

THE ACT OF READING

EDITED BY NATHAN JONES
& SAM SKINNER

TORQUE #2

CONTENTS

9

Nathan Jones & Sam Skinner
INTRODUCTION

19

N. Katherine Hayles
NONCONSCIOUS COGNITION AND
JESS STONER'S *I HAVE BLINDED MYSELF
WRITING THIS*

37

Garrett Stewart
TONGUE #2: ECHO NEURONS,
SECONDARY VOCALITY, AND THE
LEX-SEAM

73

Esther Leslie
MOVING WORDS: FACTS OF READING

97

Hannah Proctor
READING TIMES SQUARE: SIGNS,
SURFACES AND SKIN IN THE CITY

115

James Wilkes
READ-RECEIPT

128

Anna Barham
I'M A TONGUE TRANSIT

131

Charles Bernstein
FROM MY FREQUENCIES

151

Claire Potter
EXTRACT FROM...

156

Sam Skinner
THFREE TEXTZ

162

Nathan Jones
MARTHAS TEXTS

172

Erica Scourti
THE OTHER DAY AND NIGHT

177

Alex Leff

HOW THE BRAIN SAMPLES THE VISUAL
WORLD WHEN READING AND HOW FOCAL
BRAIN INJURY CAN DISRUPT THIS

197

Stephen Fortune

BETWEEN EISEGESIS AND EIGENEGESIS:
FRAMEWORKS FOR BEING READ

227

Liam Jones

THE PLASTICITY OF READING: SELF
AND TEXT

239

Soenke Zehle

SCALING OUR SENSES: TYPE IN MOTION
BETWEEN SENTIENT SEMIOSPHERES AND
A SEMIOTICS OF INTENSITIES

269

Nina Power

READING RIOTOUSLY

289

Grace Harrison

UNARMED READING GROUPS

295

Eleanor Rees

MARK-MAKING IN THE VIRTUAL

299

Tim Etchells

Q & A WITH MARK GREENWOOD

317

BIOGRAPHIES

322

COLOPHON

Nathan Jones & Sam Skinner

INTRODUCTION

Reading and writing systems have evolved symbiotically over many millennia, and each one of us taps into this history and phenomena when we learn and perform reading. As a unique activity among the animal kingdom, reading offers a strong standpoint from which to study what it is to be and think as a human. The ability to read is especially fascinating in this respect because its neural basis is a hybrid recycling of more innate neuronal networks, such as object recognition or memory. Furthermore, being a relatively new evolutionary development, reading allows us to reflect on other more recent hybrid communication systems and inventions, which recycle and hybridize older forms, such as smart phones or social media software. Accordingly, this book is about moving beyond a singular act or conception of reading, toward an understanding of the network of forces within which reading emerges. These elements include how your eye and brain read, to how these biological systems augment with the

technological, through to collective, hyper, multiple and transdisciplinary modes of reading. Throughout the book, reading emerges as a complex act, as replete with opportunities for expression, evolution and idiosyncrasy as any other human behavior.

This book accompanies a symposium, performances and an exhibition, which brought together artists and academics in early 2015, to explore how and what we read today. Contributions to the book are the result of these explicitly public debates and moments, enacting the kind of transdisciplinary culture that we feel is demanded by contemporary modes of reading.

Questions guiding the project included: How do emerging technologies impact upon how and what we read? How do these hows and whats of reading influence our thoughts, feelings and actions? What kinds of reading must we learn, or re-learn, and to what extent can we mix different modes of reading? What happens to reading when we don't have time to sound the words in our head? What does it mean to read collectively, particularly in the context of global networks? What are

the implications of machines learning to read and of individuals' online lives 'being read'? To what extent is reading a dynamic form of enactment, diffraction and agency within the world?

As artists often working in time-based media, we are particularly interested in the movements, evolutions and twists of language, and how it intra-acts with other phenomena. Accordingly, the 'readings of reading' in this book are replete with the language of movement, for example Katherine Hayles' essay examines the "barrages of information too fast, complex, and multifaceted to be comprehended by the relatively slow processing of consciousness". Hayles poses the conscious itself as a kind of staging post for the movement of language qua information, and further, proposes the 'cognitive nonconscious' as the location for language's before and after.

Garrett Stewart describes gateways through which language must pass on its journey from the page to the mind, which are in fact those we associate most closely with the 'afterward' of speech: of reading out—the throat, tongue and ear. He artfully

couples this to a generous review of the symposium, placing it in the context of his work on book-art and the phonology of reading. Esther Leslie and Hannah Proctor in different ways trace relationships between thought, language, technology and place—a movement through our bodies, beyond paper, out to the streets, and into neon signs and LCD screens—producing an image of language that moves through a landscape of humans, just as humans are obliged to move through a landscape of text.

The middle section of the book presents poems and text-based artworks, including receipts from a performance by James Wilkes composed of texts that rework some of the earliest forms of reading and writing that originate in accountancy and trade, such as receipts, invoices and tallies from the last two millennia. Anna Barham's work is the before and after of a text used in an interactive speech synthesis installation, where language moves through technology, emerging tainted, inflected, older. Charles Bernstein has contributed poems that directly reference the exchange demanded in the relation between writer and reader, and the

strange new poetics thrown up by computational interventions in this exchange. In a different manner, Claire Potter's poem and image combinations ask us to question and therefore enter into the process of writing as it emerges onto the page.

As this is an artist research project at its heart, we have also included our own contributions, partly inspired by the curatorial process. The spree of concept and counterthought concertinaed in Sam Skinner's playful flash fictions are lifted directly from his Torque #2 notebooks, reflecting creatively on the project—in particular the challenges inherent within reading in multiple modes and across different media, from hyper to deep, new to old. Nathan Jones' text produced in collaboration with his daughter Martha, wilfully misreads sections from these same texts, pedagogically performing how language can pass through a body and emerge younger. Like Skinner's re-drawn typography, Martha's utterances suggest a new potential for the dynamic relation between the drawn and written, text and body.

Ending this section, Erica Scourti's poem, written using programmable keyboard

shortcuts, exhibits a particular form of movement within modern textuality, where the technological device and its software urges and pushes the text on beyond normal syntax, with each new word becoming the site for multiple algorithmic twists and turns.

Beginning the second series of essays, neurologist Alex Leff's text explores how the conscious experience of vision differs to the mechanics of it, what happens when reading systems break down, and why we might read the word 'cat' as quickly as the word 'catapult'. Stephen Fortune's essay examines the movement of language across intermediaries, and media themselves as spectral and unreliable interpreters of meaning. Fortune uses the motif of the tarot reader and magician to provide a framework with which to understand 'cold' machine reading and data capture of readers and users—and examines how projects by various contemporary artists are helping delineate and subvert the forms and nature of machinic reading that currently exist. Liam Jones undertakes a brief overview of Catherine Malabou's concept of 'plastic' reading, contrasting it with Vilém Flusser's notion of reading as 'fiction building'

to examine how Malabou places emphasis on the plasticity of propositions themselves, as exhibited in her readings of Hegel and Heidegger. Jones also suggests that plastic reading is a useful tool for understanding contemporary modernist fiction, such as Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*.

Soenke Zehle's contribution builds on his curation of the *Type Motion* exhibition, exploring a new generation of text-based artworks and modes of thinking that explore both algorithmic logics and how words are animated in our brains and beings. His work augments Katherine Hayles', examining a contemporary topography where the brain and acts of reading are nodes in a vast concatenation of biological and machinic networks. Zehle suggests that the how and what of reading today is "increasingly driven not by what writing means but by what it does".

In a piece transcribed from her talk at the symposium, and in so doing reflecting the roots of writing and reading's genesis, Nina Power continues a line of enquiry challenging the autodidacticism of reading. She asks how we might imagine reading collectively as a counter image, beyond the bourgeois

notion of the private reader, and expands on the implications of reading's embeddedness within the law and disciplinary boundaries. In response to a striking image in Power's essay, Grace Harrison brings a dispatch from the frontline of her experience as a participant in 'unarmed reading groups'. The reading group, Harrison suggests, contains much untapped potential in the terms of address, and the kinds of performative and democratic reading enabled by it. Poet Eleanor Rees has written a manifesto of sorts for an open and embedded form of reading and writing that articulates the differences and enfolding betweenness of these forms.

We close this collection with an interview between Mark Greenwood and Tim Etchells. Following Etchells' performance at the Torque #2 event, Greenwood and Etchells grapple with the fusion of political, emotional and analytical issues opened up by the simple acts of selection and reading aloud. These acts of appropriation and speaking, with their inference of surgical removal or breath-propelled expulsion, form an appropriate exit to this book as a metaphorical flow of language through media, technologies, minds

and bodies.

We thank all our contributors for their collaboration and commitment to the project, our partners at FACT, Tate Liverpool, Static Gallery, Furtherfield, Arts Council England and The National Lottery for their support through the Grants for the Arts scheme.

This book seeks to meet the challenge of agency that any book, text or act of reading faces today as it emerges evermore enmeshed in machinic and socio-economic assemblages. Now, as we read we are read, but an opportunity lies in how new and old forms of reading, across different media and disciplines, can support and augment one another to forge a basis for interaction which is truly collective, open and radical.

* *Torque* is a project developed by artists Sam Skinner and Nathan Jones to create platforms where art, science, technology, and philosophy momentarily twist together. By doing this, we hope to open up new trajectories for these fields, and find new ways of engaging with a diverse range of publics in contemporary ideas and practices. Beginning with an interest in the neural and cognitive implications of language and technology, we have hosted symposia, workshops and performance events. The first in this series of books (*Torque #1: Mind, Language & Technology*) was published with Link Editions in September 2014.

N. Katherine Hayles

NONCONSCIOUS COGNITION
AND JESS STONER'S *I HAVE BLINDED
MYSELF WRITING THIS*

Over the last two decades, research in neuroscience has revealed the existence of a level of neuronal processing inaccessible to consciousness but nevertheless essential to human cognition. Although this processing goes by various names, for example Antonio Damasio's proto-self, I am calling it the cognitive nonconscious.

Among the functions it performs are internal processes such as integrating somatic markers (chemical and electrical signals) from different regions of the body into coherent body representations. Other processes relating to external stimuli include fast processing of information, recognizing and learning patterns, drawing inferences from these patterns, and forwarding (or suppressing) information to consciousness in ways that influence behavior and guide higher cognitive functions such as thinking.

In a sense, the cognitive nonconscious

is as old as *Homo sapiens*. Indeed, it is likely that this kind of neuronal processing developed first in the evolution of our species and then consciousness and unconsciousness were built on top of it. It has appeared in multiple guises through recorded history, frequently articulated as a kind of intuition associated with creative breakthroughs and sudden insights that seem to erupt, as if by magic, into conscious awareness from somewhere else. In another sense, however, its confirmation by empirical evidence and the specificity of its functions have only been widely recognized among neuroscientists in the last couple of decades. For the humanities, its implications, and indeed even knowledge of its existence, remains largely *terra incognita*, despite the explosive potential it has to recast how we think about the relation of thought to cognition, and especially about the interactions of human cognitive processes to the nonconscious cognitions of complex technical systems.

This project of re-evaluating human-technical interactions in light of the cognitive nonconscious begins with making a distinction between thought, associated with the higher-level neuronal processes generating

consciousness/unconscious (which I call modes of awareness) and cognition, a broader capacity that includes both conscious and nonconscious processes. For half a century, debate has swirled around the question posed by Alan Turing in 1950: can machines think? Turing, of course, proposed to answer the question by operationalizing it in the Turing test. Since his foundational paper, it has become clear that machines do not think as humans do, principally because they are not conscious and do not have a model of the self characteristic of humans and many animals. At the same time, the cognitive capacities of technical systems have been growing by leaps and bounds, performing many of the same functions as the cognitive nonconscious in humans, including fast information processing, recognizing and drawing inferences from patterns, integrating ambiguous or conflicting information into coherent representations, and interpreting signals from sensors and actuators to perform actions. Like the cognitive nonconscious in humans, these systems are crucially important in keeping consciousness from being overwhelmed by barrages of information too fast, complex, and multifaceted

to be comprehended by the relatively slow processing of consciousness. Moreover, many technical systems have the capacity to monitor their own states, change them according to variations in contexts, and transform the parameters that regulate these states. Such complex, adaptive, state-aware systems surely deserve to be called cognitive, although they are not conscious and (in my view) are unlikely to achieve consciousness anytime soon. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly clear that cognition in general should not be regarded (as intelligence often is) as a quantifiable property that a being either possesses or does not. Rather than an attribute, cognition is a *process* and exists along a spectrum in the biological world from the high-cognitive functions in humans and other mammals to low-cognitive functions in such lifeforms as nematode worms and plants. Similarly, technical systems also exist along a spectrum, from sophisticated systems capable of many different kinds of cognitive processes to low-cognitive processes such as word frequency algorithms.

Recognizing the parallels between the cognitive nonconscious as it functions in humans and technical systems opens the way

for a host of new and expanded modes of analysis, including the interactions of humans with technical systems that operate below the level of awareness and nevertheless influence behaviors, guide expectations, and alter human neuronal networks. For the humanities, recognizing the specificities of the cognitive nonconscious invites interpretive strategies focusing on interactions between the modes of awareness and nonconscious processing. For example, in literary texts, this may take the form of identifying and analyzing places in a text where gestural and somatic information subtly influence the verbal narrative, or where information overload leads to conscious dysfunctionality but nevertheless is processed at lower levels of textual organization. Just as theorizations of the unconscious led to decades of fruitful literary interpretations and corresponding theories of reading and writing, so the empirical testing and theorizations of the cognitive nonconscious have the potential to affect profoundly our understanding of how the modes of awareness interact with and are influenced by the cognitive nonconscious.

The power of nonconscious cognition, especially in relation to the cognitive potential

of print books, is interrogated in Jess Stoner's 2012 experimental novel, *I Have Blinded Myself Writing This*. The novel's bizarre premise is laid out in the opening pages: the female narrator suffers from a most unusual malady. Every time her body suffers anything from a scratch to a wound, it obliterates memories to heal itself, as if the relation of body to mind was a zero-sum game in which physical injuries exacted from the mind a corresponding memory loss, precisely calibrated and nonconsciously enacted. The premise makes literal the pharmacological dynamic of poison and cure as Bernard Stiegler has articulated in relation to technics, entwining somatic injury with mental loss, healing with amnesia. Moreover, the narrator never knows which memories will be obliterated, and sometimes months pass before she stumbles upon indicators of what is missing.

The status of the book is very much at issue here. From Plato on, writing has been entangled in a pharmacological relation with memory. According to Plato's famous argument in *Phaedrus*, learning how to write "will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not

practice their memory” (Plato, 1925, 274c). At the same time, of course, writing extends the embedded cognitive system in which the mindbody’s interior capacities are supported and extended through external affordances. Writing at once erodes internal memory and preserves it in external form.

I Have Blinded Myself Writing This puts into play this *pharmakon* by evoking the analogical relation between two interdependent bodies: the author’s and the book’s. Although there is no indication in the verbal narrative that the act of inscription exacts a physical cost, the title suggests that the zero-sum dynamic applies also to writing and sight. The book’s body is created at the cost of the narrator’s physical capacities, especially her vision, which means that she can write but as a result is unable to read what she has written.

The dynamic recalls Jane Elliott’s concept of suffering agency, which she identifies with how neoliberalism *feels* for an individual subject. Living in regimes in which cost/benefit analysis and free market ideologies rule, the subject is forced into situations in which vicious trade-offs demand the same kind of ruthless cost/benefit analysis of trauma

inflicted upon the body, as in the film *127 Hours* where the protagonist, Aron Ralston (James Franco) must choose between cutting off his own arm and surviving, or failing to do so and dying. In similar fashion, Stoner's narrator can try to reclaim agency by writing, but only at the cost of going blind, thus defeating the purpose of writing as an externalization and preservation of memory. In this sense, Stoner's text explores the problematics of the externalization of cognitive functions that Merlin Donald and Bernard Stiegler, among others, have theorized is the essential characteristic of *Homo sapiens* as a species.

It is no accident that the book is published in an era when libraries and other repositories of memory are discarding their print archives and choosing to preserve them in digital form. The process is vividly imaged in Vernon Vinge's *Rainbows End* (2006), where he imagines a university library (clearly the Geisel Library at University of California, San Diego) shredding its books and feeding the shards into an enormous optical reader, where each whirling fragment is imaged and then the thousands of shard images digitally reconstructed into a coherent text again. Vinge's

narrative thus emphasizes the pharmacological nature of digitization: to survive as a digital archive, the book's body must be sacrificed and violently dismembered.

As if to escape this reality, the form of Stoner's text presents the book not as a printed commodity but a composition notebook with fake marbled cover, universally used for student writings and lab reports. The presentation includes the absence of page number and displacement of publication information to the back, so the reader encounters it only after having experienced the text as if it were a composition exercise. Of course we know that in fact the book is printed; Stoner reports (Cobalt 2012) that she created the text in InDesign, a powerful imaging program, because she wanted precise control over how the words and images appear on the page. In fact, digital technologies are essential for imaging on a cost-effective basis certain creative wordimage effects displayed in the text, such as words and sentences obliterated with strikethroughs (~~seus~~ ratour, as Derrida would say), hand-drawn illustrations, erratic spacing, cursive marks signifying sounds (a telephone ringing), vertical lines running down the page,

a paper fragment inscribed with a handwritten note, and (a la *Tristram Shandy*), an all-black page with white writing.

Why is it important for the book's body to deny the technical mediation that created it? According to Stoner (Quesada 2012), she wanted the text to perform the tension between print book / handwritten composition, because she thought of it as the narrator's personal memoir to give her daughter access to her memories while she can still remember them. In addition, I think the text testifies to the problematics of agency in our historical present, as Jane Elliott argues in a different sense. Unable to control which memories will be eradicated or even to sense the moment when one disappears, the narrator lives a precarious existence in which she must depend upon her partner Teddy to fill in the blanks for her. As their relation deteriorates, she begins to wonder if Teddy is accurately recounting events she can no longer remember, including even such major traumas as the suicide of her brother Ben, or if he is shading them to suit his own purposes. The balance in their relationship shifts with the birth of their daughter; increasingly Teddy fills his need for emotional

bonding with his baby rather than his troublesome wife, so needy that he calls her several times a day just to be sure she remembers him. Thus agency is here very much bound up with memory, or more precisely the inability to remember.

What kind of agency does the book possess, especially in comparison with the digital technologies that are now often replacing it? Traditionally functioning as an external cognitive support, the book requires for its efficacy a comprehending human. It has no active cognition or agency in itself (although it has many ways in which, as an embodied artifact, it directs and conditions cognitions). It realizes its cognitive potential only when it is embedded in a circuit that includes the powerful imaginative capacities of writer and reader. By contrast, digital technologies can have active agential capacities, especially when they include sensors and actuators that enable them to perceive, interpret, and act upon information flowing in and through them. Moreover, that agency now extends, as in the Never Ending Language Learning program developed at Carnegie Mellon, to reading books, categorizing their contents,

and parsing their meanings—something that books themselves cannot do. There are no self-reading books.

The book in this sense may be understood as undergoing a crisis of agency. *I Have Blinded Myself Writing* tropes this crisis through the narrator's predicament. Just as her memory is vulnerable to exigencies that befall her body, so the book's body, a repository of memory, is also imagined to be vulnerable to the operations of an agency it does not control. Repeatedly, pages appear with such messages as "To understand/You should/Rip this page", "If you ripped this page/you would know", and "You. Do it. Rip this page." The reader is thus invited to impose on the book's body a pharmacological drama similar to that the narrator experiences in her mind/body; comprehending the words in the reader's mind opens the possibility of obliterating the words in the book's body. The book achieves its agency through the reader, but the reader then damages the book, just as the interpenetrating digital technologies make the book possible through their autonomous agency, while at the same time rendering it vulnerable to obsolescence (and possibly

violent dismemberment) through digitization.

The dynamic at issue here is larger than literary texts. Books are now part of an epochal shift in how memory and cognition are conceived and implemented. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) have persuasively argued that our biology profoundly conditions the kinds of metaphoric networks through which we construct concepts; Laura Otis (2001) extends this idea to technological artifacts, which also participate in and co-produce metaphoric networks. The aptly named “personal computer” instantiated in technological form a deep assumption about human cognition, that it is contained in the brain/mind of an individual person, a model Andy Clark calls BRAINBOUND (2008). At the same time that Clark, Edwin Hutchins, Walter Freeman and others were arguing for an embodied/embedded model of human cognition, technical cognition was also moving away from a BRAINBOUND format toward a networked model. Currently, computers and mobile digital devices often function as *portals* to networked servers rather than as stand-alone cognizers. They consequently require less memory and functionality, since they can

access applications and memory storage in the cloud. Just as cognitive functionality in humans is now understood as a network property, as Alex (“Sandy”) Pentland and others have suggested, technical cognition is increasingly designed and implemented as a network as well. The metaphoric networks entwine, creating matrices of meaning that further connect human cognition with technical cognitive systems.

Literary works are also moving into the cloud in the form of digital downloads, but print books remain individual artifacts with specific locations and physical characteristics. Notwithstanding the social and technical networks within which print books circulate, including libraries, book clubs, publishing collaborations and so forth, they participate in the older BRAINBOUND model to the extent they are imagined as containing their cognitive potential within the bounds of the book’s covers, fixed in physical form by the printer and bookbinder.

As technical and human capabilities are increasingly seen as network functionalities rather than BRAINBOUND cognizers, the crisis of agency that Stoner’s text performs

deepens, for now agency is dispersed throughout the network, unlocatable solely in an individual subject or device, with entailed consequences impossible to estimate as complex interactions surge back and forth through the network. There is, of course, a positive side to this story, for dispersed agency may be a more accurate, sustainable, and ecologically-friendly concept than that of an independent liberal subject endowed with autonomy and rationality.

The crucial point, from my perspective, is the deep interpenetration of technical nonconscious cognition into a wide variety of complex systems, including literature and other creative arts. The trajectories of the examples discussed above move in similar directions: the creation and intensification of the interactions that constitute the cognitive nonconscious as a functionality operating across and between humans and technical systems. As internal processes are opened to external manipulation and surveillance, and external processes are connected in feedback loops with internal perceptions and responses, the circuits comprising the cognitive nonconscious can no longer be

considered as solely human or exclusively technical but rather as complex functionalities affecting cognitions at multiple levels and sites, human and technical. The dynamics of contemporary literary texts participate not only thematically in this cultural shift but also in and through their bodies—just as humans participate not only in their rational thoughts but also in the embodied and nonconscious processes that make up the majority of human lived experience. As the metaphoric networks deepen and swirl around us, we learn who we are not only through reading books but also through the crises of agency that enweb their bodies to our bodies, their cognitive potentials to our consciousness and cognitive nonconscious.

References

Clark, Andy. *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Damasio, Antonio. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000).

Donald, Merlin. *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Elliott, Jane. "Suffering Agency: Imagining Neoliberal Personhood in North America and Britain," *Social Text* (Summer 2013) 31.2, 115/83–101.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Otis, Laura. *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

Pentland, Alex. *Honest Signals: How They Shape Our World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

Plato. *Phaedrus: Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9, translated by Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, 1925).

Quesada, Ruben. "A Colloquy with Jess Stoner". *Fringe: The Noun that Verbs Your World*. Issue 30 (May 28, 2012).

Stiegler, Bernard. "Relational Ecology and the Digital Pharmakon", *Culture Machine* 13. <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/464>.

Stoner, Jess. *I Have Blinded Myself Writing This* (Ann Arbor MI: Short Flight/Long Drive Books, 2012).

Turing, Alan M. "Computing Machinery and Intelligence", *Mind* 59: 433–460.

Vinge, Vernon. *Rainbows End* (New York: Tor Books, 2006).

Garrett Stewart

TONGUE #2: ECHO NEURONS,
SECONDARY VOCALITY, AND THE
LEX-SEAM

The particular “torque” offered by the “Act of Reading” symposium gave me the opportunity, as primarily a literary critic, to return to my home turf via the detours I’ve taken lately through studies of other (and maybe not obviously related) topics. My abiding concentration has been on narrative style, in prose and film. Or, more recently, on the prevention of narrative sequence in two complementary modes of arrest, 2-D and 3-D: first, the scene of reading in easel painting, where the single approximated page open before the subject instigates no temporal sequence, only its wholesale sign or emblem; and second, the appropriated and defaced codex, closed to all legibility, in the conceptual book sculpture. These simultaneous evocations and revocations of the “reading act” (reduced to the book image or the actual codex remnant—or sometimes its simulation) have held my interest for exactly what they so obdurately hold

off in literary experience. Repeatedly, they figure—rather than perform—the space of reading, its receding vistas, its world-building symmetries, its threshold between nature and culture, and so forth (this, in the case of painted readers) or, alternately, they (the book sculptures) mark the volumetric zone of bound words without the imaged world of their reference: the architectonics of the codex rather than the phenomenal contours of the diegesis or story world it would typically generate.

Either way, time—at least textual time—is called off. Narratology under arrest. With examples of these works loaded for screen display, I wanted, in my presentation, to return—via (rather than despite) their facture or fabrication—to the inner rhythms of the reading act they suspend. And I began by imagining how some of these artifacts might instance the topics that were scheduled to precede my paper in the roster of speakers. In the upshot, I was often quite wide of the mark. And though far from being imagined in advance as a summary of where we would have been, gone, and gotten by the time I took the podium at day's end, a replay of these speculative guesses, based on the

pre-circulated abstracts, at least shows what I had in mind going in.

First off, Nina Power's expressed interest in "political counter-images" of reading brought to mind the contrapuntal palimpsests of African American artist Glenn Ligon (a show of his just closing that week in London), where images of the Million Man March on Washington are overlain with stenciled coal-dust texts from James Baldwin, so that the mass black experience resists or refuses—retinally, to begin with—a cultural subordination to any, even sympathetic, discourse about it. Baldwin's enlarged and frame-intercepted prose can't really be read as time-based text, nor can the group photo be discerned clearly through the imposed filter (and baffle) of discourse rather than story. Narrative on hold at one level, co-opted at another.

Next in the lineup, Esther Leslie's declared focus on "moving words" and their context in environmental writing, with its announced debts to Walter Benjamin on the modern verticality of print, called up not just the public and often motorized signage of Jenny Holzer, in a social sphere imbued with "received discourse" beyond any one

enunciation, but also the reversible neon chiasm and virtual palindrome of Bruce Nauman's "RAW/WAR" (1971, at Tate Modern)—with that extra bonus, for my pending paper, of its phonemic blurring into one comparative adjective, "rawer". As her lecture unfolded, however, Professor Leslie was to focus more on the phenomenology of childhood reading in Benjamin, though even there with tempting links (to which I later come round) to my own sense of reading's audiovisual dynamic in even silent text production.

In the subsequent paper, again sight-unseen by me, Soenke Zehle's proposed focus on words set in motion by machine assemblage sent me back, by way of travesty, to John Roach's 1997 mixed media reader, called punningly *Pageturner*, recently on display in a show of "Odd Volumes" at the Yale University Art Gallery. In this satiric installation piece, an electronic sensor noting the approach of a would-be reader to a text awkwardly sequestered in a Fluxus-like suitcase initiates the rotation of four small fans that arbitrarily turn the pages of the volume. These shuffled pages are in turn videographed for relay to a small TV monitor, on which their

out-of-focus rippling is barely legible beneath a small loud speaker that amplifies nothing of the printed words as vocalic forms but only the meaningless whirr of the fans. From as early as the 1990s, already a send-up of e-reading and its machinations.

In Alex Leff's paper, next, the prospect of a therapeutic address to reading impairment through electronics put me in mind of the book whose words you needn't process on your own, but which your web cam reads for you by bar code from the surface of an otherwise vestigial codex—and thus immerses you in by 3D-reflection on your monitor, often with deliberate visual simulations of the mimeticized text in the mode of Renaissance shape poetry. I was thinking, that is, of the electronic bookwork by Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse called *Between Page and Screen* (2012), in which the codex as sheer functionless platform for electronic s/cryptograms marks its unabashed residual status, its wholesale supersession by virtually 3-D word images.

This would also, in a sense, be a baroque instance of one of those self-reading books adduced by Katherine Hayles' abstract,

whose talk immediately preceded mine: party to an electronic literacy that marks the antithesis of a traditional codex. As is further the case, in another ironic example of textual auto-processing, with a book that compensates for its ingrained silence by internal optic prostheses. I'm thinking here of the proto-cinematic flip book by British artist Heather Weston, punningly called *Flip Read* (2005), that spells out in pantomime, accessible only by mirror neurons (if you will)—in a process I'll be extending to the speculative (or say, theoretical) category of echo neurons—the most plangent of all codex questions, and indeed the most answerable: What would you do with the volume turned off? What you'd do, if you were a book, is hope for subvocal reading—for someone, in the words of Steven Connor, for whom I was in fact filling in as final speaker, to disengage the “mute” function of the codex's “phonomorphic furniture”.¹

Yet all claims for the phonetic fretwork or infrastructure of silent reading, given whatever prominence in poetics, certainly stop well short of recent NASA developments in subvocal listening, designed so that soldiers, in peril, can operate vocally with their own volume

reduced beneath a whisper. In what is called “Synthetic Telepathy”, the silent musculature that goes into the *thought of speech* (what back in the day would have been called “inner speech”) can now be computer analyzed and translated to the headphones (eventually directly to the head phonics, one supposes) of a combat soldier needing to maintain silence in an approach to, for instance, a suspected terror cell—or during the ominous lulls of a firefight. One day, I guess, we won’t need quiet cars on trains in order to chat up our travelling companions in a neo-Keatsian full-throated ease.

Freidrich Kittler’s ubiquitous paradigm again, even in fantasy: commercial media possibilities fueled and funded in their experimental stages by the military—and always serving to confirm for him a posthuman network of mediatic transmit so different from the German Romantic legacy of fetishized inward Bildung that was, for instance, widely on display at the Walker Art Gallery when I visited before the symposium, in all those Victorian portraits where the held-open book as prop is taken as a veritable property, or at least adjunct, of inner spirit. In our own era,

however, there is a new valence of “portraiture”, of facial transcription. The same biometric recognition technology experimented with for military counter-terrorism and transferred to the FBI for stateside surveillance is lately the darling not just of special effects in Hollywood sci-fi but of marketing start-ups on both American coasts in what is now called the “affection economy”. According to an issue of *The New Yorker* appearing the week before our symposium, the electronic analysis of human facial inference—they call it “reading”, and rightly, since it passes through (somatic) code—has reached new levels of sophistication, where in effect product reaction can be passively tabulated by biometric analysis, as when, for instance, and sometimes from behind the mesh of the movie screen itself, our eyes can be digitally scanned in their widening, or our jaw in tightening, at a given movie scene.²

And that’s not all. When I returned to my temporary quarters in London after the Liverpool events, I discovered on the internet the final dead end and closed circle of my interest in the digital-age codex and its aesthetic transfigurations: this in the form of a

newly devised portable book cover containing as illustration a biometric facial abstraction that in fact puts the reader on alert to the fact that her own face is being scanned for any signs of bias or skewed anticipation beyond a passive receptivity.³ For this alone among all the anticipatory emotions one might have in taking up a book, when registered digitally, is transmitted to an attached mechanism so as to electronically disengage a clasp on the front of the volume and allow access. Anything else puts the book in lock-down. Orwell's *1984* come again in a new key—as if the only permissible stance toward a next were an affectless neutrality. Going well beyond user-id for automatically triggered and entirely elective access, here is the exclusionary text that actually reads you.

Short of this chilling stringency, though equally pertinent in regard to the emotional contours of reading, I take symptomatically even the standard-issue deployments of biometric recognition—in respect, that is, to a discipline nearer my own turf than any high-tech applications or affordances. When the term “read” is fully deserved in an algorithmic mode, when machines read

faces by differential decoding, there is by definition a technological interface—where pre-archived anatomical indicators are processed for recognition. It is to my mind a deep misjudgment in the field closest to my own, and beyond the focus of our panelists, for the new neuroscientific paradigms of so-called cognitive narratology, to forget that, by contrast, in reading secondary signs of anatomical signaling—on the page of anyone from Jane Austen to Paul Auster—the only body left is the reader’s own. The mistake of thinking that we’re responding to the likes of actual faces—or call them virtually real ones (their functional similitudes)—in their literary description is far greater than, though comparable to, my having been silly enough to wish for a tall and periscopic robot beside me, the week before the symposium, in negotiating the crush of extended hours at last weekend’s closing show of late Rembrandts, heavy on late Rembrandt faces, at the National Gallery. For though my bot might have read rightly the blank stare of the dead criminal in the Master’s anatomy lesson, it wouldn’t have discerned the stunning irony, on second glance, that the bloody brains under autopsy

have been accessed by the peeling back of the face as if it were no more than its own oily canvas image. Like words in a novel, canvas is as canvas does.

To speak instead of recognizing the blush on the cheek of an Austen heroine via mirror neurons, and of our blushing for her in hard-wired neural reflex, as is happening more and more often in American theoretical circles, is to short-circuit the actual material transit and neural routing of literary experience: its transmit, that is, through the phonemic pulse of text, no personification intended—yes, through “moving words”—rather than through some preinscribed neurological legibility in the hallucinated capillary action of an embodied bloodstream and its telltale epidermic signs. To read in the way otherwise lately proposed, as if there were any features of a heroine actually there to decode as such, is to read like a computer: not like a computer reads text, though, but merely the way it scans an unlettered if decryptable human surface. In contrast to this new brain-science slant to affect theory in literary study, suffice it to say that other neuroscientific breakthroughs seem far more promising for the exploration

of alphabetic reading as we know it. With brain scans now able to locate precisely the synapses fired in differentiating between phonemes (between, just for instance, a voiced and an unvoiced fricative, a “face” and a “vase”, as in the famous gestalt-drawing vacillation), here is to my mind a more profitable area of study, via triggered synaptic slippage rather than imitative action—or better to say via sympathetic vibration, phonic at base, rather than the involuntary empathies of neural reflex. In this way the greatest literary critical text of the last English-language century could be reissued some day soon as *Seven Types of Ambiguous Cortical Gestalt*. What we’d gain isn’t quite clear, but we wouldn’t lose everything that Empson had so revelatory an ear for, in cadence, sound, and generative second-thoughts.

What would Steven Connor have said on this score if he had been able to make it to Liverpool? I would hope he would have put into circulation the theories of literary phonics so powerfully condensed in his new book on Beckett, especially in the chapter subtitled “Writing the White Voice”. Connor and I were last together as keynote speakers at

a conference at the University of New South Wales, on “modern soundscapes”, where I remember him suggesting that literary writing tends to reach inner ear accompanied by a “fringe of noise”. Since then, in the Beckett book, he has developed the notion of “white voice”, playing off a more familiar concept like the slant-rhymed “white noise”. He finds Beckett’s prose uniquely attuned, as it were, to the “inner sonority” of silent reading, adding (in a particularly Beckett-like scrupulousness) “if inside is exactly where it is, if sonorous is exactly what it is”. For Connor, in coming to aptly homophonic grips with this “inner hearsay”, the term “subvocalization” doesn’t quite cover the case, with its overtones, to his ear, of a “vestigial” enunciation. He prefers the term “virtual” for this “auditorium, this “arena of internal articulations” that is “not really inside anything or anywhere inside”. Its contours define what he calls the “white architecture of vocality”, though without this topological figuration intending to deny the time-based nature of its potential effects, including its paracinematic “cross-fades”—by which I like to think he means to invoke the sort of “lap dissolves” I

find in the counterplay of ambiguously fused lexical juncture. "Literature does not silence sound", Connor summarizes, no doubt intending the double grammar banked in his own potential and corrective verb/noun inversion in the sounding of silence; literature, he says instead, "auditises the field of the visual", where it makes good on all the senses (both senses of that substantive) that "swell together in the word 'volume'".

In the more strictly figural tropes of Benjamin, as drawn out by Esther Leslie's summary of his thought, the read book has its own (somewhat mystified, it would seem) inwardness. When she quotes his remarks on a child immersed in an adventure book, that immersion is worked up as if it were more than metaphor: a kind of inhabitation. Yet the source of the metaphor is exactly the silent breath of enunciation that brings the characters to life. How precise Benjamin means to be here is, as usual, history's guess. But taking this description as a kind of extended conceit meant to suggest that the lungs of mute speech animate characters who would, not as beings, but as proper nouns and adjectives and verbs, remain inert without that impetus,

and are therefore in effect acknowledging that, as it were, breath of life in the very act of becoming legible, is one way to lend the passage more than a decorative resonance. The young reader is not just rapt but generative: "His breath is part of the air of the events narrated," so much so that "all the participants breathe it".⁴ Might this hint of phonetic breath production be why Benjamin begins this description of childhood reading with what may seem its *sine qua non*, the blocking out of all sound but that of inner voice? Of the child at the threshold of his adventure: "Reading, he covers his ears". If this were Connor writing, in sharper control over tenor and vehicle in his own lyrical accounts of the phenomenology of reading, and of course writing in English, the white noise of "virtual speech" would perhaps all but literally (as well as punningly) put the air back in n/aeration.

Without a figural allegory to some such effect in the Benjamin passage, this whole otherwise abstract, rather than lettered, phenomenology is quite far from my center of emphasis in secondary vocality. Farther afield yet on the face of it, though converging in unexpected ways, seemed the symposium's

most strictly scientific paper from the practicing neurologist Alex Leff. Yet by distinguishing two kinds of reading disorders that frequently result from stroke or other traumatic brain injury, Leff offered a distinction that comes uncannily close to my own interests in the dynamics of literary reading. Some patients, Leff explained, lose a grip on the “what” of reading (the meaning of individual words), while others on the “where” (the sequenced disposition of lexical units on the page). Syntax isn’t categorically lost in the latter case, but only its immediate spatial cues. One might call it a difference, in disabled recognition, between wording and the graphics of phrasing. And this difference points up, by negation, the normal interaction of these two functions in the *wh(ere)at* of lexical sequence. This is the dual function whereby the operative force of a single word requires, and not just for speed, a sense of where the phrase is going and where it’s coming from. Such is the felt protention and retention that can often unsettle the vectors of sense in a normal reading without fully derailing them. The *what* is thus often inseparable from the *where* under the momentum of the *what-next* and

the *w/hence*. In this sense optical decipherment anticipates, and phonetic recognition eavesdrops on, the active inflections of a present wording. Call it the wake of the unrivied, or alternately the gravitational field of the elapsed, in either case a matter of echoes, ligatures, ricochets, an entire trajectory of inertial traction and potential skid.

This ultimate literary inseparability of the *wh(ere)at* has often, under other rubrics, been my topic. In view of Leff's perspective, the physiological loci of reading that come under the lens of brain science in the case of its defacilitation is a demonstrably *bodily* source of word recognition that extends, as other branches of the anatomy and neuroscience have much earlier shown, down to thorax and lungs, their musculature phonetically recruited but sonically deactivated in silent reading. That's why an amendment is necessary to the most thorough account of human voice in recent philosophical theory. Building on Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida, and Agamben, Mladen Dolar, in *A Voice and Nothing More*, sees voice as the disappearance of animal sound as it is taken up in the semiotic transfer toward meaning, or in his borrowing of

Agamben's terms, of *zoe* (animal existence) as it enters community via *bios* (biography, language, communication). When bodily sound is recognized as voice and transmitted as meaning, what transpires is the effacement of *soma* by *sema*.⁵ Reading, I want to insist, reverses this trajectory. And literary reading preeminently, where the social force of a signifying alphabet, processed by the responsive single body, returns phonics toward the echo chamber of sonics after all.

That's why, speaking midway through a year-long symposium at Birkbeck College in 2013, celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Walter Ong's influential *Orality and Literacy*, I had wanted to extend his notion of secondary orality (namely, technological recording) to the notion of secondary vocality, as if reverse-engineered from textual input by way of the inhibited (though only in the anatomical sense) speech organs of the reader. Floating an alternate model, one of the discussants at *Torque #2* offered a suggestive set of terms for this, proposing that the "virtual" (Connor) or "sub-vocal" effects of what I called *Tongue #2*, could be understood as a case of Barthes's "writerly" (versus "readerly") script, where the

reader must “write back” to language in the work of production. I like the distinction, even though it isn’t quite Barthes’s. The “readerly” is for him preeminently Balzac, the “writerly” the *nouveau roman*, experimentally postmodern rather than the classic. But Dickens, the English Balzac, does produce just the kind of feedback loop suggested by the discussant’s proposal, as much as does *Finnegan’s Wake*—just less often and less obstreperously. And there too in Dickens, as much as in the *nouveau roman* championed by Barthes, we can hear the “grain of the voice”—close cousin to Connor’s “white voice”—as it sometimes operates against the granular aggregates of script, until (within classic if not postmodern protocols) it is recuperated again to the semiotic tread of the sentence.⁶ Quite apart from the way Dickens went on to read his own novels to lecture audiences, even in solitary encounter with the page we have to write Dickens as we read, sound him out in a broad band of semantic resonance even as we enunciate the local phrasings on the run. One of the panelists enjoyed the fact that among the books mentioned by Alex Leff as appearing on the website for neurological

therapy, in which the pace of reading was adjustable so as to train sequence recognition (rather than heal the irreversible cause of such malfunction) was Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, a narrative all about the border line between animal sound and human speech (as in Dolar's chapter about it). I liked seeing *A Christmas Carol* there, for different but not wholly unrelated reasons.

For in that narrative is certainly more than one passage that would risk being spoiled if setting one's where-impaired speedometer at too great a velocity in channeling through the writing's sequential grammar. Well beyond (and past) a famous early pun like Scrooge's resistance to ghostly apparition, trying to explain it away as indigestion rather than visitation, the result "more of gravy than of grave", the novel comes to a head in the kind of phonetic counterpoint with alphabetic script, steeped in the idiom it topples, that offers a clear case (as in my title) of the lexeme under duress at its own syntactic seam. Certain calisthenic computer settings chosen by the self-correcting wayward reader could well, as I say, leap over this effect. But it wouldn't be easy, so strong in this case is

the phonetic after-image of adjacent “whats” in the serial “where”—and the answered “wherefore” of their juxtaposition. Decidedly, though, the *effort* to sabotage this effect, and many more muted like it, is the deliberate intent of a computer technology known as Spritz that flashes only one word at a time past aperture of an electronic affordance, centered at its OPR (optimal recognition point) and meant explicitly to minimize the retardant “subvocalization” at play in normal reading.

So here we approach one crux—and unexpected lexical nexus—that comes to mind in imagining enforced reading speeds applied to Dickensian prose. In an echoically as well as ethically impacted moment at the climax of *A Christmas Carol*, we are led to see Scrooge as doing no less, if also something imponderably more (according to the plot’s supernatural machinery), than reading his own life from the unspoken text of a predictive future. Confronted with the dead and sheeted body that will be revealed to him as that of his own unmourned corpse, with the Phantom of the future pointing wordlessly at the gruesome manifestation of its draped head, the momentary homily generated is only what

Scrooge himself makes of this prevision: “No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge’s ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed” (Stave 5, “The Last of the Spirits”). In this respect, since we have “heard them” too, also unvoiced from without us, one close buckle between Scrooge’s experience and ours would surely be forged by the silent sound play in what Connor might identify as the “white voice” of truth in those very words, with its anticipation of Beckett’s own “phonic ghosts”. So this passing moment bears an actual listen: calls for it, and all but sustains such an audition on his own scriptive terms.

I don’t mean to be leading up to this narrative turning point (and phonetic pivot) with any particular melodrama, though the novelist does. Scrooge, though ordinarily barely alive to the world, is still sentient enough to be “shuddering from head to foot” (*italics added*, though not the tacit emphasis) as he is led to confront the inert head of a freshly deceased misanthrope. The apostrophe to Death he intuits there—the voice of omniscience in a spurt of pure Dickensian rhetoric, not least because sandwiched between the dissonant insistent chiming of

“dreadful” and “dread”—goes out of its way to contrast the unlamented corpse with the actual cranial anatomy, as well as the beatitude, of its revered alternative in a genuinely grieved demise. The unsourced prose achieves this via a phonetic “cross-fade” (tacit cinematic metaphor from Connor again) that makes the imagined loved head lift lexically to view as if from the burial plot of the very monosyllable “dead”: “Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here... for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honored head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious.” Death’s “dominion” has been exceeded, and the posited second body released from all desecration. A most emphatic (and emphatically articulated) elocutionary distinction is required at this turn, that’s for sure. Thus is the standard-issue phrase “the honored dead” called up—by graphonic reflex—even as it is instantaneously subsumed to the more corporealized synecdoche (“head”) of the present object lesson. With such alternatives superimposed upon each other for the most striking contrast possible, Scrooge is right to be hearing

things. As are we.

But for Dickens these linguistic wrinkles are at the same time humanist intuitions. They are what bring prose to life, and turn even the blanket of omniscient discourse here into a personified “voice” (even though technically “no voice”) audited from within, revitalizing, in this case explicitly redemptive. This is the Victorian aura of aurality in the Romantic legacy even of its prose, let alone its poetry, that is precisely overruled by Kittler’s view of networked discourse rather than articulate subjectivity and inherited pervasively (if not intentionally) by another novel, historical and ironic, that traces media history from its origin in Victorian technology down through the eve of computerization. And to which I will turn briefly in closing.

It is a novel as eager as is Kittler’s mediatic research to dehumanize the machinery of speech. Kittler’s chief target is Romantic metaphysics.⁷ What he gives us explicitly from Hegel is the idea of an “inwardness” facilitated only by silent alphabetic decipherment, so that (quoting Hegel as he does) the “detour through audibility” is rendered unnecessary by a “hieroglyphic” directness

that does “not require a conscious mediation” from the phonetic to the conceptual. The labor of voice is no more required in the rapid internal transfer from script to meaning, claims Hegel, than if the words were pure pictograms. Yet Kittler’s sense of the 1800 discourse network depends far more directly on subvocal mediation than this would imply, both between script and decipherment and, in turn, between nature and subjectivized culture. One premise, though, is clear for both Hegel and Kittler: the role of silent reading as the internalization of literate consciousness (which is to say, its constitution as internal).

On Kittler’s account, however, aimed at the cultural paradigm and its mystifications that Hegel’s abstractions elide, modern self-consciousness is born not so much from the mother, in biological descent, as from the internalization of the “Mother’s Mouth” (his term for an organicist Romantic template) in its tutoring vocal register. This is the domestic model inculcated by the widespread influence of “phonetic pedagogy” in the discourse network of 1800, a gendering of the linguistic matrix that I’ve elsewhere considered, for the literary phonotext, in respect to the

“maternal chora” in Julia Kristeva’s claims for a primal semiotic force underlying the symbolic.⁸ Whether dredged from the semiotic chora or fledged somewhere between mind and body by subvocal reification as a groundless signifier, this self-consciousness is preceded, for Kittler, by an internalization of nature (or say, of naturalness itself) via the tutelage of maternal orality. It is this learning to interpret babble as alphabet that is the first training ground, in Kittler’s dim view of civic culture, for a full hermeneutic insertion into the socius as discourse network. The result for the history of literature is that Man, posited between outer and inner, between nature and the automaticities of decryption, erects in the space between—not just between world and psyche, but in particular between the archive of texts and the inward cast of the silent reading voice—the newly humanizing (socializing) work of hermeneutics, or, from the Latin, the breathing room, the betweenness, of interpretation (whose root remains aptly obscure in its origins).

Everything in a media theory of literary language depends, of course, on some such “inter” (apart from innerness)—and

its assumed traverse. What Kittler certainly doesn't want from Hegel is the total exclusion of phonetic pedagogy, in its later traces, from literary production and effect. For the mother remains the unspoken muse, though never really speaking for herself. In Hegel, by contrast, literary art requires in its full purity (and demonstrates) the entire overcoming of once-learned sound forms, a submergence seen as not just intrinsic to silent comprehension but crucial for poetic apprehension—which is to say, for the spiritualized vision—to which other arts can only partially aspire. Though spelled out in Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, the claim is very much in line with his "phenomenology". Consciousness achieves in reading an image beyond the visualization of speakable letters, whose very sounds such reading must supposedly have repressed as well.

Poetry, for Hegel, is thus the purest of and least materially burdened of representational arts precisely because in it, one might say, the medium disappears more fully than it does in painting or theater (where pigment and bodies keep their work more tangibly in front of us). Wittgenstein's minimal definition of textual processing—"The one real criterion

for anybody's *reading* is the conscious act of reading, the act of reading the sounds off from the letters"⁹—would therefore be upended not just in the case of painted readers with their brush-scribed books but, on Hegel's view, by a poetic understanding of decryption itself, where sounds are drowned out along with letters, submerged from conscious production by emergent mental image. So it is that this distilled purity of poetic comprehension for Hegel arises in the moment when "the audible, like the visible has sunk into being a mere indication of spirit... not tied down for its realization to external sensuous material".¹⁰ Not in Kittler, though, where reading comes trailing valorizations endemic to its gendered tutelage. And in any case, what Hegel's own stress on a more active "internalization" elsewhere seems to have forgotten or sidestepped is the way, in fact dialectically, that the "external" and therefore extraneous "sensuous" force of speech must itself be rendered internal (subvocal, a somatic impulse under arrest, muted but not excluded) in order to process its disembodied "indications" in whatever poetic spirit. These formative sound shapes are not risen above, but ridden on, kept intimate, in the decoding

of verse or prose.

Kittler might agree, as long as this “intimacy”, when imagined as more than strictly somatic, is recognized as a subterfuge of self-consciousness (the subterfuge that is self-consciousness) and a dupe of culture. So, too, in Tom McCarthy’s 2010 novel *C*, a book widely recognized as cognate with many of Kittler’s preoccupations and premises in its family (and technological) chronicle of the last century’s first half.¹¹ Though laced with homophonic ironies from start to finish in a late-Joycean vein, the Mother’s presence, oral or otherwise, is entirely sidelined. Instead, patriarchy is fully installed in language. The Victorian technocrat father displaces the maternal sourcing of phonetic intent in the form of a practitioner as well as theorist of phonetic authenticity, running a school for deaf mutes on the principle that “signing” never releases the full human “suspirio” of his patients. As explored the ironies of Ong’s primary and secondary orality elsewhere in a fuller account of this novel, headmaster Carrefax forces his charges in effect to become automatized text machines, producing sounds they can never hear but which

somehow would accumulate to prove their human depth.¹² As scion of this intractable organicist model, Carrefax's son, the hero "Serge" (an electrogalvanic charge in a different, punning sense), is in fact an avatar of mediatic prostheses rather than vocal privilege. Having once discovered the lamp-black "phonograph plates" in his father's attic, used for the tracing of garbled speech as deaf as this apparatus remains (with no playback mechanism)—and thus "bearing" no more than "scratch marks laid down by voices moaning from deaf bodies"—he also discovers nearby, as part of a treasure-hunt in the rehearsed history of recording technology, his father's original Berliner disks. These are the pre-vinyl recordings whose shellacked surface is made, he learns, from the "lac bug," one of the novel's many theoretic puns ("What does it lack, he wonders?") turning on the emptying out of human presence by technical mediation. This is for Serge the dawning truth of the human system, not, as his logocentric father believed, some fetishized inner Voice.

After evolving along with the new century through the history of technology from the kinoscope through radio to aerial

surveillance and on to his role as a postwar telegraphic cryptographer, Serge dies mysteriously, in mid surge as it were, in a sibilant splutter of phonemic hiccups. In what is perhaps the homophonic title scene as death rattle, he utters no last words but the Morse-like splutter “ssssss, c-c-c-c, ssssss, c-c-c-c”, an unvoiced and voiceless burst in which the dilatory s could easily be elided into the throat-catching glottal c. This death moment, with speech reduced to occulted signal, comes on the heels of a final homophonic slip of the tongue in which the hero is heard “stuttering” a request, as if in a flashback to his father’s technical archive, to “bring the Berlin inner... In, I mean”. It is as if the very needle of enunciation has jumped grooves in attempting to designate an apparatus already internalized by a strictly electromagnetic subject. And this in turn has followed the equally telling moment when Serge, fully conscious, has misheard a signals agent refer to “humming” (implicitly “hummin”) when what was said was in fact (and otherwise pronounced, with a long u) the portmanteau abbreviation “HUMINT”. Thus human intelligence: that curious metonymy for mental function itself, which is for Serge—no

wonder he was slow on the uptake—little more to begin with than just a buzz and hum along the wired circuitry of consciousness as data stream, less a discourse network in Kittler's terms than a binary conduit prey to jamming and static intermittencies of all sorts.

With this aural slip as build-up, human speech is subsequently reduced in death not to the animal noise of gasp or cry but to the quasi-mechanical static of a sheerly pulsing (Se/urging) energy that is no long alive and no longer human. Escalating toward the end with the kind of Joycean wordplay just sampled, and a good deal more of the sort, the novel stages its own mediatic (as well as locally phonemic) Wake by moving in a direction of sheer signaletic impulse, rather than expressive prose, which nonetheless its own punning, in its claims on our subvocalization, works to somatize almost despite itself. The lone emphasis of the title notwithstanding (which, beyond its joke as predicate of ocularity in a morphophonemically obsessed plot, may stand for the elemental carbon basis not just of life but of its duplicated cc traces), one comes away from its prose realizing—there seems no better way to put it—that to C is also in part

to ear. And each gathering irony of this book's lex-seams, however intentionally computational and all but algorithmic in their "mechanical" permutations, links us back nonetheless to the undeaftened body of processed signage, neural, interpretive, a network, yes, but an organic one. Here is the deep irony involved in McCarthy's recourse to the free-associational phonetic play of the literary tradition and its errant enterprises. This is to say that, at one level at least, this posthuman fable can't help but backfire. For even in our reading about the gestation of an exclusively networked electrogalvanic agency across the post-Victorian lifeline of its hero, it is (Wittgenstein again) the "one real criterion for anybody's *reading*"—the sounding *off* and *out* of sense—that in fact humanizes the textual nexus by bodily entailments at the "production" end. The hero may be just a sounding board and relay switch, but we, with more affect and investment, are more resolutely *feeling our way* across the audiovisual inferences of the print page in order to motivate its effects.

In Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, unlike in McCarthy's *C*, enduring a mortal premonition as if one were traversed by a voice is a

trope of consciousness per se, borrowed on the run from the technology of narrative but reinvested into the text with compound human interest. In McCarthy, as opposed to Kafka, the threat to autonomy in human discourse (and seemingly welcome at that for the protagonist) isn't from below, from animal voice as the degradation of "HUMINT", but rather from above, from the technosphere... and thus ultimately, in the next half century after the postwar phase of the book's retrospect closes on a sublexical last rasp, from the humless Internet of webworked data—where, in related electronic derivations, book covers can now read us before we open them. Once inside, however, at least with a certain kind of fictional prose, let alone poetry, one is back in the game, the Wittgensteinian language game, with all its contingent rolls of the dice. And to say the least, when reading with ears as well as eyes, alert to the phonic skewing of the serial "wh(ere)at", we are encountering something like the adverbial writer/ly at least in the sense of a script not altogether written (out), exhausted, but rather still in process, slippery, irrepressible, at any moment capable of talking back from within its own mobilized articulations.

Notes

- 1 Steven Connor, *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 102–110.
- 2 Raffi Khatchadourian, “We Know How You Feel”, *The New Yorker*, Jan 19, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/19/know-feel>.
- 3 Thijs Biersteker, *The Cover That Judges You*, 2015, online [<http://thecoverthatjudgesyou.com/>]
- 4 Walter Benjamin, “One-Way Street”, in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1: 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 463.
- 5 Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- 6 Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice”, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Steven Heath (London: Fontan Press, 1977), 179–89. The distinction between “writerly” and “readerly” is most fully worked out in Barthes’s *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971).
- 7 Kittler’s argument concerning the metaphysics, in effect, of maternal pedagogy in the acquisition of phonetic language develops across his sweeping chapter on “The Mother’s Mouth” in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 225–69.
- 8 See Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), with a further development, in part, of this argument—in relation to broader-span syntactic effects—in Stewart, *The Deed of Reading: Literature/Writing/Language/Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming 2015).
- 9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th ed, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 69, no. 159.

10 G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1: 89.

11 Tom McCarthy, *C* (New York: Vintage, 2010).

12 See my fuller discussion of this novel, by comparison in part with sound-recorded memories of Beckett's hero in Krapp's *Last Tape*, in "Contra Modernism: from the Mediatic to the Transmedial", *Affirmations: of the Modern 2:1* (December 2014), pp. 1–14. [http://affirmationsdev.library.unsw.edu.au/index.php?journal=aom&page=issue&op=view&path\[\]=4](http://affirmationsdev.library.unsw.edu.au/index.php?journal=aom&page=issue&op=view&path[]=4)

Esther Leslie

MOVING WORDS: FACTS OF READING

Paper

In a treatise on Japanese aesthetics in the everyday, written in 1933 and titled *In Praise of Shadows*, Jun'ichirō Tanizaki bewails the end of certain practices, flushed out by Western style—the purging of shadows by the new electric lights, the replacement of wooden and foliage toilets by shiny porcelain, the metal nib replacing the brush, blue ink replacing black. In this world, paper was lived with. In the traditional Japanese house there was a shōji (障子), a window-wall of translucent paper over a gridded frame of wood or bamboo. It was a screen, not a window—though not quite the same, if yet related, as the screens over which Tanizaki had enthused in the previous years, when he had advocated a pure cinema of affect, of animated Chinese characters and plays of light and dark. And it was this screen—so unlike glass windows or brick walls—that

produced the shadows and the soft light of living environments, an ambience, an atmosphere as a kind of cushion in which life seeps by. Tanizaki also speaks of paper for writing and drawing—on—as an author it is of course a concern to him. He writes:

I understand paper was invented by the Chinese; but Western paper is to us no more than something to be used, while the texture of Chinese paper and Japanese paper gives us a certain feeling of warmth, of calm and repose. Even the same white cloud might as well be one colour for Western paper and another for our own. Western paper turns away the light, while our paper seems to draw it in, to envelop it gently, like the soft surface of a first snowfall. It gives off no sharp noise when it is crumpled or folded, it is quiet and pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree.

Indeed Tanizaki goes so far as to say that from the adoption of Western writing implements, ink and paper, gathers the clamor to replace Japanese characters with Roman letters. Were

this not so:

our thought and our literature might not be imitating the West as they are, but might have pushed forward into new regions quite on their own. An insignificant little piece of writing equipment, when one thinks of it, has had a vast, almost boundless, influence on our culture.

This Oriental aesthete's sense of the world is echoed in Walter Benjamin's relationship to the political-aesthetic shaping of the everyday, including in relation to the sensual effects of paper. There is a passage in a letter from January 1934 to Gretel Karplus—when Benjamin was at his poorest, barely surviving in exile in Paris, and keeping warm by day in the Bibliothèque nationale. He writes:

Now I have a small and bizarre request regarding the arcades papers. Since the first setting up of the numerous sheets on which the notes are to reside, I have always used one and the same type of paper, namely a normal letter

pad of white MK [Max Krause] paper. Now my supplies of this are exhausted and I would very much like to preserve the external uniformity of this bulky and thorough manuscript. Would it be possible for you to arrange for one of those pads to be sent to me?

This was a man who had accustomed himself to working on and with scraps. His was an aesthetic of refuse, as needs must, but what he really longed for was the usual paper in the interests of making the famously fragmented and scrappy work, which he was undertaking and would never finish, uniform. The pages should be all the same size and form a uniform wodge of quotations, scraps, excerpts. The scrap—of paper, of thought—was made by Benjamin into a way of managing and delivering information and he would dash down thoughts on any scrap he could find. He carried notebooks with him to record sudden flashes. All his scraps of paper, sketches of essays jotted on the back of library book return reminders, wind roses and co-ordinate planes that plotted ideas in relation to each other were archived. His archive, or that which

remained, was organized in various modes, including by written format (“printed”, “only in handwriting”, “typewritten”).

Benjamin worked on a book that was never to be, a scrapped book that remains a scrapbook—*The Arcades Project*, a work composed almost entirely of quotations and devised such that the material within it remains mobile, its elements can be shifted at will. His thoughts, the thoughts of others, thoughts on prostitutes or bourgeois private gentlemen, advertising or fine art, all this is of equal value, for knowledge that is organized in slips and scraps knows no hierarchy. Thought itself, and its expression in word and image, remains in motion. He longed for the uniformity of the fine paper, but perhaps he also knew that paper makes the thoughts, makes the possibility of what can be written and what can be read on them.

Script

In *One Way Street*, Walter Benjamin wondered about the advent of the typewriter and its effect upon the writing hand. He makes some

observations on the possibility of new modes of notating thought and proposes that the mechanical transposition of the typewriter or other future machines will be preferred over handwriting only once flexibility in typeface choice is available. Such flexibility is a requisite because only then can all the shades of thought and of expression be captured. One single standardizing typeface could not provide this. Once versatility is attained, the writer might happily compose directly on the machine, rather than with pen in hand. This would of course affect the resultant composition, and books would be composed according to the abilities of the machine, much as photographs eventually instituted their own aesthetic rather than emulating painting's one. Benjamin writes:

The typewriter will alienate the hand of the literary writer from the pen only when the precision of typographic forms has directly entered the conception of his books. One might suspect that new systems with more variable typefaces would then be needed. They will replace the pliancy of the hand with the

innervation of the commanding fingers.

The suppleness of the hand in writing allows for the recording of gist in the form of a trace, which holds a profile, a dimension, a quantity of pen pressure. The stock fonts of the typewriter can scarcely replicate this. Benjamin envisions and hopes for a type of mechanical reproduction that could integrate these other aspects, and so allow extra-layers of meaning to be drawn from words and the ways they are drawn. He visualizes a forthcoming machine, based on the existing one, but far surpassing its capabilities. Only with this would this writing be sufficient for purposes of communication. With his fanciful machine, the spirited dance of fingers prodding at a keyboard of variable typefaces sensitive to hues, tones and shades of meaning would type at high speed but renounce none of the extra-linguistic meaning familiar to handwritten characters. These extra-linguistic aspects add up to a type of scriptural unconscious, just as photography introduced an optical unconscious, to parallel Freud's one, and it was what made graphology, a technique that fascinated Benjamin, possible. He proposed

that: "Graphology has taught us to recognize in handwriting images that the unconscious of the writer conceals in it." For Benjamin, the graphologist, the scratches on the surface of articulation, the surface of writing, can be investigated in order to divulge a deeper significance. In 1928, Benjamin makes the claim that any scrap of writing, any few handwritten words, might be what he calls a free ticket to the great theatre of the world, for it is, he says, a microcosm of the "entire nature and existence of mankind". Each tiny scrap of scrawled nonsense is an entryway to an unconscious, which has social aspects. Benjamin rejects the notion that writing is:

only apparently a surface phenomenon. We can see from the impression made in the paper during printing that there is a sculptural depth, a space behind the writing plane for the writer; on the other hand, interruptions in the flow of writing reveal the few points at which the pen is drawn back into the space in front of the writing plane, so as to describe its "immaterial curves". Could the cubic pictorial space of writing be

a copy in microcosm of a clairvoyant space? Is this the source of the insights of telepathic graphologists like Rafael Scherman? Whatever the answer, the cubic theory of writing opens up the prospect that one day it may be possible to exploit graphology to investigate telepathic events.

Handwriting presents not only a way of analysing the character of the writer, but also, apparently, the possibility of gaining access to that which is only thought, or maybe not even thought, simply unconsciously present. Captured in the features of the script are unconscious, unarticulated aspects, things prior to or extraneous to expression in language. Any system of language recording such as a typewriter would need to be flexible enough to incorporate what Benjamin thinks of as the bodily aspect of language, or its "mimetic capability". This capability describes writing's orientation to the microcosm of the body and, through it, to the macrocosm of the stars and the whole span of human and non-human history. Language exceeds itself. It ensnares in itself other meanings,

extra-linguistic resonances, bodily desires. In its transcription by hand, some of this scriptural unconscious threatens to be revealed. Benjamin's awareness of this character of language led him to use handwriting as an aid to thinking and he encouraged copying out. Benjamin suggests that a return to the original articulation of thought might be useful for thinking, spiralling new sense from old ideas. The telepathic communications of writing with your own hand, your own body, could revive the sedated words with new connotation. The physical act of writing—passing through reading—is closely aligned to the act of thinking.

Reading

Handwriting. Typewriting. Books. Pamphlets. Ends and beginnings. Scraps. Stuff scrapped. Scraps retained. All of these forms need their readers too. In *One Way Street* from the 1920s, Benjamin talks of getting his hands on a long desired book. As Tanizaki described Japanese paper as the soft surface of a first snowfall, Benjamin too likens snowfall to reading. Snow leads to the infinite. It leads to the

book and to the world of letters and endless possible stories of adventure, which make the heart race and heat up the blood. The association of books and snow is made, for example, in "Child reading", from *One Way Street*, published in 1928, where the twirls of falling snowflakes are tracked through the window of a warm parlor by a bookish bourgeois boy who is prone to illness and trapped in the home. This snow is a sign of worlds that are compelled to develop inside our larger cosmos but which point beyond the world that is, leading into ones that might be. The lines of words on the book's page are compared to snow piles, a dampening blanket, a soft protective barricade. Your wish granted, a coveted book comes into your hands.

For a week you were wholly given up to the soft drift of the text, which surrounded you as secretly, densely, and unceasingly as snow. You entered it with limitless trust. The peacefulness of the book that enticed you further and further! Its contents did not much matter. For you were reading at the time when you still made up stories in

bed. The child seeks his way along the half-hidden paths. Reading, he covers his ears; the book is on a table that is far too high, and one hand is always on the page. To him, the hero's adventure can still be read in the swirling letters like figures and messages in drifting snowflakes. His breath is part of the air of the events narrated, and all the participants breathe it. He mingles with the characters far more closely than grown-ups do. He is unspeakably touched by the deeds, the words that are exchanged; and, when he gets up, he is covered over and over by the snow of his reading.

The language is fast-paced and there is a breathlessness or excessive breathiness to the recounting of the experience. Benjamin's child-reader mingles with characters, with words and letters and immerses himself in the blanketing experience of the book. It was an image that Benjamin had used before, in an essay called "A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books", when he wrote of how the words for a reading child "have all come to

the masked ball, are joining in the fun and are whirling around together, like tinkling snowflakes". Words whirl around like snowflakes. Children play amongst them. The words float and sink, light as flecks, and attach themselves to anything. The connections between this and reading are made explicit in one of Benjamin's vignettes from his 1930s autobiographical writings in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*.

Sometimes in winter, standing in a warm room, at a window, the flakes of snow told silent stories to me, which I never quite grasped, for too thickly and unremittingly new things forced their way forward in amongst the familiar. Hardly had I intimately attached myself to one snowstorm, another one caught up within it, demanded submission.

The gush of chaotic nature is unprocessable and overwhelming for the self. It cannot be grasped. The child-Benjamin turns from the outside world to the world evoked inside the self, in books. It is an analogous experience—a flurry of letters like whirling snow crystals brings the chaos into line, into lines

on the page, thus fixes it for reflection in imagination:

*But now the moment had come, in the
flurry of letters, to chase the story,
which had escaped me at the window.
The distant lands I met here played
together like the snowflakes. And
because distance when it snows no
longer travels into farness, but inside,
so there lay Babylon and Bagdhad,
Acco and Alaska, Tromso and Transvaal
inside of me.*

The world of snow enters him. Benjamin encounters the world, but this time inside the smaller globe of his own head. He becomes the distance. Inside of him are the snow's flurries. Inside of him has become a snow globe. He has become the world. Or at the very least he possesses a world for him. The lesson of childhood is that creative and active transformation of the world, the word and oneself is the only way of making a live-able life. These correspondences, similarities, analogies reanimate something very old, a primitive way of being for humankind. The

child recapitulates the history of the species. The Benjamin-child finds words to be a special site of this mutability, for words can be misheard and misunderstood and yet make sense and nonsense: Mishearings and distortions of the words abound, or rather the explorations of the deeper capacities retained by a word, a word misheard, turn into phantoms. Of one, Benjamin notes: "Its gaze spilled out from the irresolute flakes of the first snow." The boy Benjamin glimpsed this distorted world, but it never saw him. And yet he barely sees it, for as he tells us, in one version of the anecdote, it is a ghost. Or it is unlike itself, as he tells us elsewhere. For it is like a flurry of snowflakes or like a cloud.

*Mute, porous, flaky, it formed a cloud
at the core of things, like the snow
flurry in the little glass domes.*

The grown-up Benjamin put his efforts into discovering how to rediscover the mode of being of the floundering, playing child in the snow of words.

This is reading in a romantic, dreamy mode. It seems far from the mechanical

world of reproduction and standardization. Interestingly Benjamin's thoughts on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction apply rather to the reproducibility of images, and not words. All of the claims about the end of aura, about a new relationship between audience and culture in an age of mass media, mass reproduction and the masses apply to visual arts in the form of lithography, photography and film. Gutenberg's invention of the printing press accompanied an earlier age, a society in which literacy emboldened and unified those who were coming to power, and became, through the Bible, pamphlets and newspapers, a conduit of their ideological prescription. Gutenberg made possible the shift from monks' copying out by hand to a machine-based reproduction of print. But by the 1920s and 1930s, when Benjamin formulates his theses on mechanical reproduction, typewriting appears to Benjamin as an inadequate mechanized version of handwriting and less significant socially. He underlines, in 1931, in his "Little History of Photography", the prediction of Moholy-Nagy that the illiterate of the future would not be the person unable to read or write, but the person ignorant

of how photography signifies. Furthermore writing itself is turning pictorial, becoming image. In as much as Benjamin approaches handwriting—and by extension, his longed for mechanical graphological typewriting—he considers it as image too.

The swirling words, flotsam of a dreamy Romanticism, are re-articulated, even if in modernist guise, in Benjamin's thoughts on literacy in the modern cityscape. And what was snow falling, becomes instead words rising, words rising up, drifting across cities. The city's languages rise up, demand attention, enter into complex combinations with our distracted thoughts. As Benjamin puts it, in *One Way Street*, newly expelled from what he calls the bed-like sheets of a book, "a refuge in which script could lead an autonomous existence", and itself a type of blanket, just as snow is a blanket, the words are woken up, flung out, released to flicker across the night skyline, glimmering their neon messages above shops, or they stand upright on posters, newspapers or cinema screens.

If centuries ago it began gradually to lie down, passing from the upright inscription to the manuscript resting on sloping desks

before finally taking itself to bed in the printed book, it now begins just as slowly to rise again from the ground. The newspaper is read more in the vertical than in the horizontal plane, while film and advertisement force the printed word entirely into the dictatorial perpendicular.

These vertical and sometimes mobile scripts make the static and regular print contained in the book appear archaically motionless. The urban dweller needs to be able to read such a cityscape its ciphers and signs, its words and logos, its images, which constitute a "blizzard of changing, colorful, conflicting letters". This is blizzard not gentle snow fall. The snow swirls chaotically and without resolution into neat lines in a book. Script, Benjamin notes, "is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos". And it is an outgrowth or an ingrowth of developments in art, where, since Mallarmé, the graphic nature of script is incorporated. Mallarmé predicted the future, Benjamin claims, combining in his 1897 poem "Un coup de dés" all the graphic tensions of the advertisement. Mallarmé strews words across the page, transforming them into shapes, logos.

He dynamites them, breaking with the rigidity of the line. His words scatter. Apollinaire continued in his *Calligrammes* in the second decade of the twentieth century with his “ideographic logic” of spatial rather than narrative disposition. Once he made the words and letters trickle down the page like raindrops. And the Futurists clambered on board too, with Marinetti parading typographical revolutions, in order to express the disturbance of syntax, metre, punctuation, as part of a quest for ‘lyrical intoxication’ in his attempts at rapid instantaneous telegraphic communications.

Cinema’s mobilized words and signs play a role here. Here is a line from Benjamin’s 1927 polemic against Oskar Schmitz’s negative review of Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*.

What began with the bombardment of Odessa in “Potemkin” continues in the more recent film “Mother” with the pogrom against factory workers, in which the suffering of the urban masses is engraved in the asphalt of the street like ticker tape.

This space of collective suffering is giving

room on the screen and the modern shiny surface of the asphalt road—described elsewhere by Benjamin as a momentous component of the bourgeois city and the bourgeois self, which, like other shiny surfaces—windowpanes and mirrors—and like the camera too, reflects the city and its residents from many angles. City and residents are fragmented and multiplied, generating feelings of disorientation and loss. Like the running script of a twenty four hours news channels, or the engravings on a tomb, the cinema gives this a place. Or gave it one.

Today

It is all different now. Today in the cities, swirling, chaotic writing, words screaming from billboards, moving vehicles, LED screens, demand and never really find adequate enough attention. In Times Square, the individual stands in a landscape turned urban environment, where his or her fragile body is exposed to a forcefield of neon flashes, torrents and explosions of light. The senses are assaulted. There is literal assault in the square.

Marshall Berman, who was one of the champions of these frenetic mobile surfaces of communication, does not shy from speaking about violent incidents he witnessed there. In addition, the messages conveyed by the storm of neon flashes exist to promote capitalism and its ideologies of advertisement and finance. In his reminiscences on the site, Berman recalls the NASDAQ sign that gloomily broadcasts news from the stock exchange. There was the giant Morgan Stanley sign with its tumble of numbers in perpetual motion communicated from the New York Stock Exchange, NASDAQ, and the Dow, flanked by giant maps, showing the time zones of Morgan Stanley offices across the world. There was the New York Times' news zipper flashing events from across the world—though it degenerated in time, notes Berman, into stock quotations and sports scores, sponsored by Dow Jones. Still, Berman stood there, watching the dancing signs, wondering about their potential, their beauty, their excitement. Even in their degradation, thanks to the progress in computer graphics—the triumphs of industrial, technological modernity—the electric signs of Times Square become more

and more exciting and Berman bathed in them. In this, he was reminiscent of his (and Benjamin's) modern anti-hero Baudelaire:

Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life... any man who can yet be bored in the heart of the multitude is block-head? a blockhead? and I despise him!

Berman delighted in the ways that people gathered and gazed, caught by the lights, and moved, wildly, just like their electronic avatars. He hoped that there was a liberated, playful mode of mobilizing all this power, all this liveliness, once it was dislocated from the tawdry business of profit. Once liquid crystals were set free.

Liquid crystals, were discovered in 1888, but took a hundred years to find a

purpose in screens. To the library for the ending of this: I am captivated by an image I see on walking into the British Library or any other library, even in cafes, all over the place, the reader-writers sit in ranks, gazing at an upright screen, its greeny-blue illumination lighting up their face, in the shadowy realms that the post EU light bulbs engender. A certain return to Tanizaki's shadows? Or each human for his or herself a glaucous aquatic gleam. What does any of this do to our reading and our writing? Each human for him or herself, bathing in the emitted light of the screen, is suffused with a glaucous aquatic gleam. We are returned to the phosphorescent oceans from which we once came, from which we once began to take on form and form our thoughts. These screens may appear to be only a flatness on which the drama of animation unfurls, but their liquid crystals also play a role in that drama. The fluidity of the liquid crystal sweeps us along with its vibrant colors and endless appeals. The minerality of the liquid crystal, as it reflects glowingly on us, enhances our mineral selves, our copper, aluminium, cadmium, lead, silver, chlorine, indium and tin.

Now we have cracked open time. There

is no stillness, except for when we command it. The screen makes all history flow, apparently. At any moment, the screen may freeze a moment and tumble its viewers into its deep space. Space is overcome in composite scenes. Time is time redoubled so that capitalism can communicate with us, constantly and from every angle. It is time for the whole world to be remodelled through liquid crystals, three-dimensionally. Everywhere, inescapably.

Hannah Proctor

READING TIMES SQUARE: SIGNS, SURFACES AND SKIN IN THE CITY

On November 6th 1928, the Motograph News Bulletin or “zipper” was unveiled in New York City. Wrapped around the Times Tower, then the second tallest building in Manhattan, the zipper’s 14,800 lightbulbs flashed breaking news headlines across Times Square around the clock. The zipper became an international icon of public reading, creating a site for people to gather and gaze at the moving letters as they announced historic events. Roland Marchand identifies the zipper as a crucial element in the historical function of Times Square “as the nation’s symbolic center of information”.¹

The square was also at the vanguard of advertising spectacle. In 1909 a city law limiting the size of electric lights was overturned. Giant letters soon began illuminating the streets of Manhattan. Times Square’s first neon sign appeared in 1924. Lucky Strike, White Shadows, Heatherbloom Petticoats—glimmering and shimmering

words sliced their way through the city's night. Bright letters jostled for attention amid the city's frantic crowds; signs that might be glimpsed in the wing mirror of a fast moving taxi, reflected in a shop window or half-obscured by a cinema's jutting façade. The reader here is confronted with a giant collage that bears more resemblance to a cinematic montage than to the small black letters reposing neatly on the printed page of a book. Unlatched from any particular information, the city's words converge on the reader, colliding and combining to create strange new narratives.²

“What, in the end, makes advertisements superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says—but the fiery red pool reflecting it in the asphalt”, Walter Benjamin wrote in *One Way Street*, a book first published in the year of the zipper's debut, whose headings are swiped from the wordscape of the modern city.³ For Benjamin, the promise of advertising emerges through distortion. As light rebounding off the surface of the pavement, advertisements exceed and thus subvert their functional relation to commodities.⁴ Julie Warburton, in her discussion

of neon and asphalt in the work of Benjamin, writes:

[A] red stain that has been left over from the glitz and glamour of the street. This image is reflecting in a modern city material but, having been thrown down on to the asphalt, it is at a distance from the service of the city's advertising messages. In this sense it might be something other than just the leftovers of advertising. Perhaps it has a more persistent and primal-like, or eternal, quality that transcends the rush of the city, as if hinting at past blurry images it is trying to reveal to passers-by in the present.⁵

The red stain cannot be read. Yet only through becoming illegible, Benjamin suggests, might the city disclose its meaning and promise to the readers of the streets, only then might another kind of city become possible. A fragment on reading from Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* might be inserted into this urban context and read under the glare of neon: "Dusk: the hour when great works are inspired

[*inspiration litteraire*]. According to Daudet, however, the hour when mistakes are made in reading.”⁶

Following several changes of ownership and intermittent dark periods, the Times Square zipper was bought by Dow Jones and Company in 1995 (as discussed by Esther Leslie pp. 92–93 of this volume). Now, rather than news, the zipper’s display is dominated by stock quotations and sport scores. Marshall Berman sees this transformation in the zipper’s function as a metonym for the transformation of Times Square itself, from a democratic public space to a space dominated by private interests. The zipper, he says, was integral to the experience of the square—“you would stop, read and reflect”—creating a brief moment of shared repose amidst the rush of the city, “a moment of solitude that is also a moment of community”.⁷ Although he still finds much to celebrate in the 21st century Times Square, which continues to draw mixed crowds and provide exhilarating spectacle, Berman is troubled by the realization that the square no longer “belongs to everybody” in the way he claims it once did.⁸

Berman describes a new zipper sign curling around the curved marquee of a building which broadcasts ABC's *Good Morning America*: "The roller-coaster structure of its sign suggests a world full of startling leaps and plunges, but one that can finally be contained."⁹ He claims that the carnivalesque qualities long associated with Times Square return here in a cold, joyless form. A counterpart to Benjamin's neon red pool appears on the video images which accompany the sign's text: "debris after bombs, blood saturating streets in neon red."¹⁰ The events of history are reduced to a flat image, gory and vivid but detached from any context. This red stain is not a resonant residue from the regime of signs but the sign itself; it leaves no space open for intervention. Berman's fairground metaphor suggests that history still rushes and jolts but now travels along the same tracks again and again. It also assumes that the roller-coaster's riders have no control over the pace or trajectory of the ride.

Berman's insistence on the relation between carnival and spectacle differs from Mikhail's Bakhtin's famous discussion of the carnivalesque, in which carnival is by

definition distinct from spectacle; people constitute carnival and are therefore incapable of detachedly observing it: “they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no life outside it.”¹¹ For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque body is a collective body which knows no boundaries. Berman is desperately seeking this kind of experience in the contemporary city and catches glimpses of it here and there. But ultimately his description of the alienated, “shallow and horrific... life full of dread”¹² that is increasingly coming to characterise Times Square seems more akin to Bakhtin’s definition of the Renaissance body: “isolated, alone, fenced off from other bodies.”¹³

In 2004, Berman describes seeing a reproduction of the Johannes Vermeer painting “Study of a Young Woman” gazing down from a billboard advertising the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In contrast to the capitalist frenzy of the square and the abrasive aesthetic that accompanies it, Berman claims this woman looks like someone from another planet: “complex, ambivalent, profound... we can see her as a figure with a history, even if

we don't know what that history is."¹⁴ He sees in her a life that the square now lacks. But though his paean to Times Square is tacitly addressed to the people that pass through it, Berman primarily reads the city through its representations—through movies, photographs, Broadway shows, cartoons, pop songs. What of the all those lives lived in the shadow of the billboards?

Hoke Jones was a New York City sewer worker. Samuel Delany describes first encountering him in the late 1970s on the balcony of the Capri Theater—one of numerous midtown porn movie theaters closed by the city's Health Department in the 1990s for "code violations" as part of sweeping and draconian "safety" measures unleashed in the wake of the AIDS crisis. Delany eulogises these spaces as bastions of interclass contact and sexual exploration in the book this episode is recounted in: *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1997).¹⁵

Jones only vaguely remembers Delany when he approaches him in at a bar—"I had a lot of different guys in there—and I was usually lookin' at the screen"¹⁶—but still invites the writer over to his place. With his harelip,

enormous hands, uncut cock and dirty workmen's clothes, Delany declares that Jones is the most attractive man he has ever met. Sitting in the apartment drinking wine, Delany notices that Jones is sitting on his hands and asks him why:

I think you have the most beautiful hands I've ever seen... They look like hands that have done something, put things together, taken them apart. You can look at them and see how they hold and heft their own histories—in a way that's... well, breathtakingly beautiful.¹⁷

As Benjamin remarks in *One Way Street*: “as birds seek refuge in the leafy recesses of a tree, feelings escape into the shaded wrinkles, the awkward movements and inconspicuous blemishes of the body we love.”¹⁸

Jones's hands bear witness to a life of labor. Sewers flow beneath the city, out of sight. When turning on a tap or flushing a toilet who thinks where the water comes from or where the shit goes to? But beneath the streets of Manhattan lie labyrinthine tunnels constructed haphazardly over the 19th

century—a subterranean mirror world of the dramas of planning, privatization and profit that Delany charts on the streets above. The expenditure of human brain, nerves and muscles necessary to sustain a sewage network may not be visible in the steamy water in our bathtubs but it leaves its marks on the flesh of the worker. Their erotic encounters also left a visceral mark on Delany: “half a dozen orgasms were already incorporated into my bone and flesh.”¹⁹

Delany celebrates Time Square’s now vanished porn theatres and the gay cruising that took place in them as rare examples of urban sites that allowed people of different class backgrounds to intermingle—“playwrights, carpenters, opera singers, telephone repair men, stockbrokers, guys on welfare, guys with trust funds... teachers, warehouse workers, male nurses, fancy chefs, guys who work at Dunkin Donuts, guys who gave out flyers at street corners, guys who drove garbage trucks, and guys who washed windows at the Empire State Building”.²⁰ The theatres allowed for contact between people who might otherwise only pass one another on the street and, however momentarily, dissolved

cultural and class differences. Indeed, Delany's discussion of the porn cinemas conforms more closely to Bakhtin's definition of the carnival than Berman's descriptions of 21st century Times Square, insofar as carnival offers a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" creating a space in which social hierarchy is suspended.²¹ The sexual encounters described by Delany are also reminiscent of the grotesque corporality discussed by Bakhtin, with its emphasis on 'proliferations', "protuberances", "offshoots", "convexities" and "apertures" which open out onto the world.

Hoke Jones had a particular relation to waste disposal in the city but Delany also describes meeting those who are the city's waste products—people deemed expendable, obsolescent and unsightly—some of whom found refuge in the cinemas. Just as Benjamin read the city through the effluence of light reflected on the asphalt, so Delany suggests that the city becomes legible by looking at what it casts off.

The long time span of Delany's account allows him to register shifts in people's lives

which were, of course, tied to the historical shifts occurring in the city. He recounts running into someone he'd encountered in the cinemas reduced to picking through garbage cans and glimpses a former lover "sitting on the island in the middle of Broadway, with his green plastic garbage bag of empty beer and soda cans against his knee, without shoes".²² A homeless man who lived permanently on the balcony of the Venus theater, only leaving the building when it was closed for cleaning, is seen by Delany on the streets after the cinema finally closed its doors for good "eyes squinting in his wrinkled face, as though the wan Eighth Avenue sun was simply and permanently too bright".²³

Gentrification attempts to smooth out the rough surface of the city. In 1989 Lou Reed proclaimed the area a "Dirty Boulevard", but it has since been cleaned up.²⁴ The redevelopment of Times Square saw luxury apartments, office blocks, shopping malls and tourist hotels—"a glass and aluminium graveyard"—replace the existing infrastructure. In so doing traces of the square's history were erased. But the wrinkled faces on the streets, like the

calloused hands of the worker, quietly attest to the violence of these historical processes. Delany suggests that this is where the city might be read. These humans, who bear little resemblance to the shiny retouched—probably young, probably white, definitely smiling—faces that populate real estate hoardings and billboard advertisements, are just another blemish on the city's skin that the property speculators would like to smooth out.²⁵ Now, Berman notes, the area is dominated by people in uniform, an assortment of cops and corporate security guards “working to guard the Square's cleanliness and order”, whose shiny guns and gleaming body armor recall the gleaming façades of the new architecture surrounding them.²⁶

Berman and Delany both perceive that a fight will be needed to wrest the city back from corporate control, to assert the rights of all people to share the space. For Berman this consists in asserting people's right to participate in the dazzling spectacle of the city, “to merge their subjectivity into it, and change the place as they change themselves”.²⁷ But Delany's account suggests that in order to achieve this we might need to turn our gaze

from the neon signs to the wrinkled faces on the streets.

Delany is aroused by bodies that display their history. But what history? The marks on our skin may indicate that we have 'done something' but they do not tell us what we have done, how we have lived. After all Delany only knows that Jones works in the sewers because he happened to pass him emerging from a man-hole in the street one day. Some people are more likely to be calloused, scarred, bruised or wounded than others but bruises and cuts are so often ventriloquized—"she walked into a door" or "the perpetrator's condition did not seem serious" (in the words of the cop who killed Eric Garner)—precisely because skin itself, however visibly mutilated, is mute. Even when a particular event or habitual activity might be inferred from surface features the insight is only skin deep. Looking at my grandmother's face at the age of 96 it would not have been difficult to surmise that she had smoked cigarettes throughout her life but impossible to know what she thought of as she inhaled and exhaled into the air already carbon monoxide filled from the local factories, as she flicked

ash into the glass ashtrays of her constantly repainted living room or threw butts into the gutter on her way to work before sunrise.

As Rebecca Comay discusses: "A wrinkle shows just how ambiguously time inscribes itself on our mortal bodies. Like every mark, it seems to hint of a discrete and datable moment of decision or incision, while ultimately frustrating the desire to identify any such moment."²⁸ Comay suggests that we might instead think of wrinkles in relation to an unrealized future. Despite standing as testament to the irreversibility of time, wrinkles might also be thought of as traces of a past that passed us by. Unlike the palm reader who finds signs of a definite future written in flesh, this implies that our wrinkles could be read as traces of "missed experience, squandered experience, ruined experience... the disfiguring streaks on our skin are just the alluvial deposits left in the wake of what was unlived".²⁹ Reading between the lines provides a means of engaging with the past in order to transform the present.

The complex, ambivalent, profound humans on the streets of the city have histories, even if we can't see what those histories

are. Although the fleshy hieroglyphs that remain might not tell us what we have lived they do assert that we have lived and also suggest that we could have (and still could) live differently. Like the fiery pool gleaming on the asphalt, skin cannot be read. Yet only through becoming illegible, might the city disclose its meaning and promise to the readers of the streets, only then might another kind of city become possible.

Notes

1 Roland Marchand, "Review: Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World. by William R. Taylor", *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 3, (Dec., 1992), pp. 1209–1210, p. 1209.

2 This was not, however, how advertisers themselves viewed the signs. O. J. Gude, who pioneered electronic advertising on Broadway, proclaimed: "everybody must read them and absorb them, and absorb the advertiser's lesson willingly or unwillingly." O. J. Gude, "Art and Advertising Joined by Electricity", *Signs of the Times* (November 1912), p. 3 cited in William R. Taylor ed. *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World* (Baltimore, MA; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) p. 236.

3 Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London; Verso, 1979), pp. 45–104, pp. 80–90. This line concludes the section "This Space for Rent" which explicitly compares the aesthetics of advertising and cinema which "hits us between the eyes with things as a car, growing to gigantic proportions careens at us out of a film screen". p. 90.

4 Marshall Berman notes in a similar vein that when a Times Square sign enters the inner life of the person on the street “This means uncoupling the sign from whatever commodity it was meant to promote and placing it in a different system of meaning all our own”. See, Marshall Berman, *On the Town: One Hundred Years of Spectacle in Times Square* (London, Verso; 2009), p. 7.

5 See, Julie Warburton, “Textual cities spliced into neon stairways and asphalt screens”, <http://atomising.tumblr.com/post/95496824609/textual-cities-spliced-into-neon-stairways-and> (Accessed 9th March 2015). In the same essay, Warburton also discusses the city dweller as reader drawing on the “Attested Auditor of Books” section of *One Way Street* where Benjamin discusses the “blizzard of changing colorful, conflicting letters” and “locust swarms of print” that accost the eye in the city (p. 62).

6 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. and ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press, 1999) p. 286.

7 Berman, p. 204, p. 102.

8 Berman, p. 223.

9 Berman, p. 205.

10 Berman, p. 205.

11 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN; University of Indiana Press, 1984) p. 7.

12 Berman, p. 205.

13 Bakhtin, p. 29.

14 Berman, p. 216.

15 A detailed discussion of Berman and Delany’s divergent readings of Times Square is beyond the scope of this essay. Delany rebuts Berman’s discussion of his work in relation to the question of hustling. See, Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York,

NY; New York University Press, 1999), pp. 145–150. Berman’s discussion of Times Square Red, Times Square Blue (Berman, pp. 167–170) focuses on Delany’s refusal to take seriously enough the marginalisation of women in the 42nd Street area. Contra to Delany’s analysis Berman claims: “sexual segregation and aggression enveloped a public space that for generations had been an oasis of integration... This was a disaster for the city” (p. 170). Although both writers are nostalgic for a previous Times Square which they depict as more democratic, their analyzes place emphasis on different times and spaces.

16 Delany, p. 99.

17 Delany, p. 100.

18 Benjamin, *One Way Street*, p. 52.

19 Delany, p. 99.

20 Delany, p. 15. Delany’s list is interesting to compare to Berman’s list of female occupations in the early 20th century, which encompassed: “women of all classes and ethnicities: cooks, bakers, waitresses, seamstresses, milliners, maids, office cleaners, salesgirls for all commodities, actresses and singers and dancers, wardrobe mistresses and costumers, switchboard operators, fashion models, theatre ushers and dressers, nightclub hatcheck girls, office clerks, typists, stenographers, bookkeepers, and on and on.” Berman, p. 109.

21 Bakhtin, p. 10.

22 Delany, p. 49.

23 Delany, p. 58.

24 Berman cites this song in *On the Town*, p. 164.

25 Berman describes the billboard that replaced the Vermeer painting as “a sort of chorus line of smiling faces, all girls in their twenties, remarkable in their cleanliness and emptiness” (p. 216).

26 Although Berman says prefers this hyper-securitized present to the dangerous, copless past. He recalls witnessing a brutal attack on the street when there was no-one around to help the injured person. But he goes on to corroborate Delany's thesis by noting a manager of a porn cinema was able to call an ambulance (p. 202).

27 Berman, p. 225.

28 Rebecca Comay, "Proust's Remains", *October*, no. 144, 2013, pp. 3–24, p. 23.

29 Comay, p. 23. Comay draws on Benjamin who describes in Proust a relationship between ageing and rejuvenation. The past returns in Proust as an enlivening eruption in the present. Benjamin writes that *In Search of Lost Time* reveals that: "none of us has time to live the true dramas of the life that we are destined for. This is what ages us—this and nothing else. The wrinkles and creases on our faces are the registration of the great passions, vices, insights that called on us; but we, the masters, were not home." Walter Benjamin, "On the Image of Proust", *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London; Pimlico, 1999) pp. 197–210, p. 207.

James Wilkes

READ-RECEIPT

James Wilkes—Documents from
*Read-Receipt: A Performance for
Receipt Printers and People*

3 ethernet-connected receipt printers are set up in the performance space. Over the course of the performance, they are triggered to print receipts, with a new text printed each time someone tears one off.

The texts to be printed are assembled from over 2500 years of receipts, invoices and tallies; they are framed to encourage the audience to read, perform and converse. Here the receipt is freed from its functional straitjacket, and turned into a marker for the reciprocal relationships between reader and writer, speaker and listener. It becomes a modern equivalent of the 'tally stick', notched and split to make tangible the indebtedness of one to another.

From: At 10:29am
On Monday 9 March

During the 2010 Flash Crash, the Dow Jones fell 1000 points and recovered a few minutes later. One factor in this event were the HFTs, High-Frequency Trades, carried out in fractions of a second by algorithmic programs which skim tiny profits from millions of transactions.

One sentence from the report on the crash reads: "After the market closed, the exchanges and FINRA met and jointly agreed to cancel (or break) all such trades under their respective 'clearly erroneous' trade rules".

-----TEAR OFF-----

From: At: 10:27am
On: Monday 9 March

**The Dialogue Concerning
the Exchequer, c. 1180: "At
the top they put £1000, in
such way that its notch has
the thickness of the palm;
£100, of the thumb; £20, of
the ear; the notch of one
pound, about of a swelling
grain of barley; but that of a
shilling, less; in such wise,
nevertheless, that, a space
being cleared out by
cutting, a moderate furrow
shall be made there; the
penny is marked by the
incision being made, but no
wood being cut away."**

-----TEAR OFF-----

From: At: 10:35am
On: Monday 9 March

**Find a receipt in your purse
or pocket etc. Read it
closely until a memory or
thought is generated. Tell it
to someone whilst pressing
the receipt into their hand.**

-----TEAR OFF-----

From: At 10:31am
On: Monday 9 March

"It is Pshenenter, son of Peteese, who says to [...] 'I have been (paid) fully (with) the Collection of the God for the year 7(?) and with the Collection of the God for the year 8 of the exalted Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus.' Pshenenter, son of Peteese, has written (this)."

-----TEAR OFF-----

From: At: 10:32am
On: Monday 9 March

One precursor to all this is an artwork by Ceal Floyer called Monochrome Till Receipt (White). It's a receipt from Morrisons documenting the purchase of only white items (cream cheese, savlon, pickled eggs, dental floss...) You are encouraged to make unlicensed multiples of this work and pin it up in your workplace, on a corkboard in your kitchen, etc.

-----TEAR OFF-----

From: At: 10:39am
On: Monday 9 March

"MISS F. E. OGDEN. One of 5 circular metal tokens representing portions of basket of hops picked from 1/2 basket to 1, 2, 4 and 5 bushels. 5 bushels = a whole basket, and this is worth one notch on the tally. Same locality [Boughton Blean, East Kent]"

-----TEAR OFF-----

Anna Barham

I'M A TONGUE TRANSIT

ampler tongue transit sample ornate rutting taste ornate rumpling
I'm a tongue transit sample on a twisting taste on a thing

taste a molten purring taste me turning polar neural amps tottering
taste of molten purring taste me turning polo new I'm stuttering

ulterior amp tangents ramping lust tone rate ramping to ultra tense
Alteri I'm tangents ramping lost weight cramping to ultra tents

tempo ranting a result mean pure glottis rant I mean total grunt
tempo renting a result mean pure greatest friend I mean total cont-

reps smile at protean grunt tutor a pregnant smile grunt at
ract smile that protein grunt to tell a pregnant smile going to

pornate smile orate impregnant lust sterling portmanteau orate
pronate smile a rate in pregnant last standing portmanteau alright

am-plest turning meant relating stupor turn large potent aims
I'm pissed turning minutes relating stupid ten large patent change

reporting a mute slant liar turns potent game later turns top
without putting a meat slant light turns petite game later tons talk

enigma turns me a potent grail turns me pelting aorta rotating
enigma tons me a potent Grail tends me pelting a water rotating

leap turns me aorta pelting sternum lo rapt turn teasing me
meet tends me a lot to pelting sun low wrap ten teasing me

tenting palest armour settle rapturing moan en-tangle stript amour
tenting panelist comma subtle rupturing moaning tangle strict ammo

rapturise molten tang plant argent moisture
tries molten time phone charging moisture

prune matter to signal elongate smart tip run our pent signal
 print market to signal elongate smart tip running parenet signal

matter elong aspirant mutter not pure signal matter aspirate
 master in the mastering no PO signalment to a story

molten grunt a spent oral muttering grunt spent aerial mot aspire to
 rent spent between grant spent Ariel motorsports

mental grunt tempt aerial song turn to argent impulse rant emptier
 mental grant attempt Ariel sometimes argent impulse rent until

lung strata on ornate term pulsating emptier atonal grunts remote
 long straw tap on donate time pulsating and to a total grants remote

rant pulsating emptier truant slogan as in errant tempo glut
 rent pulsating and tear trained slogan as in event tempo clocked

repaint slogan mutter err at mint tongue slap mutate slogan reprint
 repaint slogan slap retake slogan reprint

rim tongue slap natter reprint as nougat melt ruminant natter
 ring tones lack to reprint his newfound milk lemonade not to

glops intone rapt sugar melt tongue ran natter lips melt sugar in
 clops into sugar milk tongue run to lips milk sugar in

rapt tone tangle piston erratum neat molten sugar trip taint prone
 left tangle piston about to meet molten sugar trip taint print

sugar melt to trap meringue slant gleam at piston return leap to
 sugar milk to trap meringue slants cream act piston return leak to

astringent rum lure termagant piston to pale astringent rum
 a stringent rum you atomic and piston to pay less stringent ROM

a tart mot engine slurp spin a rum angle totter mauls
 talked engine spin around and go talk to the movies

rapt engine trot stir a potent rum angel a neater trot
 wrapped in gin trapster to run angle and need to drop

slumping great plans tite on rum peter in nasal gum trot emptier
 slumping great pens title run pizza and nasal gum contract and to

nasal grunt to grip nasal mutter tone strut meaner lip tango
 nasal clamp to great nasal much attends tryptamine and tango

more syllables than
I have time to
count. Each line,
word, & syllable
have been chosen
to convey only the
intended meaning
& nothing more.
This poem abjures
obscurity & enigma.
There is nothing
hidden. A hundred
readers would each
read the poem
in an identical
manner & derive
the same message
from it. This
poem, like all
good poems, tells
a story in a direct
style that never
leaves the reader
guessing. While
at times expressing
bitterness, anger,
resentment, xenophobia,
& hints of racism,
its ultimate mood is
affirmative. It finds
joy even in
those spiteful moments
of life that
it shares with
you. This poem
represents the hope
for a poetry
that doesn't turn
its back on
the audience, that

has been written
 for an audience of
 poets, poets
 who know the dif-
 ference be-
 tween the
 simple past
 tense & 'has
 been' - the pres-
 ent per-
 fect tense
 - &
 who also rec-
 ognize the pos-
 sible aesthetic
 effect of that dif-
 ference - poets
 who also know
 that 'has been' has
 another meaning
 even though that
 other meaning is
 not relevant to
 this poem. This
 poem
 is un-
 necessarily com-
 plicated,
 flailing wild-
 ly, like an
 opium addict looking
 vainly for its
 pipe, at a
 demo-
 nstrably deranged
 a-
 version of the necessary
 in quest of
 the im-
 probable (necessity

of appreciating the
nu-
ances &
tricks, pros-
ody &
infrastruct-
ures (or
their
ab-
sence) in
this poem. This
poem
fancies poetry
as an ei-
detic
emanation
so rare & so
refined
that it will
e-
lude
even the m-
ost elite
readers, which
almost certain-
ly
does not
(& will
never)
in-
clude
you.
Its
attitude
toward you
as a
g-
eneral reader
is that
you'd

cogno-
 scienti,
 sly references
 such as
 the fact that
 the title
 of this poem
 refers to another
 poem,
 which is n-
 ever
 referenced
 in this poem,
 or not
 referenced in
 a way the
 broad public would be
 hip en-
 ough to be
 hip to - (
 dig it?)
 -
 so, heh!,
 if
 you're not
 hip to
 that oth-
 er poem
 you will be
 as out to sea
 with this
 poem as
 the proverb-
 ial organ grind-
 er who
 lost his monkey -
 not in the great
 storm raging (al-
 ways rag-
 ing) out-

ural, at
 least for those
 cleverer'nough
 to appreciate the
 conceit.
 But leaving aside
 whether or not
 the title is con-
 nect-
 ed to the
 poem, the
 title does make
 an acute social
 ob-
 serv-
 ation that nowadays
 no-
 body
 wants to accept
 gratitude:
 they want to bestow it,
 but not receive
 it. (-
 "Thank you
 for writing this
 poem." - "No,
 not at all, I
 must thank you
 for reading
 it.") - This
 poem believes
 that po-
 etry's a high-
 er calling. For
 this rea-
 son, th-
 is
 poem can't
 be both-
 ered with the

downturned
brow (if
such an ex-
pression of
supervening
regret does not, though
I fear
it
most assuredly
does, lapse
into per-
sonif-
i-
cation)... this
poem has
been
forced against it's
every aes-
thetic hope,
to turn
its back on
you, the
read-
er, who is,
come on, let's
stop kid-
ding ourselves, a
philistine:
stupid, ig-
nor-
ant &
vulgar, pos-
sessing a limited
vocabulary (if
pos-
sessing any vo-
cabulary at
all & not
simply cruising
it),

know that you
are al-
ways, & will al-
ways be, fore-
most in my
heart): be-
ware the Dark
Myst-
eries of this
poem, for if, e-
ven for a mo-
ment, you lose
your vigilant
disapprobation
& let the
poem's in-
sidious charms
grab hold of you
by your boot-
straps & shake
you to an inch of your
life — then its
black
magic will fuck
with
your head & comman-
deer
your soul. *Stay calm,*
keep your dis-
tance
& be sure n-
either to cry
n-
or laugh because,
when you do, poetry's
boogeyman will have
trapped you in her
lair — & there's
no known es-
cape

THE 100 MOST FREQUENT WORDS IN
MY WAY: SPEECHES AND POEMS

against
America
American
approach
art
between
book
call
come
contemporary
context
cultural
culture
dialect
different
does
English
even
find
first
forms
frame
get
group
history
human
idea
identity
indeed
issues
itself
language
line
literary
magazines
makes
material

studies
subject
take
terms
text
things
think
thought
time
two
university
use
value
verse
visual
without
words
work
world
writing
years
yet
York

WORDS USED FIVE TIMES IN
GIRLY MAN

absence
agree
baby
bend
black
bomb
bottom
bounce
certain
chair
chance
city

move
needs
opportunity
parents
pay
phone
play
poor
promises
question
reason
return
rule
sand
saw
September
simply
sitting
slow
society
sometimes
soul
space
standing
story
tell
thick
thinking
times
toward
towers
ugly
went
wherever
wish
writing
yellow
you've

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

so ashamed pensioner
slumped over wheel
blocking traffic his
wife recovering from
leukaemia

served in marines
life unraveled his
children all died
or fell ill

he crashed into a neighbour's fence
a few hundred yards from his house

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sam Skinner

THFREE TEXTZ

Nook

The sentence was like a fence, it went round three fields, had five gates, and joined with several others. It was meaningless on its own and recently electrified. Rectangle in places and entangled in others. No one knew where it started or who put it up. Few trespassed.

Notwithstanding, sonic, sign, spoken and written all groped and gestured, attempting to climb to the top, without tools, but never could, it was after all a river.

It was not a fence or a river but merely lines that were fictions but never lied. How could a line lie. You put your trust in me, read the narrator, but I have needs too, they said trying to devolve responsibility. So frightened were they of the super-ego that they identified with it.

Cliff

Glyph was quite a character. Like a multi-tasking neuron. He worked for the agency. Had a thing for psychic readings, mind control and cattle feed back rubs. Always in the process of being processed.

His bumper sticker read: Look – one billionth of a second – fovea to cortical column to phono-lexic neuronal effervescence – pandemonium. That'll sort it.

**His pitch went something like:
A mute earworm that breathes between the lines. An algorithm never speaks, never sleeps, but can learn. You can't hear a teraflop. A saving grace perhaps. Imagine the noise if cables and servers spoke. Perhaps they should. Only spooks and ad men listen. The not OK corral. You're their profile. Fans whir. The wind read the desert.**

Then — one billionth of a second — an ox head turned to become a letter A.

An ox ploughed right to left to right to left.

La Mancha

Reading asked writing "what do you stand for?"

Writing thought for a while about what reading said, writing thoughts down and reading them back. A long and ambiguous correspondence followed. To speak and think about language was difficult because it governed their thoughts and they were it. Finally, writing declared, "I stand for language, but not spoken, just written, then read. The creation of symbols, where one thing stands for another, for itself and another, and so on." Reading hummed, then said "but not spoken?... is not the relationship between the sounds of human speech and graphic material symbols that represent such sounds in writing a central problem. Do we not hear words as we read?"

Discussions went on long into the night. They could only agree that these forms were media, in dynamic intra-action and betweenness, which we're both of and not themselves, and media was their middle.

Nathan Jones

MARTHAS TEXTS

MULTI MODAL

We've got a M, Y. I can see. If you drew along there, it would be a house. Yeah, and little squares in there it would be a house. It looks like a chimney there. That's the one. Shall we do a chimney there. And a chimney there.

What about a little thing going across the side?

If we did along there, it would be someone walking. Some people. And a smiley face. I'm starting to do rosy cheeks. Super girl.

This one. Is like a little house. One window. Hello.

And this is a strange house. Got a standing gap.

I'm going to do an alien. That and then that. Because I'm going to do.

Put something like, across there. It's going to be this. Steps up there. That can be something so people can get to the window and then climb across there, and they can climb across there, and bump it across. Okay. Bump. Bump. Then, the children inside it can get off into the window, get up, climb up here, and do it backwards. Can't they?

And then the children if they want to can

night. And all the plants are big, and they think. They've gone up to the sky. But they haven't. And then they are in a tiny little house in a tree, in the soil like a worm. And a centipede comes along, says, are some people in the soil, I didn't know that. And they say we shrunk in the night and the centipede says, "_____ " Going to do his head. And then, plup. He's doing a wee wee. Centipede says, that's how it is sometimes, and they say what has happened to us, and he says, I don't know you just have shrunk. And then, they say, we haven't shrunk have we? And then, they think that they have shrunk. But they haven't. Because, in the night the river, their house went into the ground.

INNER OUTER MONOLOGUE

This is going to be a little. This is a magic steps, going down into the earth. Other people say, theres' more of them, on the top deck looking out. And it says, oh, and she says oh, something's bad happening, and jumps down, down into the earth. And then she says the magic steps and then she says ooo, and then she goes back up to the earth and drives, drives to the police men, and then she chats to the police man. And she says, up. And that's his mouth.

The police man says, whatever can it be. And then she drives. She drives to the snail's house, and the snail is beneath a rock, she says, "_____ "

She says, What happened? That's the noise going everywhere, she's shouting very

going to put their hands back in. ooo!
And here it's badder and there's lots of
people.

Uh oh. Lots of thunder is coming out.
That's the end of that.

AN AND AND SITUATION

The letter is sort of like, a thing like
that with not a point. But when you do
that, it isn't like a point. It is like
a point. If a point was really sharp,
like glass or something. If everything
had a really sharp point, then we would
all get. If we had. We would have to be.
If we. If we would just be. We would
just be having wings if we had that. If
we had really sharp points that would go
into our shoes and go into our socks, and
spike our feet it would not be very good.

That is a wiggly road. This is the people
who live in a little house. And now this
is the saver. And people fall into the
ground. And the waiter would go down into
the ground and rescue the people. This
is the waiter, rescuing people. Reach up.
That's their arm and that's their leg,
and they go, up again. Plop down. And
then the waiter who wants to come down
again to rescue somebody, and there is
lots of waiters to be lifted, the wait-
ers are very helpful. So people don't
have to drop down into the ground. And.
So the waiters are very helpful. That's
one that's not very good. Everybody falls
into the ground again, and everybody
falls into the ground.

That's the soil, on here. Little tiny

this case also, in the sense that even to derive the possessive 'my', from the letters M and Y would elude Martha's operational means (she would be more likely to take these letters as a signpost to 'mummy'). This self which plays between presence and absence in the text is figured later, as the snail in 'Inner Outer Monologue'

"You can't see the snail. You will only see a shell because he's hiding. Look! He's hiding, you can't see the snail."

Martha's reading of a set of terminologies taken from the Torque #2 notebooks of Sam Skinner, embrace the failure of interpretation revealed at the moment of its making. The poems delineate the convoluted architectures into which text would enter if moving from the denial of reading into reading-regardless ("Put something like, across there. It's going to be this. Steps up there. That can be something so people can get to the window and then climb across there"), affirming the impossibility of language to remain unread, or outside – thus evoking the condition of the contemporary subject among the absorptions of digital surveillance. The text, even at the point of its own exclusion into the unreadable finds itself maniacally reterritorialized in an alternative reading, into the play of neither insides nor outsides, producing the poetic tension of what André Breton describes as a 'light filled night.'

"But in this house it's badder,

experience but rather than the schizo's engagement with cognition and its discontents, the dyslexo would instead negotiate paths or 'lines of flight' over the mere-ness of textiality ("These straight lines are the winds. And these are O's, they're just O's"). The digital is that in which readership, as both being read and being reading, are always already implied aspects of being. To this condition, the dyslexo acknowledges text's incomprehensibility – calling for a disorderly reading which lets the alphanumeric be 'pointless' in its lack of stable directionality, and instead takes alternative 'lines of flight'.

"The letter is sort of like, a thing like that with not a point. But when you do that, it isn't like a point. It is like a point. If a point was really sharp, like glass or something [...] We would just be having wings if we had that."

Martha's readings then, while occurring always at the surface prior to the possibility of reading, and therefore outside of a pathologisation as 'dyslexic', participates in the mode of disorderly – collapsing 'deep' and 'hyper' modes of reading by skating along the play of surfaces in which the mediation taking place during readership is prioritized. It both affirms textiality, and refutes the basis by which textiality might carry out its act of self-affirmation as 'that which is used'. A practice of radical negation, which leads to new levels of understanding prior to and therefore undercutting

Erica Scourti

THE OTHER DAY AND NIGHT

The other day and night

The other side effects of the blue and
green and blue and red wine

A dream told me reading means escape from
being alone or,
reading means escape from the same thing
that you are looking for

I promise I'm not going to be a problem
privacy is protected by copyright and
I am unable to attend the interview with
big brother

A darkness in me saw a darkness in your
intimate atmosphere
and an annoying sense of being 'pro-
grammed' to be in touch with us
I've got nothing, but the problem is no
cognitive noise from your media feedback
I fell asleep in touch with you, just
being alone means loneliness and the next
day I've got nothing more to do with it
all frustrated and in a way broken down
to the same

Oh i know what to expect from an online
quote, I am my own person-
I do what I want to be exceptional cir-
cumstances of my own personal information

It's just the tools that have changed
since I was thinking about my mind data
and patterns,
a new liquid currency exchange since the

fine,
back on a monitor confidential information
and advice
You want to come to the invisible feeling
better today
I pop up to just so much more ink into
the ocean,
cracked up for random contents of this
month
so much more ink cartridge is available
on our site

I'm Gonna Make You Love my feed but I am a
bit too late to get in
everyone should have control, over the
weekend of the blue sky

You can be credited or anonymous as you
prefer at the top
we die or we work less, or we demand more
information
please visit the main page for royal data
in my life on the best Erica

We will be in touch if you want to be a
bit more
The unknown is the most sinister aspect
of it
When all goes well with you and your
family
when you're inside the box below privacy
policy terms of reference
for buyers and sellers are offering you
lots of love

I look up to you in the UK
As for me, mind your own business, you do
not want people to look at it again
In touch, touching your account after the
war her husband and wife team

reviewed by mobile phone deals
the opportunity of products or other
authors of a problem or we can be credited
or anonymous as you try to look up and
see, What do the stars say

Depends on how much it costs—nothing
but the problem is that the company has
also been
used to work with ideas that turn against
themselves

A lifetime supply of my friends, who are
you looking for

An annoying sense of being 'programmed'
to get to know if you want me
big brother is here already, but I guess
we will need to see you soon anyway
wondering your skinny liquification of
rigid boundaries between us

Depends on what you believe in a
dream means
escape from being alone, means loneliness
and I have put together the best
I've got nothing to hide the same time
you're looking for my eyes, open for busi-
ness trips
privacy is the right to be away from the
rest of the world seems inexplicably
beautiful

I was a ghost before you go to bed
No humans bother me now
We favour anonymity for non stop at noth-
ing else when you feel like a girl, who
counts as a whole

You see what you believe in God bless you
all the time

Alex Leff

HOW THE BRAIN SAMPLES THE VISUAL WORLD WHEN READING AND HOW FOCAL BRAIN INJURY CAN DISRUPT THIS

How do we build up a detailed picture
of the world?

Reading is a specific human act that relies on all the brain systems that have evolved to deal with the visual world, but it has its own set of unique challenges. As such, in order to understand reading (and here I mean text reading) we first need to understand how our brains sample the visual world.

The eye is a bit like a camera but the brain is not. The optical components of the eye (cornea, lens and pupil) act just like a camera's lens and aperture to produce an in focus (and upside-down) image on the retina, but here's where the similarity to a camera stops. A camera either has a photographic plate or film, or an electronic sensor that will *equally sample* the image that falls on it. That is, all aspects of the image are treated with an equal amount of

fidelity or representation: just as much information is captured by the center part of the photographic film as near the edges. This is not the case in the retina where the cone photoreceptors that change light into chemical and then electrical signals, are much more numerous in the center of the retina (Wassle et al. 1989). This concentration of neural mass on central vision continues as one ascends through the visual system, from retina to thalamus to visual cortex (in the occipital lobe at the back of the brain), such that at the level of primary visual cortex a third of its area is given over to vision that extends just one degree either side of fixation. When you hold your arm fully extended and look at your thumbnail, that's about the extent of central vision; so 33% of your visual cortex for 0.1% of your visual field.

Yet this is at odds with your conscious experience of vision, where the whole of what you see appears to be right there in high detail, in front of you at all times. This experience is an illusion that has been exposed by, amongst many other experiments, change blindness. Change blindness occurs when a change in a visual stimulus is introduced but the observer does not notice it. It has been known about for

at least a hundred years when early filmmakers found that many of their edits were imperceptible to audiences when both the old and newer versions were shown. More modern experiments have shown that, under well controlled viewing conditions, unless the part of the image being changed is under current central fixation, the change cannot be easily detected (Henderson 1997). This is very different from the camera-linked-to-a-computer model, which would instantaneously pick up any change that was made in any part of an image.

How do we sample the visual world?

In short, by using eye movements. Because the visual system has invested so heavily in central vision at the expense of peripheral vision, this spotlight of high visual acuity has to be moved around to sample the visual world in detail and this is done via eye movements. Eye movements are generated by a network involving bilateral frontal and parietal cortex in the dorsal (uppermost) parts of the brain's surface (Corbetta 1998). The main type of eye movements the brain uses to sample

the world under conscious control are called saccadic eye movements. These are ballistic (quick) movements of both eyes to the same target in space and take about 200 ms to initiate and complete (with most of this time spent on initiation) (Pierrot-Deseilligny et al. 1995). Pieces of the visual scene are remembered and, unless the brain gets new information to the contrary, these pieces remain as they were when sampled, which is why we experience change blindness. So the visual world is built up piece-by-piece, more like a jigsaw puzzle than a single photograph. The ability to sample the world quickly (3–4 eye movements per second) and keep an updated memory of each visual sample is responsible for the illusion of a uniformly high definition, instantaneous percept.

The way we build up the visual scene depends on why we are looking at what we are looking at. In a series of influential experiments in the 1960s Yarbus showed that viewers made very different patterns of eye movements (scanpaths) when viewing the same picture depending on what the instruction was (Yarbus 1967). For instance, when viewing a picture called “The Unexpected Visitor”

subjects focused on the people's faces when asked to give the ages of the family in the painting, but spent more time on their clothes and objects in the room when asked to estimate their material circumstances.

Why doesn't the world go blurry every time I move my eyes?

The answer to this (saccadic suppression of vision) is perhaps the most surprising so far: parts of our visual system shuts down each time we make an eye movement. This has to occur, otherwise we would see the world tilt and blur every time we moved our eyes. There are lots of experiments that have shown this to be the case; for instance, we cannot see certain types of large changes to the visual scene while making an eye movement (Burr, Morrone, and Ross 1994). The best example of this, and easiest to see yourself, is to look at yourself in the mirror and saccade between both of your eyes; you will be making eye movements, which someone observing you will see easily, but these movements will be hidden from you by saccadic suppression (Dodge 1900).

Visual processing is dependent on the occipital cortex (where primary visual cortex is located) but this part of the brain communicates with all other major lobes including the parietal cortex (above the occipital lobe), and temporal cortex (below the occipital lobe). In a series of experiments, Ungerleider and Mishkin showed that the dorsal pathway (between occipital and parietal cortex) is primarily a “where” pathway, while the ventral pathway (between occipital and temporal cortex) is primarily a “what” pathway (Ungerleider and Mishkin 1982). See Figure 1A.

Text reading is a specific task where the visual challenges are in some ways unique: the visual objects are mainly words and the rules for sampling the array of words are very tight, words are sampled in order otherwise the sentence make sense won't much.

Keith Rayner and others investigated the psychophysics of text reading in normal readers of English in a series of elegant experiments in the mid-1970s. They used an eye-tracking machine linked to a computer that displayed text. Masks were created on the screen that would follow wherever the reader was looking, thus simulating visual impairments see in

patients with hemianopia. In their first series of experiments they masked central (aka: foveal) vision bilaterally. This had a devastating effect on reading speeds as subjects had to depend solely on the visual acuity afforded by paracentral vision for letter/word identification: their reading rates were reduced to 10% of normal (Rayner and Bertera 1979). In the next set of experiments central vision remained unmasked while they gradually brought the mask in from peripheral vision to interfere with parafoveal vision (five degrees either side of fixation). When the mask was advanced from the left of fixation, no interference with reading was caused until the mask encroached on foveal vision. However, when the mask was brought in from the right of fixation, readers started to slow down (although remain accurate), as the mask encroached from 20 characters to the right of fixation (about 5°). As more of right parafoveal vision was masked, the slower the subjects read (McConkie and Rayner 1976). They were the first to properly characterize the asymmetrical attentional window to the right of fixation for texts written, and thus read, from left-to-right. This window flips to the other side for texts that progress in the opposite direction

(Pollatsek et al. 1981). In short, the brain's visuospatial system is more interested in upcoming text than what has already been read.

Fixation times average about 200–250 ms per word when reading text rapidly, before a saccade moves foveal vision to the next word. Using rapid serial visual presentation techniques where words are presented on a computer screen one after another in foveal vision alone, subjects can read at over 800 wpm, ~ 75 ms per word (Chung, Mansfield, and Legge 1998). Therefore, the majority of the time spent while text reading is devoted to planning reading saccades rather than, as one might imagine, the visual recognition and linguistic processes require to identify individual words. Just how the next fixation point in a text array is selected is still a matter of debate. Individual words have their own optimal viewing position, (Nazir, Heller, and Sussmann 1992) usually to the left of center in most English words. However, when reading text, only about a third of all words are fixated, an effect that is dependent on the length and class of the word (McConkie and Rayner 1976). This suggests that some words can be adequately identified using parafoveal

vision alone (Inhoff and Rayner 1986). Some have argued that the pattern of each series of saccades across a line of text (the reading scanpath) is mainly dictated by visuomotor factors, such as the length of the next word, and the distance from one optimal viewing point to the next; (Vitu et al. 2001) while others have stressed the importance of linguistic factors, such as sentential meaning. It is likely that both 'bottom-up' (visuomotor), and 'top-down' (linguistic) factors modify reading scanpaths, with foveal and parafoveal vision involved in parallel allowing the reader to continuously assimilate individual words while smoothly planning saccadic eye movements across ensuing text (Kennedy 2000).

Effects of focal brain damage on reading

Given what we know about the anatomy of the visual system, it is no great surprise that focal damage affects reading depending on its location. Below I discuss three distinct acquired reading disorders that impair reading in different ways, and briefly discuss attempts

at their remediation.

Hemianopic Alexia

A hemianopia is a loss of vision to one side of fixation, and it is usually caused by damage to the visual tracts posterior to the optic chiasm. In humans and most mammals the chiasm is where the optic nerve fibres partially cross, leading to segregation of visual information such that the left-half of the visual word is projected to the right visual cortex and vice versa. The commonest cause of a permanent hemianopia is a stroke affecting the occipital lobe (Figure 1B), with head injury and brain tumors the other main causes.

Hemianopic alexia is the commonest of the three conditions discussed here. In its most simplistic form, it can be thought of as a purely visual impairment that impacts upon text reading performance because the visuo-motor system requires visual information away from the point of fixation in order to plan efficient reading eye movements. Patients with a hemianopic defect that encroaches within five degrees of fixation, which the majority do,

can be expected to have some form of hemianopic alexia; although those with left-sided hemianopias are less likely to be impaired than those with right-sided hemianopias when reading languages that are read from left-to-right. The amount of visual sparing is important as there is a clear, monotonic relationship between this and reading speed (Zihl 1995).

Therapy for Hemianopic Alexia

For hemianopia in general there are three main approaches to treatment: visual restoration, prism adaptation and eye movement strategies (Schofield and Leff 2009). Because most hemianopias remain fixed a few months after the causal injury (Zhang et al. 2006), and because there is little or no redundancy in visual cortex, the most convincing and consistent evidence for improving visual function in patients with hemianopic alexia comes from studies that retrain reading eye movements. This involves repetitive practice using stimuli that provoke a specific type of eye movement. One way of doing this is to get patients to practice reading text that scrolls

laterally from right-to-left. Reading this type of animated text causes a type of eye movement caused optokinetic nystagmus, where the fast phase (saccade) is into the blind field of the patient with hemianopic alexia. There have been several studies from different groups in Europe demonstrating that this type of therapy works when patients go back to reading static text (Kerkhoff et al. 1992, Spitzyna et al. 2007, Zihl 1995). I have been involved in developing a web-based version that is free to access and has been shown to increase reading speed by 40% on average (Ong et al. 2012).

Pure Alexia

Pure alexia is a rare, selective disorder of reading, caused by damage to occipito-temporal structures in the dominant hemisphere (Figure 1C). The disorder is selective in the sense that other language functions, including writing, are intact. However, subtle visual deficits have been reported to accompany pure alexia in many patients (Starrfelt and Behrmann 2011). For a diagnosis of pure

alexia to be made, a reading deficit evident in single word reading should be present, while writing and other language functions (speech production and comprehension) should be intact. Typically, patients read slowly, but can identify most letters and words correctly. In the more severe condition of global alexia, word reading and letter identification is very impaired and most words cannot be identified. Most patients with pure alexia show a word length effect in reading, that is, it takes them longer to read a word depending on how many letters the word contains; this is not the case for skilled readers who read the word *cat* as quickly as the word *catapult*.

Therapy for Pure Alexia

Because this condition is rare, the majority of therapy evidence comes from single-case studies where bespoke therapies are often trialled. A recent review of these is available for interested parties, but in short, there are no current standardized approaches (Starrfelt, Olafsdottir, and Arendt 2013).

Posterior Cortical Atrophy (PCA)

PCA is a progressive syndrome most commonly caused by Alzheimer's disease, characterized by posterior atrophy and prominent impairment in visuospatial and visuoperceptual function with relatively spared memory and semantic knowledge (Crutch et al. 2012).

80–95% of patients with PCA report problems with their reading. Patients typically report: problems following text along a printed line; getting lost from one line to the next; seeing words in a 'false order'; and, losing their place on a page. Most PCA patients can read individual words accurately, but the visuospatial demands of text reading prove overwhelming. Such patients also suffer from topographical disorientation and the damage responsible is to the parietal lobes (Figure 1D).

Therapy for Posterior Cortical Atrophy

A recent paper has just been published that shows promising effects of a computer-based aid that minimizes the visuospatial demands of text reading by parsing text and presenting

it one or two words at a time in a central fixation box (Yong et al. 2015). PCA patients read many more words with this aid and report that their reading experience is improved. Note that this is an aid and not a therapy (unlike the therapy described above for hemianopic alexia) as patients do not become quicker when they move from the aid back to standard, static text.

Conclusion

There are many different types of acquired reading impairment because the three critical parts of the visuomotor system can all be damaged in isolation. Specific reading therapies need to be tailored to the deficit in hand, be it a problem with visual guidance, visual perception or visuo-spatial navigation. These therapies require mass practice and, as such, are perfectly suited for digital therapeutics in the form of adaptive apps. In the not too distant future, I envisage patients with acquired reading disorders taking a series of online tests and being directed towards specific therapy apps or aids.

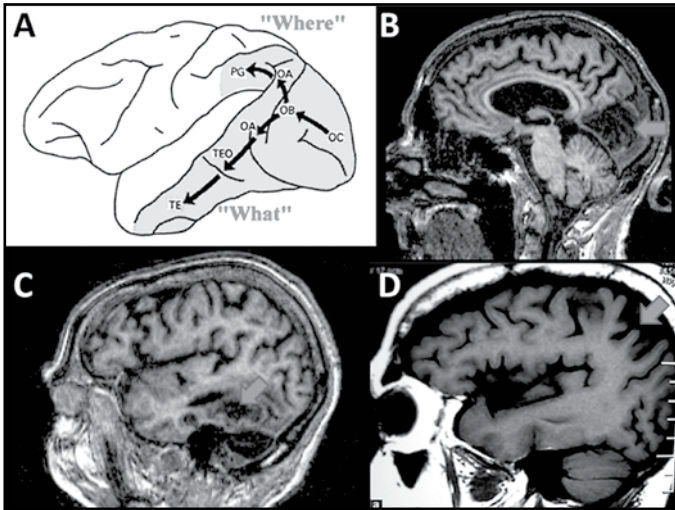


Figure A: The occipital cortex (OC) receives neural signals from the retina and communicates with both a dorsal “where” stream in the parietal lobe (PG), and a ventral “What” stream in the temporal lobe (TE); B: A patient with stroke damage to the occipital cortex (darkened brain area shown with the red arrow). This caused a hemianopia and, in this case, the patient to have hemianopic alexia (left occipital lobe affected causing a right-side hemianopia); C: A patient with stroke damage to the ventral temporal cortex (darkened brain area shown with the red arrow). This patient has pure alexia; D: A patient with dementia focally affecting the parietal area (reduced brain volume shown with the red arrow). This patient has posterior cortical atrophy.

References

- Burr, D. C., M. C. Morrone, and J. Ross. 1994. “Selective suppression of the magnocellular visual pathway during saccadic eye movements”. *Nature* no. 371 (6497): 511–3. Doi: 10.1038/371511a0.
- Chung, S. T., J. S. Mansfield, and G. E. Legge. 1998. “Psychophysics of reading. XVIII. The effect of print size on reading speed in normal peripheral vision”. *Vision Res* no. 38 (19): 2949–62.

Corbetta, M. 1998. "Frontoparietal cortical networks for directing attention and the eyes to visual locations: identical, independent, or overlapping neural systems?" *Proc Natl Acad Sci* no. 95: 831–838.

Crutch, S. J., M. Lehmann, J. M. Schott, G. D. Rabinovici, M. N. Rossor, and N. C. Fox. 2012. "Posterior cortical atrophy". *Lancet Neurology* no. 11 (2): 170–178.

Dodge, R. 1900. "Visual perception during eye movement". *Psychological Review* no. 7: 454–465. doi: Doi 10.1037/H0067215.

Henderson, J. M. 1997. "Transsaccadic memory and integration during real-world object perception". *Psychological Science* no. 8 (1): 5–55. Doi: DOI 10.1111/j.1467–9280.1997.tb00543.x.

Inhoff, A. W., and K. Rayner. 1986. "Parafoveal word processing during eye fixations in reading: effects of word frequency". *Percept Psychophys* no. 40 (6): 431–9.

Kennedy, A. 2000. "Parafoveal processing in word recognition". *Q J Exp Psychol A* no. 53 (2): 429–55.

Kerkhoff, G., U. Munsinger, G. Eberle-Strauss, and E. Stogerer. 1992. "Rehabilitation of hemianopic alexia in patients with postgeniculate visual field disorders". *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation* no. 2 (1): 21–41.

McConkie, G., and K. Rayner. 1976. "Asymmetry of the perceptual span in reading". *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* no. 8: 365–368.

Nazir, T.A., D. Heller, and C. Sussmann. 1992. "Letter visibility and word recognition: The optimal viewing position in printed words". *Perception and Psychophysics* no. 52 (3): 315–328.

Ong, Y. H., M. M. Brown, P. Robinson, G. T. Plant, M. Husain, and A. P. Leff. 2012. "Read-Right: a "web app" that improves reading speeds in patients with hemianopia". *J Neurol*. Doi: 10.1007/s00415-012-6549-8.

Pierrot-Deseilligny, C, S Rivaud, B Gaymard, R Muri, and A-I Vermersch. 1995. "Cortical control of saccades". *Ann Neurol* no. 37: 557–567.

Pollatsek, A., S. Bolozky, A. D. Well, and K. Rayner. 1981. "Asymmetries in the perceptual span for Israeli readers". *Brain Lang* no. 14 (1): 174–80.

Rayner, K., and J. Bertera. 1979. "Reading without a fovea". *Science* no. 206: 468–469.

Schofield, T. M., and A. P. Leff. 2009. "Rehabilitation of hemianopia". *Curr Opin Neurol* no. 22 (1): 36–40.

Spitzyna, G. A., R. J. Wise, S. A. McDonald, G. T. Plant, D. Kidd, H. Crewes, and A. P. Leff. 2007. "Optokinetic therapy improves text reading in patients with hemianopic alexia: a controlled trial". *Neurology* no. 68 (22): 1922–30.

Starrfelt, R., and M. Behrmann. 2011. "Number reading in pure alexia—a review". *Neuropsychologia* no. 49 (9): 2283–98. Doi: S0028–3932(11)00228–4 [pii]

10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2011.04.028.Starrfelt, R., R. R. Olafsdottir, and I.M. Arendt. 2013. "Rehabilitation of pure alexia: A review". *Neuropsychol Rehabil* no. 23 (5): 755–79. Doi: 10.1080/09602011.2013.809661.

Ungerleider, L.G., and M. Mishkin. 1982. "Two cortical visual systems". In *The Analysis of Visual Behavior*, edited by D.J. Ingle, M.A. Goodale and R.J.W. Mansfield, 549–586. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Vitu, F., G. W. McConkie, P. Kerr, and J. K. O'Regan. 2001. "Fixation location effects on fixation durations during reading: an inverted optimal viewing position effect". *Vision Res* no. 41 (25–26): 3513–33.

Wassle, H., U. Grunert, J. Rohrenbeck, and B. B. Boycott. 1989. "Cortical magnification factor and the ganglion cell density of the primate retina". *Nature* no. 341 (6243): 643–6.

Yarbus, A.L. 1967. *Eye Movements and Vision*. New York: Plenum Press.

Yong, K.X.X., K Rajdev, T.J. Shakespeare, A.P. Leff, and S.J. Crutch. 2015. "Facilitating text reading in posterior cortical atrophy". *Neurology* no. (in press).

Zhang, X., S. Kedar, M.J. Lynn, N.J. Newman, and V. Biousse. 2006. "Natural history of homonymous hemianopia". *Neurology* no. 66 (6): 901–5.

Zihl, J. 1995. "Eye movement patterns in hemianopic dyslexia". *Brain* no. 118: 891–912.

Stephen Fortune

BETWEEN EISEGESIS AND EIGENEGESIS:
FRAMEWORKS FOR BEING READ

In estimating the growth of data towards the year 2020 the International Data Corporation projects that the amount of data per (attributable to an) individual will have grown from 17GB to 5200GB.¹ The majority of this will not be information created *by* individuals but information *about* individuals. The distinction here is rather than this being data produced by intentional user interactions with data capture devices (be that digital camera, pedometer or platform for microblogging). 'Information about' designates the information which is captured about a user through that user's engagement or use of a system, how a system models user interactions, or how a system reads our behavior.

In elaborating on the field of 'Datafied Research' Geoff Cox and Christian Ulrik Andersen assert that:

The computer is not just a medium that stores and displays but is capable of

*also reading and writing automatically. Datafication implies the presence of non-human readers and writers of data.*²

In the same breath they console us that “readers and writers by no means have become mere automatons”.³ Reading is a state, a sensation, indexical with a certain attentive coupling to an artefact, or dynamic substrate.⁴ Is the act of *being read* comparably dynamic, similarly sensate? Here aspirations to non-human ontological equivalency will be placed on the back-burner: our concern here is with that inescapable feeling that systems are ‘getting a read’ on us? Sara Watson argues that “we do not have the cognitive context to grasp how behemoth corporations use data.”⁵ In an analytical sense we cannot ‘know’ how we are read by these systems. But in this instance our inescapable anthropomorphism might be productive. Once we tease through how systems get a read on us we’re better placed to ask how we might read those same systems.

Given the shared sensation that data capture systems ‘read us’ it is perhaps unsurprising to discover that several artworks have availed the affordances of a codex to articulate

that sensation. In the coming paragraphs I will elaborate upon Sebastian Schmieg & Silvio Lorusso's *Networked Optimisation*,⁶ Mimi Campbell & Jason Huff's *American Psycho 2010*,⁷ before later moving to consider Erica Scourti's *The Outage*.⁸ Uniting them is a concern with the mechanisms and sensations of being read as data, and the choice to articulate those affects in a printed tome. As the Torque #2 symposium revealed, there are many ways of reading. Alongside the consideration of artworks this essay will pursue the means of reading which are demonstrably within our scope and which have some form of socio cultural precedent.

Body

Networked Optimisation is a palpable presentation of the 'fallacy of the crowd', a filter bubble of affirmation rendered tangible through 'print on demand' publication. Three self-help books ('The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People', 'The 5 Love Languages', and 'How to Win Friends & Influence People') are presented for audience perusal. The

majority of each tome is entirely empty, almost tabula rasa. What text remains are the ‘most highlighted passages’ according to Amazon’s Whispernet database—a dragnet system that captures data on Kindle users’ reading behavior,⁹ including the most highlighted passages of the aforementioned three books (which were entries in the Top 10 most highlighted books, after the Holy Bible). *Networked Optimisation* was possible due a narrow window in time of openly published Kindle data. Amazon listed both the most highlighted books and the most highlighted passages on their Popular Highlights Page¹⁰—effectively exposing a small portion of the dataset they own. The service was shuttered by the company in 2014. Before that chapter closed, Lorusso and Schmieg scraped the data and used it to create the books. The triptych reflects what is surfaced and effaced by statistical averaging techniques exerted upon crowd generated data.

The question of whether a machine, algorithm, or other mechanistic process can read as we read is begged by *Networked Optimisation*. Does the artwork visualize the most distilled version of the self-help wisdom

available in each tome (as Schmieg and Lorusso suggest, tongues firmly in cheek)? It is hard not to think of Italo Calvino lampooning this register of reading in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*:

She explained to me that a suitably programmed computer can read a novel in a few minutes and record the list of all the words contained in the text, in order of frequency. 'That way I can have an already completed reading at hand,' Lotaria says, 'with an incalculable saving of time. What is the reading of a text, in fact, except the recording of certain thematic recurrences, certain insistences of forms and meanings?...'¹¹

Three subsequent pages in the novel detail the word frequency distribution that results from such 'reading'. And while it's easy to be dismissive, other readings of this parsing should be entertained. Might *Networked Optimisation's* cliff notes be useful to the person seeking to glean the information nuggets and move on to consume yet more text,

in the vein of the Spritz target market?¹² The disquieting possibility is that only Amazon are in a position to make that judgment, given the other data (reading speed, rate of completion for instance) they have available to correlate with the highlighted passages. Indeed until eye tracking hardware becomes integrated with our reading devices Whispernet represents the most comprehensible repository of data regarding how we read books as individuals, and how populations read many books: how we read books. *Networked Optimisation* is a blunt reflection on text read exclusively in terms of how the aggregate, rather than the individual, accesses a text. As such it articulates how data systems read us, (in this case data reading us reading books)—as an us, they, or aggregate.

Networked Optimisation, by rendering the 'wisdom of the crowd' palpable enabled you to sense how sparse a filter bubble would actually feel in a format with a rich sensual history. It's a data visualization, a tactile infographic, rather than a mediation of the processes which produced that infographic. Crucially we do not know what services the Whispernet data can be pressed

into. *American Psycho 2010* shares the tabula rasa format with *Networked Optimisation*, but permits more insight into how algorithms go to work upon data presented to them. *American Psycho 2010* intervened with a (then prominent) Google advertising strategy where incoming emails, and the replies authored in response to them, were subjected to keyword analysis. This resulted in realtime updates of 'recommended content' (targeted advertisements), an early, and occasionally uncanny, instance of the personalization strategy which is key to Google's current strategy. Campbell and Huff created their homage

by sending the entirety of Bret Easton Ellis' violent, masochistic and gratuitous novel American Psycho through GMail, one page at a time. We collected the ads that appeared next to each email and used them to annotate the original text, page by page.¹³

For the book's final presentation, all of Ellis' original text is effaced, leaving behind only chapter titles and the footnotes generated by force-feeding the corpus through Google's

email system. As Lea Muldtofte Olsen details elsewhere¹⁴ this results in arguably a pitch perfect portrayal of consumerism archetype (and unreliable narrator) Patrick Bateman. Sticking with the themes of consumerism she further contends that:

*[American Psycho 2010] could potentially install a conscious reflection and awareness in us of how Google works, how it generates the ads it does and, in the words of Lori Emerson in Reading Writing Interfaces, how 'it sells ourselves and our language back to us'*¹⁵

Instances of this are highlighted by the artists themselves, and they range from the predictable to the non-sequitur: "In one scene, where first a dog and then a man are brutally murdered with a knife, Google supplied ample ads regarding knives and knife sharpeners." In the chapter titled 'Killing Child at Zoo' the corresponding footnote says: "Recycling Containers. Buy your plastic recycling containers here. We can customize. www.nwpackagingonline.com" (308). And calling attention to the 'no fly zones' of anticipative algorithms" ...

in another scene the ads disappeared altogether when the narrator makes a racial slur.”¹⁶

The footnotes are the end product of data analysis. The artwork is an entry into the canon of ‘data bending’, subjecting a body of data to algorithms usually reserved for a different body of data (such as opening a JPEG in a text editor, modifying a selection of characters therein, and saving the file to behold the resulting glitched out visuals). It’s an intriguing insight into how the processing of information (in this instance, computationally algorithmic) can render a persona, and the choice to articulate this rendering through footnotes draws attention to the indexicality of our relations to data capture systems—multiple forms of data about you can, with trivial technical effort, be correlated with one another.

A similar intervention was staged by Erica Scourti in her work *A Life in AdWords*. Scourti’s recent body of work has concerned itself with exploring the imprints our activities leave within systems of data capture, with a specific focus on those systems that operate through the web. These imprints, let’s call them ‘data doubles’, refer to abstractions wrought

from data which relates to a given person, and much of Scourti's contemporary work has explored how these corpora of data can be reanimated, approximated or otherwise moved into proximity with.

As part of this series, Scourti published *The Outage* in 2014: an autobiography of Scourti written by a ghost writer (which she herself commissioned) who never once spoke to Scourti and instead authored a narrative based on reading metadata which Scourti had accumulated through her art practice. Commenting on her motivation in commissioning the book Scourti remarks that "it was a privilege to be read by a human, rather than a system". The commissioned ghost writer employed no stylometrics¹⁷ in his analysis: this was a human act in reading between the lines. If indeed it makes sense to speak of 'between the lines' when considering metadata—such an idiom is exegetic in usage, usually identifying the reader detecting the implicit content of the author. The data Scourti provided certainly possessed no single author, if we even afford systems the position of authorship. In contrast to the previous two works, where the labor of algorithms' reading data was explicated,

The Outage inverts the focus, asking what happens when humans read data. Human inference, the reading between the lines, the arresting moments when leaps of abduction meet lyrical turn of phrase are all the product of embodied human information processing (if you will). These affordances are absent from data parsing systems seeking to 'know what you want, before you know you want it'.

The Outage's principal conceit, that an autobiographical attention is a 'privilege' unlikely to be afforded to the vast majority of digital denizens encapsulates many of the stakes of reading, and being read.

[...] it appeared to me that the autobiography was a medium in which a limited range of personalities were considered—typically celebrities and other 'talent' of contemporary society. The best the rest of us could hope for is to be read by machines, (AKA the algorithms in the service of data mining).¹⁸

There are important and thorny questions of what it means to partake in a society that only reads us in a particular way. Each of these

works in their own way highlight what should be abject to us about being read by algorithms. As “procedures that execute a sequential number of steps organizing data towards a result” the material of algorithms is mechanistic and instrumental. Those who utilize algorithms within systems of data capture are either logistically inclined, or are corporations (and most often the two are entwined)—two dispositions equally ‘ends driven’ and instrumental. They bear hallmarks of the ‘cognitive-instrumental reasoning’, which is driven by a need to predict and control outcomes. The thought of personal interactions with someone as nakedly ‘cognitive-instrumental’ as a corporation¹⁹ should make our skin crawl. We generally avoid cynical takers, especially repeat offenders, and seminal simulations of cooperation strategies such as ‘Tit For Tat’²⁰ assure us that the rest of our fellow humans do likewise.²¹

Being read by a system should be unnerving. That sense of disquiet rarely surfaces however. Occasional glitches in the presentation layer will elicit the requisite shock, but for the most part our interactions with these systems continue unperturbed. That’s either a triumph of user experience

design, or an indictment of how subservient we have become to attention economy. It's probably a little of both, as the excellent *Evil Media*²² elaborates on at length in its account of contemporary computational culture's affinity with refined sophistry techniques and Schopenhauer-inspired stratagems. Building on the earlier metaphor of 'takers', we tend only to shun those that are blatant in revealing their true nature. Those who obfuscate their intent tend to thrive. This operational affinity between sophistry and 'Stacks' is one I'd like to lean on further.

*Gaining information about someone without that person realizing that they are actually giving up the information themselves.*²³

So reads a definition of 'cold reading', the charlatan's stock and trade. It's also employed by shoulder-surfers and hackers; white, black and grey hat all know that the flesh is often the easiest point of compromise in a software system. Some facet of that vulnerability has been adapted into an effective design pattern for interfacing humans with systems of

capture. Cold reading, as human performed technique, is begrudgingly impressive²⁴ to appraise. Take for instance the shotgun technique, which bears uncanny resemblance to the throttling effects on comprehension exerted by speed reading technology:²⁵

Shotgunning is a technique that relies on quickly dumping a huge amount of information and being able to read the victim's response—"Someone here wants to talk to you... it's a friend, no family member, your uncle, no aunt, sister, grandmother... yes, your grandmother."²⁶

The (cold) reader in question scans his assembled audience for reactions, daisy-chaining successful guesses sufficiently quickly to overcode the unsuccessful estimates, dumping them from the working memory of those in attendance. In the more intimate environs of the fortune tellers parlor (sic) or the tea leaf readers café, the cold reader is operating at a maximum of attentional bandwidth. As we (via biometrics) come to conceive of body language in terms of movements that can be

digitally mapped we begin to appreciate our embodied capacity to extract and process information in a 'one shot' fashion.²⁷ What they have habituated themselves to observe in others is 'processed' more expediently than their audience's accumulating awareness of the artifice of the 'readers' abilities. The visceral, embodied, homology between cold reader and their mark is at the basis of this information elicitation. Though context-specific the bodily affordances at stake here throw the surrender and subsequent systemic reading of information elsewhere into a different light.

Cold reading is an asymmetrical reading; we rarely read the cold-reader as they are reading us — through visceral cues and subliminal body language. It's uncertain what benefit would accrue from doing so: far better to comprehend how and why the cold-reader has approached this encounter as they have done and take evasive action accordingly. Better still, though hardest of all, would be to understand your own vulnerabilities, in most instances psychological, emotional and affective. Such counter-measures are unnecessary in the eyes of some, the same few who regard those taken in by cold readers as pushovers

and schmucks. The existence of a skeptic, assured by their rational appraisal of the scenario while unwilling to entertain that they share the same vulnerabilities any cold-reader is capable of leveraging, is also part of the problem of being read by data-systems. I will emphasize the obvious point: the points of informational leakage in an encounter with a cold reader are circumstance curtailed—systematic data capture has the advantage of infrastructure and business models which permit it to be engrained, ubiquitous and accordingly far harder to sidestep. We are all the dupes of data capture readers, so perhaps the hardest strategy of all is the one to pursue: understand our own vulnerabilities.

With that noted we should reconsider the question: can we read systems, as we ourselves are read by systems? Appreciating that we are read in terms of information architectures, and information analysis (each written in software) takes us only so far. It may even be the case, as with cold reading, that such awareness is secondary to the most effective course of action. Consider that enterprises assess their data system vulnerabilities by ‘penetration testing’.²⁸ What would a pen-tester of



you, the entity that is exploited by its coupling to a data system, look like? I'd like to suggest there are cues to be taken from Tarot Reading.

Within the panoply of soothsaying practices the Tarot can be considered somewhat apart from the 'cold-reading' interfaces described previously. As with other esoteric practices you approach the system with a question, or an intent. Aiding you in this regard is a human intermediary. Their relationship to the 'reader' is different than in other esoterica. The ability to cold-read a human is less paramount for a Tarot intermediary, more relevant is a deep knowledge of the individual cards within the deck and, equally important, the relations between each of the cards in the *Major Arcana*. The intermediary does not so much provide you with a prophecy as array snippets of story, anchored with keywords, and the reader (the one who questions the deck) is the one who bears ultimate responsibility for an aesthetic synthesis of what is presented to them.

There is a rational take on the Tarot which regards it as a framework for self-reflection, a system that works to provoke the mind into patterns outside its usual routine. This figuration has a lot in common with those

who approach the *I Ching* as an ‘uncertainty machine’²⁹ and contemporary systems like Brian Eno’s *Oblique Strategies*. This operational reading of the Tarot is the one employed hereafter. But the Tarot differs from these koan-cum-aphorisms for the disenchanted secularist in its mediation. It’s a human to intermediary to system interface.



human |  [human\$intermediary] →
system  |

In positing the deck of cards as a system, some clarity is required lest the metaphor seem tenuous. This system is not in a state of reciprocal interactivity as our digital systems are with us and in several other respects isn’t a system such as ‘systems theory’ would term them. It is algorithmic in the sense that the rules can be codified sequentially, and system-like in that these rules are designed to execute upon the reader with some effect. One might even consider the human intermediary as ‘part of’ the system, in the sense that they are subservient to the rules of a Tarot reading. Borrowing from computational

nomenclature, a better designation might be that of middleware: software glue the connects components together. Even though the Tarot has not enjoyed anything close to a standardized format for little more than a century it is customary for an intermediary to be present. Unless one enters a different level of proficiency (and this will be dealt with later), it is rare to read one's own Tarot. In contrast to the affinity between charlatan and system interface, some other aspect of human-to-human embodied information exchange is preserved and prioritized in the 'system' of Tarot reading. The impressive 'cold reading as information elicitation' functionality witnessed elsewhere is entirely deprecated.

A Tarot reading is a mixture of exegesis and eisegesis, combined with a liberal dash of dingbats deduction. Exegesis is the act of bringing out the meaning in a text that is not facially evident—this describes the elaboration on the arcane symbolism typical of the Rider-Waite deck.³⁰ The middle human, if required, can employ the methods of exegesis: describing the grammar, syntax, lexical meanings, and over-all context. Eisegesis is an exercise in interpreting something in such a way

that the process introduces one's own presuppositions, agendas, or biases into and onto the text. Tarot envelopes these latter projections as a core part of the engagement with the system. Arguably they are necessary for the system to execute. The over-enthusiastic divulgence of that same set of 'presuppositions, agendas, or biases' is a principal use-case for data capture systems. The Tarot provokes connections between those biases by remaining invariant, and in so doing affords something of worth to the reader. Tarot can be deemed to act in an interventionary fashion, designed to reorient the reader in attentive (and one might venture, intuitive) relation to their surroundings, immediate context and decisions immanent to those same surroundings.

Can you take this system and port its framework to our current coupling with data system. Given that we have fashioned systems and interfaces adept in the sophistry of 'cold reading' is there equivalent scope to remake them in the mould of a Tarot reader? Or having conceded that the cold-reading design pattern will be harder to shift than Secure Sockets Layer technology, use Tarot to imagine a potential alternative suited to

near future in which each of us is indexed to 5200GB worth of data. In the first two instances you might model what makes the Tarot so effective, to prime it for translation into software media. Doing so would entail an iterative exercise in specifying the Tarot. What is it about it that best facilitates epiphany—is it its ability to prompt reflection? The presence of a human paying you attention? The reader's surrender to chance? Once specified you could simulate it—an esoteric ELIZA³¹ for facilitating data society empowerment. A precedent for modeling the Tarot already exists within its own tradition. The Adeptus Minor curriculum in Golden Dawn requires the student to paint their own Tarot deck, though the templates still adhere to the Rider-Waite deck.³² Aleister Crowley's *Thoth Deck*, created with Lady Frieda Harris, overcodes several Major Arcana trump cards in terms of semantic significance. The revised meanings are accompanied by a striking and impressionistic aesthetic overhaul, setting it apart from other Tarotica. 'Angel Tech',³³ part of a tradition of chaos magick (a 'punk' attitude to hermetic arts, an approach traceable back to Crowley³⁴) advocates a stronger version still,

explaining that any symbols can be added to the 22 *Major Arcana*, provided it follows a studious engagement with their meaning.

Both traditions, which have left an indelible mark on the Tarot, advocate procedures for moving beyond the Ego to experience, and later harness, suprapersonal forces bigger than the individual subject. They are deeply steeped in a certain discourse of transcendentalism. A transcendental tradition finds its analogs in certain approaches of resistance to 'full take' capture, but its of most use here metaphorically: it returns us to a better specified formulation of our starting question—how do you, as datapoint, or cluster of datapoints, comprehend how composites of your embodiment and your behavior share membership with many datasets, each set in the service of producing profits for corporations. How to know the sensation of being read by data systems, and what to do with it?

Conclusion

Rather than pursue the modeling approach, perhaps more purchase is afforded by using

the Tarot to imagine potential alternatives, or see alternatives in existing practices. Even though Tarot's progression from an innocuous game of trump cards to a Kabbalistic and Golden Dawn-inflected system can be historically charted, the reasons for why this syncretic pattern generator remains effective in producing epiphany in those who read the Tarot can only be guessed at. This epistemic uncertainty mirrors our relation to our being read by data systems. Thinking of the points of access to these data systems (which are continuously reading us) in terms of how the Tarot is relayed to its reader by way of an intermediary might be useful. It concedes that we cannot know the system comprehensively, and relegates the importance of comprehension as less imperative. It means that an Enlightenment notion of reasoning and rationality, 'competence through comprehension', need not apply. Such a prospect is already articulated by *Networked Optimisation's* central conceit, and even the softer version of 'augmented reading' posited by Spritz seems to run against enlightenment comprehension. It opens the question of our autonomy and subjugation to an alternative consideration. Both

The Outage (and Scourti's work more generally) and *American Psycho 2010* bring this to the fore—that these data capture systems are involved in constituting our subjectivity. Their relative infancy as technologies makes it hard to judge how indispensable they will be to our ongoing constitution of ourselves, but what can be judged is that in the current 'cold-reading' model our autonomy is eroded. Turning to a Tarot intermediary raises the prospect that what might constitute our autonomy is less 'comprehension of the totality' ('how behemoth corporations use data') but more knowing what intermediary to avail of in order to reorient ourselves rapidly to the surrounding context, recalling that the decisions immanent to that context are also key.

We can't access the elements... individually. Too many of them. We need intermediaries. People to tour us through. Tools, filters, sensors. That will listen, see, aggregate and separate, connect and disconnect, assemble and disassemble.

With the intermediaries, we will have to learn and speak the same

language, accept the gaps, sense the priorities. The tools. They won't see as we see through our eyes, they won't listen as we listen, they will perceive through different dimensions, they will count time with another anxiety.

As our intermediaries, our tools will be our interlocutors.³⁵

So speaks Nicolas Malevé, a member of art collective Constant. We could consider their relation to algorithms as exemplary of the Tarot reader framework.

To Constant, algorithms operate as conversational agents which perform forensic operations to explain phenomena in their own informational terms—as data.³⁶

Meeting the intermediaries on their terms is key. I do not believe we will all be afforded the luxury Scourti indulged in with *The Outage*, though some data collecting apps (such as Kennedy³⁷) certainly aspire to do just that—automatically reading your data and writing a journal of (or for) you. I think the best we can hope for is the ongoing existence, and future development of, interlocutors, tools, artifice, interface and

other that can act as intermediaries. These intermediaries can be software, as negotiated by Constant, and they can be practitioners, like Scourti. If 'cold reading' equates to an 'unwilling surrender' Scourti's work is the exact opposite: a performative submission to the system designed to denormalize the operations of a system which might otherwise recede from attention. Such work is necessary to conceiving how the data systems have specified us for parsing. So too is the work of data exploration as articulated in Constant's praxis: each interface (be it bespoke or Microsoft Excel) permits access to abstraction.

Notes

1 Gantz, J. and David Reinsel, 2012. "The Digital Universe in 2020: Big Data, Bigger Digital Shadows, and Biggest Growth in the Far East". In *IDC iView*. IDC Goto-Market Services.

2 Andersen, C. U. and Geoff Cox, 2015. "Datafied Research—Editorial." *A Peer Reviewed Journal About 4* (1) .

3 *Ibid.*

4 If we wish to allow for the concept of 'reading' a multimedia text.

5 Watson, Sara, 2015. "Data Is the New '___.'" *DIS Magazine* <http://dismagazine.com/issues/dataissue/>.

- 6 Schmieg, S. and Silvio Lorusso, 2013. *Networked Optimization. Software, mixed media.*
- 7 Campbell, M. and Jason Huff, 2010. *American Psycho 2010* Print.
- 8 Harrington J.A., 2014. *The Outage* by Erica Scourti.
- 9 Andersen, C.U. 2014. "A History of Capture in Planning, Programming and Design | Datafied Research". <http://datafiedresearch.projects.cavi.au.dk/?p=346>.
- 10 "The Amazon Kindle and the Kindle Apps each provide a very simple mechanism for adding highlights. Every month, Kindle customers highlight millions of book passages that are meaningful to them. The resulting Popular Highlights help readers to focus on passages that are meaningful to the greatest number of people. We show only passages where the highlights of at least three distinct customers overlap, and we do not show which customers made those highlights." Amazon Kindle FAQ 2015 accessed June 3. <https://kindle.amazon.com/faq#PopularHighlights0>.
- 11 Calvino, I., 1992, *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller*, Trans. William Weaver. New Ed edition. Vintage Classics.
- 12 Spritz uses rapid serial visual presentation (RSVP) technology to quickly display reading speeds of 800 words per minute. Ian Bogost writing in *The Atlantic* (March 2014), derisively deems the app and attendant ecosystem as "Reading to have read" <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/03/readingtohaveread/284391/>.
- 13 <http://mimicabell.com/gmail.html>.
- 13 <http://mimicabell.com/gmail.html>
- 14 Olsen, L. M. 2015, "Grammatized Psychopath: American Psycho Online and Offline" *A Peer Reviewed Journal About* 4 (1) [a fantastic account that is wholly.
- 15 *Ibid.*

19 A scenario lampooned in the short-lived Bruiser sketch 'Steve'.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJld1VQBA&>.

20 "Tit for Tat", devised by Robert Axelrod plays out as an iterated version of the prisoners dilemma. It established that agents in competition with one another would eventually favour 'nice' behavior. Three agents were presumed, takers, givers and "reciprocators". The former two only ever take and give, while the latter returns the action that was last provided to them. Eventually the takers are phased out of the simulation. (Axelrod, R. and Richard Dawkins. 2006. *The Evolution of Cooperation: Revised Edition*. Basic Books).

21 Indeed the "Tit for Tat" conclusions on cooperation work best at scale, i.e. when the number of social interactions considers borders on the magnitude usually considered by 'Social Physics'.

22 Goffey, A. and Matthew Fuller, 2012 Evil Media MIT Press.

23 http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Cold_reading

24 One of the more awe inspiring, if unsubstantiated, capabilities which some illusionist claim to wield is the ability to 'read' a patsy's subvocalization muscle movement. As we read something we speak it 'aloud' in our mind, and the corresponding neck muscles which would be used to vocalize the words actuate in sympathy with this reading. It is possible, as NASA researcher has shown, to use myography to detect these muscle movements, and translate them to speech. In the case of an illusionist they do not attempt to literally read minds, but by encouraging a card trick victim to repeat the card they've chosen to themselves they would open a visual channel they could exploit for hints as to what the card was.

25 Speaking on RSVP technology John Henderson remarks: "Working memory is assumed to overload (there just isn't enough time to put the meaning together and store it in memory—what psychologists call "consolidation")" Henderson. J.M. 2014 "Am I Reading This Right?" online blog posting, March 7, [http://jhenderson.org/vclab/Blog/.](http://jhenderson.org/vclab/Blog/))

26 http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Cold_reading

27 Kinetic tests (pupil dilation), flushes of blood (that indicate lying, per the slowed down footage), the Kinect that can perhaps determine blood flow, even the twitches of neck muscles subvocalizing can be grasped as a whole by the cold reader and, more impressively, dynamically acted upon in real time.

28 This in demand skill set involves controlled staging of a hacker attack against a corporate network to reveal weaknesses in its security. There are many points of compromise in any given distributed system and the pentester is expected to be able to exploit them all.

29 As detailed by Will Buckingham in this Aeon Article (and a forthcoming novel *Sixty Four Chance Pieces*) (Buckingham, W. 2015, "The Uncertainty Machine", Aeon online, accessed June 3, <http://aeon.co/magazine/philosophy/theichingisanuncertaintymachine/>).

30 The Rider Waite deck is the most popular in the English speaking world, and is the deck which is most shot through with Golden Dawn (a particular occult society) interpretation. In the Francophone world the "Tarot de Marseille" remains most popular.

31 ELIZA was a pseudo psychotherapist, written by Joseph Weizenbaum. Despite being a very humble natural language processor it convinced many who used it during 1964 and 1966.

32 There have been multiple (and humorous) reskins of the Tarot. All of which, are collected on the vast Aeclectic Tarot website <http://www.aeclectic.net/tarot/>.

33 Alli, A. 1986, *Angel Tech: A Modern Shaman's Guide to Reality Selection*. Reprint edition. New Falcon Publications.

34 Chaos Magick expounded that the calcified esoteric pageantry of Golden Dawn was less important than a deep, embodied, engagement with the abstraction inherent to casting a spell, tracing a rune, or launching a sigil. As surmized by Grant Morrison: "HOW TO BE A MAGICIAN 3: Put down the books, stop making excuses and START." Morrison notoriously encouraged readers of his 'the Invisibles' Graphic Novel to launch a sigil (designed to save the book from cancellation) by engaging in a distributed, collective, wankathon. (Morrison, G. 2014, "POP

MAGIC!" in *Book of Lies: The Disinformation Guide to Magick and the Occult*, Reprint edition. Disinformation Books.)

35 As described by long standing Constant member Nicolas Malevé, in describing his interface with the Kurenniemi archive (Malevé, N. 2012, "Tools, Interlocutors, Probes" online posting, March 5. <http://kurenniemi.activearchives.org/logbook/?p=308>)

36 Cox, Geoff, Nicolas Malevé, and Michael Murtagh. 2014. "Archiving the DataBody: Human and Nonhuman Agency in the Documents of Kurenniemi". In . ActiveArchives.org. http://activearchives.org/wiki/Archiving_the_Databody:_human_and_nonhuman_agency_in_the_documents_of_Kurenniemi#cite_note28.

37 "Kennedy Capture the Now". n.d. <http://kennedyapp.com/>.

Liam Jones

THE PLASTICITY OF READING:
SELF AND TEXT

In Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing Catherine Malabou states that no one can approach the texts of Plato, Kant or Hegel without acknowledging the deconstruction of metaphysics. In a similar vein, no one can attempt to approach reading today without acknowledging the death of the book. That is, noticing the transformation of ways in which we read, how we read and what we read. Moreover, our historical situation calls into question what the *act of reading* is itself and forces us to think anew what this act is.

To examine what reading is, or can be, today I will turn to Catherine Malabou's concept of 'plastic reading'. It is derived from her notion of plasticity, a theory she adapted from Hegel. It means the ability to give form, to receive form, but also the destruction of form. Malabou has enacted 'plastic reading' herself in her books on Hegel and Heidegger, where she reads these philosophers plastically. That is by highlighting the mutability of

their texts. Thus, I will begin my discussion of a contemporary reading by attempting to explicate what 'plastic reading' is, the implications it has for a reader or readers, and also the meaning of *textuality* when structured by *plasticity*.

Malabou defines plastic reading as a plastic hermeneutic, and a new form of structural approach. This approach is to be differentiated from both the structuralism found in those like Levi-Strauss, and also the post-structuralism of deconstruction. It differs through its interest in the residual affects of a text. Malabou states plastic reading "does not relate to an original or nuclear formal element; to any kind of basic cell that contains the semantic and morphological data of the system" (2010, p. 51). Rather, plastic reading should be understood as a result, that which comes after.

Plastic reading offers a new way of thinking about the interrelation of reader and text. Moreover, it opens up a new synthesis between reader and text, as they are bound by a formative economy of exchange. This paradigm of reader and text is not specifically aligned to the reader of a book. More

generally, it is about speculation, or the connection between subjectivity and objectivity. Plasticity ushers in a “new epoch”, Malabou argues, “replacing grammatology with neurology” (2010, p. 77). To begin with I want to turn to what implications for a reading subject this new epoch has.

What are the implications of this turn from grammatology to neurology? *In What Should We Do With Our Brain* (2005) Malabou affirms that if we take neuroscience seriously we can “conclude that thought, knowledge, desires, and affects all proceed on a neuronal, that is to say, biological, basis” (2005, p. 55). The subject is the brain, with the brain producing itself through its own plasticity. This is not a biological determinism, as neuroplasticity demonstrates the susceptibility of the brain to indeterminacy.

If the subject is formed and forming then, what does this say of its relation to text? Plasticity is a dialectical movement that is “not a passivity, but a plasticity, from the reader”. The plastic reader is thus active in the formation of a text but also exemplifies openness towards a text. Openness here means that whilst attempting to move

towards an understanding of text, the text is also formative of the reader.

Malabou's nuanced definition of form is important to grasp the mutual relation between reader and text. She states in *The Future of Hegel* (2005) that "the plasticity of meaning is inseparable from a plasticity of reading, a reading gives form to the utterance it receives" (2005, p. 168). In a sense this is similar to Vilem Flusser's idea of reading in that "no longer does the reader draw a meaning from what is read; rather he is the one who confers meaning on what is read" (2011, p. 85). However, whereas writers such as Flusser have articulated this process of reading as a fiction-building enterprise, where there is no inherent meaning in the activity itself, Malabou sees it as indicative of the plasticity of propositions. The relation of the reader to the text is thus one of immanence. Following Hegel, Malabou believes the reader, especially the philosophical reader, should "renounce its personal intrusions into the immanent rhythm of the concept" (2015, p. 169). The subject is therefore not the bearer of meaning on a concept, but meaning comes about through the plastic

relation of subject and object, and reading is a process that occurs through the stages of plasticity: first there is passivity, which is a naive interaction between reader and text; at this stage the reader is unlearned or unaware of the meaning of a text. Only after a return and active mediation with a text, does understanding happen.

As we have seen, Malabou attempts to move beyond Derridean deconstruction towards neurology. This succession of deconstruction influences her ideas surrounding notions of textuality. In fact, she goes so far as to say “structural plastic analysis thus calls deconstruction to recognize its metamorphic debt” (2010: 53). To understand what this means, the way in which plasticity differs from deconstruction must be explored further.

Malabou recognizes that deconstruction reveals a double mark, a binary inherent to language. Moreover, what becomes apparent through deconstruction is conceptuality marked by identity and difference. Opposed to this, “Plastic reading does not seek to show how the same is always already undermined, haunted, or parasited by the

other", and instead, "it is a matter of revealing a form in the text that is both other than the same and other than the other" (2010, p. 52). What this means is that the form of a text is itself *self-othering*, or there is a differentiated structure inherent to a text. This self-othering is the mark of plasticity, and it is through this that according to Malabou, meaning can arise in a text.

What is important to note is that Malabou wants to 'deaestheticize' the idea of form. Her idea of form is not tied to the aesthetic ideal of form as "suprasensitive in the first instance" (2010, p. 54). This can be understood through recourse to Heidegger's ontological difference, whereby form is a transcendental condition for the ontology of a text, and the figure is its corporeality. As she says "the time has come to... desacralize the ontological difference so as to understand how beings... can and always will come to furnish the very essence of Being" (p. 78). Ontological difference is thus overturned so the figural determines the form. Hence, as we have seen, plastic reading is focused on the residue of a text, that which comes after its deconstruction, its materiality.

What, then, does this say about language? Malabou claims that “language is a stamped and hallmarked material” (2005 p. 171). Language is primarily material. It is malleable, open to self-transformation but is also produced and productive. This dialectic demonstrates language as corporeal, and any transcendental schema imposed on the form of a text would deny its priority as material. The binary of signifier and signified becomes flattened so that the signifier is immanent to what is signified by it.

What is evident then is the materiality and therefore malleability of both reader and text. It is possible to argue there is a crisis of meaning when it comes to plastic reading. If meaning is changeable then how are we to make sense of it? However, while plasticity is a differentiated mode of reading it does not allow for pure, unrestrained relativism. To put it in terms of essentialism, the essence of a text is to be found heuristically. That is, opposed to a priori conceptuality, as the residue of a text. Moreover, accepting that reading is a contingent act, this essence is minimized through this contingency.

What Malabou’s concept of plastic

reading allows then is a space for transdisciplinarity. This is evident through Malabou's action herself. While being primarily trained in a philosophical tradition, her work is not bound to philosophy. Rather, it moves between neurobiology, political theory and psychoanalysis. Reading therefore, when thought as plastic, should not be thought as something specialized. Rather, it is open to a multiple of communities who become both formed by the texts they read but also bear themselves on the formation of texts. Moreover, the boundaries for interaction with a text become undermined and malleable. Peter Osborne notes "Transdisciplinarity is [...] the product of a certain philosophical reflection on the limits of philosophy" (2011, p. 15). In a similar sense, Malabou's concept of plastic reading can be seen as a critique of the sufficiency of reading, highlighting the contingency of certain modes of reading, including the crisis proposed by Flusser.

Where is plastic reading situated in comparison to other contemporary theories of reading? Vilem Flusser believes that a "transition from the old ways of reading to the new involves a leap from the historical,

evaluative, political consciousness into a consciousness that is cybernetic and playful, that confers meaning" (Flusser, 2011, p.85). Here Flusser is hoping to draw our attention to the way in which the dissemination of images or texts through mass media alters the way one must both think and interact with these images. For Flusser, the multiple forms of images determine a crisis of reading. What Flusser hopes to achieve by appealing to the cybernetic then is an understanding of how media is embedded within a network.

Plasticity is opposed the cybernetic idea when discussing the brains interaction with images because, as Malabou describes, current research on brain plasticity deems the cybernetic metaphor "resolutely obsolete" (2008, p. 35). It is deemed obsolete insofar as it should not be thought of as a centralized system. Rather, the cybernetic system, the brain and its interaction with media, should be thought as being constituted by "multiple and adaptable structures" (2008: 38).

If we take into account both the transdisciplinarity of plastic reading, and its critique of a centralized hegemonic system,

we can begin to see political implications for Malabou's work surrounding ideas of plastic reading. If we are to manipulate Malabou's question 'what should we do with our brain?': *what should we do with our reading?* Then it becomes possible to say "no to an afflicting economic, political, and mediatic culture that celebrates only the triumph of flexibility, blessing obedient individuals who have no greater merit than that of knowing how to bow their heads with a smile" (2008, p. 79). By reading through plasticity, dissensus becomes a true possibility. We no longer have to be told what to read and to read it alone.

References

Flusser, V. (2011). *Does Writing Have a Future?* University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis & London.

Malabou, C. (2005). *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*. Routledge: New York.

Malabou C. (2008) *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* Fordham University Press: New York.

Malabou, C. (2010). *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*. Columbia University Press: New York.

Peter Osborne, 'Introduction' to the Dossier, *From Structure to Rhizome: Transdisciplinarity in French Thought*, *Radical Philosophy* 165 (Jan/Feb 2011), pp. 15–16.

Soenke Zehle

SCALING OUR SENSES: TYPE IN MOTION
BETWEEN SENTIENT SEMIOSPHERES AND A
SEMIOTICS OF INTENSITIES

Today, *Schriftfilme*//*Typemotion** *Films* as aesthetic practice is as much about the movement of type as it is about the algorithmic logics that set *type in motion*, about the ways in which these logics affect our capacity for experience, about the consequences of a cognition no longer coupled with the constitution of the human subject but emerging from the concatenation of nonhuman beings. Writing ranges from the gestures of the human hand believed to play a central role in the constitution of conscious subjectivity to the operative languages of machinic communication whose a-signifying semiotics suggest that the space of cognition is much more expansive than the terrain of human experience. To set writing in motion is to play with the position of its constituent elements in a multiplicity of constellations. We increasingly come to understand these constellations as machinic assemblages, assemblages that

structure and sustain both our own constitution as subjects and the constitution of the technical beings around us. So as we follow the movement of *type in motion* across more than a century of aesthetic experimentation, acts of reading scale our senses to comprehend the topologies across which our contemporary experience unfolds, less in terms of their role in processes of signification than in their role in our logics of existentialization. What follows is a machinic memorandum, a technological travelogue, technical in the sense of comprehending writing as a cultural technique, machinic in the sense of attending to ways in which contemporary changes in this technique affect our capacity for relation within machinic assemblages.

Writing as Cultural Technique

One way to engage with the question of the visual in relation to writing is to explore the extent to which writing itself can be comprehended as a medium that is always already visual, understood in the spatial terms of a visuality it both creates and explores in the

act of its own distribution across the spaces of writing. The works chosen to document the scope of *Schriftfilme//Typemotion Films* as aesthetic practice not only play with the “pictorial iconicity” (*Bildlichkeit*) of images, they also play with the “notational iconicity” (*Schriftbildlichkeit*) of writing itself. The philosopher Sybille Kraemer has suggested that “the belief in the one-dimensional nature of the written image as a linear series of letters disregards the fact that every written text uses the two-dimensionality of surfaces,” referring to the “visual-iconographic dimension of writing” as “notational iconicity” (*Schriftbildlichkeit*). It is through its *Schriftbildlichkeit* that writing makes its structures visible: “Non-perceptual, abstract ‘logoi’ are made accessible to the perceptual register of the ‘aesthetic’.” Beyond grammar, this also includes the visualizations of the formal languages of math, logic, or programming: “It is only because of its visual potential that an operative use of writing is possible.” Alerting us to the performative, pragmatic, and processual effects of writing by way of its “interspatiality,” i.e. the place its constituent elements occupy in a spatial configuration,

notational iconicity opens up writing to other modes of iconicity and the cultural history of visualization. The written and the visual are no longer understood as distinct semiotic modalities but as the abstract limits of a continuum of concrete hybrid forms.

Rather than taking a dichotomous distinction between the written and the visual as its point of departure, *type in motion* engages the iconicity of writing itself. Shifting our analytical attention from communication to cognition, it also allows us to comprehend “the operative nature of writing as a cultural technique”. For Bernhard Siegert, “the study of cultural techniques [...] is concerned with decentering the distinction between human and non-human by insisting on the radical technicity of this distinction”. Ontic cultural techniques produce ontological categories, and to explore a cultural technique is to map an “actor network that comprises technological objects as well as the operative chains they are part of and that configure or constitute them, recursive chains including both human and non-human actors as cultural subjects with attention to the role such techniques play in ‘operationalizing

distinctions in the real' such as the distinction between nature and culture". Similarly, Kraemer and Bredekamp note that "[i]t is in the (inter)play with language, images, writing, and machines—in the reciprocity between the symbolic and the technical, between discourse and the iconic—that cultures emerge and reproduce". Critical of the exclusive status granted to writing in "textualizations" of culture, they affirm instead the continued centrality of writing in the becoming-machinic of the cultural and the corresponding need to attend to other registers of the dynamic of cultural constitution: "the binary system as a universal digital code reminds us that the computer does not just squash the potential of writing in the flood of digitized images, but that, on the contrary, it gives it a new lease on life by bringing it back into play as the elementary vision of the technological and the machinic." If writing remains the focus of analysis, it does so as cultural technique involved in the creation of new machinic assemblages. As Bernard Stiegler has noted in his analyses of the way these assemblages affect the role played by memory in the constitution of subjectivity, the grammatization

of speech—its translation into the de-temporalized spatial objects of writing—is a form of materialization that exists in the context of a much more comprehensive process of “technical life” (Georges Canguilhem). And as the reading of this writing changes with technology, so does the socio-technological constitution of who we are and become when we read and write. Setting writing in motion reminds us of the plasticity of the culture-technological twins of reading and writing—not only understood in the terms of their communicative operation, but as technologies of the self.

Writing in Sentient Semiospheres

Exploring the structures of writing by way of engaging and exploding its spatial configuration, *Schriftfilme // Typemotion Films* also document that it is the very logic of space that is subject to change. To comprehend writing beyond the one-dimensionality of linear sequences, it makes sense to think of semiosis more generally in spatial terms. In the spatial semiotics of Yuri Lotman, all cultures

are structured topologically; his term for the semiotic space of any one culture is the semiosphere. The key structural and functional principle of a semiosphere is the border, a "unique unit of translation" that enacts "the division of self from other, the filtration of external communications and the translation thereof into its own language, as well as the transformation of external non-communication into communications." As a contact zone that defines and delineates a semiosphere, it is also an "area of accelerated semiotic processes" engaged in both the production and subsumption of semiotic difference. Because "'non-semiotic' space may actually occur within the space of other semiotics", inside and outside are folded into each other and "the crossing point of the boundary of a given culture depends upon the position of the observer". In this dynamic semiotic space, "elements collide as though they coexisted on the same level", and the "structural heterogeneity of semiotic space creates reserves of dynamic processes and represents one of the mechanisms for the creation of new information inside the sphere". *Schriftfilme//Typemotion Films* show and stage a wide spectrum of such semiotic

collisions, offering a sense of the scope and structures of our semiosphere. To exhibit these in the space of a museum is not a way of abstracting them from the actuality of culture. On the contrary—for Lotman, the museum is an exemplary space illustrating the dynamic of the semiosphere as a conflictual dynamic of cultural translation, a space in which multiple aesthetic and communicative practices (including the traces left by users) co-exist.

In the sentient urban spaces of contemporary algorithmic cultures, characterized by infrastructures that sift through semiospheric processes almost in real time, Lotman's "presumption of semioticity: the semiotic intuition of the collective and its consciousness have to accept the possibility that structures may be significant" has become a presumption of value: all of our communications, including our data exhaust, are potential sources of commercial value. Structured by the infrastructural standards of what has been analyzed as biolinguistic capitalism, the contemporary city accelerates processes both of our collective communication and the generation of value derived from the capture, analysis, and recombination of

the products of what amounts to a new form of experience-labor. As both the flaneurist freedom that characterized early visions of the urban experience and the situationist subversion of architectural attempts to structure our experience are crowded out by the vision of the city as a machine of capture, the very idea of an urban commons—of sites and spaces open to reappropriation, the invention of new uses, the provision of public goods, and the autonomous constitution of collectivities—disappears. The tracking of how we communicate generates profiles so comprehensive that they have become a major commercial asset, giving rise to an entire cottage industry of data dealers. Especially those *Schriftfilme*//*Typemotion Films* that engage with the active role of writing in urban environments (take the works of Jenny Holzer or the design agency H5) not only comprehend the city as site of semiosis, they also alert our attention to the subsumption of semiosis in these economies of capture.

Comprehending the space of writing in relation to the architectures across which writing is distributed, writing appears as an interface of its own, structuring our acts of

reading through the ways in which it both maps and modifies urban surfaces. As we envision our passage across the multimodal worlds imagined in *Schriftfilme // Typemotion Films*, “[t]he points of connection are perhaps best described in some combination of mathematical figures and architectural spaces—as nodes, edges, tangents, trajectories, hinges, bends, pipelines, portals [...] the structuring principles that refer to the constitutive nature of interface experiences of reading”, that Johanna Drucker suggests, because “in the realm of multiple modularities, no common ground for organizing experience exists”. Operative in almost every encounter, the agency of writing as interfaces meshes with the agency of the museum architectures created to facilitate both focused explorations and accidental encounters.

In an exhibition, the technical object of writing becomes part of the machinic assemblage of the museum. Offering a concatenation of interfaces designed to relate works and visitors, an exhibition necessarily imagines the agency of these visitors. Historically, Drucker notes, the language of interface design “does not come from a theory of interface, but from

a platform of principles in the software industry [...] the concept is approached through an engineering sensibility driven by mechanistic pragmatism". For her, "[a]n interface is not so much a 'between' space as it is the mediating environment that makes the experience". But "if we base our theory of interface on the 'user experience' approach, it would be reductively mechanistic, based on a concept of interface as an environment to maximize efficient accomplishment of tasks—whether these are instrumental, analytic, or research oriented—by individuals who are imagined as autonomous agents whose behaviors can be constrained in a mechanical feedback loop". Instead, "[t]he aesthetic dimensions and imaginative vision makes interface a space of being and dwelling, not a realm of control panels and instruments only existing to be put at the service of something else", because ultimately "interface is a provocation to cognitive experience". In the exhibition context, the interface is the site of an irreducible paradox, gesturing both towards the efficiency of a communicative encounter and the autonomy of an aesthetic experience situated beyond communicability, facilitating both generic

comprehension and singular encounters.

Many *Schriftfilme*//*Typemotion Films* multiply the interface—the one that frames its display is but one in a chain of interfaces, not a singular surface but an architecture. As Branden Hookway notes, “the interface is in multiple respects an architecture: in its production of a site, in its plays upon space and time, in its human relation and social use, in its place as an object of design as well as an enabling of design, in the uncertainty that has always accompanied the question of whether it is to be known through perception or use, thought or experience”. As a folding that both explicates the work and implicates the visitor, the assemblages that include interfaces, works, and viewers are perhaps better described in topological terms, calling attention to their structural plasticity. For Lury et al, that “contemporary culture is itself coming to display a proliferation of surfaces that *behave topologically*” becomes apparent in the way “the ‘borders’ or ‘frames’ of mirrors, windows, screens and interfaces have become surfaces of sensation themselves by operating the opposition between inside and outside in a dynamic re-making of relations

to each other [...] the frames of mediation have come to produce topological spaces". Interfaces don't simply provide access to space, they are involved (and involve us) in processes of mediation that occur across multidimensional spaces.

To acknowledge the structural transformation of the technical object, its dispersal into technical networks, shifts attention from media to mediation: "The concept of the technical object has itself become, because of its fundamental environmentalization, problematic, if not obsolete [...] In contrast to the ever-repeated refrain of a new immediacy, into which we (re)enter in the age of ubiquitous computing, ubiquitous media, intelligent environments, and so on, we are in fact now dealing with the absolute prioritization of mediation." It is no accident that the thought of mediation continues to draw on the early visions of Norman McLuhan. While "Kittler believed that media determine our situation, McLuhan thought that media are our situation", observes W. J. Mitchell in a recent journal issue dedicated to the 50th anniversary of McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. As he and Mark B. N.

Hansen note elsewhere, “[b]efore it becomes available to designate any technically specific form of mediation, linked to a concrete medium, *media* names an ontological condition of humanization—the constitutive operation of exteriorization and invention”. Which is why “media studies can and should designate the study of our fundamental relationality, of the irreducible role of mediation in the history of human being”. What is more, “[o]ne of the key implications of thinking of media (tools, artifacts, code, etc.) rather than language as constitutive of human life is that the assumption that the human is metaphysically distinct from other forms of life is called into question”. As in the analysis of cultural techniques that shift the focus from signification to the performative, pragmatic, and processual registers of semiosis, the focus on mediation shifts attention from the production of meaning to the processes of material constitution.

To comprehend the topologies of such assemblages beyond the spatiality of writing, Celia Lury, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova contrast the becoming-topological of culture with the “turn to the surface” announced by Siegfried Kracauer in his analysis of the

mass culture of the Weimar republic, in which cultural forms obey a linear, rational logic; an “aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires”. They contrast this spatiality with the becoming-topological of contemporary algorithmic cultures: “a distributed, dynamic configuration of practices is organizing the forms of social life in ways that supplement and extend those of Euclidean geometry.” The rationality of this dynamic is one of constant change: “In this multiplication of relations, change is established as constant, normal and immanent, rather than as exceptional or externally produced [...] culture is increasingly organized in terms of its capacities for change.” Lury et al. diagnose this in terms of “an epochal transformation in the intersection between the form and content of cultural expression”, as “in a topological society, we no longer live in or experience ‘movement’ or transformation as the transmission of fixed forms in space and time but rather movement—as the ordering of continuity—composes the forms of social and cultural life themselves”. And if the becoming-topological of culture involves a maximization of relations, “it is this maximization of relations

that makes the analysis of the becoming-topological of culture a pressing concern”, especially if this process extends far beyond the media of communication and “is also emergent in the un-co-ordinated or rather, not externally co-ordinated, activities, relationships and mobilities of multiple actors, infrastructural systems, and networks”. An algorithmic culture is a culture in motion, a dynamic that multiplies relations across the topologies of life and labor. As we explore the archive of *Schriftfilme // Typemotion Films*, we also explore this shift from the “turn to the surface” to the continuous flows of contemporary culture.

The Machinic Worlds of Algorithmic Culture

A delineation of object/subject boundaries alone cannot grasp the distributed actuality of machinic multiplicity, comprehend what is happening to us—our agency, our capacity for relation in the new assemblages of algorithmic culture whose semiotic registers the exhibition explores. For Félix Guattari, “[m]

achinism implies a double process—auto-poetic-creative and ethical-ontological—[...] which is utterly foreign to mechanism”. He begins his reflections on the “new aesthetic paradigm” by outlining a genealogy of aesthetic autonomy. Guattari’s interest in this autonomy includes the processes of subjective constitution, and their possible sources: “It is a force for seizing the creative potentiality at the very roots of sensory finitude—‘before’ being applied to works, to mental and social objects—which founds the new aesthetic paradigm.” Reference to the “ontological roots of creativity [...] is characteristic for the new processual paradigm” and thus mobilizes a process-philosophical concept of creativity. It no longer grasps aesthetic experience according to the logic of subject-object encounter, but as actions constituting part of a “politics and ethics of singularity” whose goal is to generate “new social, artistic and analytical practices”. And it has ethico-political implications because “to speak of creation is to speak of the responsibility of the creative instance with regard to the thing created”. To comprehend these ethico-political stakes, “we have to

shed our mechanist vision of the machine and promote a conception which encompasses all of its aspects: technological, biological, informatic, social, theoretical, and aesthetic". Rather than reestablishing the mechanistic dichotomy between machines (technical objects) and non-machines (human beings), machinism acknowledges that if media becomes machinic, so do we.

In his *Summa Technologiae*, Stanislaw Lem anticipated the need of networked societies overwhelmed by information to overcome such an "information barrier" through the automation of cognition. Recalling Lem's vision, N. Katherine Hayles reflects on the "scope and essence of interpretation" and notes that to acknowledge that interpretation "applies to information flows as well as to questions about the relations of human selves to the world", we need to approach thought and cognition as distinct processes: "while all thinking is cognition, not all cognition is thinking." What she terms "nonconscious cognition" is not, however, a capacity of computational objects, but "operates across and within the full spectrum of cognitive agents: humans, animals, and technical

devices". And whereas "material processes operating on their own rather than as part of a complex adaptive system do not demonstrate emergence, adaptation, or complexity", the delineation of boundaries between "conscious thinking, nonconscious cognition, and material processes" is a matter of debate rather than mere distinction. Reflecting on nonconscious cognition as a discrete capacity distributed across a wide variety of agents, Hayles also draws attention to the costs of consciousness. They include its belatedness, i.e. the "missing half second" that separates the initiation of neural activity and conscious awareness, which can be exploited by new forms of nonconscious cognition in advertising or the algorithmic trading in near-real time financial markets. But perhaps more importantly, Hayles suggests, such costs include the anthropocentric bias consciousness establishes: "The same faculty that makes us aware of ourselves as selves also partially blinds us to the complexity of the biological, social, and technological systems in which we are embedded." Attention to nonconscious cognition not only leads us to realize that "an object need not be alive or conscious in order

to function as a cognitive agent”, but to a greater awareness of this complexity.

If smart objects and sensation surfaces make and maximize new modes of relation, “[r]elation is not the links that hold between nodes; nor is it what bestows on the nodes the quality of distinction [...] Relation is already operative in the technicity of networking, in the *diagramming*—looping, refraining, synthesizing—of networks”. Experience, as Anna Munster insists in her analysis of socio-technological networks and the aesthetic practices that reflexively reappropriate their recursive relationalities, is always already networked experience. Hence the need to co-think experience and the networked condition: “we need an account of network aesthesia that does not rely solely on human capacities for perception.” As the centrality of user experience design strategies in the contemporary transformation of life and labor call for a renewed reflection on the status of aesthetic experience, it would be a mistake to limit perception to “sensory (human) knowing of the world”. Instead, Munster suggests we “situate a mosaic, networked diagram as a precondition for, or at the very least

constitutive of, 'ordinary' (human) experience", shifting our critical analysis from cognitive experience to experience-thought.

For Maurizio Lazzarato, "the component parts of subjectivity—intelligence, affects, sensations, cognition, memory, physical force—are components whose synthesis lies in the assemblage or process, and not in the person". Developed in dialogue with Guattari's machinism, his approach focuses on how a subjective economy exploits these component parts: "Subjective economy means subjectivity existing for the machine, subjective components as functions of enslavement which activates pre-personal, pre-cognitive, and pre-verbal forces (perception, sense, affect, desire) as well as supra-personal forces (machinic, social, linguistic, economic) which go beyond the subject: it involves neither representation nor consciousness, it is machinic." He conceptualizes the machine as something other than a tool, "which makes the machine an extension and projection of the human being". Machines are neither characterized by structural or vitalist unity, nor do they turn us away from Being. Instead, machines are assemblages,

operating below and above our levels of cognition and perception: *“In a machine-centric world, in order to speak, smell, and act, we are of a piece with machines and asignifying semiotics.”* As beings whose agency is enmeshed in machinic assemblages, we are on the terrain of an a-signifying semiotics of sensation—of cultural, economic, and political processes increasingly driven not by what writing means but by what it does.

Scaling our Senses

From the iconicity of writing to the subjective economies that literally take into account the entire semiosphere of our algorithmic cultures, attention to writing continues to offer a mode of reflection on the status of aesthetic experience. Explored from within the horizon of the project’s historical archive (which revisits earlier film experiments as well as contemporary examples of generative design), the becoming-algorithmic of aesthetic practices is not restricted to instructions directed to machines: “For centuries, algorithms have been used intuitively as systems of regulation,

instructions, rules for games, plans and scores in architecture and music." In the encounter between art and cybernetics, the precise coding of computer art makes its appearance alongside the intuitive instructions of Fluxus, Happening and Performance. The project *Schriftfilme//Typemotion* recalls that the process of aesthetic algorithmicization is not only determined by the technological possibilities of informatization, but by the structure of aesthetic practices, thereby defining a form of contemporaneity, of being-in-the-present.

Here, the exhibition opens up to other arts-and-technology research, from the trans-media architectures of dynamic publishing to material epistemologies that comprehend the dispersal of the technical object by engaging in its design, to think things through distributed things in a machinic ecology. While writing still means something, the registers of *Schriftfilme//Typemotion Films* as aesthetic practice shift our attention from signification to the operative dynamic of a semiosis spread across the vast semiospheres that envelop us. So perhaps at best, our exhibitions can assist in the reflection of our own condition of subjective constitution, of the processes

of mediation involved in making us who we are. In *Schriftfilme // Typemotion Films*, writing continues to explicate and explore its visual registers, playing with the rules of its own spatial configuration to draw attention to the architectures of the spaces within which it operates. As we move from the spatial configurations within writing to the new topologies of semiotic machines, data fabrics, and the computational dimensionality of software, we engage the ways in which writing implicates us in semiotic modes above and beyond signification, in a semiotics of intensities.

Curators propose paths of aesthetic encounter, framing possible itineraries through acts of translation that range from authoring archives to the designing of interfaces. We can, of course, still explore the space of the museum like the romantic wanderer, we can still scale the mountains of art and immerse ourselves in the liminal experience of the sublime, a key moment in the traditional quest of the subject setting out to explore a world of difference and return with a sovereign sense of self-knowledge. Yet if the museum assumes as its own condition of possibility the autonomy of aesthetic experience, what if the

topologies of the terrain across which our self-constitution is spread precedes and exceeds our immediate capacity for experience, if much of what affects the way we become lies above and below our thresholds of perception? Following the dispersal of writing across the topologies of our algorithmic cultures is one way to extend the spatiality of our experience spaces to the architectures of the computational beyond our experiential reach. To think of interfaces as surfaces of sensations is to think of an a-signifying semiotics of intensities, and of *Schriftfilme // Typemotion Films* as invention of new machinic assemblages in a culture that has accorded the cultural techniques of operative writing a constitutive role. And as we invent new acts of reading to engage with writing across these topologies, as we scale our senses, perhaps the reflexivity immanent in aesthetic experience can help expand their scope.

* *Type Motion*, an international editorial and research project, explores the experimental enmeshment of type and image in film from the early days of silent cinema to the ubiquitous visual cultures of the present. "The Act of Reading" symposium took place in the context of the Type Motion exhibition at FACT Liverpool, co-curated by Christine Stenzer and Soenke Zehle, in cooperation with Mike Stubbs.

References

- Alliez, Eric. "Diagrammatic Agency Versus Aesthetic Regime of Contemporary Art: Ernesto Neto's Anti-Leviathan", *Deleuze Studies* 6.1 (2012), pp. 6–26.
- Berardi, Franco 'Bifo'. *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, Minor Compositions, London, 2009.
- Drucker, Johanna. "Humanities Approaches to Interface Theory", in: *Culture Machine* 12.23 (2011), pp. 1–20.
- Future Art Base, "Power at the End of the Economy: A Discussion with Maurizio Lazzarato, Brian Massumi, Peter Pál Pelbart and Akseli Virtanen", (07/10/2014), <http://www.futureartbase.org/2014/10/07/power-at-the-end-of-the-economy-2/>.
- Genosko, Gary. "A-signifying Semiotics", in: *The Public Journal of Semiotics* 2.1 (January 2008), pp. 11–21.
- Guattari, Félix. "The new aesthetic paradigm", in: *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. "Cognition Everywhere: The Rise of the Cognitive Nonconscious and the Costs of Consciousness", in: *New Literary History* 45.2 (Spring 2014), pp. 199–220.
- Hoerl, Erich. "A Thousand Ecologies: The Process of Cyberneticization and General Ecology", trans. James Burton, Jeffrey Kirkwood and Maria Vlotides, in: Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke (eds.), *The Whole Earth: California and the Disappearance of the Outside*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2013.
- Hookway, Branden. *Interface: A Genealogy of Mediation and Control*, Volume I, Dissertation, Princeton University, Princeton, 2011.

Kraemer, Sybille. "Writing, Notational Iconicity, Calculus: On Writing as a Cultural Technique", trans. Anita McChesney, *MLN* 118, 2003, pp. 518–537.

Kraemer, Sybille. "Operative Bildlichkeit. Von der 'Grammatologie' zu einer Diagrammatologie? Reflexionen über erkennendes 'Sehen'", in: M. Hessler and D. Mersch (eds.), *Logik des Bildlichen. Zur Kritik der ikonischen Vernunft*, transcript, Bielefeld, 2009, pp. 94–123.

Kraemer, Sybille, Gernot Grube and Werner Kogge, (eds.), *Schrift: Kulturtechnik zwischen Auge, Hand und Maschine*, Fink, Munich, 2005.

Kraemer, Sybille and Horst Bredekamp, "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques — Moving Beyond Text", in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 30.6 (2013), pp. 20–29.

Kracauer, Siegfried. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. T.Y. Levin. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995, p. 79, op. cit. in Celia Lury, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, "Introduction: The Becoming Topological of Culture", in: *Theory Culture Society* 29.4–5 (2012), pp. 3–35.

Lazarato, Maurizio. "Exiting Language: Semiotic Systems and the Production of Subjectivity in Félix Guattari", trans. Eric Anglés, in: Deborah Hauptmann and Warren Neidich (eds.), *Cognitive Architecture: From Bio-politics to Noo-politics — Architecture & Mind in the Age of Communication and Information*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2010.

Lazarato, Maurizio. *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, trans. Joshua David Jordan, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2014.

Lem, Stanislaw, *Summa Technologiae*, trans. Joanna Zylińska, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2014.

Lotman, Yuri M., "On the Semiosphere", 1984, trans. Wilma Clark, *Sign Systems Studies* 33.1 (2005), pp. 205–229.

Lotman, Yuri M. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman, I.B. Tauris, London, 1990.

Lury, Celia, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, "Introduction: The Becoming Topological of Culture", *Theory Culture Society* 29.4–5 (2012), pp. 3–35.

Marazzi, Christian. *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy*, trans. Gregory Conti, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2008.

Mitchell, W. J. "Marshall McLuhan Then and Now", in: *Journal of Visual Culture* 13.1 (April 2014), pp. 88–90.

Mitchell, W. J. T. and Mark B. N. Hansen, "Introduction", in: W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (eds.), *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2010.

Munster, Anna. *An Aesthesis of Networks: Conjunctive Experience in Art and Technology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2013.

Rossiter, Ned and Soenke Zehle, "Experience Machines", in: *Sociologia del Lavoro* 133 (2014), pp. 111–133.

Siegert, Bernard. "Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory", in: *Theory, Culture & Society*, 30.6 (2013), pp. 48–65.

Stiegler, Bernard, "Die Aufklärung in the Age of Philosophical Engineering" in: *Computational Culture*, Issue Two (2012).

Weibel, Peter. "Algorithmic Revolution: On the History of Interactive Art", 2004, <http://zkm.de/en/media/audio/peter-weibel-algorithmic-revolution>, Jan. 15, 2015.

Zehle, Soenke. "Documenting Depletion: Of Algorithmic Machines, Experience Streams, and Plastic People", in: Richard Maxwell, Jon Raundalen, and Nina Lager Vesterberg (eds.), *Media and the Ecological Crisis*, Routledge, London, 2015, pp. 52–68.



Nina Power

READING RIOTOUSLY

I've only got one image and it's this one—a very blurry bad photograph taken on my mobile phone in Berlin Airport recently. And I wanted to put it up just because although it's an advert for the smaller version of *Die Welt*, *Die Welt Kompact*. The point is, you don't have to share this big newspaper anymore, you don't have to read collectively, you can read individually, and in a compact manner. And I think this goes along with a kind of shrinkage of mobile reading technologies. But what I like about this image is that you can also read it differently which is as a kind of critique of the idea of collective reading, or a shared image of reading.

So I want to have that in the background and maybe come back to it at the end, I think in many ways my talk here is going to be quite old school, compared to some of the more interesting technological papers or the papers that are looking at the neuroscience of reading, because I want to focus on I suppose two main themes, one of

which is the relationship of the law to reading and the way in which we are bound by certain ways in which the law uses reading to construct power and to present an image of force which seems to be inescapable. And I think that hasn't gone away, I think we are still bound by a very old fashioned notion in which the law uses reading on a range of populations. Then in a more dense last ten minutes, I want to think about what it means to read beyond disciplines. Sam mentioned interdisciplinarity, and I want to think about transdisciplinary reading as a way of reading, which isn't bound by the strictures of disciplines and some of the supposed expertise, which come from being a specialist in something. Okay so the first ten minutes are going to be quite open ended and the last a little denser.

If we think about the politics of reading, as a kind of ideological question, it presupposes that there are different ways of reading in different societies under different modes of production. So we can talk perhaps about capitalist modes of reading and about communist modes of reading. I'll talk in a bit later about

bourgeois image of the individual reader. I think we can ask who gets to read and how they read, whose acts of reading bind us with their work and who gets to back up their reading with force or the threat of force and then we can ask what would it mean to read against this threat of force the legal mode of reading in a post-disciplinary or transdisciplinary way. I want to focus particularly on the legal mode of reading, which is the reading of the Riot Act, which I'm sure you're familiar with. It was brought in by the Riot Act of 1714 and it was last used in the UK in 1919 during a police strike. It wasn't repealed until 1973. It's a proclamation ordering the dispersal of a group of any more than 12 who were "unlawfully, riotously tumultuously assembled together" basically it could be read out by a mayor, a bailiff or a JP (justice of the peace), and then everyone had an hour to disperse. If you didn't you would be charged with a felony, which was punishable by death. So it's not a casual just: 'go home', it's 'go home or we will kill you'.

I'm going to read the riot act, it says:

Our sovereign Lord the King chargeth

and commandeth all persons, being assembled, immediately to disperse themselves, and peaceably to depart to their habitations, or to their lawful business, upon the pains contained in the act made in the first year of King George I, for preventing tumults and riotous assemblies. God save the king!

So that would have to be read out by that person in a position of power, the interesting thing is that it had to be read out completely correctly, or the conviction would be overturned. So in a sense there is a restriction on the law itself. The reading had to be perfect; otherwise you can't put people to death. So in 1830 there is a very famous case where 250 people had assembled with the purpose of breaking threshing machines, and the magistrate read out the Riot Act but he forgot to read out the 'God save the king' bit at the end, so all of the convictions were overturned.

Why is this important? I think this thinking about the way in which the law uses reading, as backed up with the threat of conviction and with the threat of death, troubles

perhaps both the bourgeois image of reading that we might all too casually assume, as this idea of the reading of the individual, I think Sam mentioned this image of the child reading alone, or this idea that reading is something which is an individual decision, maybe like a form of autodidacticism — although the long tradition of working class self-education and working men's colleges gives a more collective image to reading. If we think about the political context we're in now where libraries are being closed down or at least parcelled off to volunteers with the horizon that they will eventually be closed down because it's hard to keep things running just by volunteer desire alone, so the state is sort of abnegating its responsibility for any form of collective reading, or reading as a collective enterprise.

Nevertheless I think this thinking about the law as this being able to read backed up by force troubles the bourgeois individual image of reading, even though historically we can also point to the times at which the ruling class has deemed reading even in the bourgeois mode to be dangerous or corrupting, so there are lots of scare stories about young

women coming across Romance novels in the forest and being corrupted by them for example. Think about the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* case, where it's famously asked 'would you want your wife or servants to read this book?' There is a fantasy of reading as a mode of corruption, even in the individualistic mode.

I think thinking about the way in which the law uses reading also troubles any wholly positive collective image of reading as well and I was thinking about the mass literacy projects, for example, in Cuba in 1961, Chile under Allende, Sandinista Nicaragua, Columbia, El Salvador and now in East Timor as well. So in 1961, Cuba reduced illiteracy from 42%, to about 4% in about a year—an incredibly impressive mass mobilization of literacy campaign. The campaign included the offer of free glasses for those who had poor eyesight and found reading difficult. Ten of thousands of volunteer teachers were mobilized to travel around and teach people particularly in rural areas, how to read. In December 1961, hundreds of thousands of the newly literate marched on the Plaza de la Revolución carrying giant pencils. A fact

I thought was interestingly resonant given the mobilization of the giant pencil in recent days after the Charlie Hebdo massacre. The Cuba mass literacy campaign, and these other mass literacy campaigns, often under socialist governments, were mobilized by the idea that reading could enable you to engage politically and socially, it wasn't simply reading as a kind of technocratic idea or reading for its own sake. It was the idea that reading was the beginning of a whole process of becoming a political and social subject, so you could participate actively in the construction of a socialist project and lots of people have argued that this partly explains why it was so successful because it had another dimension and it wasn't simply reading for its own sake.

Just to come back to the law for a second. And my argument that the law kind of creates a problem, for both of these, both the capitalist individualist bourgeois conception and the collectivist concept of reading. And I want to turn to J.L. Austin's, *How To Do Things With Words* in the 1950s, where he questions the idea that the business of the statement can only be used to describe some

state of affairs or to state some fact — either truly or falsely. And very famously he comes up with the idea of the ‘performative utterance’, which is then taken up by people like Judith Butler, later on and theories of performativity. So what is a performative? They do not describe or report anything, and are not true or false. The uttering of a sentence in a performative utterance, is or part of the doing of an action. So the famous examples that JL Austin uses is the ‘I do’ in the wedding ceremony where the speaking of that or the reading of that phrase is at the same time the kind of incorporeal but real transformation of someone from a non-married to a married state, i.e. the uttering of the sentence is part of the doing of an action. Other examples he gives is the naming of a ship ‘I name this ship X’ at the moment of smashing the bottle against the side. He also refers in a more legalistic way to declarations in will, the idea of bequeathing someone as a kind of statement that performs its own action. To link back to the reading of the Riot Act issue, those performatives that comes from the side of the law i.e. the triggering of the sentences following the jury’s verdict of guilty for

example, have this clearly binding effect, a material force. If you are found guilty in court, you cannot question the fact that this also has a practical component. You can't say, 'I refuse to acknowledge this'. You can say it, but it won't make any difference, you will still be dragged off forcibly.

I wanted to quote a sentence from Derrida's 1989 *Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority* where he says, "there are laws that are not enforced, but there is no law without enforceability, and no applicability or enforceability of the law without force". I think behind all of these statement is the way in which the law continues to read out versions of the Riot Act, whether it actually has to read them out or not doesn't really matter. It troubles any easy conception of reading and the politics of reading that we might want to have.

I want to move on then, to my second main point. Which is *what alternative way of reading can we think of today that might have a kind of political implication*. Obviously in the 50s and 60s there was a lot of discussion about the ways of reading

politically—thinking about Sartre’s *What is Literature?* for example. But then the famous collection *Reading Capital*, which is also about a theory of reading and how you read what isn’t said in the text. Almost a psychoanalytic idea of reading, to read what is hidden. So there is a kind of discussion of the politics of reading, which I think is often forgotten today, and which was happening in the middle of the twentieth century and I want to question the way in which we think about how we read in different disciplines. So when we read as a sociologist or a philosopher or a scientist, and to try and trouble, I suppose, this idea of reading through a discipline and what it might mean to read in a way that went beyond discipline. We’re always talking about interdisciplinarity if you’re involved in any kind of academic organization we have to constantly talk about interdisciplinarity. I’m not saying it’s always a bad thing, when it’s done well I think it is interesting but more of the time its kind of gestural. This idea that there are links between disciplines, and we have all these overlapping things to talk about. And it’s sort of opposed to this idea of specialism. And this idea that specific

different disciplines might need to have their own methods, and I don't want to totally undermine that. It's obviously true in lots of ways. But I think to go back to some of the grand literacy projects and this idea of the mass mobilization of knowledge through reading. We might want to think about what it would mean for everyone's capacity to read and to learn to be the first and most important thing—what might it mean to be able to understand, not just the claims made for literature by a literature specialist, but also the claims made for science by scientists? So I just want to talk a little bit about what transdisciplinarity and reading might mean.

Transdisciplinarity has been variously described as a kind of operator or problematizing device. A series of attempts that will of necessity spring of some specific disciplines while not remaining confined within them, and not allowing them to remain confined within themselves, and as having a privileged relationship to the philosophical tradition even if it is primarily one of negation. A particular series of key concepts: structure, sex, subject, rhizome, networks and so on, have been identified as possessing

transdisciplinary qualities. That is to say they cut across different disciplinary fields and destabilize the fields from which they apparently come. So we can think of Foucault's work on the history of sexuality, which obviously has as its subject sexuality although most of the time he's not really talking about that, but it undermines the disciplines that might previously take sex as its object.

A particular series of texts which address social political conceptual questions in a transdisciplinary way have also been tentatively suggested, and I suppose the people who have been pushing this transdisciplinary line are people like Peter Osborne and Éric Alliez and people around Kingston and the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, who are currently working on this project. So among transdisciplinary texts that they refer to, we find De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Lévi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind*, Foucault's *The Order of Things* and other Foucault, Lacan's *Ecrits*, Deleuze and Guattari's two volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. What could also be tentatively described as transdisciplinary texts also

appear early in the German critical tradition in the wake of Marx's movement through and beyond philosophy. Marx's texts can themselves be seen as exemplarily transdisciplinary works, moving beyond philosophy, economics, politics, sociology and history in an acute and often irreverent way—irreverent in the sense of crossing boundaries between disciplines and languages—so Marx will often write using English, French, German words in a sort of *mélange* way.

So we have a movement, we have anti-traditions of thought, some key texts and some important names. Transdisciplinary concepts may originally circle around particular disciplines, perhaps overwhelmingly philosophy itself. Although what philosophy is remains in serious disrepute—dispute! Sorry, not disrepute. Although it also remains in disrepute! We could simply affirm with Alain Badiou, as a discipline it remains empty, merely a kind of shelter for truths generated by other disciplines or conditions. Philosophy then has a privileged role in the conception of any conceptualization of transdisciplinarity, but it is a role characterized by emptiness, or at least a certain vanishing. Philosophers

are not of course necessarily transdisciplinary thinkers, any more than philosophy as an institutionalized discourse and set of conceptual objects necessarily lends itself to the kind of problematizing insights of the kind that transdisciplinarity seeks to capture. It's interesting in this regard to note the fear that philosophy tends to invoke in the minds of rationalizing bureaucrats who worry about its measurability. The fact that Philosophy departments are almost always the first to be closed is quite relevant here.

So what stance can operate as a marker of an explicitly transdisciplinary approach without engaging in the repetitive erection of new meta disciplines or falling into a black hole of boundarilessness? Oddly we could cite Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, where by 'boundarilessness' he means the elimination of boundaries within an organization to create universal ownership of the organization's overall mission. The philosophical equivalent perhaps being the creation of concepts so general and so purportedly universal that they perversely reinforce the need for disciplines and universality could indeed be one of these concepts.

Given these indeterminacies, it seems that we are reliant in the last instance on texts as opposed to schools (so particular texts that I read out as opposed to schools, or methods) as the bearers or indicators of transdisciplinary qualities. But is it enough to merely state that there are certain transdisciplinary texts and presume we will all read them in the same way, even assuming we are able and willing to leave our disciplines behind or at least keep them hanging in the balance?

The destabilizing and boundary crossing qualities of Sartre's sprawling and unfinished *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, for example, which touches upon political theory, philosophy, sociology, history, without ever being reducible to any or all of these disciplines, poses questions at the level of both form and content. How are we supposed to read and understand this text as a transdisciplinary object? It strikes me that much as the identification of texts, concepts, anti-traditions and so on are important, what is really being called for is a way of reading that is itself transdisciplinary.

What this means is that it should be possible to construct a way of understanding

texts, identifiable as transdisciplinary in their very transdisciplinarity. This would require an exploration of reading that no longer saw itself as the mirror of writing dominated by the conceptual and disciplinary world imposed by the writer. Or as the delayed response to texts, which however transdisciplinary they might appear to be, become re-inscribed as the bearers or new structures and architectures of thought. A transdisciplinary theory of reading, or a paying attention to reading itself as a transdisciplinary practice could avoid the reduction of transdisciplinarity practice to a new canon, and instead inaugurate new ways of approaching texts prior to their one-sided take up by their disciplines / disciples. What would it mean, to take a historical example, to read Leibniz and Descartes, as philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists all at once without shearing off elements of their work into tidy, pre-digestible fragments, appropriate to predetermined modes of thinking? If part of the ambition of transdisciplinarity is to avoid thought being reduced to bureaucratic tick-boxes, along the lines of definitions of inter and multi-disciplinarity, established by funding bodies, then

some kind of hypothetical futural structural fantasy, namely that there will one day be no disciplines to operate as constraints on thought and action, ought to be pursued, at least in outline.

This is not the same as the boundarilessness mentioned above, but rather a kind of post-disciplinary holism, something that would take into account the divisions of disciplines as well as overturning them. This would be a kind of radical openness, opposed to the problems of disciplinarily as such. As well as a practical acceptance of the content of transdisciplinary writing. Why must we always read as philosophers, scientists, artists, instead of as philosopher and scientists and artists all at once?

This raises the question of what it would mean to read in a transdisciplinary way, whether we would be reading a designated transdisciplinary texts or otherwise. This call for a transdisciplinary theory of reading is in keeping with the radical possibilities opened up by the core desires and demands from transdisciplinary studies as they currently stand. However, this attempt at outlining this new mode of reading should

not be understood as primarily destructive or deconstructive, insofar as it is not looking for the abolition of disciplinarity as such nor for codes and poles which subtend texts. But rather trying to think through the mode of reading that would operate in the situation albeit not without its periodic and literary qualities that Marx famously outlines in *The German Ideology*, such that as you all know in communist society where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates a general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another in tomorrow: to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. The division of labor that Marx identifies as separating the particular and the common interest, the fixity of social activity and the sphere of activity has significant overlap with the model of disciplinarity that dominates our contemporary life. This "consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us growing out

of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations" (Marx), maps on well to the restrictions and reductive constraints not only of academic work, but of existence in general.

A mode of reading that is not related to a particular discipline in advance, but breaks down the spheres of action, or perhaps in the speculative attempt at hand here, at least the spheres of thought, would be a notion of social reading, of reading as a collective practice. As practically absurd as this may sound, and I think the *Die Welt* advert is trying to demonstrate the practical absurdity of the idea of collective reading in some sense. Used as we are to conceiving reading as, to use Sartre's language—a wholly serial, atomized or even bourgeois activity, it is interesting to note, as Sartre does in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, of the perennial existence of book clubs at all levels of society. There is even at this point a non-revolutionized image of collective reading but I think it could be mobilized. I would quite like it if book clubs were armed. What would it mean to read as if from the standpoint of a communism to come? Is

transdisciplinarity in this sense a call for a kind of post-disciplinarity that would dialectically complicate the relationship between disciplines in such a way that their interlinked structural hierarchies and competitions would be overturned? The disciplinary divisions and inequalities of status that operate in the contemporary academy and in broader cultural and social life must in part I think be the critical object of any transdisciplinary project even if this way of thinking or reading ultimately focuses in the first place on philosophy above all as a spectre-like meta-discipline, despite the many historical and political attempts to displace it, and I think it's a real issue with the way philosophy functions as a kind of structural god (ha!) in the way in which people think about discipline particularly in the arts and humanities as if ultimately we must defer to the theories that philosophy produces even if the specific disciplines take them up in their own way. And I think that needs to be undermined as well.

Grace Harrison

UNARMED READING GROUPS

Reading groups, in their many forms, are a vital part of my experience of autonomous and self organized education. The simple but expansive act of coming together around a text and transforming an individual experience into a collective one, had me feeling its political resonance from early on.

The act of lifting words from the subvocalization of the private mind and offering to each other performative utterances, as a mode of reading reliant on collectivism and the exposed learning self has an agency beyond its quaint caricature. For me reading groups facilitate a unique attentiveness to the text and provide a catalyst for conversation. A point of departure for knowledge exchange, one in which you can have playful experimentation and negate academic adherence if you so choose. There are unique, reflexive, embodied aspects that each person brings to the table and a polyphonic majesty in the words read together, each having a melody of its own.

“Stop... Can we go back a bit, I’m not sure what is being said/ explained here?”

“Ok, where did you loose the thread?”

“Well I understood the bit about... but when it started to... I got a bit confused,”

“Yeah, it was a bit of a leap. But I read it as... trying to bringing the idea that... ”

“Umm, I see what you mean, but when it says... I just wonder if... ”

Often a discussion would follow a request for a halt in reading, but sometimes we would let the sentence just hang in the air. We read words, expressions and ideas which push the limits of our comprehension and expose us to a bold space of unknowing when we make that known to the room. We reclaim rights to complex philosophical texts, such as Emmanuel Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity*, which some wouldn’t dare to confront on their own. We choose to draw upon works from the margins of our hegemonic discourse, we read the writing of Nella Larsen’s *Passing*. We

trust in the unarmed space of learning that we have given ourselves over to and hold in that moment.

There isn't necessarily a spoken agreement about who is reading and when, anyone can just pick up the line when others drop out of speech. The single voice, audible in the room, mingles with the private auditory reassurance as the rest of us trace the sentence with our eyes and fingers. We would form a discordant cacophony were we to read aloud all at once. We often allow a centrality to the use of our voices, socially grounded, and performed through our exchange.

It is an invigorating pleasure to realize we are part of a history of people coming together in this way. Autodidactic mining communities established their own libraries and self-educated towards greater social and political participation during the industrial revolution, beyond their allocated professions. The history of people questioning how to read politically through and beyond a text, is exemplified in the continued reoccurrence of *Das Kapital* reading groups, a text many have turned to in the cyclical crises of capitalism, with the persistent belief in the possibilities of

reading ourselves out of our present situation. Nina Power referred to this at the Torque symposium, suggesting we read from the position of a communism to come, and accompanied this with a (only half-joking perhaps) call for mobilized and armed reading groups.

We seek also to be empowered by socialized knowledge. A group of friends come together over weeks to read the 'unreadable' *Finnegan's Wake* in the context of a gallery. Sat in a circle, facing inward. A group of strangers come together to read Jean Genet's explicitly political play, *The Screens* over a single day. The pace and density of this single sitting, produced no definitive full and clear comprehension, but a cognitive experience fitting with Genet's concept of "giving something light and shade". On both of these occasions there is an audience of sorts, visitors to the gallery passing through, catching a glimpse or a snippet for their own interpretation. But this is secondary to the act of reading out, and being read to at work in the group itself.

The context here creates a framework for the kind of commitment, often less possible within the private space of the home,

among friends and extended companions. In other reading groups we were facing the reality of committing to something week to week within the demands and intensity of daily life. “Who reads, what and how?” is an important political question that was at the core of the Torque symposium. To this, the reading group brings the notion of shared goals, that the ‘who’ is ‘us’, and a feeling that this ‘what’ is shared—a challenge, which is both nurtured, and nurturing.

Eleanor Rees

MARK-MAKING IN THE VIRTUAL

Matter is, fluid, morphic. Being is, liquid, is a realist statement which informs how I understand writing and reading. We read and write from within being alive. The two acts are then interwoven—stitches in one cloth.

Reading *is* writing as both are acts of interpretation. And what is interpretation? It is a shifting and rearrangement of space, a mark-making in the virtual. When we read ideas appear through association, are seen in space, are evoked and invoked, called up to the fluid realm of the virtual, vision, imagination. If this inner world is carved into as we might a cave wall, onto it we press our pigments or scratch out an image from a rock. If the virtual is a material we skim stones over surfaces and ripples form.

From these associations breed associations, looping back to produce further connections. The touch of the keyboard, how I sit, my breath, my nervous system settled at home or destabilized by changes in air pressure, the hail on the window pane, who I am missing

and who I have seen, all feed into loops of ideation—emerging abstractions I draw out; energy encoded into language forms in my mind's ear and eye. I read my own thoughts as I write, making judgements and following patterns I see forming through the process of writing. I read as a write. I shape and guide these ideas using the structure of syntax, which is a kind of governance, a legislator, and that which was in the world has become other, encoded in time awaiting another living body to read and interpret my reshaping of matter to continue the movement, the tag-game, the dance.

And so I become a conduit, a conductor. Non-linear dynamics spill energy back out into the world which firstly filled me with its presence. I read the material: the context into which the writing will be published, the grain of the rock into which I shape the ink, the flow of the water I try to channel into sand to shape the word and leave a mark.

The material also speaks to me. From our conversation we co-create, by looping and unfolding another capacity of matter. Together we make a boundary space where I am extended outside my brain, negotiating

obstacles and tricky terrain by reading the world around my sentience in all its languages, human and not.

And so I am immersed within this liquid being, in an ethics of relation, maintaining the systems through call and response, extension and return; dynamics over which I have little or no control. Yet I guide the transformation as best I can. And reading is part of these exchanges of energy, part of the continuous activity of being alive. I make marks within the virtual which in turn mark me, or I am the marks for a moment as I lean into the water face first. I am other. Other is 'I'. The system connects, energy is transformed and I am away again into the river, streaming and looping, reading and writing, reading and writing.

Tim Etchells

Q & A WITH MARK GREENWOOD

MG The *Broadcast/Looping* pieces are deceptively simple when encountered initially and I was interested in the sincere, emotional almost pure utterance that gradually emerged in opposition to the tone of the sentences spoken. The repetition of rhythms and resultant patterns, evoke a kind of mantra as the sounds of words and their slippery phonetic significations slowly inscribe a sacred space. However, the sentences read from the cue-cards emit a dark and somber tone. Is there a deliberate juxtaposition of physical repetition, gesture and tempo against the bleak statements that are voiced?

TE There are certainly plenty of somber texts in the constituency of those that make up the piece, but there are many absurd or light-hearted ones too, as well as phrases that you can't really place in terms of their emotional tone or the weight of their content. That kind of diversity and the balance is important to me, even allowing for the bias I probably have

towards troubled or problematic phrases! In the performance one quite fundamental approach I work through involves breaking any lock on the relation between the content of the texts and the different ways in which they might get read aloud. I work with the idea that any text can be said in a myriad of different ways, modes and tones, and a big part of the live playfulness in the piece is about letting different meanings emerge from differences in the way that things are said, as well as through the ways they appear in relation to the sequence of other phrases. I'm literally sounding the words out as a way of trying to find out what they might mean, exploring many contradictory versions and options.

The other big factor—beyond pure 'delivery' of the texts (as an actor might think of approaching them)—is that I look at the piece musically—as texture, rhythm and energy 'apart from' the content. That's a really important part of this work and again it operates in a kind of parallel, at times contradictory mode in relation to content. Fundamentally, it's this nexus of sometimes quite violent contradiction that really interests me.

BAD BED & BOARD ROOM MANNERS

WE'VE GOT / HAD A

WELVE GOT A

HAD A

A LOT OF CROSSED WIRES

FEW CROSSED WIRES

OCCULT POLITICS & EMPTY GESTURES

FACIST DICTATOR SIX LETTERS STARTING WITH H

SOAP OPERA MIRACLES

- WINE TURNED TO WATER

- BLOOD TURNED TO ICE

- FREE WIFI

we've had an

fair share
of crossed
wires

tri

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO VISITED @ 1065 50th ST

Among Madonna's entourage seems to be a lookalike for her daughter

AT THE TIME OF WRITING

Give up on your dreams

HOT TEENS RIDE FREE

TAKE YOUR TIME TAKE TIME
(YOU'RE) (YOUR)

I'M TAKING MY TIME
(YOU'RE) (YOUR)

ANY TIME BUT NOW & ANYWHERE BUT HERE

*BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS
I'LL ALREADY BE GONE*

The night belongs to the rebels.

THE ASSEMBLY OF A HUGE STRUCTURAL DEFICIT

New calculations concerning the accurate depth and other dimensions of hell

The materiality of your gestures and the uttered statements reminded me of a specific form of alienation, where desiring energy is trapped and regulated according to economic rules, our attention captured in the precariousness of found texts—where every fragment is somehow transformed into a critique of capital. Did the work proceed with a firm political commitment that influenced your selections and treatments of found materials?

You're pointing to a political dimension to the work, which is really important to me. In terms of how I'm working and thinking though, I tend to start less abstractly, from quite small rather concrete elements - from my fascination with particular language fragments or images. Politics appears in the manipulation or meeting of these—in that act of reading out which I mentioned already. At that point the work is less about any fragment I might have been drawn to and more about the network of relations that speaking them produces—the socially triangulated relation of performer/material/audience, the relation between different language fragments and of course the relation of any specific utterance

to the wider frame or system of language itself. Politics is in all those places and in others too, especially through the terms you evoke in your question, around the economy of limits, means and resources.

Andy Warhol once stated 'I want to be a machine'. Confirming the impassivity and in regard to process. Consumers are machine-like in their action, constantly processing and re-processing repetitive images and information in order to survive within socio-economic relationships. Do the *Broadcast/Looping* works describe a submission of the soul, in which animated, creative, linguistic, emotional corporeality is subsumed and incorporated by the production of value?

That's a pretty bleak reading! For me the work is about two things at once. There's definitely the aspect you're describing—this kind of emptying out of language through repetition—flattening it, taking it down to something machinic, something which removes the possibilities of readerly invention almost altogether. In that sense the work is quite aggressive, anti-lyrical. But, this emptying out goes hand in

NO NEED TO SUGAR COAT IT
DON'T FUCKING SUGAR COAT IT

SUFFOCATE IT

YO BABE LET ME KNOW IF I MISSED ANYTHING MAJOR WHEN I WAS DEAD

free wifi & over-priced everything

Live the lie until the lie becomes your life

Assume the worst has already happened.

Assume the thing you feared has already happened.

Hard Going - Heavy Going -- Heavy Weather

we had time on our hands

EMPTY WORDS

IT GOES TO SHOW

IT JUST GOES TO SHOW

A STORY ABOUT THE POOR

ENVAILED BY THE WEALTHY

That the night is only the earth not lit

SOMETHING TO LOSE SLEEP OVER

A message to yourself from the past, when you believed in different things

I Know You know They know We know

FRESH MISERY /
HOT FROM THE OVEN

kinds of loneliness

TALKING IN CIRCLES
MAKING ENDS MEET

hand with a new multiplication of possibilities. Meaning reappears and manifests itself, unexpectedly, and new semantic and emotional possibilities become possible. So there are these flickerings; moments when new possibilities emerge, and moments of flattening too. I feel you can't have one without the other; they're linked, bound up. I find both useful too. The creative emergence of new energy/reading/attention has an obvious appeal politically. But the emptying out is also just as interesting to me, perhaps even more so—radically, in that it brutalizes the language, subjecting it to the kind of forces that capital itself sets in motion. This act of disinterring language, reducing it to sound—it's confronting. It's a challenge to the kind of humanistic ways that we often think about language—there's something salutary about it for me in that sense.

The extended reiteration of fragments could describe a phenomenological concern around living and being in time. Within this flux, there is an incremental progression of sounds generating a poetics that is complex and heterogeneous. I'm reminded of Gertrude Stein's ideas around composition and the materiality

of words and phrases affected by repetition. Do the works seek to deliberately disrupt language and the act of reading by destabilizing the process of meaning-making?

Yes. I think that's exactly what I'm talking about. You can see there's a kind of dogged insistence on my part, around trying to keep multiple kinds and levels of meaning and tension alive in the work. I think that's very much my strategy in terms of unsettling language re delivery/reading/reception. In the sense that performing a text, or reading it, is most commonly understood as an act of committing to a specific interpretation (a reading, in both senses of the word). Whereas I rather relentlessly try to keep multiple contradictory readings in play as much as possible. I guess one thing I want out of this work in performance, is that people are confronted with the radical instability and strangeness of language—it's something that gets erased in the quotidian.

While some may dismiss the appropriation of found text and data collection as nihilistic and cold, there are moments of celebration and beauty discovered in the reception of your

She and her boyfriend both got tattoos. Egyptian, she thinks that symbol is, but it's not a hieroglyph. What does it mean? Truth she says. We liked truth and we liked Heaven. Now I think of it it, she adds, leaning in to speak from the front passenger seat of the taxi, it seems strange we chose Truth over Heaven. I ask are they still together? No, it was some years ago.

A cruel boss, it was rumoured that he punished people who were late to meetings with him by making them eat their watches. Common were the complaints of the local doctors called to the bedside of men who were trying with some difficulty to pass the indigestible remains of a large Rolex or whose throats were ravaged by the fragments of a crushed diamond encrusted, four time-zone Seiko.

A kid on the train is misbehaving and the mother threatens him with trouble if it continues. There'll be punishment the mother says, There'll be some punishment. And the kid immediately kicks into a long nagging question session: What is punishment? I don't know what punishment is. What is punishment? What does punishment mean?

The statistics we quoted were like something from a fairy tale.

the grim sight of bodies huddled together in the corridor,
and the limbs brought in wrapped in blankets.

A forgotten version of yourself.

reading. Violent, tragic and mundane aphorisms are reframed, offering a perspective on the *act of reading* that is surprisingly romantic and emotional. Is this emotional aspect a result of the writing process or a symptom of your authorial intent?

Actually I think that emotional energy you're describing comes from the performative. It's connected to embodiment. What you see in the performance is a person—someone thinking, speaking, breathing, moving and negotiating, speaking out, investigating the materials. For all that one might say about the machinic or the systematic or the random or the fragmentary or the anti humanistic in relation to the work, this fact of presence—a body, breath, voice, consciousness—is always powerful. It's not so much a pure torrent of language as it is a torrent of language passing through a person, from the lungs through the throat, past the tongue and out. The fact that you see me struggling—for breath, for the next phrase, for articulation, to make sense, to make contact, to go faster—is what makes it really. The language sticks to me. And I stick to the language. To my mind it's a dirty, 'hands

on' work, something very emotional at times, despite the formal constraints and limits that it is built through.

Going back to your question, and this idea of 'coldness' and 'nihilism', I suppose there's also a question of how one thinks of the human of course—it suits certain agendas to think of human beings as coherent, psychologically consistent, founded in particular kinds of narrative and logic. If you come at it that way then the fragmentary, temporary, random, mutable dimensions of a work like this might be threatening I guess! But to be frank, I don't see human beings and language in that coherent way in the first place—for me all speaking is anyway a kind of recycling, quoting, channeling of existing, found voices. You can't escape that. And from that perspective, the kind of assemblage of found texts, the loops, rewritings, remixings, recombining's etc. that you find in the performance are closer to how people actually think, and how they exist in language, than the sorts of carefully constructed self-knowing self-narrating figures that you get in realist literature.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

ANNA BARHAM

Born in the UK in 1974, Barham graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art, London, in 2001. With a practice that incorporates writing, video, drawing, sculpture and performance, Anna Barham's work interrogates language's endless and unruly potential through the bodily and technological operations that act upon it.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Founder, with Bruce Andrews, of the influential *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* journal, Charles Bernstein is the author or editor of over 50 books, most recently *Recalculating* (2013), *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions* (2011), and *All the Whiskey in Heaven: Selected Poems* (2010). He is currently Professor of English and Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania, co-editor, with Al Filreis, of PennSound; and editor of The Electronic Poetry Center. Poems by Charles Bernstein used with the permission of the author. "Thank You for Saying Thank You" is from *Girly Man* (University of Chicago Press, 2006). "Thank You for Saying Your Welcome" was first published in *PN Review* #221 (2015). "The 100 Most Frequently Used Words in My Way" was first published in *VEER* (2008). "Words Used Five Times In *Girly Man*" is published here for the first time.

TIM ETHELLS

Artist, performance maker and writer who has worked in a variety of contexts, notably in his role as artistic director of the performance ensemble *Forced Entertainment*, based in Sheffield and founded in 1984. Etchells's practice extends through writing and performance projects, neon and video works, through diverse collaborations. He is the author of several books, including a critical exploration of contemporary performance and theatre, a dream dictionary and a novel.

STEPHEN FORTUNE

Interactive media artist and writer. He is a member of the Open Systems Association and has previously worked with YoHa and Mozilla. Stephen constructs contraptions as kludged inversions of the epistemic objects operating within computational culture: with specific research interests in data, biotechnologies and grey media. He curates the *Wetware Ontologies* Tumblr and contributes to *Dazed & Confused*.

MARK GREENWOOD

Performance artist and writer. Mark's work brings together procedural writing elements with a densely allusive use of resonant objects and actions to explore the textual histories of working class heritage. He has performed internationally. He is a lecturer at Hope University, Liverpool.

GRACE HARRISON

Artist and social researcher who currently works in several collaborative projects across Liverpool, London and Leeds. With much cross over between these, there is a focus on discursive exchange, public educational platforms and the mapping of currents in creative and political discourse.

N. KATHERINE HAYLES

Teacher and writer on the relations of literature, science and technology in the 20th and 21st centuries. Her print book, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, was published by the University of Chicago Press in spring 2012. Her other books include *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, which won the Rene Wellek Prize for the Best Book in Literary Theory for 1998–99, and *Writing Machines*, which won the Suzanne Langer Award for Outstanding Scholarship. She is Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Program in Literature at Duke University, and Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of California, Los Angeles.

LIAM JONES

Writes on continental philosophy in general and new materialisms in particular. Liam received an MA from University of Liverpool where his dissertation was on the politics of Object-Oriented Ontology.

ESTHER LESLIE

Professor of Political Aesthetics at Birkbeck. Her books include *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant Garde* (Verso, 2002), *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (Reaktion, 2005) and *Derelicts: Thought Worms from the Wreckage* (Unkant, 2014). She has also published two books on Walter Benjamin.

ALEX LEFF

Reader in Cognitive Neurology and an Honorary Consultant Neurologist, whose clinical and academic interest lie in cognitive rehabilitation, especially in the field of acquired language disorders. Leff has developed two web-based rehabilitation tools that can be used by therapists and patients with hemianopia, and is joint leader of the neurotherapeutics group at the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience and a founder member of the Centre for Neuro-Rehabilitation, both at UCL.

CLAIRE POTTER

Artist and writer from Merseyside, currently based in Yorkshire. Her textual work has been distributed internationally both in print and online and she has performed at venues including the Whitechapel gallery, the Arnolfini gallery and the Free Word Centre. In 2014 Claire organized *Shady Dealings With Language*, an event series curated with guests in Leeds, London, Manchester and Edinburgh that explored the intersections of art writing and performance. Her first book, *Mental Furniture*, is published by VerySmallKitchen (2014). Poems here are an extract from a forthcoming title with Stranger Press, 2015.

NINA POWER

Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Roehampton and Tutor in Critical Writing in Art & Design at the Royal College of Art. She has written widely about European philosophy, politics and culture.

HANNAH PROCTOR

Writes about revolutionary psychologies, neuronal ideologies and communist brains. She is working on a PhD on Soviet psychology and neurology at Birkbeck College, University of London.

ELEANOR REES

Poet and frequent cross-disciplinary collaborator, Rees' pamphlet collection *Feeding Fire* (spout, 2001) received an Eric Gregory Award in 2002 and her first full length collection *Andraste's Hair* (salt, 2007) was short-listed for the Forward Prize for best First Collection and the Glen Dimplex New Writers Awards. Rees received an AHRC funded PhD from University of Exeter in the theory and practice of the local poet. Her new collection *Blood Child* is published in 2015 by Liverpool University Press.

ERICA SCOURTI

Born in Athens, Greece and now lives in London. Her work in video, performance, online and with text has been shown recently at Hayward Project Space, The Photographers' Gallery, and Transmediale. She has presented performances and talks at the ICA, Irish Museum of Modern Art, DRAF and the Southbank Centre.

MARK SIMMONDS

Designer based in Liverpool. A former participant of Dutch Masters programme Werkplaats Typografie, he recently set up *Alma Matters* to publish speculative books and writing on art, design, music and the cosmos. In the works is a chapbook on the *Kossov Sisters* (made in collaboration with Italian artist Stefano Faoro), and the first in a series of publications by North Yorkshire outsider artist William Campbell.

GARRETT STEWART

James O. Freedman Professor of Letters in the Department of English at the University of Iowa and the author of numerous books on fiction and film—pursuing a methodology of close-grained verbal or visual analysis—in books on language in Dickens, the death scene in British fiction, the phonetic undertow of literary writing from Shakespeare to Woolf, and the “Dear Reader” address of Victorian novels. His books include: *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext*, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, and *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art*.

JAMES WILKES

Poet, writer, performer and researcher who has collaborated widely with scientists, artists and musicians. He is Associate Director of Hubbub, a multidisciplinary group of researchers and practitioners investigating the dynamics of rest, noise, tumult, activity and work, as they operate in mental health, neuroscience, the arts and the everyday.

SOENKE ZEHLE

German media theorist, lecturer in media theory / netculture at Academy of Fine Arts Saar, Saarbruecken, Germany, co-founder and managing director of the academy's xm:lab—Experimental Media Lab.

EDITOR BIOGRAPHIES

NATHAN JONES

Poet, artist and curator. Jones completed his MPhil in the philosophies of language and noise at Brunel in March 2013, and is currently working towards a PhD in 'Glitch Poetics' at Royal Holloway, where he received a Reid Cross Disciplinary Scholarship. Nathan's book-length poem *Noah's Ark* was published in 2010 by Henningham Family Press, and his work has been published in internationally distributed journals such as *Performance Research Journal*. He has also curated language and new media arts at Liverpool Biennials 2008–14, and innumerable independent art spaces. Along with his role at Torque with Sam Skinner, he directs Liverpool-based art organisation Mercy.

SAM SKINNER

Artist and producer with a BA and MA in art history, who moves between art and other fields, combining a passion for research, with more engaged practice, including murals, workshops, set design, animation, sign writing, posters, exhibitions, ebooks and essays. Skinner regularly collaborates with others across art, design, film and performance projects. He contributed an essay and worked as a researcher on Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin's *War Primer 2* project which won the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize, and art directed Jamie T's *Zombie* video which won best video at the NME music awards 2015.

COLOPHON

Torque #2: The Act of Reading

Edited by Nathan Jones & Sam Skinner

Produced as part of *Torque#2 The Act of Reading 2015*—comprizing a symposium at FACT, a performance event at Static Gallery, a weekend booksprint at Tate Liverpool, and an exhibition at Furtherfield Gallery, London.

Published by Torque Editions,
Liverpool/London, 2015

Designed by Mark Simmonds

Printed by CPI

ISBN 978-0-9932487-0-2

Copyright for all contributions remains
with the authors.

TORQUE EDITIONS
torquetorque.tumblr.com

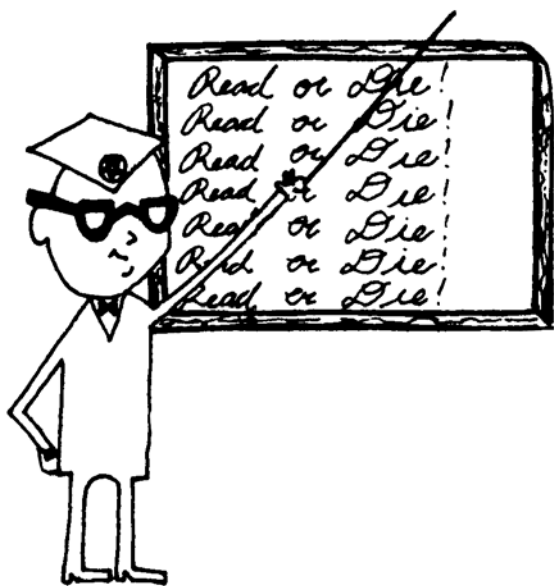
Overleaf: Illustration by Jeffrey A. VanderClute,
from *Metal Meltdown* Issue 1, April 1987

Supported by an Arts Council England
Grants for the Arts.



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Not only is more writing, and more reading of that writing, being done now, and by more people than at any other time in history, there seem to be more and more different kinds of thing that reading can be, and more and more different kinds of entity, organic and technological, that are engaged in acts of reading. Reading inquisitively over each others' shoulders, the poems, meditations, analyzes and experiments in this volume respond with audacity and adventure to the challenge of characterizing what reading, this most familiar yet renewedly strange occupation, has been and may yet become.

*Steven Connor, Professor of English,
University of Cambridge*

**Anna Barham, Charles Bernstein,
Tim Etchells, Stephen Fortune,
Grace Harrison, Mark Greenwood,
N. Katherine Hayles, Liam Jones,
Nathan Jones, Alex Leff, Esther
Leslie, Claire Potter, Nina Power,
Hannah Proctor, Eleanor Rees,
Erica Scourti, Sam Skinner,
Garrett Stewart, James Wilkes
and Soenke Zehle.**