I Tweet, Therefore I Am: Uncovering Animal Consciousness

*glisten) HIVE, by Julie Andreyev
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-- I got lost today. I had to scream to get someone's attention! -- outings with them are tiring for me -- After having oat and grass hay - and with my buddy next to me - I feel safe -- We miss her when she's away --

Marshall McLuhan said we encounter our humanity through our technologies. McLuhan argued that we need to recognize that technology is in fact an *extension* of the human body, an extension of ourselves. In recent writings, Richard Cavell has applied this theory to digital communication in contemporary culture, reiterating a significant point from McLuhan's often undervalued theories – in any communication, it is the sender who is sent. The task then, is for us to understand and recognize our reflection within the technologies we use to communicate with one another. Is it possible that digital technology might enable us to better understand our current selves? As is often the case, perhaps we can learn to *know* ourselves through technology by first learning to understand 'other' beings?

Julie Andreyev's recent projects of <u>*Animal Lover*</u> examine the distinct being of the animal through the use of digital technologies. The artworks converge on questions and critiques addressing modern relationships with animals, and how humans regard animals. The goal is to offer representations of human empathy; humans reflecting on the subjective experience of animals. <u>**glisten) HIVE*</u> is an interactive audio-video installation that visualizes real-time online communication about animal consciousness. The piece consists of animated text messages submitted from Twitter contributors all over the world, presented in a real-time exhibition space; interaction can also occur using an on-site computer terminal. Participants are asked to 'tweet' what their companion animals are thinking, feeling, or doing. The messages then transpire, via digital projection, on the semi-transparent screens that line the wall of the gallery space. Snippets of text, restricted to the 140 character limit of the Twitter social media application, are generated into swarms of social-insect patterns, resembling the movement of bees navigating themselves toward a hive. The concept of "emergence," and the related underlying theory of complexity science, is exemplified in the visual arrangement of text messages. In the artist's statement, an emergent pattern is described as a "collective effect," in which "each organism is primarily reliant on the movement of others in its immediate vicinity." The arrangement and movement of each string of words depends on the movement of its neighbouring messages. Similarly, the representations of these emerging animal thoughts are dependent on the perceptive actions of their human companions.

The sensory experience of **glisten) HIVE* is heightened by a processed soundscape of bells and flute, layered with low blips and constant pulses, ultimately producing a hypnotic atmosphere. One of the sound channels contains the recorded voice of Tom, the artist's dog. As the digital images enlarge, certain words and phrases become more easily deciphered, at times revealing moments of reflection: -- *Sometimes when I'm anxious at night I puke in the morning -- We'll just sit and wait -- If you close your eyes no one can see you -- Maybe there'll be some fun today *hopeful**. Except for the small amount of white light emanating from the projected text, the room is completely pitch-black. As the swarm of tweets become slower in pace and reduced in size, the volume of the sound lessens, and we feel as if we are in an empty field on a quiet summer night. The technologically busied mind now becomes subdued, embracing what appears to be insects, perhaps fireflies, as strings of words transform to floating dots that recede into empty space. As other visitors approach the screens, human movement triggers the digital sensors and a feedback loop instigates animal consciousness once again.

Stepping back from the work, the swarming patterns are now located within four large network configurations that span across the long row of horizontal screens. We are reminded of the collaborative nature of the work and its many contributors. The cooperative structure behind the work resembles that of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's _Vectorial Elevation_ searchlight installation piece, recently situated over English Bay, also in Vancouver. These works consist of an initial structure designed by the artist, but the end results depend on the participants' interaction with online technologies. Both Andreyev and Lozano-Hemmer, have portrayed technology as an extension of our humanity and, by doing so, encourage us to encounter other beings, while perhaps gaining a better understanding of ourselves.

*glisten) HIVE is an experience that oscillates between a spatial representation of a supposedly simple animal's mind and an extremely complex system that goes beyond an individual state of being. As we engage with the piece for some time, there is the desire to locate oneself within this system, either as an abstract presence or a thoughtful participant.

Readers can interact with this work at _http://glistenhive.ca/_