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GEO-ETHICS SYMPOSIUM SETTING THE SCENE

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Z GEO ETHICS

POSITIONING THE GOOD LIFE



FACULTY OF GEO-INFORMATION SCIENCE AND EARTH OBSERVATION



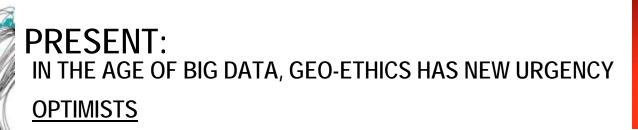
PAST: WE ARE NOT STARTING FROM SCRATCH



Geo-ethics has tradition in our field (Brian Harley 1991)

In a famous roundtable debate on "Ethical Problems in Cartography" in 1990, cartographers defined ethics as professional ethics -- the "principles of conduct guiding the practices of an individual or professional group", which for meant being "precise, accurate and exact." Brian Harley suggested then that the greater ethical dilemma is that the map must be a socially responsible representation of the world. He asked: "Can there be an ethically informed cartography and what should be its agenda? [...] Can we debate cartographic ethics in the narrow arena of internal practice, looking for a pragmatic code of professional conduct, or should we be concerned with transcendental values that go to the heart of social justice in the world at large?" Harley was ahead of his time. Socially responsible innovation is now part of the Dutch and European research agenda.

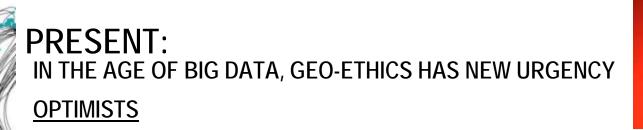






On Privacy -- **Techno-optimists** like <u>Hal Varian, Chief economist of</u> <u>Google</u>, claim that "nowadays, people have come to expect personalized search results and ads." Google wants to do more. Instead of having to ask Google questions, Google should "know what you want and tell you before you ask the question. [...] That vision has now been realized by Google Now [...] Google Now has to know a lot about you and your environment to provide these services". Varian wonders why "this worries some people" since we share such knowledge with doctors, lawyers, and accountants whom we trust. Varian: "Why am I willing to share all this private information? Because I get something in return …"







On Contracts -- Techno-optimists like <u>Hal Varian, Chief economist of</u> <u>Google</u>, argue that "because transactions are now computer mediated, we can observe behavior that was previously unobservable and write contracts on it. This enables transactions that were simply not feasible before ... Computer-mediated transactions have enabled new business models ..." For instance, if someone stops making monthly car payments, the lender can "instruct the vehicular monitoring system not to allow the car to be started and to signal the location where it can be picked up."



PRESENT: IN THE AGE OF BIG DATA, GEO-ETHICS HAS NEW URGENCY <u>PESSIMISTS</u>



Techno-pessimists, like Prof. Soshana Zuboff of Harvard, argue that the assault of companies like Google on our geo-located behavioral data is so sweeping "that it can no longer be circumscribed by the concept of privacy and its contests. This is a different kind of challenge now, one that threatens the existential and political canon of the modern liberal order defined by principles of self-determination that have been centuries, even millennia, in the making. I am thinking of matters that include, but are not limited to, the sanctity of the individual and the ideals of social equality; the development of identity, autonomy, and moral reasoning; the integrity of contract, the freedom that accrues to the making and fulfilling of promises; norms and rules of collective agreement; the functions of market democracy; the political integrity of societies; and the future of *democratic sovereignty.*" In other words, Zuboff argues that **what people** living in western societies consider the GOOD LIFE is in danger.





FUTURE:

NEITHER TECHNO-PESSIMISM NOR TECHNO-OPTIMISM

- In this symposium, our entry point is that geo-information technology is malleable and we, geo-information scientists, have social responsibility and agency to shape technology.
- Possible questions to raise in setting the scene:
- In the era of big data, can there be an ethically- informed GiScience/EOScience and what is its agenda?
- Is this an agenda about professional GIScience ethics or also about the social responsibility of GIScientists?
- 3. How to foster debate with students and research collaborators on the GOOD LIFES (there are different conceptions of what is a good life) in the Northern and Southern contexts where we conduct research?



LITERATURE

Harley, B. (1991). Can there be a cartographic ethics? Cartographic Perspectives 10:9-16

Varian, H.R. (2010). Computer Mediated Transactions, American Economic Review 100(2): 1–10

Varian, H.R. (2014). Beyond Big Data, Business Economics 49(1): 27-31

Zuboff, S. (2016). <u>The Secrets of Surveillance Capitalism</u>, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 05.03.2016



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LETS HAVE A GOOD INFORMED INTERACTION AND DEBATE

Thank you



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