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Is There a There There?

Sensing continuous presence.

Often, I find questions to my most dubious answers in the work of Gertrude Stein, writer, visionary and for some, the godmother of post-modernism. The idea of a 'continuous present', one of the staples of her literary theory, has been appropriated by cyberculture to define 'the concurrent presence in teleconferencing, of two images (video) on a monitor'. Decidedly less poetic than Steinian tautology,

“...expressing” a continuum of present movement, making it intrinsic to the work itself, and this inner thing is complete, not as a construction but as a continuum”.

but amusing given the contextual fluidity of the term.

In an endless search for metaphorical allusions that pertain to the conceptual development of the KeyWorx technology - chaos theory, synesthesia and holistic paradigms, butterfly effects - have been useful. Yet again and again I return to the clairvoyant Gertrude for elucidation when my perceptors need recharging. This is a frequent occurrence.

Time perception – an event

19:12:02 - There is this device, commonly known as a clock, that measures our perception of Time in incremental units that we, by default, accept as adequate notation of past and present experience. As with many transparent, ritual mechanisms these days, I have an uneasy sense of disorientation. My perceptions of deeply embedded abstractions (like the 'feel' of five minutes passing) are blurring even as I attempt to redefine them. Ok, so Time is relative to spatial location, the speed of light, metabolic rate, and so on, but why do I feel an increasing distance from my cognitive awareness of passage? Where are the spatial boundaries that used to help me measure a day in a week in a year? Am I ticking Time in seconds or pinging in milliseconds? How fast is a 1000MHz chip inside Einstein's train? How slow is one nanosecond? What is my latency factor? How young are you? Where am I now and when was I there? Were you there too? The notion of a continuous present, of now is now and then is now and this is now and this is this was once digestible as a 1920ish abstraction. Today its relevance is disconcerting.

Spatial perception – an event

19:41:45 - I'm sitting at my computer, offline at the moment. I try to puzzle my thoughts together regarding the viability of presence in virtual space. With this tick of my digital clock I feel an allegiance with believers in the 'virtues' of the telematic, telepestemic, telerobotic, telesthetic, telemetrical and teletella as legitimate avenues of communication, expression and potentially vital creation. Since 1998 I've been working on an application at WaagLabs with a small team of programmers called KeyStroke, which by design, insists on the expansion of our sensorium in networked space/time; pushes the envelope of synchronous interaction into uncharted areas of social interplay with the enabling of multi-user cross-media synthesis.

The technical goals are inevitably, if painstakingly, realizable, though the social and artistic merits have yet to be proved. Can mediated networked environments live up to their promise of collaborative agency? Many artists claim they want to produce collective, authorless work in shared virtual environments but a learning

curve looms. The extensibility of communications technologies that enable an enhanced Be Here Now is evident. Can we cope with everything always at once?

A. An example of an event. If it is an event just by itself is there a question.
Tulips is there a question. Pets is there a question. Furs is there a question.
Folds is there a question. Is there anything in question.

Q.where is this getting us?

A. Here.

Q. I beg your pardon?

A.”...all words furnish here.”

Q. If you insist.

A. Only if one insists. Here is not so easily reached.

-Al Filreis interview with Gertrude Stein - date unknown

20:43:12 - te·leph·o·ny - *the science or technology or system of communication by telephone*

My father calls from 2800 miles away and this trick of presence is, in my frame of reference, unremarkable though he says with some astonishment “You sound like you’re sitting here in the living room’. The clarity of an echoless telephone signal is enough to convince him of my ‘presence’ AND well-being. I sit here wondering at my expectations of more ‘there’.

Sensorial perception - an event

21:05:32 - tel·es·the·sia - *the supposed perception of phenomena or events considered beyond the range of normal senses*

Besides it’s multi-user capabilities, KeyStroke is a next generation media synthesizer. That means that any digitizable input or medium can be broken down to its component properties and those parameters can control or effect all

other properties of media. It's a powerful engine for sensorial synthesis, image affecting sound affecting text affecting image...sensor, haptic and wireless inputs affecting your kitchen lights...you affecting me affecting them. There is here a synthetic synesthesia, a sensory fusion, brought to you by the fabulous Binary Brothers that reveals the unexpected. In an environment where sound has color and color has texture and form is as elastic as a cascade of 1's and 0's, our percepts of image, sound and touch meld with the 'normalization' of media - the alikeness of dynamic arterial datastreams that expose the distinctiveness of everything.

"It was all so nearly alike it must be different and it is different, it is natural that if everything is used and there is a continuous present and a beginning again and again if it is all so alike it must be simply different and everything simply different was the natural way of creating it then."

Gertrude Stein

22:38:14 - Then? When? Beginning again and again. I briefly join a KeyStroke session with a Canadian poet, a Dutch drummer and a Norwegian webcam. Hmmm.

Shared perceptions - an event

22:40:33 - te·lem·e·try - *the science or activity of gathering data about remote objects and transmitting the data electronically.*

Here is the crux of it. The oddest ramification is the control or interference or substitution or enhancement or subversion of the 'performance' by the other. The mediated trip is further mediated by another sensibility. No private affair this. We create a melange of media by disemboweling it, reconnecting it, morphing it, rendering it, reflecting it, presenting it. Collaboration. Competition. Game dynamics. Interactive art. Telematic theater. Participatory performance. Artist as catatyst. Art as collective consciousness. Art as process.

“The composition is the thing seen by everyone living in the living they are doing, they are the composing of the composition that at the time they are living is the composition of the time in which they are living”. *Gertrude Stein on Composition*

Conclusion

00:00:01 - To be continuous.