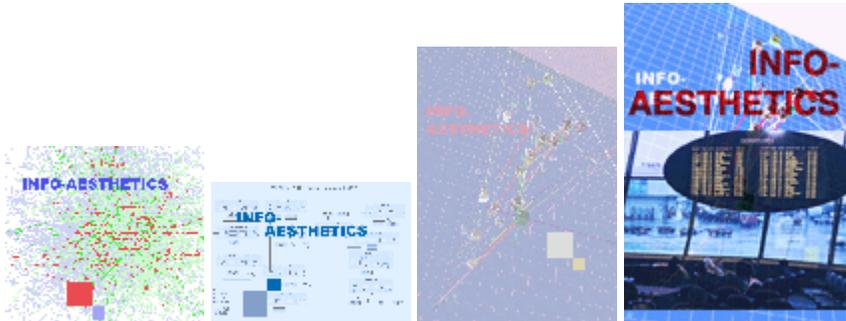


INFO-AESTHETICS is a <semi-open source> book/Web site in progress  
Project started 8/00  
Last update: 10/27/01

# INFO-AESTHETICS: INFORMATION AND FORM

[manifesto](#) [summary](#) [content](#) [projects](#) [images](#) [student projects](#) [links](#)



## INFO-AESTHETICS MANIFESTO [ updated 3/3/01]

Twenty first century has arrived. What comes after modernism, postmodernism, and new media? Welcome to **INFO-AESTHETICS**.

INFO-AESTHETICS is not only the aesthetics of data.  
INFO-AESTHETICS is the new culture of INFORMATION society.

**INFO-AESTHETICS** is already here. Do you see it?

A computer: Never before a single machine was an engine of economy --  
AND the main tool for representation. **INFO-AESTHETICS** needs to reflect this duality.

How can we use new media to represent human experience  
in INFORMATION society in new ways? Discover **INFO-AESTHETICS**.

In the beginning of the 20th century modernist artists created new forms, new aesthetics, new representational techniques, and new symbols of industrial society. We need to do the same for INFORMATION society.  
Join **INFO-AESTHETICS**.

## **INFO-AESTHETICS SUMMARY** [updated 10/28/01]

**INFO-AESTHETICS** scans contemporary culture to detect emerging aesthetics and computer-based cultural forms specific to information society. Its method is a systematic comparison of our own period with the beginning of the 20th century when modernist artists created new aesthetics, new forms, new representational techniques, and new symbols of industrial society. How can we go about searching for their equivalents in information society – and does this very question make sense? Can there be forms specific to information society, given that software and computer networks redefine the very concept of form as something solid, stable and limited in space and time? There are radically new representational techniques unique to our time, given that new media has largely been used in the service of older visual languages and media practices: Web TV, electronic book, interactive cinema? Can information society be represented iconically, if all its most characteristic activities – information processing, interaction between a human and a computer, telecommunication, networking – are dynamic processes? How does the super-human scale of our information structures – from 16 million lines of computer codes making Windows OS, to forty years which would take one viewer to watch all video interviews stored on digital servers of the Shoah Foundation, to the Web itself which cannot be even mapped as a whole – be translated to the scale of human perception and cognition? In short, if the shift from modernism to informationalism (the term of Manuel Castells) has been accompanied by a shift from form to information, can we reduce information to forms, meaningful to a human?

Arguing against post-modernist analysis of the 1980s according to which the modernist logic of the new has become exhausted, **INFO-AESTHETICS** suggests that new media culture picks up the constructive energies of the modernist project (while discarding its demand to forget the past) – but these energies now work in a different way. This difference is mapped out in the first part of the book, “Avant-garde as Software.” I first show that the 1920s avant-garde techniques became transformed into the conventions of modern human-computer interface and software, thus functioning as a foundation of post-industrial labor. I also claim that new media does represent a “new avant-garde” of information society even though it often uses old modernist forms. If the 1920s avant-garde came up with new forms for new media of their time (photography, film, new printing and architectural technologies), the new media avant-garde introduces radically new ways of using already accumulated media. Thus the new avant-garde is the computer-based techniques of media access, manipulation and analysis. In other words, information society may not need new visual languages, new forms and new representational techniques because it can use computers to re-configure the old ounces in radically new ways.

The second part of the book “Info-Aesthetics” analyses new media’s potential to enable fundamentally new types of representations and forms, apart from its ability to reconfigure what already exists. I again use the comparison with the 1920s to help us see where the logic of computer culture maybe already at work. Early twentieth century modernists believed that that the new aesthetics of industrial society emerged in the industrial realm. They admired the forms of motorcars, bridges, grain elevators, aircraft propellers; and they begun the project to carry over the logic of these forms into the realm of design, architecture and art. “Ornament is Dead,” “The House is a Machine for Living,” “Form Follows Function” is some of the slogans they designed to describe this new industrial aesthetics. Following this strategy, **INFO-AESTHETICS** suggests that the new aesthetics already exists in information interfaces and information tools that we use in everyday life. In other words, new aesthetics of information culture manifests itself most clearly in computer software and it interfaces. Similarly, I argue that computer applications employed in industry and science – simulation, visualization, databases – are the new cultural forms of information society. The challenge before us is to figure out how to employ these tools to create new art; in short, how to interface them not to quantified data but to human experience, subjectivity and memory.

## **WHAT IS INFO-AESTHETICS ? (BOOK OUTLINE)**

[updated 10/27/01]

### 1. New representational and communication techniques?

Where are the new representational and communication techniques appropriate for IT society?

Why do we still use old modernist techniques from industrial era (photography, montage, etc.)?

Text segment: [Avant-garde as Software \[8/1999\]](#)

### 2. New Forms?

Industrial society: Bauhaus aesthetics, "form follows function."

What are the new spatial/visual forms appropriate for IT society? [example: Guggenheim Bilbao](#)

Thesis 1: "customisable form, customisable function." [example: skins](#)

Thesis 2: "information as play." [example: imac](#)

### 3. New Symbols? Representing Information Society

How can IT society be represented symbolically?

How can information be turned into forms?

If the key aspects of IT society are NOT visual (computation, network, distributed processes), can visual strategies still work?

What would a monument to IT society look like?

[example: Manetas's paintings](#)

[example: visual representations of cyberspace](#)

### 4. Computer as a New Representational Engine

A novel and a fiction film became new cultural forms for industrial society.

What are the new cultural forms for a computer age?

Database? text segment: [Database as a Symbolic Form](#) [10/98]

Computer visualization? [example: information spaces](#)

Computer simulation? [example: the sims](#)

### 5. Information as Form?

Can telecommunication and information access, these two key forms of work in IT age, be turned into new cultural forms?

Can we have culture without objects?

Text segment: [Information and Form](#) [spring 2001]

Text segment: [Culture without Objects, or Representation versus Telecommunication](#) [from [The Language of New Media](#)]

### 6. Work into Art

If IT info-labor becomes play (see #2), what about IT culture?

Should art and culture of IT society adopt the conventions/interfaces of IT work such as GUI, multitasking, search engine (as the interface), quantitative data displays, etc.?

Text segment: [Work into Art](#) [GUI / spatial montage]. [from [The Language of New Media](#)]

### 7. From Figuration vs. Abstraction (modernism) to Figuration vs. Data (informationalism)

### 8. New Concepts of Form in Information society

Form as distributed representation (Internet, neural networks)

Form as emergence (AL)

Software represents any object as set of parameters - therefore form is never fixed

From figure/ground (modernism) to information/noise (informationalism)

### 9. Reception: New modes of perception

## 10. From Visual Culture to Information Culture

Using the concepts of software / information architecture / interface to think about cultural history  
Text segment: [Post-media Aesthetics](#) [7/2001]

## 11. Representing INFO-subjectivity

Text segment: [Jump over Proust](#) [1997]

## PROJECTS:

[FROZE 01](#) for [Electronic Orphanage](#)

[DATA BEAUTIFUL](#) for [Mapping the Web Infome](#)

## NOTES:

[summary](#) [6/00]

[Helsinki Map](#) [9/00]

[Graduate Seminar Description](#) [10/00]

## IMAGES FOR THE BOOK:

[Avant-garde as Software: visual summary /1998](#)

[Time Square / NYC / 6/00](#)

## DISCOVERING INFO-AESTHETICS: STUDENT PROJECTS

Helsinki / Fall 00

[Info-Aesthetics Workshop for MA students, Media Lab, University of Art and Design  
Student Projects Proposals](#)

San Diego / Fall 00

[Info-Aesthetics Graduate Seminar, Visual Arts Department, UCSD](#)

San Diego / Fall 00

[Info-Aesthetics Undergraduate Seminar, Visual Arts Department, UCSD  
Student Projects](#)

## LINKS:

coming up

