

Writing's Analogy to the Wave-Particle Duality

In 1924, Louis de Broglie, in his thesis « Recherche sur la théorie des quanta », hypothesised that particles of matter can exhibit wave behaviour, and that waves such as light can exhibit particle behaviour. The corollary, widely accepted as part of the bedrock of Physics, is that there are no distinct categories of particles or waves, but hybrid wave-particles, which exhibit particle behaviour under some circumstances, and wave behaviour in others.

I propose that this wave-particle duality is an accurate metaphor for the nature of writing.

Writing contains words. Much attention is given to analyses of the meanings of these words. Often, writing is treated as if its only purpose were to convey semantic meaning through words. We might describe attention to words as the particle aspect of writing.

Linguistics, semantics, most philosophy, literature, legal documents, email and SMS messages focus on the particle aspect of writing.

Less attention is given to the non-verbal quality of writing : its visual appearance, and what this might convey. The visual appearance of writing could be described as its wave aspect.

Signatures, calligraphy, asemic writing and graphology operate more on the wave aspect of writing.

Western civilisation massively over-emphasises the particle aspect of writing. We need to consider both sides of its nature, in order to truly understand what writing is, and what it does to us.

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