iG9(t)

Reading (Machines) Illuminated by YouTube Videos

Proposal: Reading (Machine)
Product Name: iG9(t)
Précis: What if one designed a product based on grammatological and
rhizomatic theories, YouTube-as-paradigm, and avant-garde experiment as
model and example? What if one proposed a product that would serve
sociopoetic goals rather than financial market forces? Comparing the
model of participatory activity and quick-video aesthetics demonstrated,
and exemplified, in YouTube videos with text on video screens in e-reader,
one realizes that reading in digital video formats has not caught up to
YouTube videos. The theory-product proposed suggests a way to think
through these issues. Given this initial comparison, Greg Ulmer's video
work, broadcast by Paper Tiger TV, serves as a useful lens to consider
Reading on TV (the title of his program). Branding and product names
serve as a useful, if untapped, theoretical tool, and the product described
here explores the implications of a provocative, if poetically coded, name
not unlike the regularly parodied named iPad. Although parody is not an
ornamental value in understanding reading on a video screen-player, the
product suggests a new theory of reading that is earnestly explicated. The
model for the product is the avant-garde reading machine designed by Bob
Brown in the early 1930's. Brown was a publisher-poet who worked with
Marcel Duchamp and many others in developing his ideas on how to
prepare texts and readers for a time when one would read wirelessly,
quickly, and using hyper-abbreviated and miniaturized printing
techniques and scrolling reading machines. Using Roland Barthes' theory
of the "receivable," the product will also illuminate a particular social
organization of the users unlike readers of both modernist texts or realist
novels or movies. Finally, the product's business plan examines a
sociopoetic theory of pricing using J. S. G. Boggs project to chart a
sociopoetic financing and pricing model. The structure of the essay, loosely
alluding to business plans, implies that theorists can use the language of
distribution and business, in a way familiar to those that developed online
and distributed video products.

Business Plan, Part I: Existing Conditions and Comparisons

The sheer scope and reach of interactive and networked e-readers changes

the quality of the form expressed. Now, publication makes more sense

when understood in the dynamics of video distribution networks. It is no

longer simply printed texts in a convenient digital form: not simply words on a page distributed on a video screen. It has more to do with a sociopoetic experience. The e-readers' peculiarities (i.e., its similarities to contemporary video distribution networks) change the boundaries and definition of reading and literacy. The elastic, virally connected, and large audience defines not only contemporary communication, but also the new gadgets that are defined by their distribution mechanisms to an extent not seen before. In traditional scholarly terms of the past this new type of media (similar to books, video, and canvases) might have been known as post-form (or post-media). Instead of those awkward labels, one might simply call them sociopoetic.

The term sociopoetic describes texts that use social situations or social networks as a canvas; intimate bureaucracies being a type of sociopoetic work. The term sociopoetic does not define my methodology. Instead, the term describes an aesthetic approach that asks to shift the focus from formal issues or cultural contexts or social scientific surveys, toward examining how situations function poetically (or sociopoetically) (Saper, Networked Art, 2001).

Although it is a well-worn truism of media studies that Walter Benjamin's hypothesis, that the reproduction and mass distribution of art and media will lead to reader's becoming writers and a collective enervation, the extent of this effect has recently increased and intensified. One might, therefore, need to update Benjamin's eloquent description of this process to

include the networked element. Instead of a reader becoming a writer, the sociopoetic process resembles a spectator becoming an artist and, more importantly, becoming part of a mobile, contingent, and vast art group or movement. It is not that a single person gains class-consciousness as in Benjamin's model by being in a laughing or crying audience, or even that the entire audience gains this consciousness together. Rather, the visceral experience, rather than consciousness, of networks resembles joining an art group (or simulating that experience). These art movements are both the largest and shortest lived ever.

A number of groups have claimed to represent the largest art movement in the world. YouTube channels, with their elastic networks of participants, serve as a useful comparison to the current reading situation. One might imagine taking the largest phone book in the world and putting an art movement's name on the cover. This is absurd, and sounds like an avant-garde art-stunt except this is precisely the process that occurs regularly in the forming of groups with individuals joining, unsubscribing and moving out, visiting, commenting, reading without commenting, networking with avatars, etc. The situation most closely resembles ants making hills.

Like ants pushing pieces of dirt around until randomly two pieces land on top of each other and an ant hill forms. In fact, the biologist Lewis Thomas explains that ant colonies and hills are more like one organism than a collective of individual ants; they are parts of one animal.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe these rhizomatic connections and smooth flows of intensities that defy the gridded space. The image of the grid is precisely the metaphor that many seek to resist by living off-the-grid, but networked. The amorphous, changing, contingent, and massively connected off the received gridded organization of knowledge defines the situation that demands a new e-reader. Every encounter has the feel of six degrees of separation, but the competition for the iG9(t) does not account for any changes.

Business Plan, Part II: The Analogy of Reading on TV

In the late 1980s, Paper Tiger TV, a group of media makers and critics who produced radical participatory no-budget television programs for public access channels, broadcast *Ulmer Reads Reading on TV*. The program, written and directed by Greg Ulmer, was framed as an episode of *Believe It or Not*, and appeared to claim that a wacky Professor believed that a sinkhole in Florida (called the Devil's Millhopper) was the meaning of (Shakespeare's play) *Hamlet*. With that overall premise, the program examined, and parodied, the Annenberg/CPB (Corporation for Public Broadcasting) Project's "Voices and Visions," an attempt to televise how to read (poetry) on television. Ulmer's video suggested that the well-intentioned and ambitious reading on TV project depended exclusively on one discredited model of interpretation: the only meaning of a poem was a product of the author's life and place. These psycho-biographies, common in PBS documentaries on authors especially, have a neat and tidy

melodramatic tautology: author's meaning completely explained by personal childhood strife, trauma, and nostalgia (for a fleeting happiness).

Over and over again, the program's focused on places, like where Emily Dickinson lived, to explain the meaning of poems. The PBS project even attempted this stunt with poets, like Wallace Stevens, widely regarded as producing works tangled in metonymic analogies eluding any singular reference. The visual track of the "Voices and Visions" programs made the poem's meaning a literal interpretation of the poet's surroundings. Ulmer's video offered an alternative model of interpretation: to pull the (Mill's) stopper and let writing out of the logocentric book-logic. One could appreciate the meaning of even a masterpiece of literature and drama in terms of the reader's setting and situation. In speculating about ways to teach reading and interpretation using television, Ulmer's video also hinted at ways to construct pedagogical infrastructures and delivery systems as well as deal with theoretical legacies. It is time, to borrow Bob Brown's phrase, to pull out the stopper that has kept writing bottled up in books and to televise reading.

Business Plan, Part III: Product Name and Theory of Read(ies)

The name iG9(t) works on multiple levels including the homophonic sonic-pun visceral parody of the competition, and as an acronym. The current code for interactive reading machines (reading music, texts, images, etc), the i- replaces I and suggests a different rhizomatic organization

comparable to art groups that produced unsigned works collectively and often anonymously. The interactivity usually concerns speed, volume, size, direction, and organization of the text. It does not suggest writing new texts. One puts texts in lists, shuffles the texts, presents the texts in ways suitable for the absolutely particular situation: louder, smaller font, this paragraph placed here and not there, pause, play again, forward fast, rewind, etc.

Our iG9(t) will use a previous reader never adapted by the mass market, and built in the context of the expatriate avant-garde in France in the early 1930's with input from Marcel Duchamp, Gertrude Stein, transition writers, futurists, and other vanguardists. It was intended to enter the market, but never received a patent because, in 1930, no one could imagine anything that would compete with the book's codex technology and the corresponding printing, grammatical, and publishing rules. A reader should have mechanisms to change the direction, speed, quantity, and size of the text. Just as video and sound players have these functions. We will return to the precursor model below.

G has multiple meanings including the recent association with a wireless standard of networked communication. The combination of ig also has multiple meanings including a personalized webpage by Google and also interest group. It also suggests ignoble and ignorant as the prefix that suggests the negative.

In that sense, the philosophical foundation of the product is negative dialectics or simply parodic negativity. It challenges the habituated response to reading and especially the morality of literacy programs. To suggest that there is a mechanism in negative relation to literacy or a para-literate reading is to provoke condemnation and rejection. To suggest that a reader might have to respond to what Greg Ulmer calls electracy will not win any friends in education. To suggest preparing texts in negative relation to traditional forms of literacy (e.g., book, pages, and lines of print one on top of another in defined margins) challenges the entire apparatus of rhetoric and composition never mind well-meaning literacy.

The 9 has multiple connotations including the pun on the German *nein* and an allusion to the Beatles' song "Revolution No. 9" and an electronic software's version 9. Numbers also appear in codes, passwords, serial numbers, and play an increasing role in contemporary literacy. No rhetoric or composition textbook focuses, or even mentions, this new type of writing not just prevalent in our networked communication systems, but crucial to the dominant forms of cultural transmission and communication. It seems absurd to suggest that we need to teach students to read and write these code systems -- as absurd as suggesting students previously learned about the library cataloging system.

The (t) suggests text, visually organized (text) that cannot easily translate to verbal speech. The reader will have em–dashes, abbreviated txt IM, and other visual marks that may suggest visual speed instead of grammatical

punctuation for a speaker. The (t) also alludes to Greg Ulmer's CATT(t) acronym. Others in this volume will expand on Ulmer's work and acronym. The acronym has the following structure:

C = Contrast (opposition, inversion, differentiation)

A = Analogy (figuration, displacement)

T = Theory (repetition, literalization)

T = Target (application, purpose)

t = Tale (secondary elaboration, representability)

The tale of the e-reader, the secondary elaboration of the machine, has to do with the history of reading, literacy, and, in this case, a specific history of the invention of a reading machine in 1930. The inventor of that machine called the texts, prepared especially for the machine, *readies*.

Bob Brown's *The Readies* includes plans for an electric reading machine and strategies for preparing the eye for mechanized reading. There are instructions for preparing texts as readies and detailed quantitative explanations about the invention and mechanisms involved in this peculiar machine. In the spirit of avant-garde manifestos, Brown writes with enthusiastic hyperbole about the machine's potential to change how we read and learn. The consequences of his research on reading seem prescient in light of text messaging with abbreviated language, electronic text readers, and even online books like this edition. Beaming out printed text over radio waves or televised images, in 1930, had a science fiction quality or, for the avant-garde, a fanciful art-stunt feel. Brown's practical

plans and consequences for his reading machine were about seventy years ahead of their time.

His machine substitutes for the book as a distribution mechanism. Instead, one would take rolls of texts, similar to micro-film spools, and slip it into a slot in the machine. Then, the reader sets the "speed regulator, turns on the electric current and the whole 100.000, 200,000, 300,000 or million words spill out" before the reader's eyes. Unlike, microfilm, the text would roll out in "one continuous line of type." Magnifying glass, spools of one line of type, electric current, controls and regulators seem both quaint and futuristic. Using his 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" and "at the speed of the day."

The printed form of the readies in book form used punctuation marks as visual analogies. For movement we see em-dashes (—) that also, by definition, indicate that the sentence was interrupted or cut short. These created a "cinemovietone" shorthand system. The old uses of punctuation, like periods to mark the end of a sentence, disappear. Reading becomes more in tune with watching a continuous series of flickering frames of images become a movie.

The context of his literary and artistic tastes and writings make it easy for even the best critics, and sometimes Brown himself, to think of the project only in terms of the modernist revolution of the word and a "stab in the

dark at writing modernly." Instead, the readies function as a printed analogy for what reading will feel and look like "spinning past the eye out of a word-machine." The readies, with em-dashes on a printed page are, for Brown, a "crude" attempt to simulate motion.

Business Plan, Part IV: The User of the iG9(t)

Using Roland Barthes's category of the "receivable" (Barthes, *RB* 118), the messages in the iG9(t) offer something that is neither traditional narrative realism (readerly), nor a modernist text that depends on a reader's responding as if s/he were writing the text (writerly). Instead, the gadget resembles certain works sent to Barthes by his friends, the receivable. Barthes does not know quite what to make of these texts, but he gladly receives them. he explains that this type of "unreaderly text catches hold, the red-hot text, a product continuously outside of any likelihood and who function – visibly assumed by its scriptor – would be to context the mercantile constraint of what is written"(RB 119). Barthes did not intend this definition to apply to the iG9(t) that contests the mercantile constraints associated with other e-readers and publishing systems. Nevertheless, Barthes goes on to describe the receivable in terms of another key attribute of our iG9(t). He explains that "this text, guided, armed by a notion of the unpublishable, would require the following response: I can neither read nor write what you produce, but I receive it,

like a fire, a drug, an enigmatic disorganization"(RB 118). Texts that you receive like a fire, or the e-reader will produce an enigmatic disorganization in the user. These will be our product's slogans.

The experimental tenor of the e-readers links to a massively connected user-base resembles social scientific experiment. In that sense, the use of the iG9(t) will often seem like an actual social psychological experiments. Stanley Milgram, best known for his "shocking" work on obedience where volunteer "teachers" followed orders to inflict supposedly fatal shocks to "students," did less invasive work to study "communicative webs" in the late 1960s (Milgram). He wanted to study how people are connected, and his work closely parallels the work of artists' networks (and the publications that grew from those networks). He began with a randomly generated list of people living in Omaha, Nebraska. Each person on the list received a package containing instructions to write their name on a roster and send the package on to someone they knew, a friend or acquaintance, who might get the package closer to the final destination (someone who lived in Sharon Massachusetts and worked in Boston). Milgram used the mail system, and a chain-letter-like experiment, to investigate social connections. He found that it took on average only six steps to reach the final destination. The phrase, "six degrees of separation," and the implications of our links to large social webs have been explored in the play and film of the same name and in the party game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon."

Business Plan, Part IV: Pricing, Design, and Fund Raising for Start-up

In the volume translated as *Paper Machine*, Jacques Derrida mentions that if computers were available when *Glas* was published, he probably would not have investigated the visual form of the page. Our e-reader will investigate the sociopoetic and massively overdetermined allusiveness of the product which will be designed from glas(s) and priced to sell. We are currently looking for entrepreneurial start-up funds. Our plan is to follow the Boggs money-raising plan.

As is well known, J. S. G. Boggs, starting in the mid-1980s, has drawn carefully crafted versions of currencies including the United States dollar bill. He had drawn similar bills as early as 1969, but did not begin to use them as exchangeable currency until 1984. His work has drawn the negative attention of governments investigating counterfeiting including cases against him in Australia, Great Britain, and the United States.

His art uses the trappings of a large bureaucratic system to create an intimate community among those involved in the transactions. Typically, the final artwork consists of a framed collection of the receipt, the proper change (that Boggs later sells to the collectors), and the drawing used to make the purchase. If consumers legitimate national currencies with *necessary* fictions or mythologies about our dollar bills' unique and substantiated value, then Boggs' Bills create what I call an artificial mythology.

On the one hand, the appropriation and parody of the depersonalized aspects of mass bureaucratized life appears to make the purpose of a bureaucracy absurd. On the other hand, those involved in using Boggs' Bills and the iG9(t) use bureaucratic distribution and production systems. The inside jokes that result from this parody, and use of, bureaucratic forms make the search for more democratic forms seem insincere. Boggs's art is to create new forms of exchange systems not to simply parody government's currencies, but to create artificial value. Likewise, the gadget proposed here creates artificial intelligence.

Boggs' exhibit "Making Money" opened in Berlin on May 19, 2001. During the exhibit, he lived in the gallery, o-zwei -- pronounced... Ooh TsVie -- which translates literally as (the letter "o", and the word "two"). During the exhibit, Boggs wrote to me on email that he was "spending Boggs Mark or B-M (all puns intended!) instead of DM (Deutsche Mark)." The sums were considerable. On one dinner he spent a B-M 1000 Boggsnote (about $500 U.S.) with a little over DM 500 in change." In one of his anecdotes, he recounts his experience with the exhibit and the unusual networks it created. One night Five POLIZEI (police) came to the gallery around midnight, banging on the door, shouting, and forcefully trying to twist the door handle. The lights were on, and they could see both money and Boggs-bills in the window, as well as Boggs' sculpture/performance work that includes an attaché case with ONE BILLION EURO. The police wanted in, but Boggs couldn't find the key to the door so he opened a window and

started answering their questions.

"Who is making this false money?" they demanded. So, the network begins with a questioning of the legitimacy of the bills; in all of the networks the Boggs' bills create, participants enter the network as soon as they recognize the currency as an apparent forgery. That is, they must appreciate that this is an alternative system to the one sanctioned by the government. The question usually suggests an initial rejection of the new network system as counterfeit. Quickly, the negative reaction and rejection become the cue for Boggs to begin his sociopoetic work. The apparently counterfeit bills are a pretext. Likewise, the iG9(t) user goes through a similar process.

In this case, Boggs explained to the officers that he was an artist, and his work was not "falschgeld" (counterfeit money) but "KunstGeld" (art money). He showed them a sheet prepared by the gallery with an explanation in German. The sociopoetic work asks the participant to enter into an art network; that is, Boggs asks them to accept the money as art money suggesting an alternative world or exchange system called art. This opening was met with skepticism. This will be the same strategy used in our business plan to raise funds for the production of the iG9(t).

Boggs then resorted to the "ace-in-the-hole", an official letter from the German Senate giving him permission to do his work in Germany. That seemed to calm them down a bit, but they still weren't so convinced, and

thought that maybe they should take him and his work down to the station for further discussion. SCHISSE! (Shit!) Boggs thought. Then he grabbed one of his BM 10 notes with a picture of STEFFI (who works at the gallery) on it. It's modeled after the DM 100 note, so it isn't the same color, and the guy on the DM 10 "isn't looking too happy" compared to Steffi. The police smiled, and seemed to like it.

"Do you think this is worth ten D-Mark?" Boggs asked.

They started to bob their heads back and forth as they considered. Each raising one eyebrow, they seemed to be conceding the point.

"But, well...there still might be a problem..." the officers explained. They entered into at least recognizing the possibility of a legitimate exchange network aligned with art.

Much of the criticism of contemporary art and artworld practices has to do with the inflated prices and seemingly trivial endeavors, and we expect that same criticism to be leveled against our e-reader. Boggs shifts the argument to make the value of the art dependent on the acceptance of the sociopoetic wager (i.e., "will you accept this as art"). The police pointed at "The EURO!" Boggs' ONE BILLION EURO sculpture is made using 1,000 of Naples Bank Note Company's 1,000,000 Euro Notes.

"Since people are not used to the Euro, perhaps they wouldn't realize it was art. I grabbed one of the 1,000,000.oo Euro notes."

"Got WechselGeld?" asked Boggs. The police burst out laughing.

WechselGeld means "the change" in German. So, Boggs paid them a

1.000.000 Euro Note and off they went into the night. The interaction had

come to focus on the sociopoetic work not Boggs' skill at reproducing

features of a Euro bills or Deutsch Mark.

The iG9(t): priced to sell, receivable like a fire, and sure to produce an

enigmatic disorganization in the user. Reading in a YouTube distribution

system.