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When given the assignment, **The Future of Reading**, I was asked to begin an exploration of what it means to read.

I pondered. **What does reading mean in my life? How do I read? Is there something specific about reading that shapes the way I comprehend the world?**

On the way home from school, in a reflective environment, I was overwhelmed by the amount of words I noticed everywhere that I went. Just from Margaret Morrison to 6846 Thomas Blvd., I read so many things: event posters taped to walls, road signs, text messages on my iphone, words signaling me from building to building, the lit-up sign of the busline, advertisements on the bus, street names, etc. I also began to notice that when I heard others around me speaking, the image of the words they spoke showed up in my mind. I noticed that when my eyes focused on common objects, thoughts, words, and associations around that object flashed across my mindspace.

I was reading everything that my senses picked up.

10:24 am email to Dominique
 11:05 am email from Dominique
 11:30 am microwave buttons
 11:35 am english reading
 response - 3 dog
 life.
 11:35 am email from Chelsea
 11:38 am survey from Chelsea
~~11:52 am~~ 11:52 am lot of Aliya's
 process book
 12:05 Three Dog Life and
 response - in class.
 1:27 pm email from Donna and
 Chelsea.
 1:36 pm internet for yoga
 flow schedule.
 1:38 pm text from Don. alt.
 smoking.
 1:50 pm check email from
 Chelsea Spadro
 online store
 2:01 pm skype website

*image above:
 a sample of the documented
 words read for an entire day.*

I began documenting how often I read words. For an
 entire day, I kept track of everything I read - I gave a
 short description and the time it was read.

After reading so many words and documenting them, my first idea came about. I would determine which of the words had the most distinguished affect on my day. I would do this by keeping an open-minded awareness to how much each word influenced my thought processes. **Did the word send my mind on a tangent? Did it bring up thoughts and ideas that otherwise would not have come up? Did it remind me of something important in my life?**

I would use photography to document each important word in the context that I first saw it. From this research, I would create a time-based artifact consisting of a photographic display of images representing these words and how they affected the thought processes of my day. The goal would be for the viewer of the artifact to notice similar habits in his or her own reading of words in the world and, maybe, this enlightenment would give the viewer a different perspective on reading.

The reader doesn't just read books, pages, and text; he or she reads every word seen and - because of every word's association to specific events, thoughts, and feelings in life - each word has the power to affect the outcome of the reader's day.



*image above:
example of word association
through photography.*

ENEMY

**dislike
foe
war
avoid
hate
evil
them
friend
hostile
forces
love**

This short essay sums up the topic of reading to be explored.
The bolded text highlights the ideas that were carried
through to the resulting artifact.

I am interested in the idea that, in many ways, written text has come to shape the thought processes of modern society. The reading of text is done constantly. Every time one looks up, down, around, or even closes his eyes, he sees written text. Sometimes its message is completely meaningless and sometimes it is crucial for survival in society. Sometimes one reads text because he is actually looking for meaning; sometimes it just happens to be in his line of vision. It seems to me utterly impossible for a literate person to look at a word or letter and NOT read it. If it's there, the mind spells the word out into vowels and consonants and - either consciously or subconsciously - speaks the word in the mind. **Once this happens, the mind either dismisses the word or places meaning on it which then sends the mind on to association - the visualization of other words, images, sounds, or feelings having to do with the original word.** For example; when riding on the bus home from school, I see the words "Squirrel Hill" flash on the bus display screen as soon as we enter that neighborhood. My mind leaves its current thoughts to attend to the image of little fuzzy creatures running about a huge hill in the middle of nowhere. From there, I may think about how my dog loves to chase squirrels. Then I may think about how I would love to take her to the park to throw the ball and chase squirrels. The text "Squirrel Hill" has brought up a whole array of thoughts associated with that text. It even is powerful enough to change my day; I just may go home and take my dog to the park.

In this project, the future of reading, I would like to bring awareness to the idea that literates constantly read text all the time and the meaning-making to what is read shapes the thought processes of the individual. If text suddenly evaporated, the structure of society would have to be completely re-designed and people would be lost. They not only would adapt to a new way of navigating their world, but they also would adapt to a new system for meaning-making. They would have strictly objects, people, sounds, smells, spoken words, images, etc to create meaning from--but no text. There is a whole array of outcomes that a text-free world could bring about and I am interested in considering these.

I would also like to go into how text is read: is it read by default of the mind or does the mind consciously seek it out? How often does the mind register a piece of written text? Is it glossed over? Or is it actually spelled out and then dismissed? The brain can do this so automatically that one could not possibly consciously notice every time he reads a piece of text.

I plan to study the dependency that society has on the written word. I hope to, in some way, bring some form of empathy for non-literates. What would our world be like if we couldn't comprehend written text? What would it be like if we had it and it was suddenly taken away? How would we function? What would we use as it's substitute? Could we exist without a substitute? These are all questions I will ponder throughout this process.

The amount of information I could obtain strictly through personal interaction with reading words and associating them with a thought stream was endless. I could compile data forever. It was time to do some research in order to hone in on the matter at hand.

Psycholinguistics and word association were the topics most closely relating to my ideas. Psycholinguistics studies how humans process language; how this language is acquired, understood, and produced. Word association is how humans associate words with words and how this association forms the meaning of the word to the individual. A chunking occurs in the brain when words are read; words are not understood by their definitions so much as by other words that are associated with them in the mind of the reader. From this research, I learned that - because of this chunking of associations - words are understood differently from person to person. When one person reads, he or she understands the text based on his or her own past experiences and chunking of words - we all obtain different meaning from different words.

Amidst all of this research, I found the Edinburgh Associative Thesaurus (EAT) - a set of word association norms. To compile the data, subjects were given a word (stimulus) and asked to respond with the first word that came to their mind (response). This response became the word association. Over time, and through much testing, this thesaurus was created. EAT became my main source for word association compilation.

jump

high	hurdle	freedom	ride
leap	land	frequency	rope
up	off	fright	sex
joy	pit	horse	ski
over	quick	in	start
down	skip	into	tall
long	bang	jack	to
run	dead	lake	water
spring	dive	miss	white
height	fall	parachute	

image above: The Edinburgh Associative Thesaurus in action.
*jump (stimulus word) along
with its response words in
order from most common to
least common.*

I began to think about more ways I could represent this idea of reading and associating words. The preliminary idea of photographs of words and their responses did not suggest real time; rather, it suggested a contemplation of the past.

The importance of revealing a blip in **present** time with no beginning or end was growing. A moment in the life of the word-associater should be the focus. I began to ponder the idea of using universal sounds coupled with words being read and thoughts being associated. The artifact could contain a blank screen where only audio is present. The audio may depict sounds such as sitting in a restaurant, or the bus stop. As words are read, they pop up on the screen. From those words, word associations are made. From the word associations made, a thought stream could occur. This idea did not hold my attention for long because it didn't allow the viewer a visual representation of the modern world of words.

I decided on an activity that was obvious, straightforward, and common - **a walk down the street.**

step **4** *a walk down the street*



walking down a street
w/ lots of textual images
and recognizable symbols
and sounds and language.



create a kinetic
video that shows the dynamic
of text in the environment
as visual cues for associations
to be made.



text spoken - text heard -
text seen - text
thoughts by association.



image above:
preliminary sketch.

A blip in time - walking down the street -
reading and associating - experiencing an
environment of words.

I decided to experience a walk down the street; Penn Avenue to be exact. I took a video camera with me. The following is a storyboard of the experience that I had. This experience shaped the final artifact.

Some thought-provoking ideas that this video is attempting to convey to the viewer:

You shall know a word by the company it keeps.

(church 1)

Word meaning does not exist in isolation but acquires its full significance with reference to other words.

(jullian 519)

We understand words to the full in association with other words.

(jullian 519)



image above: Start slow with a very blurry moving video. Video slowly begins to come into focus - but not completely.
storyboard #1

So I was taking a stroll down Penn Ave. this morning - my sole intention being fresh produce.

**The bolded italicized text indicates a voiceover.*



*image above:
storyboard #2*

Reader notices the text.

All of the text begins popping up and following the video. Video stays slightly blurred but text is sharp, though changing in size and opacity. This beginning sets the scene for the idea to be conveyed.

Somewhere along the way, a pattern began to distract my attention.



image above: Text continues to follow the video.
storyboard #3

Strange that no one ever notices.



*image above:
storyboard #4*

Video blurs out completely and text stays. Word associations pop up. They come quickly at different opacities and size. They glitter and fall down the screen. The screen stays blurred for the remainder of the video and text from word associations keeps popping up.

Word meaning is not stored in isolation.



*image above:
storyboard #5*

A thought stream then culminates with **word**.

When we read a word, our mind shapes its meaning from clusters of related words and therefore, experiences that we have had with that word. From those relationships comes thought, and from that thought comes... ?

How do you read a word?

Things to consider / decisions to make.

- * Audio: Strictly street sounds? Or inclusive of music.
- * Aesthetic: Blurry or clear? Color or no color? Font?
- * Voiceover: Does the viewer need explanation? Or does the artifact speak for itself?
- * Conclusion: What are the ending questions raised? What are the conclusions made?

The outcome of the video influences readers to ponder what occurs when they read words. How do they understand the meaning of those words? How does comprehending the meaning of words shape the thought processes surrounding the simple activity of walking down the street? **Reading text and comprehending it is not a simple activity; the mind is doing so much more.**

The resulting artifact will contain street music and noise to enhance the *being on the street*. It will be blurry with desaturated color and the font will be the most common universally seen on the street - Helvetica. Viewers should experience the present moment alongside the video and notice one thing only; the words being read - everything else is white noise. An explanation with a voiceover is unnecessary - viewers will have their own unique experience with the words being read. They do not need guidance.



image above: The sounds of the street and a fade from white to
introduction screen #1 moving blurriness sets the opening scene.



*image above:
introduction screen #2*

Words begin to be read. Each word is sharpened with white Helvetica Neue thin condensed characters. Each word seems to bounce around as it comes closer to the viewer. The sounds of the street continue and the street music begins: The Dueling Saxophones of Eddie Barbash and Jessie Sheinin.



image above: The viewer looks around and notices more and more words to read.



image above: The word **Coffee** is read and becomes distinguished by the viewer. The characters turn brown and are bolded to obtain hierarchy above the white Helvetica Neue thin condensed characters.

Stimulus #1



*image above:
Stimulus #1 accompanied
by word associations.*

Coffee is then joined by **headache, awake, instant, french, mud, stain, pot, sugar, milk, grounds, strong, starbucks, lounge, morning, break, and bean.** These words slowly come onto the screen and - changing opacity and size - are animated around the word **coffee**.



*image above:
Stimulus #2 and #3*

The words **wild** and **spot** are simultaneously read and distinguished by the viewer. **Wild** turns orange and **spot** turns cyan; both are bolded to obtain hierarchy above the white Helvetica Neue thin condensed characters.



*image above:
Stimulus #2 and #3
accompanied by word
associations.*

Wild is then joined by **beast, chase, night, maniac, jungle, free, life, west, hairy, party, animal, and crazy**. **Spot** is joined by **place, dog, grease, dust, dab, red, stain, pimple, mark, circle, and dot**. Again, these word associations move about the stimulus word.



image above: When **wild** and **spot** disappear, **soft** comes into focus.
Stimulus #4



*image above:
Stimulus #4 accompanied
by word associations.*

The word associations, **tame** and **rough**, that originated in the stimulus word, **wild**, continue as a word association to **soft**. **Soft** is then joined by **music, bed, face, drink, warm, feather, water, ball, hard, brush, and slow**.

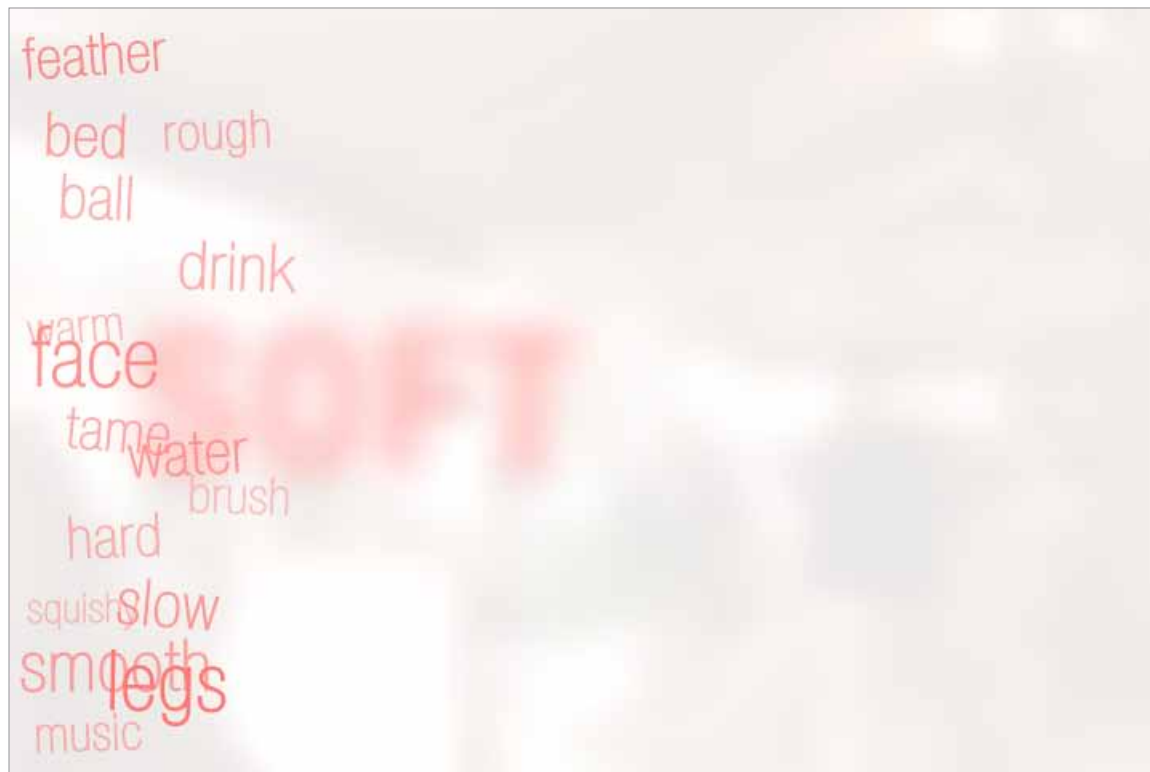


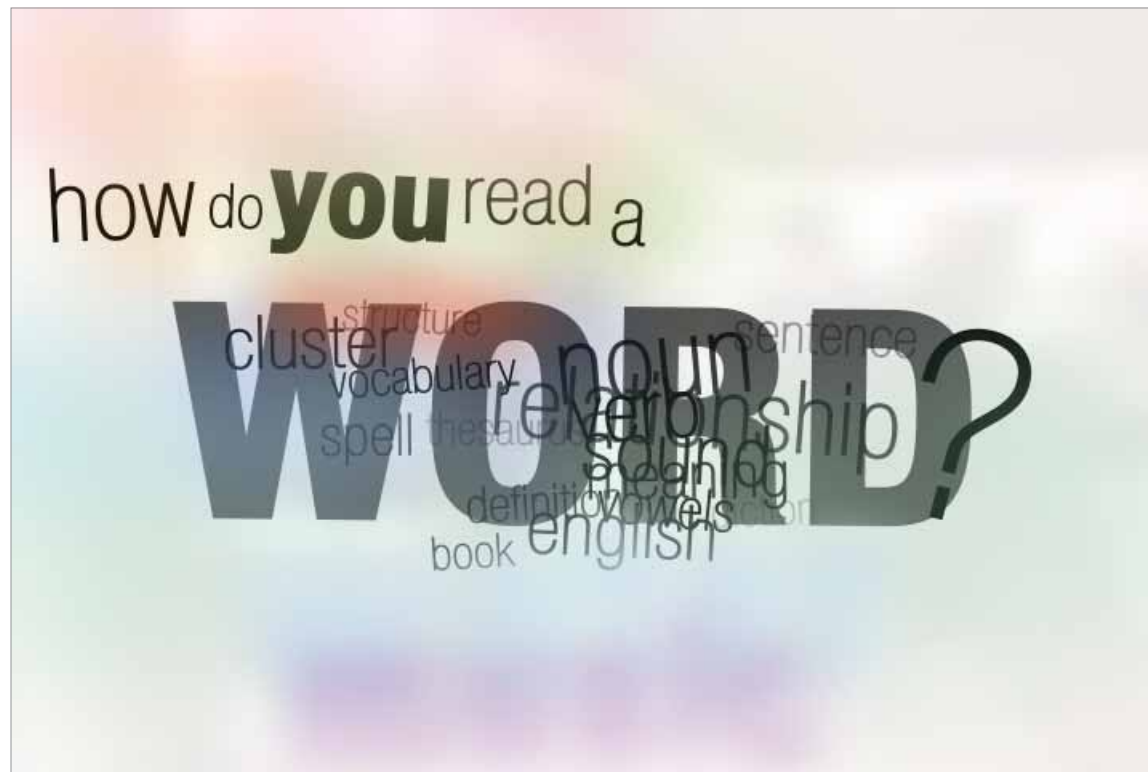
image above:
Stimulus #4

The word associations from **soft** continue to animate around the page. They make their way to the left side of the page and **soft** disappears.



*image above:
thought stream from
stimulus #4*

Synchronized to the beat of the dueling saxophones, the words bounce off the side of the page and each changes from the uniform pink to separate bolded colors. Then, multiple streams of word associations dance horizontally across the page. Each word association response becomes the stimulus for the next word. For example: **soft - feather - bird - omelette - ihop - sunday - relax.**



*image above:
final stimulus*

Associations originating from **word** are then animated around it. They include **sentence, noun, sound, verb, relationship, meaning, thesaurus, definition, vowels, english, vocabulary, cluster, structure, spell, diction,** and **book**. From those word associations a question is posed, **How do you read a word?**



image above: All of the words fade out with the thought stream
ending fade out blur of colors still resonating.



image above: Sarah Calandro
ending screen. The Future of Reading
Graduate Studio 1
Dan Boyarski Fall 2009
Dueling Saxophones
by Eddie Barbash & Jessie Sheinin

What works? What doesn't work? What comes next?

- * The background noise needs tweaking to be more effective.
- * The words read while walking down the street are still a bit jagged in their movement. They need smoothing.
- * There needs to be two more word association stimulus and responses; one before and one after the thought stream. I plan to use a word spoken by a lady on the street - around the time that **spot** and **wild** are being associated - to intensify the *random-ness* of the words chosen. I also plan to extend the video after what is currently the final screen. One more stimulus word will be read and associated after **word** along with it's own thought stream that the viewer can read and engage with. This will give the viewer one more chance to fully realize the idea.
- * Along with the question, **How do you read a word?** I will pose questions such as, **How do you comprehend words? What is your experience of reading words?** And maybe I will even go so far as to ask, **Do your words fly too?**

What I learned.

I learned that clarity is a difficult task, even with the simplest of ideas. For me, coming up with the idea was not the difficult part of this project. It was following the idea through clearly, consistently, and with grace. I continuously repeated in my head, *Keep It Simple Stupid* and somehow, it still had a point of too much complexity. I also learned that this project will never be finished. I will continue to think of new pieces that I can include to make it better. I will also continue to think of completely different approaches I could have - and maybe should have - taken that work better. This project was about choosing a direction, sticking with it, and sending the idea across with clarity. Hopefully, this piece will transform to it's height of clarity, consistency, and grace.

Resources:

Church, K., and Hanks, P., "Word Association Norms, Mutual Information and Lexicography," *Computational Linguistics*, Vol 16:1, pp. 22-29, (1991).

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Jullian, Paula. "Word Association: A Resource to Raise Awareness About Semantic Relations." *ELT Journal* 54.1 (2000): 519-29. Oxford Journals. Oxford University Press, 2007. Web. Nov. 2009. <<http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/54/1/37>>.

