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Critical Reflection Four

Art and the API

An application programming interface is understood as a program which facilitates connections between other programs. "I like to think about an API as a bridge which allows one computer program to talk to another computer program." API's are mainly utilized to connect dissimilar programs together that run on different devices. Many software infrastructures use API's for communication among their software. Many mobile applications and social networks are interconnected with API's.

The Twitter mobile application is one example of an API, the mobile application uses an API which connects itself to the main Twitter headquarters. Twitter also left their API open so other businesses may use their API. As a result, many businesses utilized their API to create many projects that Twitter itself would not have managed to create. "by allowing businesses to build products around the main tweeting system, they'd end up with many more projects build on Twitter than they could have built themselves." The influence of Twitter's open API has led to many other businesses leaving their API's open and free. Furthermore, their API has influenced other large companies to create API's notably Google's and Facebook.

API's can be simple to create, one example is from Josh Begley, where Begley created an API which accesses information about US drone strikes. "Updated as new strikes are reported and confirmed." Begley's API updates the data of new drone strikes that were confirmed, as a result, many journalists use this data and create their stories, such as Dronestream. Dronestream is "a Twitter stream of every known US drone attack." Dronestream and other API's are tools for media artists and journalists alike.

Moreover, API's may extract data from the information requested or submitted to visualize different types of data. "Instead of returning a single number of people killed in a drone strike, what if we returned a list of names?" The usage of an API can differ, meaning that a user can generate copious amounts of content from the API used. An API is a tool which may be used by anyone and created to serve their purposes, this includes journalists and artists if they would like to create artistic or meaningful data. API's facilitate the connection of certain software together so they may communicate with each other as well as provide open source software for regular users to manipulate data to how they see fit.