

arte_e_critica

CHARLES SANDISON. IF (AND WHERE) OTHER FORMS OF LIFE EXIST

by Lisa Pedicino

It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle. - Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering yes and no. And innumerable others. -- And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 19



The terrestrial echo of solar storms, 2013. Courtesy the artist and Moscow Manege.

The text and the texture are, in the theatre of words staged by Charles Sandison, the two main concerns. As he himself admits, the fact that the computer acts in this commitment with representation is of little or no importance. The binary code simply proves the best medium by which to describe a dual direction of the word (horizontal and vertical, meaning and fluid pattern) that produces a juncture where the word itself, from being a linguistic object, results in a “formal living entity”.

But the computer as an instrument generator of the code, beyond any limit of classification as Media Art, cannot but be the envoy of numerous questions. The role of

the speaker or – in the case of Sandison’s environments – of the reader raises a question that is by no means trifling: can a *speech* appear more difficult than a binary codification today? And above all, what ontological value should we attribute today to a possibility of generation and evolution that in an increasingly evident way linguistic codes possess?



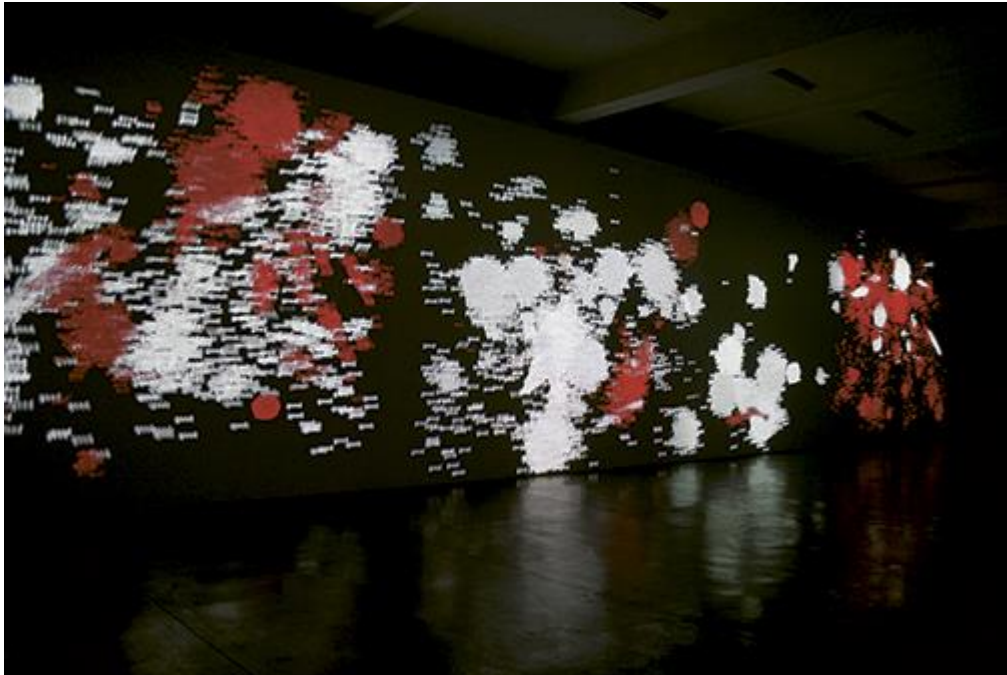
Sinhue, 2008. Copyright Charles Sandison.

Sandison began collecting languages able to solve problems ever since he had his first SinclairZX81, bought in Scotland for 30 pounds when he was 12 years old. Subjecting nature to examination – history, light, architecture, objects and words – and then reprojecting it into the reality of space, is an integral part of his problem solving. At the beginning of 2013, the Grand Manege in Moscow, a huge space very close to the Kremlin, was invaded by the digital elaboration in cross motion of passages taken from Chizhevsky, the scientist confined by the soviet regime for having assumed the influence of the solar cycle on human choices, first of all on wars and massacres. Thus, not the class struggle but rather the sun predominating over any chaos. While the interweaving of multiprojected letters introduces the audience into the three dimensions of the large *motile* painting along the main reference line of the pattern, the removal of speech raises doubts: and if it were precisely this way? If it were a strict determinism that regulates, generates my hate? In the solving of a problem, an organism and an artificial intelligence have according to science the same capacities, notwithstanding that some interpretations of Darwinism consider evolution as a sex affair, of a physical nature, from which the AI is automatically excluded¹. However, it does not seem unthinkable that technology should be able to generate worlds – social, economic, political, esthetical. And this possibility is intrinsically entrusted to his linguistic potential. The genome is inherent in the sign.



Chamber, 2009. Copyright Charles Sandison.

In *Living Rooms* (2001), thanks to 8000 lines of computer codes, the generation randomised by the chance encounter between selected basic words (male, female, food, father, mother, child, old, dead) determines a vision of the world just as easy to imagine, like “mother + father = child”. Working on the same principle, but veering from generation to assimilation, *Good & Evil* (2002) and more recently *Love & Hate* (2011) visualise the remaining traces of a battle similar to that of *Yes/No* (2004) in which, at a primary level of a moral existence and/or of linguistic codification, the collision with the opposite can turn it into a double of itself. By mistake, deviation or genetic mutation? In the brawling texts of *Belshazzar’s Feast* (2006) there is room for everybody, for Darwin, Marx, Freud, and – obviously – for God.



Good and Evil, 2002. Courtesy the artist

So: what *ontological* value should we attribute today to a possibility of generation and evolution that in an increasingly evident way linguistic codes possess?

1. Robert T. Pennock, *Negotiating boundaries in the definition of life: Wittgensteinian and Darwinian insights on resolving conceptual border conflicts*, Springer Science+Business Media B.V., 2011

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