The Aesthetics of Information Ethics

“discusses methodologies, techniques, 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 - Empathy
Internet
Fatalism, Polarities, Hypes, Fear, Oversimplifications.
- \text{vs}\ -
Policies, Informing, Complexity, Accountability.

Proactive, Problematizing, Negotiation, Awareness, Efficiencies, Strategies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misleading Polarities in Information Ethics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation -VS- Coercion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipation -VS- Exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom -VS- Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion -VS- Exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access -VS- Withholding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commons -VS- Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private -VS- Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opacity -VS- Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy -VS- Surveillance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscurity -VS- Exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy -VS- Humiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity -VS- Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility -VS- Impunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation -VS- Scoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy -VS- Manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating -VS- Misinforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantifiable -VS- Undetectable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplicity -VS- Complexity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
The ethics of representation is on the cultural understanding of technology

And in particular the creation of polarities

Privacy vs Surveillance

Polarities needs to be broken down with simple and working solutions
NOT OVERSIMPLIFYING
or POLARIZING
but embracing
SOCIAL COMPLEXITY
UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT of INFORMATION with how is LOCATED DISTRIBUTED ACCESSED RATED USED
QUESTIONING
MEASURING
DISCUSSING
INFORMATION ETHICS
to
EVOLVE and DEVELOP
HUMAN RIGHTS
Information Ethics

"the branch of ethics that focuses on the relationship between the creation, organization, dissemination, and use of information"
Paolo Cirio on the
Aesthetics of Information Ethics

The Aesthetics of Information Ethics discusses methodologies and practices of art portraying, affecting, and addressing the technological, personal, and societal spheres influenced 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, 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 components 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 critique and intervention have the potential to reverberate throughout the whole web of networks, consequently affecting 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. Meanings and effects 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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation -VS- Coercion</th>
<th>Obscurity -VS- Exposure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emancipation -VS- Exploitation</td>
<td>Empathy -VS- Humiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom -VS- Control</td>
<td>Anonymity -VS- Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion -VS- Exclusion</td>
<td>Responsibility -VS- Impunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access -VS- Withholding</td>
<td>Reputation -VS- Scoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commons -VS- Property</td>
<td>Autonomy -VS- Manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private -VS- Public</td>
<td>Educating -VS- Misinforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opacity -VS- Transparency</td>
<td>Quantifiable -VS- Undetectable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy -VS- Surveillance</td>
<td>Simplicity -VS- Complexity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some problematic issues concerning information ethics:

Search engines & social media moderation:
- Hate Speech
- Harassment
- Trolling
- Bullying
- Blackmail
- Stigmas

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

Privacy and surveillance:
- State and corporate surveillance
- Cryptography for power structures
- Cryptography for individuals
- Public shaming

Media and politics:
- Targeting Voters
- Fake News

Algorithms:
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Artificial Intelligence

Blockchain, deepweb, and darknet:
- Anonymity
- Trust
- Privacy
- Fraud
- Cruelty

Digital Currencies:
- Transparency
- Access
- Volatility
Security:
Hacking
Leaks
Theft

Piracy:
Copyright
Trademark
Royalties
Fair use

Sharing Economy:
Labor rights
Private property

Robotics:
Automated weapons
Automated labor

Infrastructures:
Decentralization
Cloud servers
Net neutrality
Internet of things
Ecological destruction
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