README

A mesostic is a poem (or other typography) were a vertical phrase intersects lines of horizontal text. The practice was used by John Cage. These were made by a machine choosing words from the article.

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    we algorith**M**s
          progr**A**mmed
      to mimi**C** and manage
             t**H**e user
             **I**s
         a ce**N**tral
     part of th**E**
             f**R**om
           th**E**
           th**A**t
  come performe**D**
             **I**s

        (joh**N** cayley
  daniel howe co**G**nitive
     tudies fro**M**
            re**A**ding)

       (from **C**ayley and
          **H**owe as
        ne**I**ghbourhood
         a**N**d
       pag**E**
        fo**R**
        sp**E**cific
          **A**lgorithmic rules.

    neighbourhoo**D**,
        grammat**I**cal
            a**N**d structural
    the reader a**G**ents


             **I**f this
         tra**N**sform
            **T**his

         com**E**
            **R**ead as a body. the
       body **F**rom the
           m**A**ss
     stereotypi**C**al and

         rol**E**
            **I**s
           o**N** to the image
      of bo**D**y;

       its s**U**bjectivity
           i**S**
        grea**T**ly
       measu**R**ed,
  calculated wa**Y**s.
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MACHINE NETWORK READING

Christian Soren

Text production has always been a central part of the development of the World Wide Web. Hypertext has become a complex conglomerate of references and citations that are spun together by a machinery of reading and writing. A central factor in the text machinery is Google. The scale and variety of Google's activities signify how a control of production, distribution and consumption of text has become a new culture industry.

This double-sided reading – where machines read how humans read – is not new. Interaction has always conditioned how computers register and reacts to users' behaviour at the interface (this is what cybernetics is all about), but it has spread and been increasingly intensified with the interface industry and "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff). We increasingly read texts that are re-written by algorithms programmed to mimic and manage our reading. Or, put differently, the texts we read integrate a large body of text, and the scripts that control this integration are (in more or less sophisticated ways) based on scripts that monitor reading behaviours. The conditions of reading are in this way significantly reconfigured by a new interface industry.

What deep tendency lies within this new mode of production? Here are two brief examples.

The Readers Project created by John Cayley and Daniel Howe consists of a series of on-going experiments, installations, performances that relate to reading. These experiments are based on literary software, or programmed readers, that read texts, rewrite the texts, and present them to human readers; thereby making their reading visible and readable for the human reader. In other words, their literary interfaces visualize the programmed readers' reading. Their reading patterns are inspired by cognitive studies of human reading, and range from something close to standard Western human reading (from left to right/top to bottom in the Simple Readers) to reading across what Cayley and Howe define as the typographic neighbourhood and page (Perigram Reader) to readers looking for specific letters in order to form words (Mesostic Reader) and readers following the grammatical structure of the text and finding alternatives words to fit this (Grammatical Lookahead Reader). Consequently, the different vectors of reading create routes through the text based on algorithmic rules, typographic neighbourhood, grammatical and semantic structures.

In some of the interfaces the human readers can only read the texts through the programmed readers' reading and re-writing of the texts; in others, the programmed readers' routes are highlighted and obviously influence the human reading. The human readers thereby not only become conscious of their own reading process (including the grammars, habits and materials governing it), but also of the algorithmic readers' grammars and (re-)writing of the text. The human reader ultimately meta-reads (Portela) and realises that his/her reading is enmeshed in a networked cybertext where reading is tracked and used to generate writing in an endless data loop that we also know from social media, but rarely are able to read directly.

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Through the production of reading, the work reflects how passive reading becomes an active form of rewriting. In the interface industry, reading (and consuming, more generally) becomes a production, but in The Readers Project the human reader also experiences how the text becomes controlled, and how this challenges his/her reading. The Readers Project lets us read how our reading becomes productive as re-writing and how this production becomes part of the text and textual business of big software companies such as Google. The reader is able to see, explore and read the bureaucratisation and instrumentalisation of reading. The instrumentalisation of reading also offers new ways of writing. For instance, Erica Scourti explores how users may express themselves re-writing the interface. With a feminist perspective, she focuses on the body and the ways it becomes profiled, programmed and gendered through for example Google and smartphones. In her video work Body Scan she uses the app CamFind to photograph parts of her body with an iPhone and search for similar images on the World Wide Web. The video work displays the photographed images and the images returned from the search. In the background Scourti reads from the search results:

"Identifying human stomach. A hollow muscular organ. Forms gastric acid. Is it cancer? And, how to survive another human."

Scourti's body appears overly intimate (exposed and photographed naked at close range); and yet, at the same time her voice is overly distanced to the object. In this way she demonstrates how the body is read, profiled and interpreted as a data and a commercial entity – or, more generally, how the interface has become part of the user's body; how the body is part of a larger sensorium that is at once human and nonhuman, representational and computational.

The video displays a strange mixture of her body, the way she is read and profiled, and all the cultural prejudices and commercial models she is subjected to. It thereby demonstrates, how prejudices, gender stereotypes and commercial biases are projected back to her (and everybody) even through intimate, bodily interaction. However, it does no longer seem to matter whether Google manages to profile the body successfully. In this way, Scourti exemplifies a body that not only comes into existence by subjecting itself to a consumer logic that objectifies it, but also a body that comes into existence by allowing itself to be read as a signal and be part of an interface industry's textual machinery. To come into existence, the user does not need and desire to become a particular consumerist body (female, male, etc.), but to be read as a body. The body of the interface industry is therefore significantly different from the mass media body (that is stereotypical and inflicted with sameness). The neo-liberal body of Google is less dependent on replying to the image of a consuming body; instead, its subjectivity is greatly dependent on the body's readability: that it can be measured, calculated and assessed in a million different ways.

Cayley, John, and Daniel C. Howe. "The Readers Project." http://thereadersproject.org/. Howe, Daniel C., and John Cayley. "The Readers Project: Procedural Agents and Literary Vectors." Leonardo 44, no. 4 (2011): 317-24. Portela, Manuel. Scripting Reading Motions : The Codex and the Computer as Self-Reflexive Machines. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2013. Scourti, Erica, Body Scan, https://vimeo.com/111503640, 2014. Zuboff, Shoshana. "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization." Journal of Information Technology no. 30 (2015): 75-89.