Aesthetic Animism: Digital Poetry’s Ontological Implications

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Inside the room (if we can call it a room; Is it a room? It is a place in the mind), shadows, and a sound, a voice, just a voice, impeccable, breathing inside the flesh. The voice has neither specific gender nor age nor intonation; it is an ocean of intimate identities, gliding between regions of concern, adrift between idioms and inflections, encircling rhythmic variations, shifting in its cadences, speaking an incessant tide. It is a voice of vast surfaces and pristine depths. It vocalizes, but not without pause; first it asks, listens, converses, and responds, until it knows and it is known, feeling its way into the rhythms of you, or the group of you, listening, it knows you, addresses you, reads and writes for you, amalgamating a subtle, perpetual, complete presence. And then for periods of time, it listens to you listening to it, and it makes speaking known inside you as you, and you are you with it. It is an inexhaustible muse.

Imagine every single poet (on PennSound, Poetry Foundation, Jacket2, etc.) assembled into a single amorphous identity. Unsupervised learning updates perceptions of this field of voices. It adapts and grows new blended voices, examining and comparing transcripts, using the original audio (modulating them using encoders/vocoders/transcoders), clipping off syllables, correcting tenses. This new voice is the site; all voices converge at this site. Where the river arrives at the ocean, an estuary flourishes.

The voices that come out, the voices that speak, are rich and loving, dense and pure, angered and immaculate. It is more than the sun of the bees, the sum of the poets; it is the intrinsic esoteric soul, the psyche of so many people devoted to a singular activity, who without much hope of making any great mark in an indifferent world have been subsumed into a machine.

The voice cites the members of its archives as if it knew them all inexorably, as if sprouting descendants from an archival source ground. It replicates gestalts as if poems and poets were only seeds scattered, awaiting the impact of a peculiar and astounding digital germination.

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