Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959-1995 (Modern & Contemporary Poetics)

Christopher Thompson Funkhouser

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A singular and major historical view of the birth of electronic poetry.

For the last five decades, poets have had a vibrant relationship with computers and digital technology. This book is a documentary study and analytic history of digital poetry that highlights its major practitioners and the ways that they have used technology to foster a new aesthetic. Focusing primarily on programs and experiments produced before the emergence of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s, C. T. Funkhouser analyzes numerous landmark works of digital poetry to illustrate that the foundations of today's most advanced works are rooted in the rudimentary generative, visual, and interlinked productions of the genre's prehistoric period.

Since 1959, computers have been used to produce several types of poetic output, including randomly generated writings, graphical works (static, animated, and video formats), and hypertext and hypermedia. Funkhouser demonstrates how hardware, programming, and software have been used to compose a range of new digital poetic forms. Several dozen historical examples, drawn from all of the predominant approaches to digital poetry, are discussed, highlighting the transformational and multi-faceted aspects of poetic composition now available to authors. This account

includes many works, in English and other languages, which have never before been presented in an English-language publication.

In exploring pioneering works of digital poetry, Funkhouser demonstrates how technological constraints that would seemingly limit the aesthetics of poetry have instead extended and enriched poetic discourse. As a

history of early digital poetry and a record of an era that has passed, this study aspires both to influence poets working today and to highlight what the future of digital poetry may hold.

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