Aesthetic Animism
Digital Poetry as Ontological Probe

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U JUST STEPPED WAY OUTSIDE MY COSMOLOGY.
This presentation offers the occasional satellite imagery of Painting (video) & Poetry (programming)
Aesthetic Animism

attribution of aliveness based on perceived beauty:
a combination of motion, belonging, intention and appropriateness.
There are ontological implications of malleable typography.

Creative practitioners and viewer-readers of digital poetry experience alternative ontologies.
Multimedia means that the term ‘text’ is insufficient.
TERMINOLOGICUS

'TAV'
(Text-Audio-Visual)

'TAVT'
(a TAV in a 3D Territory)

'TAVIT'
(an Interactive TAVT)

I have no illusions or expectations that these terms will achieve widespread adoption, but am certain that some terms like these will of necessity emerge to concisely and accurately convey the difference between text, tav, tavit and tavit.
TAVIT
Text Audio-Visual Interactivity

a proto-embodiment for letterforms
abstract language digital entities

rudimentary typographic metabolisms
Elements of future languages will be perceived as if they were organisms.

Ontology stems from the Greek verb ontic: of being. It is the study of what exists, what is real, and what has come to be accepted as being real. Language is becoming visually and palpably different from what it was prior to computation. New means of expression are emerging. I explore what this means for the reception of poetry. Poetry is crossing an ontological membrane from being an abstract printed system to becoming a system of quasi-entities: words and phrases that are dimensional, kinetic, interactive, code-full, context-aware and tactile.
ANIM(ATION)ISM

The link between poetry and animism is ancient: oral poetry arose in the mouths of oracles who read messages in matter.

Advertising has used life-like mobile text for decades. And I am far from the first to link animation and animism. Animation has been referred to as the 'illusion of life' by the Lumière brothers, Walt Disney and Orson Welles.

Etymologically animation is either endowing with movement or endowing with life (Cholodenko. 1991). I am also not the first to link digitally animated text to notions of aliveness. Jason Lewis and Alex Weyers Active Text (1999) prototype application was called It’s Alive!

Cyrille Henry’s (2007) draws trees out of words drawn from internet branchings.
STRATEGIES

Practice-Led Software Studies

My empirical research-creation practice creating and exhibiting (both physically and online) digitally-mediated language-art.

My interpretive research examines the literary, aesthetic and ontological implications of digital poetry on collective attitudes toward life.
Richard Rorty identified philosophy as a series of turns.

Like the head of a small bird, the head of philosophy pivots around to find new concerns each generation.

In the early twentieth century, Wittgenstein’s *linguistic turn* precipitated a concentration on language as fundamental metaphor. In 1994, the *pictorial turn* (of W.T.J. Mitchell) proposed a visual generation, ocularcentric and inundated in photons. The *pictorial* turn is living in parallel competition (and partial completion) with many other concurrent turns: the *media* turn, the *hybrid* turn, the *non-linear* turn, the *interactive-tangible* turn, the *agency* turn, the *augmented* turn and the *network* turn.

**Turns are Converging.**

The primary turns of the 20th century *Language, Pictorial, Media* are converging around the concept of *life.*

**TUR(N)ING**
when *tavits* become indiscernible from reality

where language and the pictorial meet new-media 3D-representations, there will be a re-turn toward *aesthetic animism*, animism without precedent: a digital animism that includes language as a proto-animal.

This will be the turn toward *living language*
Words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and books are data-structures capable of accumulating memories. When these memories plug into a distributed intelligence (networked software), they might become capable of experiences.

**PIMES will be poems that know who wrote them & who has read them**

**SPIMES : POEM vs PIME**
As perception of living changes so does the world. Technological changes in the way digital poets are producing and handling language provide a valuable diagnostic for examining subtle modulations of collective belief systems, specifically attitudes toward life and technology.
MECHANISTIC ANIMISM

“I think it is legitimate then to talk about the cell as a cognizer”

Katherine Hayles in Ricardo. p. 49

I accept the possibility that the materialist worldview of things as inanimate represents an interim viewpoint. I redraw the anima mundi to include apparently inanimate matter (such as integrated circuits) and abstract systems (such as language).
The terms \textit{behaviour, model, transitions and actions} occur in both \textit{animation and Finite State Automata}. Deterministic finite state automaton

“are widely used in text editors for pattern matching, in compilers for lexical analysis, in web browsers for html parsing, and in operating systems for graphical user interfaces. They also serve as the control unit in many physical systems including: vending machines, elevators, automatic traffic signals, and computer microprocessors. Also network protocol stacks and old VCR clocks. They also play a key role in natural language processing and machine learning.”

are at the core of how machines think.

Both finite state machines and cartoons aim to transform data into a recognizable life-like format. Animation need not dance, but be animated in the sense of listening and responsive to contact from users and networks. Auto-completion processes (as in auto form fillers and Google Scribe) are animations. They anticipate users with auto-complete suggestions and act to provide services. Auto-page turners that recognize where gaze is and turn to next block of text are animations. Mediation implies animation; and animation implies mediation.
THREE ARGUMENTS FOR
AESTHETIC ANIMISM

1. Evolution
2. Prosthesis
3. Assimilation
The separation between language and nature as methods for aesthetic experience (a separation that emerged with inscription and was mass-disseminated by the printing press) will be resolved when digital language adopts features of organic life and is perceived as natural and natured.
Related software case-study: Mudbox
Specular depth, refraction indices, inverse kinematics and other terminology from 3D modelling may prove useful as digital semiotic indices and literary terms. As may easing equations, matrices transforms and splices.
Languaged media is technology, therefore (following McLuhan) it is an extension of our body. Our bodies are perceived as alive. Therefore the more mediated language becomes, the more it will seem alive. Eventually its abstract foundation may be forgotten.
PROSTHESIS

Related software case-study: Mr. Softie
Unlike material objects which when rendered do not gain dimensional qualities that they did not previously possess, a dimensional animatable body is being created for letterforms that they previously never possessed.
ASSIMILATION

Language is slowly adopting features of a real object in a real world. The assimilation of language into audio/visual interactive environments occurs in stages until it belongs like a mitochondria to images.
ASSIMILATION

Related software case-study: After FX
As long as it seems physically appropriate, obedient of basic laws like conservation of momentum, gravity, collision detection, receiving light, casting shadows, and occupying space, then text belongs to its environment. If the basic physical appearance of belonging is satisfied, then the automatic presupposition is that it has a life; forms experience space thru formal laws.
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