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Grammalepsy: An Introduction

It was only a few months prior to the gathering of these chapters that I discovered that I had grammalepsy. Or, rather, I determined that we are all of us, language animals, in the grip of this condition. We are seized by it, and singled out in its thrall, whenever we encounter or make more of the language, the languages, that we have. Linguists, historians of language, scientists studying evolution, philosophers, and philosophers of language are all able to affirm that human beings “have” language, but this is one of the very few things on which they do agree and they do so, in part, as an admission of ignorance—concerning essential details of the when, the how, the why, and, in particular, the what of this species-unique facility—not a trait exactly, because it *requires* interaction. Language cannot exist for one without others.

So, we—the plural is essential—have, and can use, and can make things with, language. And some philosophers of language also suggest that it has us, or that we dwell within it; that language uses and forms us. We live, in any case, in relations with language that alternate and unravel in terms of who or what determines the practices and performances of whoever or whatever we are—languages and ourselves—when we speak and read. Rather than taking a determinate, prescription-inducing stance on the nature and characteristics of some predominant relationship between humans and language (or language and humans), I preferred, even before discovering that I had grammalepsy, to work with language as a maker, as if it was my medium, and, thus, to learn about language in practice. I compared my practice with that of other makers in other media. And occasionally, I also made other kinds of artifacts in other media.

One of the things that I learned about language is that its “materiality” is singular, or, rather, that the way in which language comes to be is singular—embodied by and fashioned to exist as humanly perceptible material phenomena.¹ For, whatever language is, it cannot be identified—essentially or substantively—with anything that is materially perceptible to

us. Obviously, I'm bracketing certain conceptions of materiality—placing materiality into the phenomenological *epoché*. This will be clear to you because, for a start, I am trying to engage, explicitly, with an ontology of language. I say that language exists. Moreover, I accept many aspects of what would be characterized as a “materialist” philosophy of language in that, for example, I can work with the notion of “semiotic material,” and I believe that linguistic artifacts have real effects, not only in so far as they operate symbolically or in terms of signification, but also in terms of their affective force, the force of language.

Grammalepsy is, as I say, a condition of language animals. It is not a pathology, unless we think of language itself as a pathology (as some people do, despite the likelihood that thinking itself must suffer, necessarily, from the same malaise). Grammalepsy is, nonetheless, a symptom of our “having” language. And it does, I believe, bear a relationship with pharmacology. It may be poisonous for certain aspects of human experience at certain times and, all at once, it may be rendered experientially therapeutic when administered with care. The condition is symptomatic of a process, grammalepsis, that I have come to understand as constitutive for linguistic ontology. We behave and we gesture—we set out to inscribe—in our attempts to make language, but language as such only comes into being when we succeed in grammalepsis, when our gestures become readable—to ourselves and to others—when they can be read as the grammē of (a) language.

Another way of putting this is simply to say that language comes into being as a function of reading. I do not, of course, mean by this that language, somehow, depends on writing for its existence. The gestures of inscription that I speak of are heedless of support media—with which, as I've already said, language cannot be identified. These gestures are referred to grammatology, within which writing as such serves to provide us with a better way of understanding the practices of language in terms of their general principles (and the metaphysical consequences). Writing has, historically, materialized differently with respect to speech, but reading—grammaleptic reading, the reading of grammē—has remained what it was, regardless of actual linguistic practices in visually perceptible graphics. The etymology of “[to]read,” in English, supports this media agnosticism, deriving (as I read it) from something like the ability to make well-advised, convincing guesses.

If we are happy to say (in plain English) that reading brings language into being, then what is the point of inventing a new word for an implicated symptom? What is the point of grammalepsy? For one thing, the intimate association of reading with actual, historical writing is a problem for us. It nudges us toward a misdirection to which we have already alluded. Our civilizations are founded on writing and thus also on reading (of literal graphic forms), but our civilizations are as nothing when compared with the eventualities of biological evolution that gave us—that allowed us to

“have”—language. And our evolutionary disposition is unlikely to change any time soon. The brain plasticity that allows us to adopt literal reading and writing with extraordinary facility does not imply that we have evolved with respect to language.

More pragmatically, there are the implications of “-lepsy.” This suffix captures and expresses an important overall characteristic of the manifold processes of reading that bring language into being. It suggests seizure, sudden seizure, the “grasp” of something that we experience as we encounter elements of language that we can understand or can use to understand. This characteristic of grammaleptic reading is, I believe, underappreciated and possesses significant theoretical potential. It indicates the threshold, for example, between expressive gesture and actual language. Gesture remains gesture until, suddenly, it is seized by grammalepsy and thus becomes a sign within the discrete, structured world of language, within a particular language. In the case of sign languages, this abstract analogy becomes “literal.” Gestures made by someone who does not know a natural sign language remain gestures. But once they are grasped within a practice of language, they become, suddenly, something different. They become language. Grammalepsy helps us to locate and specify the horizons of language.

Grammalepsy also helps to explain how and when phenomenon with wildly various, apparently continuous interrelations of substance and form can suddenly be grasped and read as signs. Or, rather, it cannot explain exactly “how” this happens but it reminds us that it happens suddenly—I used to think and say, *catastrophically*—once substantive forms have, in their shifting morphologies, passed a threshold that causes them to be recognized as: distinct phonemes or letters, words, phrases, clauses, sentences. Past this threshold, substantive forms that were once in the world of material things are suddenly also in the world of language.² And once they have entered language, unless they lose or abandon the form that they have achieved—a phonologically or orthographically readable shape—they cannot go back. They will remain distinctly separated from other forms, even forms of the same material substance, in so far as they remain readable.

If we consider certain problems of language in general—with respect to translation for example—and (other) natural languages (“other” in the sense of those that we do not know), grammalepsy also helps us. Why should a language that we do not know be so absolutely incomprehensible to us despite our sense that the people who know it are talking and writing about the same experiences? Grammalepsy suggests that, at every level of linguistic structure, there is no reason for any of the forms in another language to be graspable, to be readable, *until they (suddenly) are*—until they are learned, known, and seized upon—since, until they are, these forms are simply gestures, just unreadable parts of our perceptual world, gesturing toward language, without having reached its threshold, not, at least, for us.³

Why set out, in an introduction to this book, by proposing and then beginning to explain a new term that is designed for a philosophy of language? Because it helps me to understand what I have done and what I was trying to do while making the aesthetic work that underpins much of the theory in these expositions. Specifically, grammalepsy helps me to grasp important characteristics of my chosen medium, and, because I also work with digital media—networked and programmable media—it is crucial, I believe, to be able to single out a particular medium and determine what it is that I am doing with it, especially when aesthetics are at stake. Grammalepsy reminds me that it is precisely the sudden change it makes to the materiality of a medium—at the moment of grammalepsis—that brings language into being and thus, ontologically, distinguishes it from any and all substantive media within which it must, nonetheless, simultaneously, be embodied. If my concern is an art of language, then it follows that I will work with language and with digital media in the knowledge that the latter will influence and inflect the when and the how and the why of grammalepsis but not necessarily the what of the language that grammalepsis brings into being—the language that is made readable. My aesthetic responsibilities for language art and for its digital situation are distinct. This practical and theoretical orientation is quite different from that of many other practitioners in the field that usually goes by the name of electronic literature.

Because of its explicit association with grammatology, grammalepsy also helps me to recall and maintain the principle of media agnosticism with respect to language art, to apply this principle whenever writing and literature are evoked. Writing and literature are overdetermined by their implicit media—archival publication in print, and practices of writing in a visuality that is constrained, typically, to literary forms or, of necessity, to literal forms. As the final chapter of this selection, “At the End of Literature,” claims, I believe that one of the most significant future cultural potentialities—as digital affordances continue to be applied to language—will be the reconfiguration of the relationship between language practices and their predominant support media. In principle, the digitalization of culture will give rise to an aurature that is able to contest the traditional sovereign claims of literature.

For the practice of language art in digital media, grammalepsy lends us perspective on a particular and a particularly critical issue. This is the question of the status, the ontology, the significance and affect of the synthetic, or, perhaps, virtual “language” that is generated by algorithmic processes. Related questions are taken up by the chapter “Reading and Giving,” within which grammalepsy is discussed before, as it were, I had learned what best to call it. Not all the practices of digital language art call for “text generation.” Indeed, much that is produced or studied as “electronic literature” bears little relation with computation that is compositionally involved with fashioning its incorporated language. On the other hand, algorithmic

text generation, translation, and reconfiguration are all important in my own work and in that of a number of colleagues, some of whose work is discussed here. Moreover, since the passing of an AI (artificial intelligence) winter into its spring during the 2010s, the ascendancy and popularization of natural language processing (NLP), the aggregation of vast quantities of statistically analyzed “big data” for natural languages, and the application of neural net and recursive neural net technologies to linguistic corpora, all of these factors and others mean that there is an ocean of generated artificial language out there, especially on the internet, ostensibly readable by language animals. This is a world of materially existing linguistic forms within which digital language artists must now make their own interventions and artifacts. Grammalepsy offers, in this context, a way of reflecting on and perhaps judging the relative artificiality or virtuality of algorithmically generated language. For, although all literally inscribed (and thus encoded) language has been grasped by a symbolic order that is continuous with contemporary computation, grammalepsy indicates an analogous but distinct process that is defined by reading, the reading performed by the only language animals that are known to us. When elements of language are grasped and thus brought into being as language through grammalepsis, this is *not* to say, reductively, that they have (just) been “parsed” and processed by a formal computational system. The material presence of language-like tokens within encoded computational structures does not guarantee their linguistic ontology—not until, in some manner, grammalepsis has also taken place. Within the computational order, traces of actual language and tokens of synthetic or virtual language are materially indistinguishable, but this does not mean that they are the same thing. And it is vital, in my opinion, that human readers remain capable of distinguishing actual language from synthetic “language,” especially those readers who are also practitioners and theorists of digital language art.

There is also, simply, the reason—for introducing grammalepsy in this introduction—that it represents thinking and theory to which my practice has brought me. It is an outcome in itself, part of a final, if unfinished, chapter.

The essays selected for these chapters span a relatively lengthy period of time—from the mid-1990s down to the time of writing, in the late 2010s—longer than might be expected of comparable collections. Given the pace of change in digitally mediated culture, this period may seem even longer, one during which its early artifacts must surely appear to have dated significantly if not catastrophically. I was pleasantly surprised to find that, although much of the work referred to in these pages has ceased to be supported on contemporary platforms, its underlying principles of composition and the associated theory still have something to offer.

This book is by someone who identifies, first, as a practitioner, a translator and poet-turned-digital poet and (digital) language artist. But I am the

kind of practitioner who never works without a more or less articulated theoretical understanding of what it is that I am trying to do, and I have endeavored to take this self-reflexive understanding seriously, siting it in the context of literary criticism, poetics, critical theory, and cultural studies. The essays collected here always aimed to be engaged with their proximate critical discourses. They do, however, gravitate around my own production, and thus, this self-reflexive theory tends to involve more reference to my own work than to that of my colleagues. This selection's first chapter, "Beyond Codexspace," is, in particular, more of a description of work, more of an artist's talk, than a developed thought or argument. This is excusable, I trust, in so far as it provides the reader with some initial context, by populating the book with initial examples of practice for which, at the time, literary and poetic theory barely accounted.

I have, of course, reread all of the chapters in this book and done a little light editing of their main texts. There is more of this for the earlier chapters, rendering their allusions to contemporary circumstances a little more relevant, or general, or up-to-date. The notes throughout have been more extensively edited. To the best of my knowledge and abilities, I've brought references, especially internet references, up-to-date. I've also tried to use URLs that will persist, and I have checked for accessibility, and included most recent access dates in the bibliography. Links for which I was responsible but which have broken since first publication have been repaired or substituted. I have had to remove a few links that were irreparable, and I apologize in anticipation of those broken links that will surely remain.

There are a number of obsessions that run in threads throughout these chapters. By way of brief introduction, I will follow some of these threads, aiming to touch on each of the chapters at least once, where appropriate, and link their thinking to the more general entanglement.

From well before the 1990s and even today, after more than two decades of hyperhistory, the media that concern us—networked and programmable media in my terms—have been characterized as "new." Newly perceptible phenomena call for—and are brought into language by—new terms, and the field within which I have practiced and theorized is beset with the problem of naming. I was and am as much a part of the problem as anyone. In 2008, I tried to settle some of the issues in the "Weapons of the Deconstructive Masses" (WDM) but singularly failed, since I hadn't then come up with the term with which I am now content. The field I work within is "digital language art." "Literary art" is a highly privileged subfield of language art, but this name concedes relations with both literal media ([typo]graphic media) and "the literary" as an assertion of cultivated values which are implicated with particular canons and traditions of practice. "Language art" specifies a medium without the implicit commitment to particular support media, while "art," at the head of the phrase, asserts a pragmatic intimacy with art as it is practiced in other media. I always balked at "electronic" and

at all the various “e-” and “i-” prefixes. Except by analogy with “electronic music” (where “electronic” indicates technicity and a very wide range of actual electronic sound-making and recording instruments), it seemed to me foolish for aesthetic language practices to establish inappropriate material associations from the get-go, especially in the context of computation, given the latter’s singular, problematic materiality. But just as electronic music has an established tradition and nomenclature (although for longer than its literary bedfellow), electronic literature has now, along with a canon of sorts, an established place in the academy and, to an extent, in the world of letters.

As for the “digital” of digital language art, this is also a problem given that an art of language is our purpose. The last chapter in this book—although concerning itself only minimally with these questions of naming—states it clearly, “The digital ... is not a medium. More precisely, it is not a medium of interest to the majority of theorists or practitioners of those arts for which language is the medium.” In the future, I expect digital language art to go the way of digital art. There is art, but no one need mention that it is “digital” because art is simply part of a culture that is also, inevitably, historically digital, and these circumstances have little to tell us concerning the significance or affect of the art as such.

Apart from in “WDM,” questions surrounding nomenclature are taken up, particularly, in “Beyond Codexspace,” “Of Programmatology,” and “Hyper/Cybertext/Poetext.” Summarizing, I preferred “digital” to “electronic” and, albeit hopelessly, “programmaton” for “computer.” “Programmatology” is a more or less playful and obvious allusion to Jacques Derrida’s “grammatology.” For a time, once having settled in a university department for which “creative writing” underlay, institutionally, its “literary arts,” I determined to call what I did with my colleagues and students “writing digital media,” but I have abandoned even the nice ambiguities of this phrase’s grammar and its medial hostage to fortune, as outlined above. One of the phrases for which I credit myself and which I still find useful is “networked and programmable media.” The programmability of both compositional and delivery media—once encoded instantiations of substantive media became available—was and is something that distinguishes these media and their potentialities. The actual creation *by these same programmable media* of what we now think of as *the* network, and their broadcast life in the new world of information, gave programmable media overwhelming quantifiable power by which, in practice, they are also specified and qualified. Not “digital” then, but “programmable” and “networked.” The insufficiently anticipated non-mutuality of emergent network architectures is another matter, and we will return to this.

Initially, “cybertext”—which no longer seems to figure despite the continuing influence of Espen Aarseth’s eponymous monograph—presented itself as a much more inclusive and catholic term as compared with

“hypertext” when these circulated together in the first decade of accessible digital language art. I associated hypertext with the long-form fiction that predominated in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, during the initial, broader dissemination of digitally mediated writing (writing as it most definitely then was). Given my background in the translation of poetry (from Chinese) and also as a poet per se, I was resistant to the predominance of a form that was, programmatically, formally, and poetically straightforward, relatively so, and that remained largely uninvolved with the composition—the generation and modulation—of a work’s constitutive language. My work was part of an informal factional intervention that encouraged practitioners who were beginning to self-identify as electronic writers to involve themselves with historically contextualized poetics, especially experimental and innovative poetics, and, at the same time, to encourage poetic practitioners to take digital mediation seriously with regard to both criticism and composition. “Pressing the ‘REVEAL CODE’ Key,” “Of Programmatology,” in particular “Hypertext/Cybertext/Poetext,” and “Time Code Language” are all situated at this juncture, offering both critique and collaborative common ground.

“The Code Is Not the Text (Unless It Is the Text)” is my most influential essay in the field. It is impossible to discount or exaggerate what code and coding can and will do for practices of language. This chapter, however, asks us to tread carefully when we try to understand the relationships between practices of coding and practices of language, to know what we are doing when we treat one as the other, or acknowledge a hybrid “codework.” My position is still that code is not natural, human language at any level. Code is practiced entirely within the framework of formal, usually Turing-complete computer languages, but “language” in this phrase has a constrained and far different meaning to the one it has, even in everyday speech. The elements and formal structures of code can be easily introduced into language, but the elements and structures (even the formally expressible structures) of language cannot easily be introduced into code as such (other than as quoted strings) and, if they could be, then the code would no longer be code. “The Code Is Not the Text” asks language artists who work in programmable media to remember what they are working with.

In common with many artists who have, at some point, identified themselves as writers, I am fascinated by the surface(s) on which we write. For most of us, this resolves to a fascination with the book and its culture, an extraordinary world, with no sign of ending any time soon. Jacques Derrida’s expansive notions concerning what “the book” and “paper” may still become have more distant horizons than those of many more materially focused critiques. Clearly, however, those of us who work with programmable media present themselves with strangely mediated surfaces, as well as with innovative instruments that inscribe these surfaces. Today, in the developed world, this is, essentially, true for all writers.⁴ A screen, displaying a surface, usually made up of light-colored pixels, is interrupted

and thus “inscribed” with dark-colored pixels. On the one hand, it appears to us that the surfaces on which we write have become impossibly complex at levels beyond our perceptual horizons; on the other, linguistic inscription is, as it always was, a play of the most fundamental and abstract possible difference—dark against light, 0 and 1.

Quite apart from screens, I have also had the privilege of working with writing—language art—for immersive stereo 3D audiovisual instruments. In the graphics world that these instruments project, language can be inscribed in the articulated light of artificial space, perceptible to us as like the space within which we live habitually. In “The Gravity of the Leaf” and “Writing on Complex Surfaces,” I discuss this aspect of my practice and attempt to explore the potential “complexities” of inscription’s surfaces. There are important problems here, which these chapters do not resolve, and do not do so, perhaps in part, for strategic, pragmatic reasons. My understanding of the complex surface took inspiration from my reading of Joan Retallack as cited at the beginning of “Writing on Complex Surfaces.” But for writers and poets, like Retallack, the “complexity” of the writing surface is figurative—although no less real in terms of significance and affect—and this may be all it ever needs to be. Poetic practices—or the “poethical” practices that Retallack proposes—are more than enough to render the inscribed surface as fractal, invaginated, complex. In digital language art, the complexity of a writing surface can be actualized (shying away from the overdetermination of “literalized”), but may nonetheless risk performing a “(philosophically) ‘thin’ literal materiality.”⁵ This risk, when combined with underappreciation of language’s singular materiality—its ontological distinction from its support media—can create problems for the critical reading of digital language art.

A particular variety of practice, emergent from my engagement with the inscription of graphic language in artificial 3D, remains unambiguously complex for me in terms of inscriptional surfaces. This kind of practice takes place at the horizon of text and paratext and is characterized by the (mis)placing of textual or figurative graphic forms such that they themselves become surfaces for inscription. In the world of 2D graphics, the work of Saul Bass represents exemplary practice of this kind, in designs where flat figurative forms not only provide paratextual, design-functional “rules” but also make surfaces for letter-formed words. In immersive virtual reality (or simply on the 2D-for-3D of the computer screen), graphic forms can be made both to give passage into spaces that are “beyond” the surfaces on which they appear to be inscribed, while simultaneously serving as surfaces for the graphic forms of inscriptions that may be indeterminately situated. So long as they are readable, they could be either “in front of” or “beyond, through the window of” the forms-serving-as-surfaces that support their readability. My maquette, *Lens*, demonstrates this complexity. From the perspective of language art, it is important to note that, whatever the modeled spatial

arrangement of the graphic elements may be, when they become readable as language, their spatial relations collapse for the purposes of taking up existence on the singular surface of language. Or, in other words, through grammalepsis, as we read what they say, these forms *become* language and allow us to enter the linguistic dimension of experience. For me, such phenomena, actually perceptible in immersive virtual reality, create a conceptual rhyme with certain believers' experience of the icon. An icon is not a representation; it is a threshold, a form that gives access to the thing itself, allowing the artist and believer not only to see but to have direct experience of the deity.⁶ In the same way, and just as mysteriously, graphic forms may be arranged to become language, to bring it into being for a reader, or, on the other hand, to remove it from their experience.

Throughout these chapters and in the underlying work, one constant has been a desire and ambition, shared with other artists and theorists, to demonstrate and articulate the specificities of digitally mediated practices of aesthetic language. The singularity, as I see it, of linguistic ontology and the manner in which this determines its relations with the actual material culture of language makes it difficult to assert these specificities. Grammaleptic reading is reading no matter when and how it occurs, and it is this reading, fundamentally, that constitutes language. Thus the specificities of linguistic practice in digital media are, precisely, matters of culture; they require that the institution of reading is cultivated in new ways and that new ways of reading are brought into the institution as a whole.

The chapter within which there is the most concerted effort to make claims for a specific type of digitally mediated language art and an associated practice of reading is "Time Code Language." It remains the case, I believe, that time and language art—the restructuring of the culture of human time with respect to reading—is one of the dimensions of language art practice where digital mediation has come to play a crucial and undeniable role, changing, qualitatively, our understanding and appreciation of language art. Composed (pre-composed, pro-grammed), not only performed, linguistic artifacts are able to exist as materially temporal artifact-events thanks to the affordances of computer and screen (in the form of distribution now most familiar to us). "Text in digital media can move and change. It's as simple as that."⁷ This makes possible, as set out in "Writing on Complex Surfaces" and in works of mine like *overboard* and *translation*, an ambient poetics, and it demands that literary criticism accept the existence of linguistic artifacts for which there is no definitive text or edition in the conventional sense. Literary critics will have to learn to read certain "texts" as pieces in time, as experiences, like music or like film. It's ironic that a sophisticated criticism of film, in particular, has flourished in humanities departments for which the study and appreciation of literature conventionally and typically demands a textual criticism that forecloses the potential for certain expressive temporalities of its texts.

With “Writing to Be Found” and “Terms of Reference” the theoretical impetus shifts—along with that of my underlying practice—from the ways in which language relates to its compositional and delivery media along with what these media’s digital affordances make possible or necessary for aesthetic language, toward a deep concern with the effects of the digitalization of culture on practices of language, including practices of aesthetic language. The ideas behind “Writing to Be Found” predate “big data” and the civil-scale architecture of computation, within which we now live, that I call “Big Software.” These ideas predate, that is, a more general critical awareness of cultural circumstances that do now circulate, as of the late 2000s and 2010s. My views on these circumstances are quite clearly and explicitly set out in “Terms of Reference” and also in an interview I gave for an important gathering of academics’ and artists’ views on digital media and digital culture.⁸ “Writing to Be Found” helped me realize that practices of language had already changed; I would venture paradigmatically, regardless of any instruments for composition or delivery, because, in the developed world, the situation of human beings with respect to culturally powerful frameworks for language use had changed. This thought can be summed up by saying that, in “Writing to Be Found,” “Google is our point of reference.” It is not only that I made a specific intervention using Google, I discovered, for myself and I hope for others, crucial implications of acknowledging that Google is our linguistic point of reference, generally. Whatever else you may say (and there is much more to say about these matters than I am able even to attempt), our points of reference—for writing, for practices of (authorized) language—had moved out of the library and away from the books archived there, and onto the internet, in the questionable—all-too-little-questioned—“care” of huge, private service providers, “GAFA” as the French have it: Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and so on. I won’t reiterate what is in the chapters here or try to say more. My main point is that if your points of reference have changed, then your writing, your practices of language have changed. One consequence is that the executive branches of government in certain countries are conducting business and garnering popular support on Twitter—courting institutional aporia and virtual tyranny.

As I see it, if they do not already, then it will not be long before software architectures of global scope and power—privately owned and managed—will shape and structure the culture, as a whole, of the developed world. This seems to me an extraordinary thing to say and yet the extent to which it is already the case is remarkable. I’m not so much talking about any determination of, for example, what counts as an artifact or artwork—not at this stage. But where and how an artifact circulates and the frameworks within which it is made, these contexts are already significantly beholden to super-managed networked services. Of immediate, civil and political concern is the manner in which the culture of our polity itself is or could be super-managed, with instantaneous effects that would, inevitably, be

ideologically implicated, and also historical in the sense of changing what happens. Consider the effect on media in the Anglophone world if Twitter reconfigured their software architecture to make all accounts equal, with followers universally limited to humanly appreciable numbers. Consider effects of the fact that such a policy is not instituted in Twitter's current software architectures.

The penultimate chapter in this selection, "Reconfiguration," acknowledges related aspects of what I take to be artists' historical circumstances toward the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century. The culture within which artists work has, in the developed world, been reconfigured by global software architectures that control and channel the human attention that may or may not be directed toward art. The scale and power of this architecture is now commensurate with corresponding institutions of the pre-digital era. In a sense, little has changed for innovative or experimental practitioners, who must still compete with, and perhaps oppose, popular and persistent cultural forms. The programmability of computation, however, appears to encourage innovation both in terms of realizable potential and simply because the culture of software values innovation for itself. In these circumstances and because "configuration" is an appropriately resonant technical term within hardware and software development, the chapter "Reconfiguration" suggests that artists, particularly artists working with and against digital media, already do—and should self-consciously—characterize their practice as "reconfigurationist." A trope that I take to be typical of this kind of practice is also identified, the "symbolic image," a configuration of image—or whatever is considered "content"—with, as it were, embedded symbolic, often algorithmic, process. This is an abstracted form that I take to underlie a wide range of art that is now digital, and it is a form that lends itself to reconfiguration.

The final chapter, in the grip of grammalepsy, is aurature, "At the End of Literature." It speaks for itself, and, like the other chapters in this selection, represents the result of an engagement with experimental aesthetic practice—my efforts to reconfigure the emergent software architectures of transactive synthetic language. It makes a number of significant claims that I continue to find compelling despite—tumbling within the breaking waves of constant, self-consciously disruptive, and unprecedentedly powerful technological innovation—the difficulty of deciding which fascinating innovation will actually survive and bring some shape to our shared experience. But listening and speaking together are constitutive of what we are—as language animals and as makers of language art. Now that networked computational processes present themselves in located, (even minimally) socialized physical bodies and now that they listen like we do and give voice as the mark of humanoid embodiment, I think that we and they have reached a threshold, perhaps one that we thought was a horizon. Grammalepsy should be read as a condition of shared human life. It characterizes experiences that are preformed and,

necessarily, shared by human animals as we become, continually, language animals, as perceptible forms that we fashion suddenly give us access to a symbolically structured human world, a world that is more human because it is suddenly more language. Who or what else do we believe might live in this world with us? Who or what else can read, can perform grammalepsis? Or, on the other hand, might we be cured of our grammalepsy and driven out of human language into a desert of symbolic exchange?