

SPEED READING AND LIMINAL TYPE: ABSORBING CONTENT

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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
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,
do
the
eyes
themselves
retain
an
integral
archaic
distraction?
Speed
reading
apps
like
Spritz
and
Spreader
describe
the
process
of
scanning
back
and
forth
across
a
page
itself
as
"disorderly"
or
"unnatural".

So
increased
speed
of
reading
is
only
one
of
the
possibilities
afforded
by
RSVP.
Commercial
apps
like
Spritz
and
others
like
it,
appropriate
and
redirect
the
science
of
optimal
viewing
position
toward
fluent,
fluid,
immaterial
experience
of
text,
claiming
it
might
evaporate.
Instead,
here
every
space
is
replaced
by
a
carriage
return.
But
it's
an
evocative
approximation.
No?
You're
new
reading
down,
down,
down,
dropping,
guided
by
the
plumb
line
of
structural
rules
governing
the
composition
of
clauses,
phrases,
and
words
in
natural
language
(though
you
could
read
in
other
directions,
along
other
lines.)
With
RSVP,
you
go
down
into
the
temporal
depth
of
the
screen.
And
a
repetition
deeper
deeper
deeper
would
simply
be
a
pause
in
the
us,
rather
than
us
happening
to
it?

Within
the
format
of
this
publication
we
cannot
show
one
of
the
speed
reading,
and
the
text
here
is
far
from
its
vaporous
form.
Perhaps
it
is
boiling
though.
If
it
were
a
flick
book
with
one
word
on
each
page
then
perhaps
it
might
evaporate.
Instead,
here
every
space
is
replaced
by
a
carriage
return.
But
it's
an
evocative
approximation.
No?
You're
new
reading
down,
down,
down,
dropping,
guided
by
the
plumb
line
of
structural
rules
governing
the
composition
of
clauses,
phrases,
and
words
in
natural
language
(though
you
could
read
in
other
directions,
along
other
lines.)
With
RSVP,
you
go
down
into
the
temporal
depth
of
the
screen.
And
a
repetition
deeper
deeper
deeper
would
simply
be
a
pause
in
the
us,
rather
than
us
happening
to
it?

Speed
(reading),
incidentally,
can
be
an
urge
to
politicize
these
questions,
this
new
medium.
Are
speed
readers
a
symptom
of
semicapitalism,
for
example?
Perhaps
only
if
you
read
too
fast,
or
do
not
use
your
new-found
spare
time
to
sufficiently
free
your
mind?
Perhaps
also
they
are
a
cure
for
a
disorder
invoked
by
semicapital
machinations?
A
chronic
pharmakon?
We
would
like
to
form
a
theory
and
practice
with
speed
readers
that
is
resistant
to
narratives
of
continual
accelerations
and
efficiency,
even
as
they
appear
to
be
a
metonym
for
this
very
trajectory
in
the
contemporary
environment.

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,
our
cortex
did
not
find
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
houses,
icons
and
logos
to
maps
and
dry
stone
walls,
possess
a
similar
signature
in
their
configuration
distribution.
This
suggests
underlying
principles
governing
their
shapes.
He
provides
an
ecological
hypothesis :
that
the
visual
signs
have
been
culturally
selected
to
match
the
kinds
of
conglomeration
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.

There
seems
to
be
an
urge
to
politicize
these
questions,
this
new
medium.
Are
speed
readers
a
symptom
of
semicapitalism,
for
example?
Perhaps
only
if
you
read
too
fast,
or
do
not
use
your
new-found
spare
time
to
sufficiently
free
your
mind?
Perhaps
also
they
are
a
cure
for
a
disorder
invoked
by
semicapital
machinations?
A
chronic
pharmakon?
We
would
like
to
form
a
theory
and
practice
with
speed
readers
that
is
resistant
to
narratives
of
continual
accelerations
and
efficiency,
even
as
they
appear
to
be
a
metonym
for
this
very
trajectory
in
the
contemporary
environment.

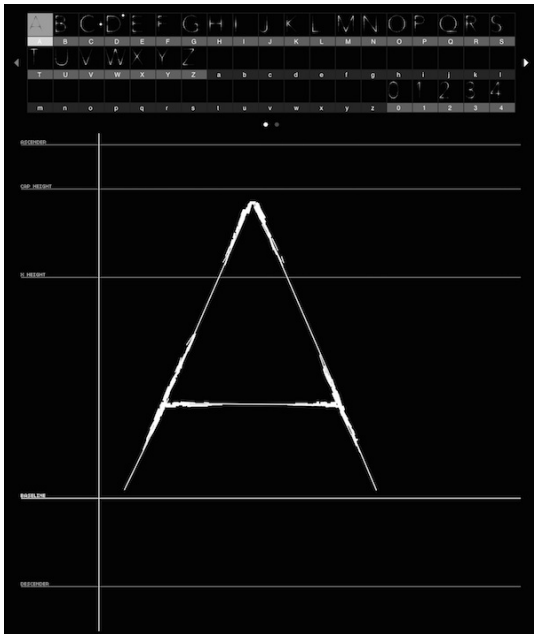
The
neural
recycling
hypothesis
developed
by
Stanislas
Dehaene,
similarly
implies
that
our
brain
architecture
constrains
the
way
we
read
with
reference
to
more
"natural"
or
fundamental
encounters
with
shapes.
Dehaene
argues
that
our
cortex
did
not
find
it
easier
to
absorb
specifically
evolve
for
writing,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

So
words
look
the
way
they
do
because
of
the
nature
traversing
and
born
between
external
landscapes
and
internal
networks.
This
is
a
reading
of
the
brain
itself
as
a
renewable
materialism,
which
we
find
deeply
enticing,
particularly
relation
to
the
notion
of
textual
evolution
embodied
and
vaporised
in
speed
reading.
Reducing
the
conglomeration
to
its
fundamental
core,
the
Torque
liminal
typeface
accentuates
only
the
areas
where
visual
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
do
If
this
is
(more
than
ever)
a
post-human
time,
and
literature
is
co-evolving
with
the
folding
into
technics,
is
there
a
hard-fork
literature,
a
hard
fork
humanity
at
the
point
of
speed
readers?
One
perhaps
that
somewhat
replicates
the
temporal
aspects
of
language
orality,
through
the
shifting
visual
field
of
a
landscape?
Is
the
speed
reader
glitch
at
which
we
dissolve
back
into
landscape
as
reading-beings?
Can
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?

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
a
the
lower
limits
of
legibility
lie,
the
need
for
speed?
The
withering
of
graphical
marks?
Or
replicates
the
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.

