

# ICT & Art Connect: Findings from the Data & Ethics Working Group

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**Abstract.** This paper consists of an extended abstract, concerning the presentation *Findings from the Data & Ethics Working Group* for AISB50.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Data and Ethics Working Group (DEWG) [1] was formed during the ICT & Art Connect [2] event in Brussels in November 2013. It is a collaborative body using art to explore public interaction with data access, exchange and retrieval systems and the ethical implications of data ownership and open or closed networks.

DEWG addresses Data and Ethics as an experimental space or device to test public perception and reactions to existing protocols. It does so by colliding Data and Ethics, through performative acts that result from the exploration of Art / Science hybridisation. This presentation will explore such forms of Art / Science interaction in the context of data collection, that allow for the creation of meaning, not truth. It will do so by presenting two of DEWG's most recent experiments where Data and Ethics is addressed as a critical space for artistic and scientific exploration.

## 2 EXPERIMENT # 1

During the ICT Art & Connect event in Brussels in November 2013 The Data and Ethics Working Group conducted Experiment #1: *Terms & Conditions*, a manifesto, performative act and demonstration, presented at the European Parliament on Monday 11th November. Experiment #1, comprised of audience participation in the action of data entry and consent, juxtaposing visual, textual, and performative elements of reality and the absurd to highlight their ambivalence to data consent.

Below is an extract of the foreword contained within the *Terms & Conditions* booklet:

*Terms and Conditions is collective experiment number one. A prototype and tentative reflection on the ontology and current context of data collection and application. It is research made*

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*public, following reflection on collecting data as art and applying data within arts practice. It is an exploration on how data is compiled, has been acquired, and mostly what it means to volunteer personal data. A legal framework exists, but are we really aware of the terms and conditions?*

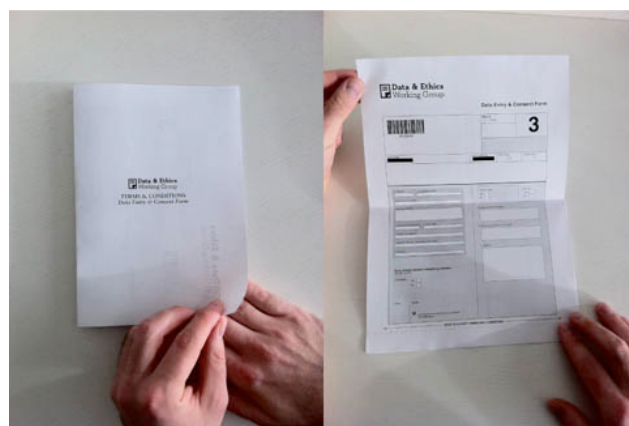


Figure 1. The Data Entry Consent Form

*Human activity results in outputs and consequences. When witnessed, knowledge of actions, habits, time and place inform our thoughts and decisions. As perpetual observers of information we require these insights in order to improve the current situation.*



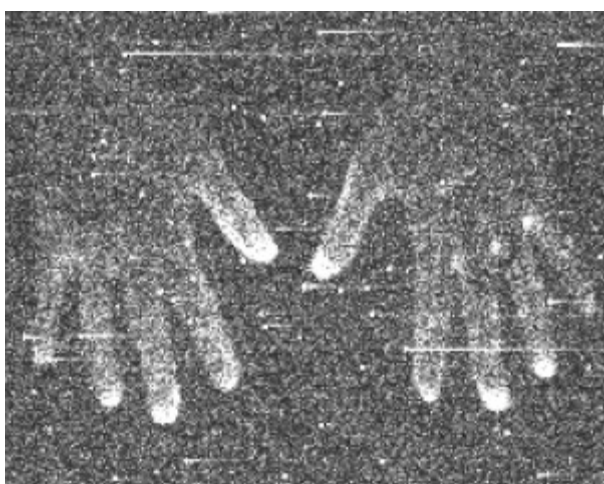
**Figure 2.** Performance at the European Parliament

*However, at the point that information is turned into data and stored as archive a new form of potential energy is created. An energy containing power and risk. As collection, storage and application of data have become increasingly sophisticated and part of a professionalised industry, this potential energy becomes more significant and less understood.*

Anxieties surrounding the use of personal data are valid and pertinent to the current cultural and political landscape. But to claim ownership of all information regarding personal actions is naïve and contrary to the nature of human interaction. The Data and Ethics Working Group, does not advocate for privacy or any agenda associated with the application or exploitation of data. Our explicit intention is to create a discourse that links personal experience with a wider cultural shift driven by the exchange of data.

### 3 EXPERIMENT # 2

*Consent* is collective Experiment #2. It is a proposal for an intended installation set within Museum Boijmans van Beuningen and accompanies *The Rhythm of Life* project [3] which translates biophoton emission from the skin into sound. *Consent* features explanation of procedures, documented consent and a successive series of opportunities to opt into or out of participation in scientific research conducted by The Netherlands Metabolomics Centre.



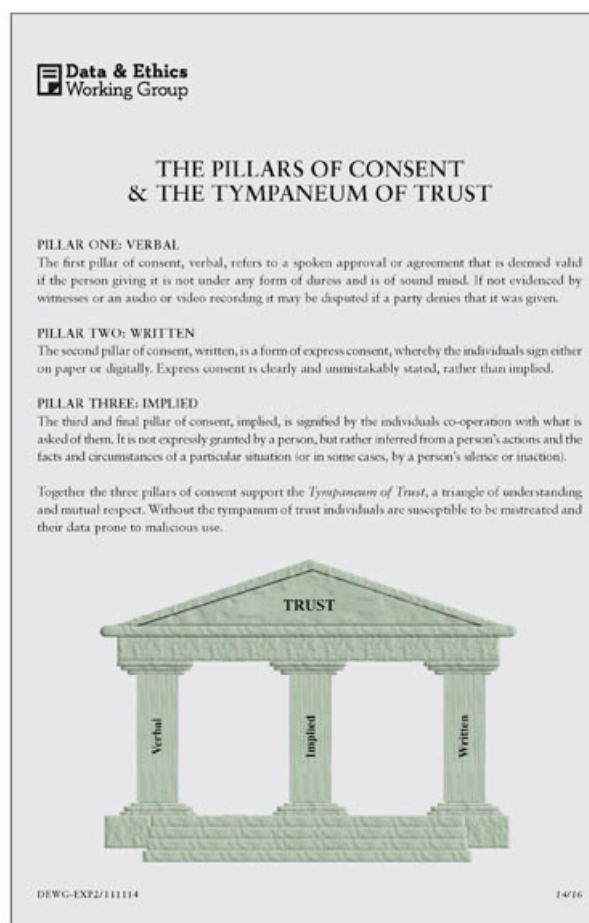
**Figure 3.** Light emission from subject's hands (intermediate intensity) recorded at Leiden University<sup>3</sup>.

The Data and Ethics Working Group (DEWG), as research artists, present through Experiment #2 their examination of the processes and authoritative gestures that legitimise the collection of personal information and how informed consent is attained and defined. The genuine requirement to attain consent for The

<sup>3</sup> Image provided by Van Wijk, et al. (2013). Imaging human spontaneous photon emission. *Trends in Photochemistry & Photobiology*. 15, p36.

*Rhythm of Life* and the position of DEWG in facilitating the research process is used to critically define and draw attention to the gestures that create expressed, implied and informed consent.

DEWG approaches the research process as an art form to create a discourse around the use and submission of personal data and the conventions of written, verbal and implied consent. The presentation of *Consent* places art as part of a process rather than as an outcome: a stage ahead of a procedure that requires a documented understanding for the legal system. However, when the future use of gathered information is unknown and information is acquired speculatively, it is uncertain what may become relevant in the future. The consequences for both researcher and participants are unknown.



**Figure 4.** The Three Pillars of (informed) Consent

Within this game of ambiguity, the questionnaire plays an important role where the artists confront questions such as: what is legitimate to ask? What is actually required from the questionnaire? What questions are redundant to the scientific purpose and which aren't? The questionnaire raises concerns about 'data sharing' and proclaims the whole process of data sharing and the acknowledgement of the action as a performative event. The conflict between art and science is perhaps resolved

or reconciled in this ambiguity of process, where questions reveal both the artistic and scientific agendas of the project. This ambiguity may also represent a response to the actual ambiguity of the data, which at the moment provides readings with unclear scientific significance.

Along with the specified participation, awareness of the occurring transaction and visual elements, it is no coincidence that these measurements, and consequently, all the data collected during the process, embodies real research data for scientifically purposed experiments and future conclusions.

#### **4 DISCUSSION & FUTURE WORK**

Exploring the cross-overs between performance art, designed interactions and (bio) data collection for scientific experimentation, we will share insights from DEWG's attempts to explore Data and Ethics as a critical space for reflection on the collection of data. These observations will hopefully aid in further understanding the derived meanings and knowledge generated from the context of data collection and application within arts practice, parallel to scientific research and knowledge.

#### **REFERENCES**

- [1] <http://www.dataethics.org>
- [2] <http://www.ict-art-connect.eu/>
- [3] <http://www.therhythmoflife.nl>