

Theory on demand #33

Algorithmic Anxiety in Contemporary Art:

A Kierkegaardian Inquiry into the Imaginary of Possibility

Patricia de Vries

Over the past decade, a growing number of artists and critical practitioners have become engaged with algorithms, resulting in algorithmic theatre, bot art, and algorithmic media and performance art of various kinds that thematise the dissemination and deployment of algorithms in everyday life. Especially striking is the high volume of artistic engagements with facial recognition algorithms, trading algorithms and search engine algorithms over the past few years.

The fact that these three types of algorithms have garnered more artistic responses than other suggests that they form a popular subject of artistic critique. This critique addresses some of the major, supra-individual anxieties of our decade: socio-political uncertainty, the global economic crisis and ongoing recession, the centralisation and corporatisation of access to online information, and political polarisation and instability. However, the constituents of these anxieties — which seem to be central to our experience of algorithmic culture — are rarely interrogated. They therefore merit closer attention.

This book uses prominent artistic representations of facial recognition algorithms, trading algorithms, and search algorithms as the entry point into an exploration of the constituents of the anxieties braided around these algorithms. I propose that the work of Søren Kierkegaard — one of the first theorists of anxiety — helps us to investigate and critically analyse the constituents of what I will call 'algorithmic anxiety'.

Printed on demand

ISBN: 978-94-92302-52-6

Institute of
network cultures

Algorithmic Anxiety in Contemporary Art: A Kierkegaardian Inquiry into the Imaginary of Possibility

Institute of Network Cultures

ALGORITHMIC ANXIETY IN CONTEMPORARY ART:

A KIERKEGAARDIAN INQUIRY INTO THE IMAGINARY OF POSSIBILITY

PATRICIA
DE VRIES

THEORY
ON
DEMAND

A SERIES OF READERS
PUBLISHED BY THE
INSTITUTE OF NETWORK CULTURES
ISSUE NO.:

33