Art, Consciousness and Immanence:
A Panpsychic View

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The basis of experience is emotional...

the rise of an affective tone originating from things whose relevance is given

(Whitehead, A.N.1933, p:176)

Humans do not know where awareness arises from or why. In the absence of verifiable proof, a feasible hypothesis to explain the *existence of existence* is the immanence of mind in matter. It is my conjecture that awareness arises to meet itself by taking form from light; and at the liminal space within embodied structures where awareness meets matter to form mentation, art transcribes the undulations of consciousness in contact with itself. This paper explores some radically speculative implications for art and technology that arise from this panpsychic worldview.

1. Panpsychism

Panpsychism is a philosophical worldview that sees mind as immanent in matter. Very generally, panpsychism resists the physical-reductionism of the materialist paradigm that sees consciousness as exclusively a higher-order epiphenomena or abstraction of brain-generated thought. The panpsychic view is harmonious with implications of quantum theory which conceive of materiality as an epiphenomena of consciousness.

In the panpsychic view, consciousness is not dissociated from the body, nor is it delimited by the body. Consciousness is distributed and co-existent with matter; mind is analogous to an immanent substrate medium: a self-organizational recursive network of topological and temporal awareness domains insulated by phenomenological sensor constraints.

Mind as immanence has had adherents since before known time. In the western philosophical tradition: Empedocles, Plato, Campanella, Liebniz, Clifford, Paulsen, Fechner, James, Bateson, Whitehead, and currently Clarke and Skribna.

2. Automated Artists and Virtual Ecosystems

As technology evolves, future virtual ecosystems may be inhabited by industrious software-artists: responsive autonomous code entities searching, sniffing and sifting through mammoth amounts of potentially edible data, funneling and filtering the results to humans whose personality taste profiles influence the creative-creature code-art output. Art becomes viral and parasitic, custom- fit to its consumers' cognitive needs. Automata suggest art as consciousness.

A modular panpsychic outlook, which perceives awareness as an immanent feature of all perception, will be inclusive of autonomous software entities. Panpsychism easily assimilates organisms of either silicon, organic or cultural form at all levels of scale. Regardless of the materiality of the structural substrate from which intelligence emanates, the immanence of experience (as it is defined in Whiteheadian terms: a panexperientialism), is an open "meta-theory" (Skribna, 2005, p. 2) capable of incorporating conjecture concerning network-distributed cognitive apparatuses whose physical forms are not delineated by any bio-skin or data-server.

Panpsychism anticipates a future where art is an entity enclosing innately-aware phenomena which cluster and cling to each other to create aesthetic events. Contemporary automated curating prototypes (Krysa, J., Sedek, G.,Ward, A. 2003) and internet viral art-works (0100101110101101.org, 2000-3) can be seen as significant precursors to AI networked devices (code artists) which will act as the intermediaries between biological forms and a cybernetic living cultural net.

3. Art's Hard Problems: Love and Death

Consider two simple tenets: 1.) Everything living, (to some degree) loves. 2.) Everything living, will one day, die. Panpsychism suggests that love and death are the hard problems for every particle of awareness. A simple attraction-repulsion algorithm underlying existence at all levels of scale may involve proto-love, proto-loss.

For neurologist Jaak Panksepp (1998, p.27) **"**the most primal affective-cognitive interaction in humans, and presumably in other animals as well, is encapsulated in the phrases *I want* and *I don't want.***"** From a panpsychic perspective, love-hate as an energy-vector of attraction-repulsion may be one of the primary activities of proto-awareness. It

is irrelevant whether this 'love' occurs in a biological or cybernetic network. Attachment to other, attraction to symmetry, desire for nourishment propagated along all levels of scale, constitutes conscious activity. Its reverberations ricochet through time as culture. Occasionally artists are the antennas and conduits of these currently unquantifiable affective energies.

The combination and generation problems, the 'How consciousness came to be?' questions, are of interest psychologically, ontologically and epistemologically. Predicate logic, set theory, recursion theorems, neurology, cognitive science, quantum microtubules, mythology and astrophysics all (to some degree) examine the 'How' question.

But the 'Why' question? The Why question is the question of grief; 'Why' is the question of lament, requiem, effigy, ritual; 'Why' is the question which creates meaning; ''Why' is an origin point of art. It begins at that point where thought sees itself. Auto-noetic exploration is motivated by the impact of existential ignorance; the human condition: not-knowing why we are here, seemingly conscious and embodied, involved in a vast mysterious coalesced process of reflexes and stochastic autonomy. Caught in the peristaltic seizures of aggregated percepts, love and death are the hard problems of consciousness for an artist.

Why am I here? Why does love exist? Why does death exist?

Identity, desire, loss. Art is an attempt to answer these hard questions. They may seem to be secondary, mere sentimentality to the more general problem of consciousness, yet, if impulse or activity implies impetus or motivation, then in the first instant of everything (before the big bangs and the little whimpers) desire co-existed with dream. Ontologically, love is at the origin of the world. Affect is eternal and a priori.

4. Birth of Meaning in the Thinking Heart

Allow me for a moment to continue to be wildly speculative: perhaps the widely-distributed and ancient mystical emphasis on the heart as seat of soul's intelligence is reflective of the heart's capacity to 'think' for and through other physical dimensions. In other words, what is conventionally thought of as 'thought' (rational analysis supervening on the brain) may be only one form of intelligence; feeling, intuition and emotion are parallel forms. The M in contemporary string theorists' M-Theory may be *Meaning*: and that semantic meaning may be sensed in humans as affective feeling; art may be the heart's amplifier; each artist a conduit.

Artistic or cultural products may perform as prosthetics (temporary parameters interconnected in recursive kinematics to form animated forms) compensating for individual lack of emotional and ontological insights. Nobody knows why we are here; nature is an insulated network. Technoetic art-forms arise as coagulated nodes of symbolic activity exploring regions beyond the normative perceptual range of the human

organism in an effort to answer questions about origins. Myths (ancient tech) and immersive environments (contemporary tech) are both technology and sacred living spaces. A panpsychic viewpoint can accept that sometimes art-events may operate collectively as networks consolidating masses of ambiguity into manifest form (like clouds forming in an empty sky), coalescing subconscious structures distributed across social collectivities and species.

Artists may be engaged in invisible work of which even they are unaware. It is possible to imagine that our species is the architect of an inconsequential gland in an immense body. Technology and culture will dictate whether our presence is malignant or benign within this hypothetical greater body (in religion, this greater body has been referred to as god or goddess).

5. Is Time Conscious?

An added implication arising from a panpsychic viewpoint (which admittedly may seem very very implausible to most people) is that time itself, --from Godel's perspective, a spatially-navigable realm (Yourgrau, P. 2005)-- might also be conscious. Awareness might exist between congruent time-frames: temporal continuity could be a by-product of individuated time-slices clinging to their neighbors to form a self-organizing topologically-undulant network of interpenetrant memories; each node with a lifespan. This speculative hypothesis (of a mind or minds immanent within time) advocates perceiving networks of time as consciousness: it implies that epochs may communicate amongst themselves. Shamanistic and artistic practices can be interpreted as attempts to enter into time's conversations and experience a direct perception of time.

6. Epiphany Machines

As many imaginative thinkers have postulated, in the future neuro-modulators may be manipulated directly using networked cybernetic implants; artists will be involved in building these devices. Some of these devices may function as *epiphany machines,* enabling collective bursts of experience beyond sequential time Other devices may provoke efforts to nurture communication with alternate forms of consciousness, even forms of consciousness that appear to be inanimate. A panpsychic viewpoint may arise organically as these practices become prevalent.

In data networks where change-over-time is rendered spatially as a skin, emotional and cognitive systems of populations will be perceivable and palpable as topology to be sculpted and sketched. Data visualization and generative art is contemporary cartography of the soul. Artists are building proto-organisms to live on the gushing data of human words and images (Levin, G., Nigam, K. 2005 and Harris, J., Kamvar, S. 2006). "Affective" or "emotional" methodological analysis is often at the core of these projects. .A form of intuitive listening, or opening of interface-orifices into the collective mind is occurring. This algorithmic listening is analogous to meditative listening. In this era, silicon-based intelligences enable artists to listen.

7. Is Anything Conscious?

Imagine you belong to an advanced post-biological cybernetic species where time travel is ubiquitous and sold as soft-wet-ware. From this perspective, biological beings (like earth-born mammals from the 20th century who live within bodies that lock them into time as a sequential process from a known birth to an unknown death) are seen as unconscious mechanistic specks that undergo a very strict constrained life-cycle of growth and degeneration. From the perspective of these beings who navigate time, the human life-cycle of becoming, being and perishing on schedule like little machines is not suggestive of extensive conscious freedom. From the perspective of alternate life-forms, humans may appear to be inanimate.

8. The Death of Time

Now imagine time dies. The idea of eternal unchanging physical laws governing space and time are at the foundation of scientific dogmas. Yet from a panpsychic perspective, *if time is an organism, then perhaps it is mortal.* And perhaps (to continue introducing radically speculative material with the intention of creatively destabilizing habitual thought) the laws governing physical reality also constitute a conscious aggregate maturing and evolving, and eventually dying. (*What if the laws studied by quantum physics enter menopause*?) There is no reason to believe that time might not age or mutate radically and fundamentally, not just in its structural form but in the way that it organizes the data that constitutes matter.

Art in its post-biological form may involve a requiem for time; artists may be faced with the task of grieving for previous modalities of embodiment. Future consciousness may enact cultural rituals in ways currently unconceivable to humans; art may indeed become post-biological, post-embodied, post-temporal.

9. Conclusion

This paper proposes a few speculative implications of approaching the evolution of art as research creation in the service of a panpsychic worldview. It is based on an intuitive assumption that cultural symbols emerge from levels of consciousness currently impenetrable by quantitative instrumentation and normative human consciousness. In this radical monist ontology (Pearce, 2004), awareness is a primary art research tool; mysticism is one of the archives of prior research activity; and art is a set of manifest research results. From this perspective, a continuum connects diverse cultural habitats and recursively reifies mind, energy, time and matter. Love becomes the ethical responsibility of the system to accept itself. Art is the ideological medium for the transmission of that acceptance.

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