Digital epistemology in 45 tweets.

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My inspiration for the form of this submission is the Swedish Twitter University (SvTwuni), who has invited scholars (especially in the field of Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Philosophy) to deliver a presentation in 25 tweets, followed by a twitter seminar. Although twitter itself is not a big deal in my presentation below, I was inspired by the challenge to reformulate my statements into tweets. This restructuring of language is indeed an offspring of digital epistemology.

Thus, my presentation will take the following – not 25 but 45 – tweets as its point of departure. I will further develop these statements in Paris, with more elaborated examples and some visual illustrations, and (probably) some exclusions.

Technical note: Twitter allows 140 characters/tweet. Italics are not possible, why I have emphasized with uppercase letters instead.

1. FIRST: »This is not new! Already the modernists...(etc)» and »This is entirely new, since technology has made possible...(etc)»...

2. BOTH these propositions are uttered from the gutenbergian central perspective where history itself is the vanishing point.

3. And they rely on romantic conceptions of progression. Au contraire, I will recite what history teaches: juxtapositions – »reverelations».

4. The statements above are (a few of many) points of departure for my investigation of the concept of Digital Epistemology (hereafter: DE).

5. DE is in fact not DIGITAL per se, but rather a (quite flickering) dominant in the discourse of arts and literature since the 1950's.

6. The 1st aspect of DE I want to touch upon here is about the relation between information structures and narratives.

7. Of course, stories have always NOT been told, but from the 1950s and onward this could be fruitfully related to digital environments.

8. It's not about »cause-and-effects», though, but about RELATIONS. »The digital» shapes environments that mirror cultural expressions.

9. The 2nd aspect of DE is about the body OF the text, as well as the body AND the text – the relation man/machine or man/environment.

10. From a media archaeological point of view these relations have been around all the time, in all art. DE just accentuates them.

11. Electronic texts challenge us to reconsider this, not primarily as an effect of digital media, but as a historical materiality of art.

12. This is not to say »There's nothing new under the sun» – because there is! But the new highlight the old, and vice versa.

13. DE demands (I would say) a posthuman approach to the arts, challenging the gutenbergian notions of understanding and interpretation.

14. Other aspects connected with DE (beside »text» & »body») are the relations between »reading»/»making»; »interpretation/materiality».

15. 1st example: Johannes Heldén's work *Entropi: edition* a digital companion to his poetry book *Entropi* (2011). http://oei.nu/e/entropi_edition.html

16. The interface clearly resembles the classic arcade games, like fx Metroid. http://www.classicgamesarcade.com/game/21640/metroid.html

17. When you »chase» the dots, poetic fragments show at the top and the bottom, like: »the consciousness is searching», »a smoky edge», etc.

18. The text, apart from lines as »books are machines» or »a new presence   confirmed real» is not explicitly »electronic» or »posthuman».

19. But the relation between the interface, and the bodily action performed to complete this text accentuates central aspects of DE:

20. Fx: a) the body/artwork relation (in all works of art); b) alternative information structures (rather than the verse or the narrative).

21. c) the (posthuman) relation »man/machine/environment»; d) the act of reading as MAKING rather than interpretation; art as ACTIVITY.

22. 2nd example: Torsten Ekbom's prose book Signalspelet (»The Game/Play of Signals» 1965) states not to be a novel but a »Prose Machine».

23. The text claims to be generated by a computer, but is indeed a literary collage made up mostly of fragments from a Biggles adventure.

24. After a while, some sort of »story» emerges, about Room 17 and agents A, B, C, D, E, F, G, etc., communicating with knocking signals.

25. Here's a digitalized version of an extract from the novel:
http://www.afsnitp.dk/galleri/konkretpoesi/ekbom/vaerker/3.html.

26. The structure of the text is not a narrative, nor a database or a game, but rather a (quite poetic but) confused computer output.

27. »Five minutes passed.//Five minutes passed. //Five minutes passed. //He lit a cigarette. //Five minutes passed. He lit a cigarette.»

28. The text accentuates the relation between man & machine, as well as the threat of depersonalization in the age of the computer.

29. The DE here operates on the notion of the Machine, the Automata, and the loss of human agency in the age of New Media and the Cold War.

30. This depersonalization (no »author», no real characters) may seem to differ from the notion of »embodiment» in the arts today.

31. But on a fictional level »someone» HAS »done something» (i.e. the programming). The machine somehow operates the reader into activity.

32. 3rd example: Susan Howe's The Midnight (1993) has (apart from the digital typesetting) apparently nothing to do with computers.

33. The Midnight consists of poems, pictures, reflections, themes and associations, vaguely clustered around the death of Howe's mother.

34. The book starts with a reproduction of a tissue interleaf from a R L Stevenson novel:
http://www.full-stop.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Howe.Ballantrae003.jpg

35. The tactile qualities of books are very present, the sound of reading (»Listen, quick rustling»), the materiality of libraries...

36. It's not a narrative, nor a poem, but rather an investigation into memories, associations, oscillations, language and history.

37. The structure of the text is deliberately open, seemingly following the narrator's sudden impulses. But is this an expression of DE?

38. The information structure of the book has obvious relations to what we, prematurely, might call a »browser poetics».

39. The book also has strong resonances with the paradigm of media archaeology. Not a survey of cause and effects, or »what came first?»

40. ...but rather a display of juxtapositions and associations, engaging the reader to EXPLORE rather than EXPLAIN – activity, again!

41. These short examples lead me to the conclusion that DE could most effectively be described with a media archaeological approach.

42. We don't NEED to categorize texts (as printed or electronic, realist or modernist) or sort them into epochs or lines of progression.

43. No, what we need is a productive approach to the (always multimodal) relations between digital, textual, visual, oral and aural art.

44. Let us read electronic texts NOT as electronic texts (which we always do), and printed texts NOT as printed texts (which we never did),

45. ...but as expressions of the always already posthuman in all art – then we can learn what history teaches: »history teaches« (G. Stein).