

SPEED READING AND LIMINAL TYPE: ABSORBING CONTENT

Sam Skinner and Nathan Jones

This text by Sam Skinner and Nathan Jones (torquetorque.net) describes and explores the implications of speed readers, and their intermixture with graphically reduced type faces. It is presented here in a form intended to evoke, and perhaps remediate, the speed reader form.



A 2014 Honda advert used speed reading to invoke the relation between our ability to "push harder" and evolve our reading ability, and Honda's innovative car-making. The advert was banned after only a short showing, because it is deamed irresponsible for a company to make "speed" the central theme of a car advert.

Speed reading applications isolate words from bodies of text, and display them sequentially, one after the other, often with the middle letter highlighted to retain the focus of the eye in this specific area. Rapid Serial Visual Presentation (RSVP) of this order can increase reading speed from 100 to 1000 words per minute. It does this in part by suppressing the need for the visual system to perform eye-saccades. In *normal* reading, when reading a word among many others your eye is scanning ahead for words within your parafoveal vision, and back again. This saccadic twitching of the eye is echoed by the subvocal twitching of the throat.

These physical components of reading might be considered wasteful, and furthermore present a number of obstacles to like *pure* reading. For example, many reading disorders are associated with a failure to perform efficient eye-saccades, rather than any issue with character recognition or interpretation. This poses the question : Although the modern brain has been trained into a concentration of singular focus, the eyes themselves retain an integral to archaic distraction? Speed reading apps like Spritz and Spreader describe the process of your scanning back and forth across a page itself as "disorderly" or "unnatural".

So increased speed of reading is only book with one of the word possibilities each afforded by then perhaps Commercial it might evaporate. Instead, here others every like space it, is displaced by a carriage return. But of it's evocative position approximation. Right? No? You're reading down, dropping, guided to smooth the over plumb Spritz of structural rules governing the composition of clauses, phrases, and words in the natural language to (though you could read in new directions, either lines.) With RSVP, not moving you eyes go down into the read. depth of the screen. And longer a move a repetition eyes in deeper ways." deeper A new would simply be then. As a pause Colin Schultz in the action of the transformation smithsonian.com blog, one "the word to process feels the less next. Deeper like remaining and for more three frames, absorbing as the the heart beat of the text stops.

Speed (reading), incidentally, can be slow and fast. Speed merely refers to a replacement of the spacial dimension with a temporal one. As with the difference between the billboard and the receipt, speed arrives with a huge amount of latitude. Stationary and blurred words mark the extremes of this dimension. As clauses, well as raising interesting conceptual questions, the speed reader asks new things of our bodies and minds. It can push against and cut across our physical and cognitive capabilities, amplifying some physical responses, such as blink reflexes and iris contractions, over others, such as subvocalisations. The same can be said of the cognitive. How does rhythm, frequency, enter into the semiotic regime now? What is reading-watching? Is this text happening to us, rather than us happening to there seems

Liminal Type The typeface (pictured) Skinner designed for a speed reader accentuates areas where contours intersect. It engages with the notion of text's evaporation. Perhaps its relative lack of materiality compared to these letters here, might make it easier to absorb or for it to absorb us. The liminal typeface is both easier and more difficult to read. It is influenced by the work of Mark Changizi which describes how all human visual signs, from letters to icons and logos to maps and stone walls, possess a similar signature in their configuration distribution. This suggests there are underlying principles governing their shapes. He provides an ecological hypothesis : that visual signs have been culturally selected to match the kinds of conglomerations of contours found in natural scenes. Perhaps because that is what we have evolved to be good at visually processing skills developed for orientating ourselves through landscapes or divining fruitful trees, for example.

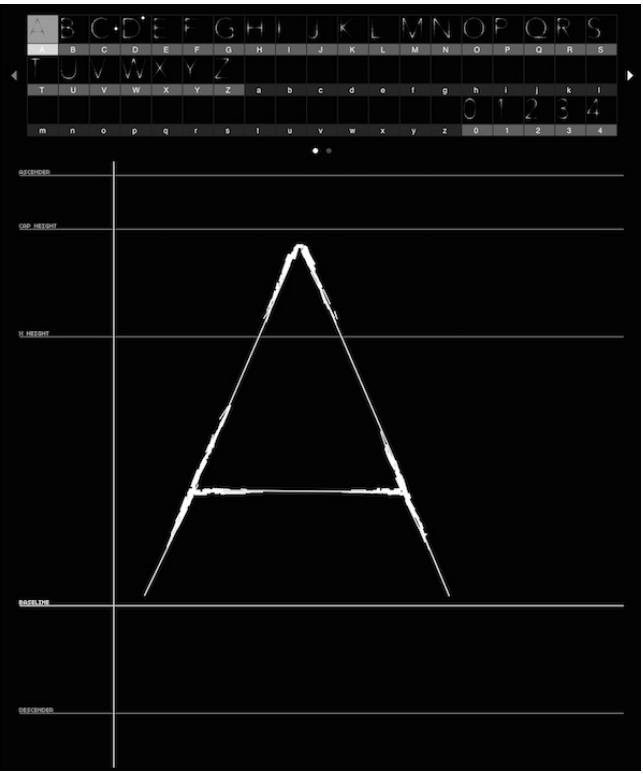
The neuronal recycling hypothesis developed by Stanislas Dehaene, similarly implies that our brain architecture constrains the way we read with reference to a more "natural" or fundamental encounters with shapes. Dehaene argues that our cortex did not specifically evolve for writing, rather, writing evolved to fit the evolution of the cortex and be easily learnable by the brain. A massive selection process, where over time, the calligraphers, writers, designers developed evermore efficient notations that fitted the organization of our brains.

So words look like they do because of nature traversing and born between external landscapes and internal networks. This is a folding into techniques, is there a hard-fork literature, a hard fork which we find deeply enticing, particularly in relation to the notion of textual evolution embodied and vaporised in speed reading. Reducing the conglomeration of its fundamental core, the Torque liminal typeface accentuates only areas where lines intersect. It is part of a tradition of typefaces in which the marks are reduced to their bare-life, least-lines, finest, lightest form. Hanging in the balance between non consciousness and consciousness, the liminality of the type evokes a forest at night, just as the speed reader interface can invoke vertigo, nightmares or panic.

We finish this project precipice with questions. If this is (more than ever) a post-human time, and literature is co-evolving with the folding into techniques, is there a hard-fork literature, a hard fork which we find deeply enticing, particularly in relation to the notion of textual evolution embodied and vaporised in speed reading? One perhaps that somehow replicates the evolution of language orality, through the shifting of visual field of a landscape? Is speed reader glitch at which we dissolve back into landscape as reading-beings? Or a speed reading be used in such a way that it accentuates the fundamentally humane, suffering, subvocal and involved physiology of reading? Can underexplored potencies in temporal text be type deployed to re-engage the throat, the eye, the hand, the empathic connective tissue-echo between reader and writer?

Do the surprising conceptions of legibility and readability within speed reading and liminal type afford new possibilities for content, typography and the physical-cognitive relation in reading? Where do the lower limits of legibility lie, the need for speed? The withering of graphical marks? Or vice versa, the slowness of horizontal reading, the heaviness of type? In a sense are we, with the horizontal page, already at the furthest degree of "unnatural" reading? Are our abilities to absorb information from conglomerations of lines already suppressed into their most contorted form, waiting to spring back to archaic, unfocussed, fundamental efficiencies? What do machinic systems of computation and display enable, awake, replace, or stupefy, and how in turn does this affect our reading of and with the world?

Finally, now machines are learning to read, will we read to or through or with them?



Some stills from Skinner's liminal Torque typeface, ver 1.

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