

Signwave Auto-Illustrator

Artistic Concept

Although presented much like a traditional piece of graphic design software, Auto-Illustrator expresses a vast new way of treating code as a creative extension of the self. The routines of Auto-Illustrator have been imbued with coded implementations of the author/artist's creative decision-making process. In effect, this results in a deferred artistic activity, away from the original author, and as it is a computer application, in the hands of the person executing it.

This brings about many questions regarding authorship and authenticity of digital artworks. It poses new possibilities for the valuation of mechanically reproduced artworks, and offers the possibility that programming (a creative act above anything else) becomes more than just a method of production (i.e., a craft) - thus rendering the author as code. This also opens us to the possibility of a real-world implementation of cyborgism. When you run Auto-Illustrator, you interact with me, the author of the code. Your final products (despite thinking they are created by you) will actually have been produced in collaboration with the me.

Interface Condensation

Also presented as a parody of Adobe Illustrator, it mimics certain interface elements in an attempt to highlight the growing inadequacies of modern software. Professional software development is now about making software for the masses, and not for the professionals. The latest incarnation of Adobe Photoshop typifies this move away from focused professionalism to extreme populist automation; Photoshop will now render all your web page buttons for you. Hopefully, within a few years, all web pages will conform to Adobe's graphic design specifications!

As an extreme reaction against this, Auto-Illustrator deliberately forces the user to experience a slightly jarring and dysfunctional approach to graphic design. Every time you ask it to draw an oval, it tries to draw a psychotic face. It'll never draw the same psychotic face twice, mind you.

Process over Product?

Auto-Illustrator features a great deal of tools and utilities that allow the user to explore different ways of generating artwork. As well as allowing traditional visual design skills, users can automate their own behaviours, and reiterate them on their own artwork, or even on others'. The menus of filters, transformations and plug-ins reveal that it is possible to codify graphic design skills as code. On a practical level, this makes generating certain visual designs easy (through automation), and yet on a philosophical level, we start to question where a graphic designer's skills may lie. Would it be possible to render yourself purely as code, and then sell your skills as applications?

Beta Software

Auto-Illustrator is work in progress because it serves as a testing ground for many theoretical and experimental ways of dealing with certain issues that I, the author, feel are important. Through writing Auto-Illustrator (and its earlier companion application, Autoshop) I have confronted and challenged issues surrounding artistic theory and computing practice. I extend these arguments beyond the usual boundaries by implementing them in differing social contexts - my software is used by visual artists, academics and graphic designers; Each group finds their own reason for using it, and experience these challenges in a variety of ways, each drawing their own conclusion.

Adrian Ward

Thursday 22nd March 2001, London.

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Technical Realization

Signwave Auto-Illustrator is an interactive graphic design application for Windows and Macintosh computers, although it operates best on Macintoshes. While in development, it may be downloaded for free from its web site (<http://www.auto-illustrator.com>).

Due to its nature, it is highly unsuitable for this software to be demonstrated in any other way than by the individual downloading it and running it for themselves. Although I have provided a short video of the application in action, it must really be utilized how it is intended.

Please download the application from the web site (or use the copy provided on the enclosed CD-Rom) and install it on any G3 Macintosh computer. It requires MacOS 8.1 or higher, with QuickTime 4+, and at least 32ma RAM.

Artist Biography

Adrian Ward works as a software artist, developing interactive generative visual and audio applications. Concerned primarily with issues of authorship and the extension of aesthetic subjectivity into code, he is engaged with a number of projects that intend to bring about a subtle change in the way people interact with technology.

Currently collaborating with a range of musicians, conceptual and performance artists, he also uses his software for live musical performances and installations. He is involved with a number of educational software projects that actively engage the user by exploring interactivity within a generative context.

Ade has had his work published by Lovebytes (Sheffield), MediaSpace (Plymouth) and Rhizome (New York), had software exhibited at 291 Gallery (London) and the New Museum of Contemporary Art (NYC), and has presented papers at two International Generative Art conferences (Milan). His most ambitious project to date - Auto-Illustrator, a generative vector graphic design application - recently co-won the Transmediale.01 Artistic Software award (Berlin).

Supporting material

Digital photographs of the artist are provided on the CD-Rom.

A copy of Signwave Autoshop for Macintosh computers is also provided - please unstuff onto your hard disk using Alladin Stuffit Expander before using.

Copies of two previous papers presented at the 2nd and 3rd International Generative Arts Conferences are provided in HTML format - please view the appropriate index.html files in your favourite browser.

For further material, please visit the following web sites

<http://www.signwave.co.uk/>

<http://www.sidestream.org/>

<http://www.generative.net/>