help with marketing, sales, and retail site selections. This database is an amalgamation of Census and consumer data. The above profile consists of probable facts about my consumer habits and lifestyle choices. Data was gathered on 06/13/01. To see what you look like in a similar system, visit YOU ARE WHERE YOU LIVE at <http://www.fallschurch.claritas.com/YAWYL/Default.wjsp?System=WL>. And while online, go to [www.bsing.net](http://www.bsing.net) for related projects by Brooke Singer and the technology and art collective, TnA. Text written *Summer 2001* by Brooke Singer.