

Curated Panel Discussion: The State of Aesthetic Computing or Info-Aesthetics

Monday, August 3, 3:45-5:30pm

PANEL

Michael Kelly

University of North Carolina
at Charlotte
mjkelly1@uncc.edu

Victoria Vesna

University of California,
Los Angeles

Paul Fishwick

University of Florida

Andrew Vande Moere

University of Sydney

Kenneth Huff

Savannah College
of Art and Design



Aesthetic computing is one of several related new fields: info-aesthetics, database aesthetics, network aesthetics, and software aesthetics. What are their similarities and differences? What are the aesthetic issues driving them, and how are they linked to technological developments? And what exactly is the role of aesthetics in this context?

In Paul Fishwick's anthology, *Aesthetic Computing*, Roger Malina outlines two claims about aesthetic computing (art and aesthetics applied to computing, not the other direction): "The weak claim is that by stimulating the flow of ideas and methods from the arts to computing, computer scientists and engineers will achieve their objectives more easily, quickly, or elegantly." The strong claim is "that by introducing ideas and methods from art and design into computing, new practices and approaches will emerge, responding to new objectives that would not naturally have evolved within the computing sciences and engineering."

In defense of the strong claim, we will argue that aesthetic computing is not merely about symmetry, elegance, optimality, and other properties that enhance the usability of computing artifacts. Rather, aesthetic computing is critical thinking about the cognitive and

affective interactions between humans and computers where these interactions are not only between humans and computers but among humans and are occasioned by some form of visualization (scientific, data, or knowledge visualization, game theory, or the like).

How are we to identify and understand the aesthetic dimensions of these interactions, especially in relation to the technical, ethical, and political values embedded in them? Who gets to make decisions about, and is thus responsible for, these interactions? The answers involve good design, but lead back to earlier computational decisions constraining and enabling design, and forward to issues of the social-political impact of these decisions. In addressing these questions, we also want to clarify how aesthetic computing relates to info-aesthetics (the symbiotic relationship between creative design and information visualization - Lev Manovich), database aesthetics (the backbone of databases driving the aesthetic of projects - Victoria Vesna), and network aesthetics (the production of connections between people and data - Warren Sack).

This Panel is supported by a kiosk in the Information Aesthetics Gallery, which includes *The Sky Oracle* and *The Katrina Project: NO-LA*.