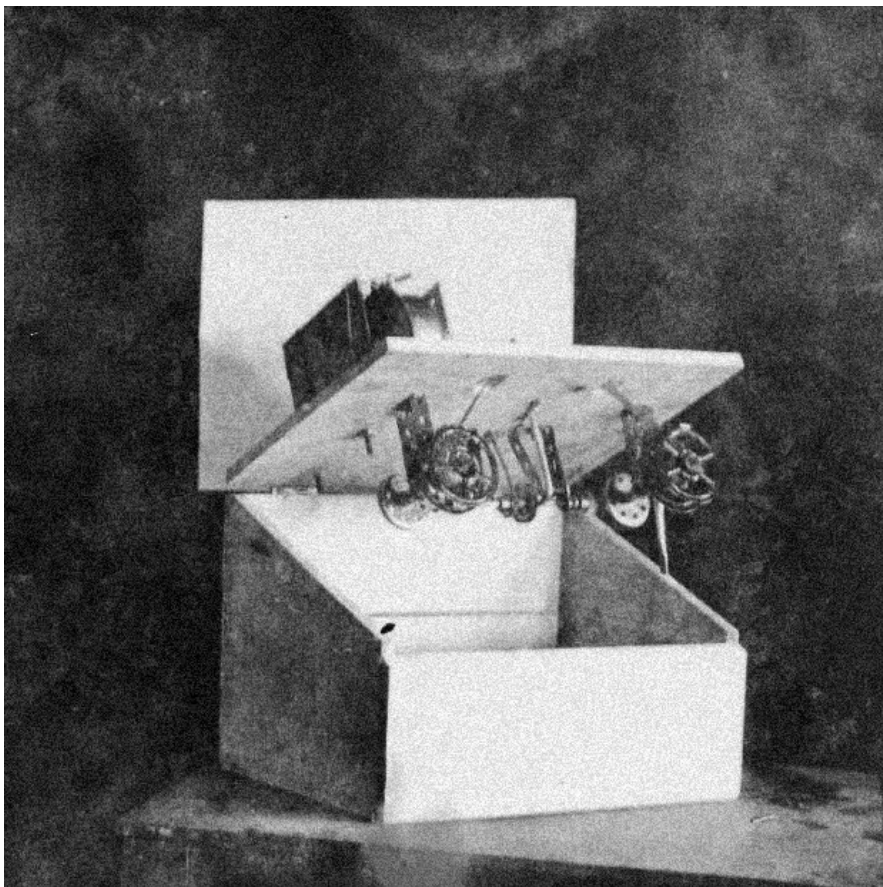


ORATION ON RHYTHM

CYCLE FOUR: MUSIC FOR READING

Samuel Brzeski





*The reader is the gate that has to open
to let the meaning through.*

Kae Tempest



Considering attention
as inherently rhythmic,
whilst taking into account
that the history of attention
can be seen in terms
of the history of reading,
can reading, then, be experienced
as a rhythmic event?

Reading is an act
in which a retreat,
(or an escape)
from the world
and its surroundings
is fully acceptable.

Reading is an opening
between writer and reader,
a vectoral communication flow
usually experienced alone
in a meditative or contemplative state.

*Reading has inhabited the scenes of solitude: the attic, the beach, the commuter
train, scenes whose profound loneliness arises only because of their proximity to a
tumultuous life which remains outside their peripheries.*

Susan Stewart

Reading is a holding of attention
on the peripheries of a tumultuous life,
a step out of the fast flowing current —
an active withdrawal,
an act of self care.

Acts of reading can be
experienced as rhythmic
in terms of flow and environment,
in terms of speed and progression,
in terms of a stepping-out-of,
or a stepping-in-to,
a different sphere of composition
and a different rate of temporal flux.

The environment that sets

the conditions for the reading
is heavily influenced by
the auditory landscape,
which brings its own
rhythms and distractions
that can add to (or take from)
the conditions of concentration
that inform and affect
the experience of reading.

Fluctuating speeds of reading
can be set by atmospheric conditions
and experiential controls —
undulating and pulsating
in an overall composition
of rhythmic attention.



Books ruined my life, and I love them.

Anne Boyer



Whenever we visually explore an environment,
we continually make rapid eye movements
called saccades that scan the field of vision.
Between each saccade, our eyes remain still
for around 200–300 milliseconds,
with this pause being known as a fixation.

When reading, the average saccade fixation area
is a 7–9 letter space (dependent upon the size of the text).
For English readers, the direction of reading
doesn't purely follow from left-to-right,
but also involves right-to-left saccades
for approximately 20% of the time.
In trying to translate and comprehend unknown words,
the eye scans periphery information for clues in context:
syntactic ambiguity,
syntactic complexity,
and syntactic violations,
have been shown to influence
the eye movement patterns
during sentence comprehension,
with pause and review given
to address inconsistencies in text
and to comprehend ironic statements.
Words that typically do not receive a fixation are short,

high-frequency function words,
such as articles and prepositions.
Fixation durations reliably reflect
the underlying mental processes
that are ongoing during the act of reading.

This wobbling, billowing, flex and flow of reading
is an active, engaged, rhythmic process —
the eyes quiver and palpitate across the page,
thrumming and vibrating in a hammer pulse,
moving across and around words, gleaning
information and searching for comprehension.
Each saccade is a note on the beat of the rhythm
of the reading experience, fluctuating in speed and duration;
a speed that is dependent upon the emotional
and educational conditions of the reader
and the comprehensive make-up of the text.



*I know words can do anything, become anything, all I hold out for is more and better
reading of the words we've got ...*

Bob Brown

In a word — — Oh, my word.



Bob Brown saw books
as antiquated word containers.
He felt that reading should become
*more optical, more eye-teasing, more eye-tasty,
to give the word its due and tune-in on the age.*

In 1930, Bob predicted that the printed book
was bound for obsolescence.
He planned for a machine that would allow
one to read books (or any text) extremely fast
and in a hyper-abbreviated form.
*Reading will have to be done by machine;
microscopic type on a movable tape
running beneath a slot equipped
with a magnifying glass and brought up to
life size before the reader's birdlike eye,
saving white space, making words more moving.*

Bob Brown

He called these abbreviated texts,
with em-dashes between words, *The Readies*,
and envisioned sending these condensed texts

for wider distribution through wireless networks.
Bob's reading machine created a need for new words
to work with the speed of the machine —
words which he called *smashum* words
like *nowtime* and *machinewise*.
At the same time, conjunctions,
articles, prefixes, quotations,
grammatical marks, and other *bulky residue*
were eschewed from the script.
The texts themselves are held together by
the *hermaphroditic hypodermic hyphen*,
replacing the spaces in between words
and creating texts that flow together
with a frenetic frequency:

—Myself—I—see—motherfather—newscope—Optical—Writers—running—
—round—newhorizon—rims—rhythmically—Eye—Writers—writing—endless—
—lines—for—reading—machines—more—optical—mental—more—colorful—
—readable—than—books—simple—foolproofReadie—Machine—conveying—
—breathless—type—to—eager—eyereaders—tickling—Inner—ears—dumping—
—Inner—ear—Eyefuls—of—wriggling—writer—right—before—receptive—
—ocular—brain—portals—bringing—closer—hugging—readerwriter—now—
—there—is—more—mental—necking—radioactivity—television—readievision—
—going—on—more—moving—reading—more—moving—more—more—

Bob Brown

Bob saw the *smashum hypodermic hyphen style*
as an emancipation from traditional experiences of reading —
the reader is rid at last of the cumbersome book,
the inconvenience of holding its bulk,
turning its pages, keeping them clean,
jigging his weary eyes back and forth
in the awkward pursuit of words .

Using Bob's method,
a dozen books can be skimmed through
in an afternoon without soiling the fingers,
cutting a page or losing a dust wrapper.

It is unclear whether Bob's machine
ever actually functioned,
but multiple modernist authors,
including Gertrude Stein,
William Carlos Williams,
and Ezra Pound,
endorsed the project
and submitted reworked texts
for the machine.

What *The Readies* did achieve is a
suggestion for a shift towards
a different way to comprehend texts —
a tempo deviation that mutates

the rhythm of comprehension,
through the rapid scanning of information:
a sort of force-feeding,
where words become
graphical flow.

Bob Brown's work is an ancestor
of the shorthand languages emerging
around new media technologies,
of speed reading disciplines and applications
and of neoliberal narratives
of productivity and intensity in work drive.



*reading in time
across digital lines
when words are leaving
banned from use
sense outside
of meanings meant
skint
i mean broke*

Liz Rhodes



Searching various app stores
for speed-reading applications
results in a long list
that sounds off like Santa's reindeer:
 come Spritz and Spreeder!
and Reasy and Reedy!
 and Spray and Gritz!
and Accelerator and Spreedread!
 and Focus and Balto!
and Outread and ReadEye!
 and ReadMe and Spritz-it!

Although shunning
the shortening and
hyphenation of words,
as proposed by Bob,
these applications still
fire texts at the reader
one word at a time
in quick succession
and varying speeds
of words per minute (wpm).

If you're like most people, you have a lot of books you want to read, training you need to complete, news you need to "stay on top of". In today's society, we're confronted with information overload. There are so many things we wish we could read and remember. At Spreeder, we've worked with the world's leading experts to make reading faster, easier, and more enjoyable. With Spreeder you can take control of information overload, save time, and be more productive in life.

eReflect, the team behind Spreeder, claim that by spending just two weeks Spreeding for fove to ten minutes a day, users of the application will be able to read up to three times faster than before.

As advertised on their website, this leads to:

- powering through
- more time
- more successful
- more productive
- being enlightened
- less effort
- becoming smarter
- save time
- better comprehension
- save massive time

The Spreeder developers also claim that use of the app will remove some so-called bad reading habits such as:

- subvocalization* (saying the words in your head)
- regression* (unnecessarily stopping and re-reading)
- limited fixation* (reading only a single word at a time)
- and *unnecessarily losing your place*.

In a logic of competition and completionism users are encouraged to earn reading points, tracking developments in reading progression on their personal dashboard, containing detailed reports on time spent reading with trophies awarded when milestones are met.

The rate of reading can be set up to a ridiculous maximum of 5000 wpm. The texts are completely unreadable at this speed, as the words themselves become spectral hauntings, blurred echoes, with only hints of form appearing. All rhythm of reading dissolves into a ceaseless flow: a drosscape of instantaneous refresh, moving faster than the eye can comprehend, barely alluding towards any form of comprehensible narrative.

At the more modest speed of around 300-400 wpm

the texts are somewhat readable and digestible.
However, after a while, a growing sense
of latent panic and increasing unease arises.
As a reader I feel rushed and pushed beyond my limits;
the enforced regular rhythm of refresh allowing for no fluctuation
other than the slight pause given alongside punctuation marks,
denying any flux in attention or moment for reflection or rumination.
The words bear no relation to one another in this force-fed manner,
and thus no additional contextual information can be gleaned.
This leaves no space for nuance and suggestion,
no space for ironic interpretation,
no space for a poetic resonance.

A clicking sound can also be toggled on and off
as the words refresh on the page of the screen,
setting a rhythmic intonation and providing
an auditory cue for the reader
to adapt their attention.
Although this semi-musical setting of a pacemaker attempts
to aid in the focusing of the faculties of concentration,
the felt effect (in me at least)
is a renewed anxiety in the awareness
of the ceaseless passage of linear time.



*Reading and listening are secret empty spaces out of which nothing can be derived
other than the relationships, conversations and connections that they host. They meet
life.*

Daniela Cascella



In the 1970s, Georgi Lozanov
devised the educational practice
of Suggestopedia which was based
on his studies of Suggestology:
the power of suggestion.

Suggestopedia formulates conditions
in which the mind of the receiver
can enter into a relaxed state,
thus more open to the influence of suggestion.
Lozanov holds that a relaxed (but focused) state
is the optimum state for learning,
establishing an atmosphere for receptive minds
by increasing alpha wave activity in the brain,
creating conditions for the holding of a relaxed
(but focused) attention within the students.

The original form of Suggestopedia presented by Lozanov was used in the learning of languages and consisted of the use of extended dialogues, often several pages in length, accompanied by vocabulary lists and observations on grammatical points. These dialogues would be read aloud to the students to the accompaniment of music.

The most formal of these readings, known as the *concert reading*, would typically employ a memorable piece of classical music that had striking dramatic elements, common choices including Beethoven or Brahms. The music would form the main focus of the reading, with the teacher's voice acting as a counterpoint to the music, shifting in rhythmic flux and intonation with the rhythms and fluxes of the composition; an exaggeration of the voice as a mellifluous agent of communication.

A second, less formal reading would employ a lighter, less striking piece of Baroque music – here the focus being the entering into a state of rhythmic relaxation that is quite in tune with the natural rhythms of the human body – as Baroque compositions are quite commonly played at a pace of around sixty beats per minute, and sixty beats per minute is the average heartbeat of a human at rest.

During both types of reading, the learners sit in comfortable seats (armchairs rather than classroom chairs) in a suitably stimulating environment in terms of décor and lighting. Thus these readings are experienced as a kind of pleasurable event, with the learners free to focus on the music alone or on the voice alone or on the rhythmic combination

of voice and music sailing sweetly
through the air on the power
of rhythmic suggestion.

After the readings of these long dialogues
to the accompaniment of music,
the teacher would then make
use of the dialogues for more
conventional language work.
In theory at least,
large chunks of the dialogues
would be internalized by the
learners during the readings
due both to the relaxed and receptive
state of the minds of the learners
and to the positive suggestion
created by the accompanying music.

The music provides
a psychological state
that opens the mind,
that opens the reserves of the mind,
creating an expanded reading experience,
a collective expanded reading experience,
achieving a soft state of alternative attention –
a rhythmic ecology of music, voice and reading,
to assist with the process of information transfer
in a pleasantly performative manner.



Our speech rhythms are only a small instance of rhythm as a force in nature, indeed a force in the cosmos. Solar pulses, the ebb and flow of tides, those circadian rhythms that affect our sleeping and waking as heliotropic beings are only some of the rhythms to which we are subjected. Rhythm indeed may be a necessary, if not sufficient, condition of human life, for the embryonic heart begins to beat eighteen to twenty-one days after conception; at that point there is no blood to pump, no function for the heart to serve, but if the beat stops, the embryo dies.

Susan Stewart



*Everything we do is music,
Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise.
When we ignore it, it disturbs us.
When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.*

John Cage

If, as Cage indicates,
music is everywhere,

then we are therefore
already listening
to music as we read,
with the inclusion of ambient
background music as a given.

Composed music can, in some way,
aid concentration and focus attention,
by drowning out background annoyances.
For the last year now, I have listened
to parts of Max Richter's epic eight
hour long album project *Sleep*
almost every evening to focus my
concentration on whatever
I am reading, avoiding instances
of overhearing my neighbour
in her various late night DIY exploits
or social engagements.
The listening has become somewhat
of a ritualised process for me now
and immediately puts me in a state
ready for textual reception.

In the study *How listening to music affects reading: Evidence from eye tracking*,
test results indicate that the change from one song to another
has the potential to interrupt fluent eye movement
as readers note and acknowledge a background change.
The recommendation is to listen to a familiar playlist
in the known order of playback, so that the listener/reader
is already familiar and prepared for any transitions.
Further to this, music without lyrics
is the recommended accompaniment
to avoid semantic distraction.

Personally I prefer ambient classical
or extended drone albums.
I feel something of a warm embrace
in the subtle shifts in tone and texture,
whilst underlying rhythms and drones
come to the fore or melt into the background.
As the drone continues on,
it builds an auditory landscape,
a vast hall of architectural complexity
that seems to stretch on forever.
Indeed, as Joanna Demers identifies
drone music as music for the end of the world,
the drone music that I listen to
whilst reading books in my
comfortably small apartment for one
constructs a familiar sonic space,
ending the world of the outside
and opening inwards to the interior.



*Sound
may be addressed
to you
or it may not.*

Rae Armantrout



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Samuel Brzeski is the Lydgalleriet Writer in Residence.