

The Aesthetics of Information Ethics

discusses methodologies, strategies, and practices of art addressing the personal and societal spheres affected by information systems.

Aesthetics of Ethics - Ethics of Aesthetics

Ethics of Representation

**Articulation - Discourse - Context
Law, Freedom of Speech, Empathy
- Internet -**

**Fatalism, Polarities, Hypes, Fear,
Oversimplifications.**

- VS -

**Policies, Informing, Complexity,
Harm, Accountability.**

**Problematizing, Negotiation, Awareness,
Proactive, Efficacy, Strategies.**

Misleading Polarities in Information Ethics

Participation -VS- Coercion

Obscurity -VS- Exposure

Emancipation -VS- Exploitation

Empathy -VS- Humiliation

Freedom -VS- Control

Anonymity -VS- Accountability

Inclusion -VS- Exclusion

Responsibility -VS- Impunity

Access -VS- Withholding

Reputation -VS- Scoring

Commons -VS- Property

Autonomy -VS- Manipulation

Private -VS- Public

Educating -VS- Misinforming

Opacity -VS- Transparency

Quantifiable -VS- Undetectable

Privacy -VS- Surveillance

Simplicity -VS- Complexity

Paolo Cirio on the *Aesthetics of Information Ethics*.

The *Aesthetics of Information Ethics* discusses methodologies, strategies, and practices of art addressing the personal and societal spheres affected by information systems.

Information Ethics is broadly defined as "the branch of ethics that focuses on the relationship between the creation, organization, dissemination, and use of information." [1] The so-called information revolution brings us an increasing number of pressing ethical issues. Artists can be particularly sensitive to these issues and they are able to question ethics by proposing and challenging perceptions and scenarios beyond common understanding.

Artworks can creatively discuss and play with distribution systems of sensitive information, ethereal economies, flexible labor and property, circulating bodies and goods, manipulated and monitored relationships, expanded public spaces, exploited opinion formation, and, generally, technological apparatuses affecting social systems. Nowadays, social contracts are fluid; they constantly reorganize society and produce new social conditions. These active spaces are where information ethics emerge and where artists intervene in questioning, revealing, and reassembling the agents and environments of their artworks.

Ethics of Aesthetics concerns the ethical frameworks in arranging the sensibility of the audience and the subjects of the artworks. The aesthetic methodologies of intervention, discourse, and representation of information systems can include the production of critique, distress, fear, empathy, alienation, complicity, spectacle, confusion, awareness, and other artistic devices. The aesthetic qualities of the artworks can be called into question through the articulation of the ethical conditions of the works and their subjects. The responsibility and conscience of the artists - as well as of the art critics and curators - are integrated in the analysis and validation of the social and artistic efficacy of the artworks. Concurrently, the ethical and social relations created by these artworks produce aesthetic forms, which concerns the field of the Aesthetics of Ethics.

Social fields and norms are increasingly interdependent with technological advancements of information computation, sharing, and control. Information technology has become the heart of the social order. However, it can be understood not from a technological point of view, but rather through a constant reflexive examination of what it produces in the social sphere. The ethical discussion can't be limited to technocrats, legislators, coders, and the opaque internal policies of private entities. Art can play a role in this process of creating awareness and reflection on difficult ethical questions by making them relevant and engaging.

The material of these aesthetic examinations is not limited to the Internet, algorithms, big data, and other technologies. These technical elements are mutually influenced by the political, cultural, legal, and economic systems, as well as several other social fields and infrastructures. Information systems should be understood as interconnected networks of social systems in which reflection and intervention have the potential to reverberate throughout the whole web of networks, consequently impacting a variety of conventions, entities, and individuals which are inevitably connected.

The ethics of the power of these information systems are directly embodied in artworks that use and address such power. The ethical inquiries and relations activated by art with information systems create aesthetic forms. This aesthetics is discussed by measuring, comparing, and evaluating the strategies, consequences, conditions, and circumstances of the works of art. Such analysis needs to take into account a broad social context, therefore integrating the distribution of the work, the mode of presentation within the site of execution, and ultimately the intended and unintended recipients, critiques, and results that the work generates.

Ethics are negotiated, developed, and balanced through reflections on the consequences and intentions of human activity. Differentiating themselves from morals - which are often static and ideological - ethics are dynamic, reflexive, and evolving principles that must be constantly discussed and confronted. Art plays a central role in this process. Evolving cultural forms and critical art are essential instruments for sensing and signaling the forming of ethics.

The Ethics of Representation and information systems

Social transactions and contracts are discussed, created, rearranged, or accentuated by artists for making visible the complexity, contradictions, and complicity within such social relations activated by information systems. However, only an attentive examination of the effects, causes, and nature of such systems can fully address them. Thus, representations of social and technological systems should engage with the dialectics of the construction of ethical values. The integrity of the agenda pursued is a responsibility of the artist in relation to the system addressed, while the critical reception should assess the means and ends of the artworks within the whole spectrum of forms and contexts of presentation.

As such, techniques like the exposure and appropriation of sensitive information as well as the manipulation and disruption of social relations should be balanced with the parameters of intentions, receptions, and outcomes of the artwork. In the *Aesthetics of Information Ethics*, context is main the principle from which we can assess the ethics of artworks. Meaning and impact vary based on the context of presentation, execution, and results. The context needs to account for all the properties of the information systems involved. These methodologies, techniques, and practices of art production and critique are ultimately oriented to maximize and develop the common good within the notion of ethics as the making and understanding of a dignified existence for humans and the environment surrounding them.

Polarities in Ethics of Representation

In the *Aesthetics of Information Ethics*, the appearances, perceptions, and sensations of reality created by artists should take into account the formation of polarities. Mystifications and oversimplifications about the social impacts of information systems are instances of the Ethics of Representation. As such, the creation of falsehoods, hype, confusion, anxiety, or fatalism sustained by the producers and reporters of information systems create polarities in understanding ever-changing technological apparatuses and their social impacts. The *Aesthetics of Information Ethics* is about breaking down polarities to offer a broader understanding of the conditions within these systems.

Examples of problematic issues in Information Ethics

The *Aesthetics of Information Ethics* can be applied to examining the liability of algorithms, responsibility in anonymous networks, exploitation of shared content and labor, censorship on social media, freedom of speech used to harass, public shaming to condemn, hacking to protest or leak, and micro-targeting for political campaigning. In order to inspire inquiry, the artist questions how to balance freedom, empathy, justice, and accountability.

Misleading Polarities in Information Ethics:

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Emancipation -VS- Exploitation
Freedom -VS- Control
Inclusion -VS- Exclusion
Access -VS- Withholding
Commons -VS- Property
Private -VS- Public
Opacity -VS- Transparency
Privacy -VS- Surveillance

Obscurity -VS- Exposure
Empathy -VS- Humiliation
Anonymity -VS- Accountability
Responsibility -VS- Impunity
Reputation -VS- Scoring
Autonomy -VS- Manipulation
Educating -VS- Misinforming
Quantifiable -VS- Undetectable
Simplicity -VS- Complexity

Some problematic issues concerning information ethics:

Search engines & social media:

Hate Speech
Harassment
Trolling
Bullying
Blackmail
Stigmas

Social Profiling:

Social score & bias
Consumer profiling
Racial profiling
Sex offenders
Criminal records
Predictive Policing

Media and politics:

Targeting Voters
Fake News

Algorithms:

Accountability of coders
Artificial Intelligence control

Blockchain, deepweb, and darknet:

Anonymity
Trust
Privacy
Fraud
Hate speech
Cruelty

Privacy and surveillance:

State and corporate surveillance
Cryptography for power structures
Cryptography for individuals
Public shaming

Security:

Hacking
Leaks
Theft

Piracy:

Copyright
Trademark
Royalties
Fair use
Education

Sharing Economy:

Labor rights
Private property

Digital Currencies:

Transparency
Access to means
Volatility

Robotics:

Automated weapons
Automated labor

Infrastructures:

Internet of things policy
Cloud servers
Decentralization
Ecological impact

Ethics of Representation

Do these images harm their subjects?

Is it an ethical violation to make a photograph of suffering beautiful?

Do I have a right to look at other people's pain?

Ariella Azoulay.
The Civil Contract of Photography

Susan Sontag.
Regarding the Pain of Others.

Claire Bishop.
Artificial Hell.

Alain Badiou.
Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil.

Geneva Convention

Article 13 states “prisoners of war must be protected, against insults and public curiosity”. This is the Article that prohibits States from trafficking in images of prisoners that can be used for propagandistic purposes or could exploit misery for salacious reasons such as selling newspapers.

Society of Professional Journalists

- Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.
- Balance a suspect’s right to a fair trial with the public’s right to know. Consider the implications of identifying suspects before legal charges.
- Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.

American Advertising Federation

ETHICS
VS
MORALS

ETHICS

**ANONYMITY
VS
ACCOUNTABILITY**

**ACCESS
VS
PROPERTY**

**EXPRESSION
VS
RESPECT**

**NOT
OVERSIMPLIFYING
POLARIZING
SOCIAL COMPLEXITY**

UNDERSTANDING

CONTEXT

where

INFORMATION

is

LOCATED

DISTRIBUTED

ACCESSED

RATED

USED

by
QUESTIONING
MEASURING
DISCUSSING
INFORMATION ETHICS
they
EVOLVE and DEVELOP
as Human Rights

**Should fake news on
social media be
removed by Internet
companies
themselves?**

**Should we remunerate
the open source code
utilized by big
corporations such as
Google?**

**Should the coders of
algorithms with racial
biases be legally
accountable?**

**Can the hacking of
political parties during
election be justified?**

**Should we be able to
trace individuals who
use digital currency,
such as Bitcoin?**

**Should Facebook
delete posts
concerning hate
speech toward
refugees?**

**Should the documents
leaked by Snowden be
made available to
everyone – not only
journalists?**

**Should public figures
on Twitter be given
access to block other
accounts?**

**Should politicians be
able to use fully
cryptographed
communications for
work?**

**Should voter profiling
and databases being
banned?**

**Should vulnerable
individuals be
protected online even
if they are key to
public debate?**

**Should political
spending for online ads
be regulated like they
are on TV?**

**Should electronic
voting be completely
avoided and analog
systems restored?**

**Should ads managed
by algorithms be
considered
physiologically
manipulative
advertising?**

***Machine Logic: Our Lives are Ruled
by Big Tech's 'Decisions by Data'***

The Guardian

***The EU is Right to Take on Facebook,
but Mere Fines Don't Protect Us from
Tech Giants***

The Guardian

Why Are We Giving Away Our Most Sensitive Health Data to Google?

The Guardian

***Right to be forgotten: Swiss Cheese
Internet, or Database of Ruin?***

The Guardian

***If Fake News Fools You, It Can Fool
Robots, Too***

Bloomberg

***Obfuscation: How Leaving a Trail of
Confusion Can Beat Online
Surveillance***

The Guardian

***How Europe is Fighting to Change
Tech Companies' 'Wrecking Ball'
Ethics***

The Guardian

***In the Wake of Apple v FBI, We Need
to Address Some Uncomfortable
Truths***

The Guardian

Artificial Intelligence is Ripe for Abuse, Tech Researcher Warns: 'A Fascist's Dream'

The Guardian

***The A.C.L.U. Needs to Rethink Free
Speech***

NY Times

***Algorithms: AI's Creepy Control Must
be Open to Inspection***

The Guardian

Forget Far-Right Populism – Crypto-Anarchists are the New Masters

The Guardian

***We Can't Ban Killer Robots – It's
Already Too Late***

The Guardian

Make Algorithms Accountable

NY Times

***Why is Silicon Valley Fighting a Sex
Trafficking Bill?***

The Guardian

***Why Does Facebook Allow Advertisers
to Target 'Jew Haters'?***

The Guardian

***Scholar Says Google Criticism Cost
Him Job: 'People are Waking Up to its
Power'***

The Guardian

***Why is Google Spending Record Sums
on Lobbying Washington?***

The Guardian

***Far-right 'Free Speech Week' at
Berkeley Collapses in Recrimination
and Discord***

The Guardian

***Tech Firms Open to Changing Law to
Combat Sex Trafficking***

Wired

***Forget Wall Street – Silicon Valley is
the New Political Power in
Washington***

The Guardian

'From Heroes to Villains': Tech Industry Faces Bipartisan Backlash in Washington

The Guardian

***'Our Minds Can Be Hijacked': the Tech
Insiders Who Fear a Smartphone
Dystopia***

The Guardian

***As Google Fights Fake News, Voices
on the Margins Raise Alarm***

NY Times

***Data Power Could Make 1984 'Look
Like a Teddy Bear's Picnic'***

Irish Times

Rethinking Ethics Training in Silicon Valley

The Atlantic

***Tories Refuse to Disclose Content of
Facebook Adverts Targeted at
Marginal Seats***

Independent UK

***Facebook and Google: Most Powerful
and Secretive Empires We've Ever
Known***

The Guardian

***How Do You Stop Fake News? In
Germany, with a Law.***

Washington Post

***Data Populists Must Seize Our
Information – for the Benefit of Us All***

The Guardian