

Computer Network Issues Explored

The global information network is an electronic "frontier" where the laws and ethical standards are still being written and users test the bounds of acceptable behavior. Who will define the rules of conduct for this new society? And how will they differ from those governing other discourse?

"Laws and regulations usually represent a consensus in the society that embraces commonly held objectives and goals," said Mark Hellman, a Chicago lawyer specializing in legal and social aspects of computer use. "But in the Information Age no such public consensus exists."

He was one of 40 people in a forum last month on legal, ethical, and technological aspects of computer network use and abuse. The conference, supported by the National Science Foundation, was the second of two organized by the National Conference of Lawyers and Scientists, a joint committee of AAAS and the American Bar Association's Science and Technology Section.

This year's workshop on the Eastern Shore—which included attendees from Argentina, Belgium, England, and India—focused on accountability and liability in cyberspace; what is "public" and what is "private" on computer networks; and what new legal, ethical, and administrative frameworks may be needed. Most agreed that as increased Internet access transforms on-line communication from a town meeting—with civility governed by user norms—to a world bazaar, more formalized rules are needed.

A key issue was privacy protection and concerns about erosion of individual liberties as numerous record systems—each innocuous alone—are interconnected. "A lot of confidential information is getting swept along," said Mary Connors, a behavioral scientist at NASA-Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California. Hellman noted that someone with even a simple com-

puter can compile a detailed dossier on an individual.

A group of participants said a good starting point in creating rules is an obligation of disclosure based on principles such as:

- Users should always be informed about the status of a network—public, private, or quasi-private—and the "local customs."

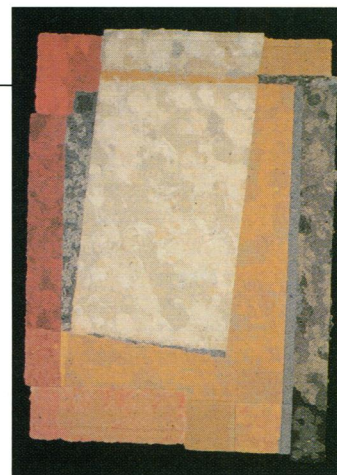
- If a user is operating in a private arena, dissemination of information beyond that arena would require informed consent.

- Users have a right to know of any transactional data about them being collected and subsequent uses to which it may be put.

Anne Branscomb, a lawyer and visiting scholar at the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, said accountability of users and liability for content are critical issues to resolve. Strict liability applied to information providers could chill commentary; full accountability for users threatens anonymity. Questions of copyright, obscenity, and defamation further complicate things. Conflicts on such issues, she said, "are moving into the courts with some troubling results."

A report will be available from AAAS Science and Policy Programs at 202-326-6600. E-mail: science_policy@aaas.org.

Paper construct. Viewing the work of Nancy Genn, an observer remarked, "is like experiencing a Rothko painting or the subtle cracks and patina of a simple plaster wall in the Zen gardens of Kyoto." The California native uses colored paper pulp to "paint" evocative landscapes that emit a quiet power and intensity. The work is on exhibit at AAAS through 16 December. For information, call Virginia Stern at 202-326-6672.



Roma #2. Handmade paper embossed.

AAAS at Unesco

Amid indications the United States may soon rejoin Unesco, a AAAS delegation traveled to the agency in Paris last month to discuss possible collaboration in scientific programs. The 2-day visit was the result of an invitation to AAAS President Francisco Ayala by Federico Mayor, director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization since 1987. Mayor is a biochemist and, like Ayala, is a native of Spain.

Joining Ayala were Eloise Clark, board chairman; Richard Nicholson, executive officer; and Richard Getzinger, head of the International Directorate. They also met at length with Adnan Badran, head of Unesco's science sector, and his staff.

In the meeting with Mayor, Ayala pointed out that objectives of Unesco and AAAS overlap—

"that the 'E' and 'S' of Unesco correspond to core AAAS activities in education and science, and culture is represented in the Sections on Anthropology, History and Philosophy of Science, Linguistics, and Psychology."

Getzinger said the group conveyed association support for the United States' return to Unesco and "heard many warm expressions of interest in cooperating with AAAS" once that happens. The United States withdrew in 1984 citing poor management, lack of budgetary constraints, and increased politicization. But in recent years the agency has been widely credited with having made major improvements. In 1989 the AAAS Council adopted a resolution calling for renewed U.S. participation, and 2 years ago the association testified on Capitol Hill in support of such a move.

Ayala said Mayor told the group that as a result of official visits to Washington this year, which included conversations with President Clinton, he came away reassured that the United States would rejoin Unesco at an early date. Mayor also said he would write to all heads of state in the Americas urging them to put science and technology on the agenda of a regional summit in Miami next month—a goal adopted last summer by the steering committee of AAAS's Western Hemisphere Initiative.

Also discussed were science education, expansion of communication technologies, and environmental issues.

Fellowship Applications Due

Applications for AAAS fellowship programs are due 15 January 1995. Scientists and engineers are eligible for the following four programs. Contact the AAAS Directorate for Science and Policy Programs for information and application procedures. Phone: 202-326-6600. Internet: science_policy@aaas.org.

- **Congressional Fellows.** One year on Capitol Hill as special legislative assistants in Congress.

- **Diplomacy Fellows.** One year with U.S. State Department or U.S. Agency for International Development.

- **Environmental Fellows.** Ten-week summer assignments doing research projects for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

- **Technology Policy Fellows.** One year with RAND Critical Technologies Institute.

Undergraduate and graduate students and postdocs in science or engineering can apply for the following program. Call the Directorate for Education and Human Resources, 202-326-6760, for details.

- **Mass Media Fellows.** Ten-week journalistic assignments at newspapers, magazines, or radio and TV stations.