



UDK 7.038.53:17.023.36:004.8

DOI 10.51937/Amfiteater-2026-1/202-232

Abstract

Environmental ethics is a field that attempts to expand the framework of moral action and ethical principles beyond the limits of the human. Ethical consideration is becoming increasingly inclusive, moving beyond the initial Kantian focus on humans to include sentient beings, living nature and, eventually, inanimate nature. The environment, as a non-human entity, acquires independent ethical value. A special issue arises from human-made artefacts, such as cultural heritage. First, the text describes the structure of enunciation using methods of discourse theory, drawing on the example of Vuk Ćosić's new media art project *Nation – Culture* (2000, reconstructed in 2022). It is an early, convincing example of the machine's autonomous creativity in new media art. The text then reviews fundamental macroethics, in particular, Luciano Floridi's information ethics, which is part of his philosophy of information. Ethical issues are discussed in the infosphere as an all-encompassing environment, conceived to enable reflection on artificial, i.e., engineered, agents and hybrid combinations of artificial, natural and human agents. Multi-agent systems seem to raise important questions about relationships among people and with the communities to which cultural artefacts and practices are connected. The information metaphysics proposed by Floridi is a basis for understanding and constructively addressing the complex phenomena of the digital age. The minimalist conception of the ethics of the information environment enables ethical evaluation and moral decision-making between possible courses of action to enhance the well-being of the entire infosphere, which represents reality most inclusively.

Keywords: new media art, information ethics, environmental ethics, Vuk Ćosić, Luciano Floridi

Aleš Vaupotič is an assistant professor and senior research associate. Between 2021 and 2023, he was the director of the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana. He received his PhD in realism in art and literature from the Faculty of Arts and his MA in video and new media from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, both of the University of Ljubljana. He led the interdisciplinary research project Sustainable Digital Preservation of the Slovenian New Media Art, which took place between 2021 and 2024 at the University of Nova Gorica, the University of Ljubljana, the Intellectual Property Institute in Ljubljana, and Moderna galerija and was funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency. He is the author of the scientific monograph in the field of comparative art history, *Vprašanje realizma (The Question of Realism, 2019)*, as well as numerous scientific articles.

ales.vaupotic@guest.arnes.si

New Media Art and the Ethics of the Infosphere

Aleš Vaupotič

Faculty of Design, Ljubljana

The text reflects a moment when computer-generated simulations of human utterances can no longer be distinguished from actual human utterances. The term “slop” is being introduced to denote the output of deep neural networks that appear to be human statements across different media. Slop reminds us of the earlier phenomenon of “spam”, the unwanted messages, seemingly unarticulated but at the same time very clear and understandable, since they are obviously trying to sell us something. Both slop and spam enter interpersonal communication by overwhelming it with a massive number of messages, thereby disrupting, modifying and weakening the dialogical exchange in our societies. In addition to causing cognitive exhaustion, generative artificial intelligence output – that is, slop – also violates our privacy and often uses our intellectual property without permission.

On the other hand, it is important that the concept of a trusted repository is part of the open science paradigm and aligned with the FAIR principles for data exchange and sharing. The data here is primarily intended for machines; their use in artificial intelligence research and services is a given, alongside the broader goal of adopting common standards and ontologies in research practice. This second perspective reveals the fragility of the technical and informational entities, namely, data, agents and artefacts. Data are sometimes lost. The artificial agents break down, become obsolete, lose support within the operating systems and digital platforms, and vanish. Examples include the augmented reality platform Layar and the Macromedia/Adobe Flash vector animation tool. We can construe these as born-digital cultural heritage; in the case of the Flash platform, it was also an approach to interactive graphic design and animation. However, the current heritage institutions are not devoting sufficient effort to safeguarding and preserving this segment of heritage. Bear in mind that this is the part of the heritage that is a key record of the transition of our societies from the pre-digital into the digital age.

The text consists of two parts. The first part presents a new media art project in two versions realised two decades apart – they reflect the different sociohistorical and

technical contexts and reveal insights into the relationships between people and their utterances within an experimental digital communication platform. The second part is dedicated to Luciano Floridi's information ethics, which is construed as an environmental ethics that focuses on the infosphere, the information environment as the all-encompassing reality.

In conditions where the flow of information is accelerating, a key question regards human agency. Also, an important question is how to gain insight into the multimedia and multi-author messages we face. One approach is to identify the social discourses and their social groups that enter into dialogue within and between composite utterances. This follows a well-established approach in Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, a version of discourse theory. Mikhail Bakhtin studies the dialogue of voices in novels, which is considered a secondary utterance; his main example of dialogic emphasis in novel writing is Dostoevsky. An utterance has a beginning and an end of enunciation; it has an author who is responsible, but it is not exclusively her own product, for example, a personal expression, since human languages exist in the communities of speakers. An utterance consists of foreign words, that is, someone else's words, which are given a new meaning and significance in a given concrete situation. The author is responsible for the addressee's free response and must consider the context of reception while striving to enrich the great dialogue of reality. A monologic discourse, a direct word, carries a negative connotation in this theoretical approach, because it does not reveal the richness of the voices of different social groups. (Foucault's theory of discourse can be used similarly.)

An important dilemma emerges here, as illustrated by ethical issues in the domain of cultural heritage. On the one hand, there is an internationalist and universalist view on the values of cultural heritage. On the other hand, cultural heritage can be construed as tied to national identity. However, while the nations and, in particular, nation-states do have agency to promote cultural heritage as part of identity-building, this is not the case for many intranational cultural groups that are less clearly structured and lack the means to act or even articulate their claims. In this approach, therefore, the ethical questions are posed through careful identification of cultural groups and their agency, as well as their ability to formulate and express those claims. In line with the theory of discourse, a supraindividual and subindividual entity is presupposed – a social group that traverses individuals, and an individual may be part of several social groups. The ethical focus is on preserving voices, as construed by Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. The voices are actions of people in concrete contexts.

The project *Nation – Culture* by Vuk Ćosić (2000, 2022) is a classical work of Slovenian new media art. It represents an early, viable case for machine-based verbal art generation. The analysis focuses on the relationships between voices that take part

in the artistically articulated dialogue, which is the work. (The full Slovenian article includes an appendix summarising the public presentation where Marko Plahuta, the programmer of the project's 2022 reconstruction, explains its technical details.) The first version of the project from 2000 consisted of a projection of sonnets that were a search stream, that is, the real-time queries of users of the then main Slovenian portal for the World Wide Web, *Mat'Kurja*, presented in the shape of a sonnet on a projection in a gallery space. The second embodiment, the 2022 reconstruction, used several solutions, among them most interestingly a custom GPT-2 large language model trained from scratch on Slovenian tweets; subsequently, using Slovenian sonnets, the generative model was fine-tuned to write sonnets.

The project analysis in the paper focuses on how the voices of users are represented or merely used (e.g., as training data) in the sonnets at the exhibition. We see the differences between the early hopeful use of website content via search engines, the disillusionment of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current political atmosphere, articulated through the artistic use of a large language model.

The second part of the article focuses on Luciano Floridi's information ethics, aiming to expand the scope of environmental ethics to include new media art and artificial agents, primarily drawing on his monograph *The Ethics of Information* (2013). Environmental ethics is a field where attempts are being made to expand the framework of moral action and ethical principles beyond the limits of the human. Ethical consideration expands from the Kantian focus on humans to include sentient beings, living nature and, eventually, inanimate nature. The environment, as a non-human entity, gains independent ethical value. A special issue arises from artificial artefacts, such as cultural heritage. The distinction between an intrinsic and an extrinsic – that is, instrumental – value is of key importance. Luciano Floridi develops his macroethics as part of his system of the philosophy of information. Information ethics is, for him, an environmental ethics that replaces the life, ecosystem, pain triad with the triad information, infosphere, entropy (which as a metaphysical term, as he notes, represents an impoverishment of the information environment, which encompasses everything starting with anything distinct in some way from something else; it does not have the same meaning as the term in physics and information theory).

Information ethics is a non-standard ethics, meaning it is not centred on the agent but on the patient. It differs from deontologism, consequentialism and contemporary virtue-ethical approaches. If the ethical act is considered a message from the agent to the patient, then the passive entity is the patient. It is (for this perspective) the source of value and therefore demands respect from the agent. In contrast to the Kantian maximalist approach, which considers people to be the only ethically relevant entities, information ethics advocates a minimalist approach. The patient has a certain moral

standing, consisting of essential properties and moral interests. This standing deserves to be respected – through rights to exist and develop – and demands respect – through guidance and constraints on the agent – at least minimally: initially, in principle, *prima facie*, relatively, where possible, at least also, overridably and when contrasted with other interests. Any form of Being is a coherent body of information – the information state is the minimal common factor shared by any entity. Information ethics removes biases even further, against “inanimate, lifeless, intangible, abstract, engineered, artificial, synthetic, hybrid, or merely possible,” as well as ideal and intellectual (64, 111). “IE takes Being/infosphere as intrinsically good [...] moral prescriptivity becomes, at least also, an intrinsic property of information [...] together with other] first principles, such as εὐδαιμονία, happiness, duty, or life [...] what is morally good in itself” (75). Information ethics is not pure conservative green ethics, but a blue ethics (from blueprint) that foregrounds the increase of complexity and flourishing of the infosphere. The agents actively contribute to enriching their environments, which in part aligns information ethics with virtue ethics.

In its conclusion, the paper reflects on the two approaches: one that starts from discourse theory and focuses on the different voices linked to social groups and then the intrinsic-value approach of environmental ethics, which allows us to think about distributed systems of agents and morality without consciousness. It emphasises the dilemma of choosing the human focus of ethics, the responsibility of entities with consciousness, and the different ethical issues within the agency of machines that are merely accountable, but cannot be held responsible for their actions. Should we, as people, feel bad for a robot being harmed or abused? How should such a dilemma be approached? Information ethics, with its minimalist approach, is the first step in articulating the new ethical problems linked to digital technologies. These questions, however, are increasingly misaligned with our moral intuitions and emotional responses to situations in which human utterances are seamlessly integrated with simulated utterances generated by large language models. The study of new media art, as in-depth experimentation with new communication technologies, can provide a rich source for understanding changes in human communication amid the increasingly ubiquitous simulation of human expression.