thought virus: **MX**
the memory experiment

user manual

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thought virus: **MX**
a conceptual introduction

every meaning is an organism

"In my opinion, you're on the wrong track" - The Roches, Hammond Song

Hi.

I'm attempting to grow, as organically as I'm aware, sharable mental systems as art. As nature follows the path of least resistance, the easiest mental things to share are our words. Being a poetic fuck, I'm most interested in feeling, ease, romance, the way that words cuddle emotions with teeth and pull, in short, love, pleasure, and art.

What does this mean in terms of mind? What is a beautiful thought? What is loving information? What's the joy of thinking? The aesthetics of knowing yourself? Cognitive art?

To explore these questions, and also because it's way cool, I'm growing a phenomenological semantic virus designed to infect computer systems with language, and explore and spread ideas with enjoyable personal experiences of discovery.

language as a virus
(or, teaching W. S. Burroughs how to suck eggs)

A mind, as the cliché goes, is a highly contagious brain parasite transmitted to a child by parents, school, and society using words. Currently using **MX** is like a new form of writing, idea storage. Each unique idea, thought, text string in the entries.dbf table represents a *semantic object*, basically: something that means something. These thoughts as text are each given an ID number, and doubly-linked: ID1 to ID2 *and* ID2 to ID1 in the links.dbf table. The object with its links represents a *semantic structure*, open-ended, and simple.

As this experiment continues, I intend to build these structures into *semantic organisms*. **MX** right now is about creating a population of interconnected thoughts. A month from now, adding time sensitivity, four months, adding weighting and inhibition. **MX** will be a swarm of semantic microorganisms, an idea soup.

That's one perspective. The other perspective is that of a meme carrier. My first goals with this system were to 1, try to encourage an exploration of diverse values and thought-styles, and 2, encourage the development of non-linear thought processes. **New Visions, New Voices**, is the first group to see this outside a few close friends.

wadical epistemology

My Webster's Dictionary defines *epistemology* as "the study or theory of the origin, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge." The goal of this experiment is to grow, evolve a shared human-computer epistemology, a way of knowing. I believe I've started with the fundamental *primitives* of knowledge: differentiation, and association. I've been hanging out here for a while, typing entries where I could have written a program to read and parse text files.

I started this experiment 10 years ago, sending 10 lists with 10 items each as mail art to different

friends and artists. One week I sent a list, art
1 art and compassion
2 architectural beauty
3 memory
4 happiness
5 Kandinsky
6 art kills
7 the sacred arts of life
8 a source of unexpected ideas
9 a source of ideas
10 the statistical nature of art

A friend sent back,
art
1 asshole gallery owners
2 starvation
3 struggle
4 that dick at the Piezoelectric
5 impeach Reagan
6 freezing my ass off
7 ...
I was struck by a completely different *method* of knowing, apparent in just a few lines. I decided to keep investigating this structure, and eventually learned how to code, and make it easier to save these lists.

In experiments asking large groups of people, "list 10 associations you have with ..." I was consistently amazed not only at how differently people's associations were, there was always less than a 3% match, but also how differently the *structure* of their thinking was from mine, and each other. I hope by getting groups of people to share this software, and eventually putting it on the net, a great diversity of knowing might be explored. In my silly epistemology, what I *know* is that which I both think *and* feel. I deeply believe that discovering ways to share what we know with each other is the most important task at the end of this extraordinary century. Do more with less, knowledge is power.

steps to a computable language

1. give every meaning a number
2. allow everything to be connected to anything
3. guide networks to the generation of diverse forms mirroring uses

The structure of associations in **MX** allows compact digital representation of meaning relationships. These can be foundations for differently layered neural nets. Humans in english, machines in binary.

thought virus: *MX*

having a conversation with your thoughts

how to use this software
no mind, no interface

MX is designed to encourage reflective thinking, allowing your thoughts to ramble easily. Following Edward R. Tufte's principle of "least chart ink," I've worked very hard at removing everything possible that isn't the thoughts themselves. I realize that, as it stands, **MX** has an "expert" interface, one that only the person who wrote it *really* knows, but using **MX** is *really* simple.

Start with any idea, type it in, play. Let's begin with an idea already in the system: **MX.**
1. start **MX**
2. at the cursor, type: mx<enter>. The thoughts already associated with "mx" will start loading into the screen list. You can interrupt this at any time, but let it load for now.

simple things you can do while a list is loading
· to add another thought, just start typing (a-z)
· to get a blank entry, type the <tab> key, or <ctrl>+<down arrow>
· to start a new list, type the <enter> key
· to edit the title, type the <ctrl>+<down arrow> key
· to choose an entry on screen at random for a new list, type the <page down> key
· to go into "ramble" mode, type the <+> key
· to pause the loading, type the <spacebar>

while a list is loading and paused,
· as above, and to select a specific entry on the screen, type the number key <1> to <0>, 0 for 10 for the list line

You should now see a randomly cycling display that looks somewhat like this:
mx

1 word association database
2 software toy
3 animating thoughts

4 benevolent virus
5 taking my art more seriously
6 memory paths
7 I don't know how to explain this very well
8 omnitopological network
9 thought library
10 I want to design a virus

Let's play for a while. Use the <up arrow> and <down arrow> keys, or type a number key <1> to <0>, 0 for 10, to change the size of the cycling list. Pause the list, and get more random selections by typing the <spacebar>. Toggle the number display by typing the <#> key. Change the selection rate by using the <right arrow> key to slow the cycling, and the <left arrow> key to speed it up. In Windows, you can now resize the window, and move it around.

more simple things you can do while a list is cycling
· to add another thought, just start typing (a-z)
· to get a blank entry, type the <tab> key, or <ctrl>+<down arrow>
· to start a new list, type the <enter> key
· to edit the title, type the <ctrl>+<down arrow> key
· to choose an entry on screen at random for a new list, type the <page down> key
· to go into "ramble" mode, type the <+> key
· to pause the loading, type the <spacebar>

while a list is paused,
· as above, and to select a specific entry on the screen, type the number key <1> to <0>, 0 for 10, for the list line
· to get another set of associations, type the <spacebar>
· to restart the cycling, type any of the <arrow> keys

ok, think

What do you think about? What do you like thinking about? At the moment, **MX** is a passive system for gathering thoughts. The most interesting thinking, in fact the *only* thinking that's going on is in your mind. Using **MX** can be many different things to different people:
· a self-patterned oracle
· a brainstorming tool
· a relaxing way of noodling around silly ideas
· an attractor and forest for stray thoughts, removing them from your mind
· a tool for conceptual mapping, and conceptual development
· an affirmations thingy, you are *so* good-looking

· a thought-flow, right-brain, writer's block-clearing methodology
· a thought diary
· a word game

for now, lets play a game:

Type the <enter> key until you come to a blank screen. Choose a thought, an idea, a word, or phrase, type it in, and type <enter>. Has it been "thought" before? If it has, the list will be cycling, type <tab> to get a blank entry. What creative associations do you have when you see the phrase or word you've chosen? Type then in and hit <enter> How many can you think of? When do you find that you want to think about something else? Perhaps something you've just entered? Are you thinking differently than the way you normally think?

your idea
13 _

what you can do while entering a thought

· to edit previously entered thoughts (to save typing), type the <uparrow > or <downarrow> keys to cycle through the list of loaded thoughts
· to edit the title, type the <ctrl>+<down arrow> key
· to get a blank entry, type <ctrl>+<down arrow>
· to choose the current for a new list, type the <page down> key
· to start a new list, type the <page up> or <esc> key
· to delete an association with an entry, type the <control>+<delete> key combination, this will not remove the thought from the database, only remove the link with the title thought.

searching for already entered thoughts

· type in the first characters of what you want to find and type the <tab> key
a "browse" window will appear if the text if found. Navigate using the mouse, <arrow> and <page> keys to get the selection you want.
1. to get the text, type the <enter> key. You can then edit it at the prompt.
2. to select the text as a new list, type the <control>+<enter> key combination

Note: be careful in the browse! Editing functions don't exist yet, so the browse is the place to fix typos. Delete an entry completely by using <control>+<delete>.

things to do

· put **MX** on a network and let a group use it
· try the "ramble: mode to "dream" through the lists until coming upon one with less than 10 entries.
· **MX.EXE** is designed to create blank data files when run in a directory without data files. Please try both adding to existing data, and starting *tabula rasa*.
· When using **MX**, there is no right way, or way you're *supposed* to use it. It's an experiment. Like any swarm system, any mistakes will be lost in the rhythm of large numbers. Ignore all errors!

common misconceptions about this software

1. This is hypertext. Not. This is like hypertext, but this is a tool/toy to actively use in experiencing the nature of thinking, one thought at a time. As such, we're not linking texts, but thoughts. Call this hyperthinking or some such around me, and I'll belt you. The granularity of semantic objects is smaller, **MX** is more personal--again, not text processing but thought processing. There is no "end-product" such as a help system or encyclopedia, **MX** is a process tool. If using this, you start thinking about the art of your thinking, I'll be happy.

2. This is Artificial Intelligence. No! Aiee! Again, there's a bit in common. **MX** takes a basic inspiration from Ross Quillian's semantic networks and other early frame-based AI. **MX** is much more the beginnings of a collectivist net of natural intelligence. I try to gather, what do people actually think? What are the ways people actually think, not with logical rules, but with amorphously shifting areas and concentrations of awareness. Again I'm not interested in thinking machines but in gathering thinking together with people.

The closest AI system to **MX** is Doug Lenat's MCC supported Cyc system which tries to "objectively" create an ontological mapping to the real world. Fuck that. I'm an artist, there is no "objective" knowledge. The terms are contradictory. Bottom up or dick.

Do I really need a computer that thinks? I really need something that holds my best thoughts and replays them back to me. I trust my knowledge well enough, and my most difficult times are forgetting what I already know, forgetting myself. How do I make love stay? Self-love, even?

3. Viruses are bad. Ok, most of the time for us, I guess they are. I joke with my lover, "so many viruses, so little time." Viruses are the agents of change, the messengers and catalysts of evolution. They exist as systems on the borders of life, and like with so many other things, the boundaries are the places that are most interesting, where change happens fastest. What is toxic change and what is healthy? Beats me, in the long sense I

mean. We are well on the way to creating virus-like semi-living systems. Our interactions with these systems will change us as much as our systems.

4. This was easy to do. Aaargh! I wanna be at the beach! The most difficult thing is keeping things simple. KISS. Ugh, work. Actually, it's kinda fun once I get into it,.but rather difficult to earn money at. Throw money at me! Ha ha ha ha ha! ***Ignore all errors!***

The books

My art is about sharing information, and as it's getting close to the postmark deadline, I'll just add a small bibliograhy in lieu of actually writing more:

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about the artist:

I never ran this ad :

> Frog of a soul, old before the afternoon, seeks redoubtable compainion: perky tits, tanned thighs, hazel eyes, Nobel prize. Used to not getting everything he wants, but still surprisingly and unfairly petulant. Difficult to get drunk. 31, but not stable--imitating aging and good at it. The same brown eyes as before, but brown hair still longer.

I write stories.

the institute for the prevention of design:

The Institute for the Prevention of Design is a vehicle for research and implementation of ideas concerning the prevention of design in body, events, society, and mind. To this end we encourage the attitude: Everything must be art. Besides working with intuitional, biological, and evolutionary generative systems as an alternative to design, we actively seek to nurture an aesthetic appreciation of the arts of prevention. Current projects include Sofia, a local group mind project based on MX. Past projects have included the Metaphorgasm and Cafe of Dreams open poetry readings, and several books of poetry. Write the Institute at: 1436 8th Ave., San Francisco, CA 94122, or in care of mc2@well.sf.ca.us. Thank you.