



<http://social-epistemology.com>
ISSN: 2471-9560

Becoming a Reader: Dwelling Within the Page

Sarah Bro Trasmundi, University of Oslo, s.b.trasmundi@ilos.uio.no

Trasmundi, Sarah Bro. 2024. "Becoming a Reader: Dwelling Within the Page." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 13 (3): 20–32. <https://wp.me/p1Bfg0-8Ep>.

In this response, my focus will be on the kind of reading that requires effort—a kind where individuals are rewarded for dedicating time and sustained attention. I am less interested in the algebra-driven approach to reading, which often involves rote-learning, skimming and skipping. Ultimately, I will argue against categorising this surface-level form of engagement as ‘reading.’ This differentiation is not only ideological but also vital for shaping future reading environments, especially in light of ongoing technological innovations and socio-political priorities. These developments, I will argue, influence how people conceive of reading and finally how they engage with reading materials. I will briefly elaborate on my ethnographically-derived vision of reading before I link it to Tim Ingold’s view (2022) and his critical commentary (2024) more specifically.

Dwelling as Leading Astray Within the Page: Navigating Dithering and Waiting

In reading, mysteries and tensions can unfurl as narratives, sentences, words and syntax fracture and shatter under the reader’s engagement. Written marks are not just decoded; rather, they are modulated into a narrative tempest as turbulent forces surge through their structure. This modulation is exemplified in affective gesturing, rhythmic and prosodic interplay of written marks by readers (Trasmundi and Cowley 2020).

Experiencing this type of reading demands that readers fully engage themselves within the page; that they feel connected to it; and it often leads to a deeper appreciation of the text’s quality and details, including what could be there. From empirical observations, this process is not smooth but rather punctuated as readers dither, challenge and are challenged by the engagement—a process that is often reported as arduous, rewarding and serendipitous (Trasmundi, Toro and Mangan 2022; Trasmundi and Toro 2023). Reading as dwelling further involves engaging with the page in a manner that not only creates its meaning but also prompts a change within the reader themselves. Thus, reading is a form of becoming.

Etymologically, ‘dwelling’ encompasses the notions of ‘leading astray,’ ‘hesitation,’ ‘remaining’ and ‘fixating attention.’ In this sense, it suggests an element of uncertainty, gradual perception, even dullness, as well as the act of allowing oneself to become unhurried and immersed in a particular place here, the page.¹ Dwelling thus allows grounding, and it enables semogenesis (Halliday and Matthiessen 1999), a process emerging from co-occurring temporal frames—personal, social, cultural, and situational. While reading is influenced by socially derived methods of attention, the engagement with a page is just as unique as a person’s voice. Thus, meaning potentials do not pre-exist but emerge from a historical person’s engagement with the page. Consequently, reading is intrinsically coupled with writing: the reader both perceives and creates, listens and responds, waits and imagines. Dwelling within the page entails being open to what will come, being critical, being countenancing risk and allowing oneself to be led astray, and it is contingent upon specific conditions such as motivation, skill, attitude, culture, the task and the materiality of the text.

¹ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/dwelling>; <https://blog.oup.com/2015/01/dwelling-word-origin-etymology/>. *Oxford English Dictionary*: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/dwelling_adj?tl=true. Accessed March 2024.

If these conditions inhibit dwelling, the activity, I suggest, may be delineated as distinct from reading—it may involve mere word recognition, a distinction I will elaborate later.

This perspective on reading aligns closely with, yet diverges from, Ingold’s conceptualisation of ‘reading as inhabiting the page’. Ingold’s concept of ‘inhabiting’ refers to how the inhabitants of the page (*pagus*: region or countryside) would both read and write the earth through activities like scratching, cutting, and incising, underscoring the profound influence of the earth—from soil to page and screen (Ingold 2022, 182). While I am certainly inspired by this form of engagement, my focus lies on dwelling, because it more profoundly emphasises the hesitant, struggling, often non-linear, imaginative and playful nature of our engagement with a place. While inhabitants have obligations to sustain life forms, readers of today’s page have the luxury of enduring their affective engagement and being led astray to the degree that they can fail and retry over and over. Their failure carries a positive aspect of learning and becoming, whereas a mariner’s failure may have more dire consequences.

Reading conceived as dwelling should encourage a more adventurous exploration of the imaginative realm, leading to reading paths characterised by considerable unpredictability. Although written marks and linguistic structures impose certain limitations on readers’ focus, individuals vary in how they interact, here with forms, shapes, and sounds, for instance. Consequently, their reading behaviours become unpredictable, as written language is not decoded but actively reconstructed through the reader’s dynamic interaction with written marks; an interaction that is indeed saturated with socially established conventions of engaging too. I am also more reluctant to claim how dwelling is inhibited across the various textures of the page, or lack thereof. Finally, while I underscore reading’s ecological-cognitive aspects, Ingold holds a distinct perspective on ‘cognition,’ which serves as a fundamental bone of contention between our viewpoints.

Ingold staunchly opposes the term cognition, lamenting psychology’s “persistent stranglehold” on a narrow vein of theorisation and mechanistic inquiry into the complexities of the human mind. His view is well-known: “In truth, a mind can only think the thoughts it does because of what the world lends to its continued functioning. Its thinking, then, is not inside-the-head but in-the-world; *not cognitive but ecological*” (Ingold 2022, 225, my emphasis). Thinking-in-the-world is what I—and others—call ecological cognition (Sutton 2024; Trasmundi and Steffensen 2024; Cowley 2024). However, Ingold remains unconvinced by the shift towards an ecological, ethnographic-based approach in cognitive science. He favours ‘thinking’ over ‘cognition,’ and the mere mention of the term ‘cognition,’ even with recent ecological connotations, seems to act as a catalyst, eliciting an emotional maelstrom within him. This reaction proves the point of how reading is a bodily-affective activity and based on personal ways of standardised attending.

Ingold ends his critical commentary with a sweeping scolding aimed squarely at psychology: “Is it too much to ask of psychology that it should desist from projecting its amnesia towards the past into its designs for the intelligence of the future?” (Ingold 2024, 7). Overall, Ingold’s critique addresses an unearthly, ungrounded and cognitivist approach to reading. In this reply, I highlight and engage with three aspects of his critique:

- Mainstream psychology’s tendency to seek mental mechanisms as sole explanations for the workings of the human mind.

- The way research (in psychology) exhibits an amnesia towards historical contexts, leading to a distorted understanding of reading.
- A concern for the future due to the absence of a multi-temporal perspective, stemming from a politically and scientifically biased focus on technological efficiency and functionality.

My argument, that becoming a reader depends on how humans dwell and dither within the page, follows a three-fold reply, originating from the critical points listed above.

Initially, I question whether it is justified to hold psychology solely accountable for the ills outlined in such broad assertion, especially because cognitive science has moved far beyond mainstream psychology. I therefore suggest exploring the collaborative potential between anthropology and an ecological, cognitive ethnography. Specifically, I will examine the possibilities of amalgamating a broad anthropology of past reading practices with an ecological, cognitive ethnography of contemporary and particular reading ecologies. I will argue that the integration of anthropology's temporal depth with the detailed granularity of cognitive ethnography leads to an adaptive and hyperthymesia-based future orientation which is currently absent in reading research. As such it paves the way for designs for the intelligence of the future, I will argue—something that neither anthropology nor cognitive ethnography can accomplish as effectively in isolation as they can when combined.

Subsequently, I address the essential components required for the development of a robust theory of reading. How can we seamlessly integrate past, present, and future considerations into an academically rigorous framework for understanding reading, encompassing its historical evolution and its potential trajectories? And what is the problem with developing a theory that integrates what reading has truly meant, with what it means in current societies and also what it can be in the future which anticipates trailblazing technological innovations? Drawing inspiration from the Japanese philosophy of *living pauses*, I propose that the adjacent components of dwelling and pausing are pivotal for a comprehensive theory of reading.

Lastly, I seek to advance the discussion about a reading future by sketching a narrative of future readers and reading ecologies. This narrative will confront present-day challenges arising from digitalisation, including the juxtaposition of the traditional notion of a codex with the contemporary paradigm of digital reading interfaces. Furthermore, it will confront socio-political shifts that have commodified reading, elevating solutions, productions and outcomes over contemplative and exploratory reading processes. I end by raising a concern: if we follow this trajectory of changing reading ecologies, dwelling and dithering within the page will become increasingly inhibited, to the point where we might abandon the concept of reading altogether and replace it with a mere linguistic algebra—a notion centred solely around problem-solving. So, what can we do for the next generation of readers?

An Arranged Marriage Between Social Anthropology and Ecological Cognitive Ethnography?

Ingold illustrates how anthropology encourages a broad perspective, listening to echoes of the past (often spanning centuries) when approaching a phenomenon in a cultural practice. He thus seeks to trace what a concept, here reading, ‘truly meant’ to people in the past (*prima prot e*), guiding him to address critiques of the current state (amnesia) and project trajectories for the future based on this understanding (pro nostalgia). This epistemological investment characterises Ingold’s anthropology as inherently social, encompassing community and practice-based descriptions that depict reading as specific ways of life for various groups, such as mariners, farmers, and medieval monks. Reading, in these contexts, entails *being ready* for challenges in relation to sustaining modes of existences: it involves navigating terrestrial and ethereal pathways and phenomena like the stars, tracks, and weather in relation with others, including animals (Ingold 2024 and 2022).

Ingold’s social anthropology extends to today’s readers, which he refers to as screen readers and who interact—not with tangible pages—but with intangible digital *windows*, detached from the terrestrial ground. They carry no traces and call for visual projection instead of tactile engagement. His critical narrative is significant, yet it overlooks ontogenetic processes or what could be termed “the social in the personal” and “the personal in the social”. Cognitive ethnography explores how individuals navigate the interplay between social and personal aspects of life, revealing tensions within social practices and uncovering multi-faceted cultural descriptions. In this context, it not only compares screen readers to print readers but also explores differences within these categories.

The term ‘cognitive ethnography’ is traced back to Hutchins’ descriptive portrayal of cognitive task-worlds observed in their natural habitat (Hutchins 1995; 2014). Through his conceptualisation of cognition as distributed and ecosystemic, he fundamentally altered the study of cognition by shifting the focus from an internal, localised, and brain-centric perspective to one that considers environments of interactions. In Hutchins’ framework, attention is thus directed towards distributed cognitive systems rather than autonomous individuals in isolation. A key criterion for defining a cognitive system revolves around systemic function, emphasising how tasks are managed through interactions among system components. As a result, cognitive ethnography emerged as a methodology to investigate distributed processes of cognition *in the wild*.

Hutchins’ cognitive ethnography has been qualified in more anti-representationalist and ecological directions, focusing not only on functional coordination of task(s) within a system, but also on imaginative and open-ended forms of living (Trasmundi 2020, Trasmundi and colleagues 2024). It is this recent and creative form of ecological cognitive ethnography, to which I adhere. It constructs narratives based on observations and insights, aiming to contextualise them within broader frameworks. While historical perspectives are indeed acknowledged, the initial focus lies in understanding the diverse ways people engage in current activities. It brings forth how people achieve similar objectives through varied methods and how these practices intersect with societal norms and values. The interest in understanding how individuals navigate and cultivate their activities within their real-life environments is what conferred this form of ethnography its “ecological cognitive” designation (Trasmundi 2020). While I use ecological cognition; Ingold uses the term

‘correspondences’ to convey roughly the same idea (Ingold 2022). In both formulations, the central notion is that movement and locomotion are invariably influenced by factors beyond the capabilities of the individual, the *cogito*, acting in isolation. They both emphasise how people respond and listen to each other, coordinating their differences into joint modes of existence. However, the strength of ecological cognitive ethnography lies in its ability to combine approaches. It leverages various observational techniques, facilitating learning from direct interactions with people, alongside the use of video recordings that can be reviewed repeatedly and in slow motion to apprehend details and forms of engaging that emerge with trained observation and in dialogue with the experts under study.

Ecological cognitive ethnography examines human coordination across multiple timescales, focusing on inter-bodily dynamics spanning behavioral, physiological, experiential, interpersonal and cultural processes. For instance, the coordination of eye movements and sensorimotor actions in relation to a particular setting. Ecological cognitive ethnography’s interest is, indeed, in the detailed particular forms of engagement—but only to put those details and particular observations into the larger world in which they belong (Malafouris 2014).

Finally, cognitive ethnographers actively engage in dialogue, posing questions, listening attentively, and offering alternative interpretations based on observed practices. This form of engagement inherently adopts a future-oriented perspective, probing into questions like “How can this be?” (also informed by history) and “Is there a different way?” (focusing on how the future should and could be). These inquiries extend beyond the immediate context and can be situated within a broader historical-prostalgic way of thinking.

The two positions complement each other by leveraging their respective strengths in a mutually reinforcing manner. Anthropology’s broad perspective enables the exploration of societies and cultures across diverse contexts and time periods, fostering the emergence of large, coherent narratives. On the other hand, cognitive ethnography focuses on the nuanced trajectories of distinct yet interconnected events, revealing how different features and tensions co-exist within a social practice and sculpt its development. In doing so, it adds depth and vibrancy to the intricate patchwork of human forms of life. Importantly, an ecological cognitive ethnography has nothing invested in mainstream psychology; it moved beyond this framework. It is, however, open to interact with neuroscience about how the brain interactively responds to ways of living and vice versa (cf. Anderson 2014).

Is it Possible to Develop a Timely Theory of Reading as Dwelling Within the Page?

Reading models are not invented in a scientific vacuum. Therefore, the discussion of reading is interdependent with how people engage with symbolic material at a given historical time. Historical processes have shaped the axiomatic and scientific bases of reading models, a fact underscored by the enduring “reading wars.” These wars represent heated debates over the optimal approaches to reading instruction, spanning diverse methodologies such as phonics-based teaching and ‘global’ or ‘whole word’ reading approaches (cf. Dehaene 2009; Trasmundi and colleagues 2021). Neuroscience has engaged in this debate and argues, that some methods are better than others when teaching children to read: when the brain

encounters what could be termed a 'brain-unnatural method' such as global reading, it triggers responses in the right hemisphere's visual word form area instead of the left, resulting in a less efficient pathway from vision to meaning (Dehaene 2009).

In essence, reading in brain-unnatural ways becomes more challenging and requires greater cognitive effort compared to alternative methods. However, neuroscience primarily focuses on reading in a narrow sense. The neuroscientist, Stanislas Dehaene, acknowledges that the profound question of how visual symbols on a screen or paper, encountered by the reader's senses, can ignite imagination, provoke emotions, foster deep understanding, and alter our perception of self and the world, remains largely unexplored. While Dehaene suggests that this puzzle remains a concern for neuroscience, Ingold's critical perspective becomes crucial. That is because neuroscience grapples with unravelling how meaning manifests *within the brain*: "how meaning is actually coded in the cortex remains a frustrating issue. The process that allows our neuronal networks to snap together and 'make sense' remains utterly mysterious" (Dehaene 2009, 110). In these uncharted realms, neuroscience must expand its boundaries to seek answers, a sentiment I share with Ingold.

Ingold presents an anthropological analysis highlighting significant shifts that have influenced our understanding of reading and critiquing the prevalent cognitivist perspective. Our current model of reading is not a result of changes in reading ecologies, he claims, but is simply flawed by reducing reading to something that is "so narrow, indeed, that it includes barely a fraction of what people actually do when they read" (Ingold 2024, 1). He thus, elucidates the biases perpetuated by mainstream reading models including how modernity has shaped this perspective in and beyond academia, and contrasts it with alternative approaches rooted in grounded, social, and bodily understandings of what people are *actually* doing:

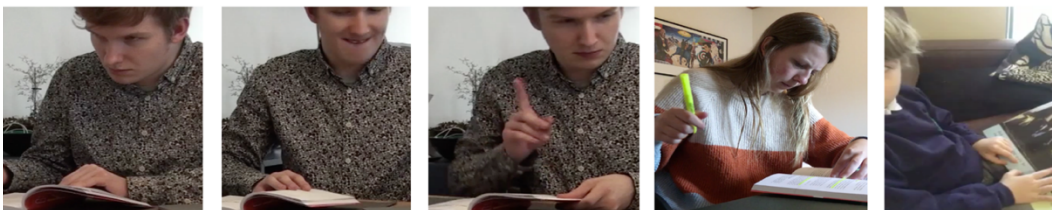
...in reading a score, you stay close to the surface, almost as if you were following a path on the ground. Medieval monks would do the same in reading liturgical texts, following the letter-line with a finger and murmuring the corresponding sounds as they went along. The words, heard rather than seen, would fall out from the reader's voice. [...] Essentially, to read in this way means to *inhabit* the page, much as the wayfarer inhabits the terrain. [...] How different it is for the readers of today! For them it is as though the page has vanished (Ingold 2024, 6).

Ingold's anthropological work reminds us that when reading ecologies change (for instance the material changes in reading surface starting from the veil to pane, sheet, face, and ultimately the digital screen), so does the engagement fuelling reading experiences; but it also reminds us that such changes are the results of what societies—including scientific communities—prioritise. This is important because reading ecologies have changed significantly over the last century and dramatically within the last 25 years (Wolf 2018, Bratman and colleagues 2015). For education, for instance, it means that not only have we moved reading out of the landscape and into classrooms, but we have also moved the classroom out of the brick-and-mortar school building and into the digital cloud; iPads or laptops replace print as primary substrates for textual material.

We need to empirically explore the impact that these changes have had on reading, particularly in terms of imaginative engagement with the world. This shared concern raises the question of whether it is possible to reconcile what reading *truly meant* with the evolving landscape of screen-based reading and the technologically driven reading experiences of the future. While Ingold highlights the challenges of the current reading practices, and questions the attitude of readers of today, I will refer to contemporary ethnographic studies that offer an alternative perspective, suggesting that readers, regardless of whether they read on screen or in print, often struggle with sustaining attention (OECD 2023). However, this challenge does appear to be more pronounced in screen reading compared to print reading. The observed difference indicates that screen-based reading may hinder the immersive and bodily expressive aspects of engagement, ultimately diminishing the overall reading experience and presumably due to causes mentioned by Ingold. However, among print readers, an intriguing distinction was noticed (Trasmundi and Toro 2023).

Readers who enjoyed the act of reading tended to exhibit slower, more dynamic and hesitant forms of engagement, while those who struggled to engage and enter a state of flow typically followed a faster, more uniform, and predictable reading trajectory. Immersed readers in contrast endured the tempest: instead of giving up, they are emotionally invested, and the emerging tensions are modulated in their pace-making; they wait and undergo continuous cycles of changes from puzzlement to judgement. The gallery below provides a few examples of such moments in these cycles from readers’ natural (i.e., non-experimental) reading practices.²

The few examples indicate that the readers do not disengage even though their engagement is ruptured and dynamic: they gesture, change their gaze direction, and mimic intensely. In fact, the dithering does not seem to relate to decline in attention or inability to move on. Rather, the readers use gestures—like Ingold’s monks—which allow them to smoothly change between conducive forms of engagement very efficiently.



² In a current research project, “The Imaginative Power of Reading”, I explore the hypothesis that readers who embrace pauses during reading may exhibit more enriched imaginative reading processes compared to those who avoid them. Indeed, this idea warrants further empirical exploration to uncover how various socio-cultural and material constraints influence the (non)occurrence of pauses. Key questions arise regarding the relation of constraints amongst different readers—such as genre, pace, task, medium and tools, culture, personality, location, and motivation—that shape pause conditions during reading. This shift in focus towards readers underscores the diversity of reading trajectories among individuals. Moreover, engaging in conversations with readers beyond their reading sessions provides valuable insights into how reading intersects with their cultural, social, and personal identities. This depth of understanding exemplifies the essence of cognitive ethnography, as researchers observe how norms, emotions, reading tools, personality traits, and settings collectively shape the reading experience.

One strategy to contain tension, as we see in the above gallery, is holding on to certain elements (gesturing in the text) while at the same time exploring others. Also, we see how the female reader holds on to an impression by marking its significance as she suddenly leaves her hand hovering in the air, when she also searches for elements in the text. Readers allegedly rely on bodily pace-making strategies for dwelling and dithering within the pages and managing pauses and allowing imaginative processes to emerge. This control of attention is similar to *being ready* in the word's original sense, because the reader allows associative ways of thinking to percolate without losing track of the overall path. These observations have significantly influenced the development of the theory of reading as dwelling and dithering within the page. It became evident that dwelling is intricately intertwined with timing, encompassing attitudes of both waiting and responding. Meaningful hesitation fuelled rather than inhibited the reading process among the observed readers. This phenomenon resonates closely with the Japanese philosophy of embracing pauses in life.

Consequently, I propose that adopting such an attitude of waiting and embracing pauses can be pivotal for cultivating a deeper engagement with the page. By incorporating this philosophy into reading theories, we can attain a more nuanced understanding of what reading entails and its potentialities. Moreover, it can serve as a normative guide to encourage readers to adopt a different approach when interacting with text. Furthermore, from observations it is suggested that screen reading may be more likely to inhibit this immersive experience, a topic I will elaborate in the final section. However, prior to addressing this issue, I will elaborate on the significance of integrating this philosophy of living pauses into the fundamental assumptions underlying reading.

A Japanese Philosophy of Living Pauses in Reading as Dwelling

By dwelling within the page, I mean invest the time to experience and question its features. It requires an effort to enact a mindful attitude and it takes more time than rapid scanning of a text—or when a reader ‘leapfrogs’ from page to page without carefully engaging. Dwelling is a strong relationship whereas skimming or scanning is just an ephemeral meeting. While Ingold mainly explains this skimming tendency as causally related to the surface-ground texture of the reading material, I argue that an awareness of attention that also relates to crucial aspects like motivation, skill and attitude, can be trained.

An important theoretical backbone that gives flesh to the idea is the theory (and dramaturgy) of living pauses from the Japanese Noh theatre, established by Zeami in the 14-15th centuries (Morioka, 2015). The Japanese interrelated concepts of *a living pause* and *a moment of nothing* are *ma* and *senu-hima* (Morioka 2015; Kono 2022). In the Japanese Noh theatre, *senu-hima* is performed as: “taking a pause, maintaining silence, and in experiencing the deepened chronotope” (Morioka 2015, 84). The concept gives weight to the idea that waiting and pauses are not just empty voids, but meaningful because of their dynamic change potential. Also, in traditional Japanese culture, people report how *ma* is experienced as an inherent dynamism of an intertwined space-time.

Ma is “giving space for inner recapitulation, rehearsal, and imagination [and] is a facilitating factor in dialogical relationships” (Morioka 2015, 84). Ma, as described in the general Japanese culture, is a basic phenomenon of controlled locomotion, and defined as crucial for generating quality in life, rich imagination, and dialogical skills (Morioka 2015). Further, *a*

living pause in the Noh theatre has been described as the most intriguing moment because it disturbs anticipation, habitual thinking, and prediction (Morioka 2015, Kono 2022).

When flow is punctuated, the waiting attitude constitutes a threshold for new beginnings. In other words, a waiting attitude during reading *can* be an imaginative incubation phase where everything becomes possible. In reading, these moments have not systematically been studied empirically *in situ*. However, from the pilot studies I refer to, these moments have nothing to do with decoding. Likewise, from personal observations, I experienced that when Noh-performers suddenly freeze on the stage, the audiences hold their breaths, they are highly alert and cognitive-affectively engaged (Morioka 2015). The tension is felt, and observable and the actor's pause is not random but deliberately timed and informed by experience: "The actor's internal mindful effort is critical. Superficially, it may seem that the actor has halted his movement; however, his inner tension must be maintained" (Morioka 2015, 90).

Similarly, readers can be encouraged to cultivate and embody a dynamic attitude, restraining the tendency to skim and skip. But it requires extreme attention control: "Paradoxically, it necessarily requires more effort for the Noh actor to retain this posture of *not-doing*, and activate the internal sensitivity of his mind" (Morioka 2015, 90). Likewise, readers should learn how to wait in reading and to integrate ideas as they read. Importantly, in the Noh-theatre, *senu-hima* does not just involve an inner tension, it is also a performance, which is described as *kami* (the performance of *the sound of silence*) (Morioka 2015; Kono 2022).

It indicates how the performers hold their breaths for a while, and that performance will determine every action that follows in terms of strength, pitch, speed and timing. Because the future is not scheduled, *kami* depends on what happens in the situation. Crucially, for Noh actors to master *senu-hima* and *kami* requires a lot of training and attention control. In light of these insights, it seems recommendable to encourage living pauses in reading too. And further to explore how the theory of *senu-hima* can be applied to the case of reading and to education and learning far more generally.

What the Theory of Reading as Dwelling Does *not* Include

Some readers would now think: what about the majority of readers, I mentioned above, that struggle with dwelling within the page to the extent that they never get immersed? And what about the readers who report that reading mostly feel like a tedious task, or a taxing engagement saturated with aversion? For them, reading is a forced activity, devoid of genuine interest, reduced to mere (alphabetic) rule-following task. Further, many proficient decoders, particularly children, find themselves disinterested in the content they recite, focusing solely on correctly matching of letter-sound correspondences. They might find joy in treating it as a rule-following, problem-solving game.

While such activity is organised around a text, I would say that it is very different from reading as dwelling within the page. Yet, I reserve such practices for a theory of language games aimed at recognising and articulating words, for instance. Likewise, Alva Noë suggests, that perhaps we need to differentiate between reading and merely perceiving

words, much like the distinction between using a hammer and admiring its appearance: “Maybe we need to contrast reading and, as it were, seeing a word, just as we can contrast using a hammer and, as it were, contemplating the look of a hammer” (Noë 2023, personal communication). Further, Ingold argues that “reading has become a practice of algebra, in its original sense—from Arabic—of the ‘reunion of broken parts’” (Ingold 2024, 6).

I concur with Ingold’s assertion that reading is increasingly being replaced by a superficial form of engagement, akin to algebraic reading. But empirical studies offer valuable alternatives to this tendency which can be used intelligently in the cultivation of a more engaging form of reading. By observing how individuals enact living pauses in their reading, we can derive practical strategies to enhance the reading experience. This insight can ultimately contribute to the development of a theory of reading based on the concept of dwelling within the page. Such theoretical advancement is crucial because the crux of matter lies in the fundamental disparity between existing theories of reading and the actual act of reading itself. As Ingold critiques, many current theories prioritise problem-solving and task completion over genuine reading experiences. Therefore, it is imperative to provide empirical examples and theories that describe exactly what a genuine reading experience involves and entails.

Moreover, this theoretical shift may serve as a safeguard against collective forgetfulness regarding the significance of past reading practices. It is noteworthy that reading research’s amnesia is not confined to psychology alone; reductionist tendencies permeate various scientific domains that have a theory of agency and language, which is relevant for reading research. For example, John Stewart, a process biologist and enactivist, shares Ingold’s dissatisfaction with how life is studied in highly reductionist manners, and he advocates for a revitalisation of biology if we want to understand the complexity of life:

[B]iology studies an object, the object of its science, which is not life! The object of biology is physico-chemical. From the moment that one does biochemistry and biophysics, and one understands the physico-chemical mechanisms which account for the properties of living beings, life evaporates! *Today, a molecular biologist has no use, in his work, for the word ‘life’.*” (Stewart 2019, 1, my emphasis).

Likewise, the linguist or cognitive scientist has often neglected the reader: On their objective road to work, they squeezed life out of the project: “It is when they put on their hats as scientists that life evaporates” (Stewart 2019, 4). Presenting a theory of reading as dwelling within the page is an attempt to breathe back life into reading research. Perhaps a true *science* of reading makes little sense, since it will naturally be lifeless and unable to focus not on reading but on readers, not on rule-following but on how readers become.

A History of Future Readings: Who *Really* Reads Anymore?

We currently face at least two interrelated challenges for reading as dwelling within the page. First, technological innovation makes the page vanish, leading to a very different form of engagement from previous manual engagement. Second, organisations are politically shaped by ideas about proficiency, efficiency and productivity, which encourages a rapid form of engagement that is in deep contrast with dwelling and dithering.

The initial challenge involves a concerning trend: the younger generation reads less than before, and they struggle increasingly with long-form reading (Mangen, Olivier and Velay 2019). This decline may stem from various factors, however, one major topic that is being discussed is *digitisation*, including the pervasive shift from books to screens and from handwriting to typing, reflecting the broader digitisation of traditional manual processes of engagement. Paradoxically, surveys and inquiries into students' and children's reading preferences consistently reveal a strong inclination towards printed texts over digital ones (Baron and Mangen 2021). However, it is noteworthy that many digital-native readers, despite their preference for print, often find themselves compelled to engage with digital formats due to the omnipresence of technology in contemporary life.

Currently, there is a timely emphasis on exploring the affordances of both screen and print reading. Ingold has articulated concerns about the disappearance of the page, noting how it impedes bodily engagement that seems pivotal for imaginative and creative, critical thinking. As an example, one effort to counteract this tendency is evident in the Swedish Government's reversal of its digitalisation strategy in primary education. The government has earmarked significant funds to procure high-quality books, acknowledging that the previous digitalisation approach was implemented without sufficient critical examination.³

Only time and further research will unveil the extent of cause and effect in this regard. I argue that an ecological cognitive ethnography can inform this view by presenting empirically informed narratives that demonstrate the differences in tactile, bodily, and sensorimotor experiences when engaging with various materials (Wig and colleagues, forthcoming). However, I also stress the importance of considering attitudes towards reading. Why do we read at all? And is the decline in reading engagement among contemporary readers just as much due to a lack of time and incentives for dwelling? This brings us to the second challenge: the impact of political agendas on organisational frameworks, subsequently shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and their reading habits.

Universities, historically centres of scholarly reading, serve as an apt illustration of this dynamic. Research by Baron and Mangen (2021) illustrates a departure from the reading culture once prevalent in academia. Their findings reveal a decline in the volume of texts included in American curricula, with texts becoming notably shorter and less challenging. The historian and literary critic, Stefan Collini, posits that this shift can be attributed, at least in part, to the broader transition towards a market-driven society:

... universities change as societies change, but never as a simple and direct reflection of those changes: the relationship is always more dialectical and indirect. One way to characterize the transformation of much of the developed world in the past three decades is to say that we have moved from having market economies towards being market societies, as more and more

³ <https://www.folkeskolen.dk/it-i-undervisningen-skolepolitik-christiansborg-sverige/sverige-onsker-ogsaa-mindre-skaermtid-afsatter-penge-til-fysiske-undervisningsmaterialer/4699176>.

domains of life have been reshaped on the model of market competition for profit (Collini 2018, 36ff).

He argues that the maxim “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it” epitomises the dominance of productivity in universities, eclipsing receptivity to others’ contributions unless they directly contribute to productivity. This imbalance, deeply ingrained and unsustainable, prioritises publications and citations over genuine learning and growth (Collini 2018). Consequently, scholars end up writing for miniscule audiences which, in Ingold’s terms, leapfrog from place to place to see if there is anything of use to support one’s own ideas. This prevailing, hasty attitude fosters a culture of sending without receiving, speaking without listening, teaching without learning, writing without reading, and demanding attention without reciprocating. Finally, this form of monological engagement shapes the pressing question: Who *really* reads anymore?

In conclusion, because organisations and communities prioritise values such as growth, productivity, and quantity, they inadvertently foster cynical modes of engagement. While these attitudes can be hard to shake off, initiating conversations like this is a crucial step towards fostering positive change.

References

- Anderson, Michael. 2014. *After Phrenology: Neural Reuse and the Interactive Brain*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Baron, Naomi S. and Anne Mangen. 2021. “Doing the Reading: The Decline of Long-Form Reading in Higher Education.” *Poetics Today* 42 (2): 253–279.
- Bratman, Gregory. N., Gretchen C. Daily, Benjamin, J. Levy and James J. Gross. 2015. “The Benefits of Nature Experience: Improved Affect and Cognition. Landscape and Urban Planning.” 138: 41-50.
- Collini, Stefan. 2018. *Speaking of Universities*, New York: Verso.
- Cowley, Stephen, J. 2024. “How Expertise is Enabled: Why Epistemic Cycles Matter to Us All.” *Social Epistemology* 38 (1): 83–97.
- Dehaene, Stanislas. 2009. *Reading in the Brain: The New Science of How We Read*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Halliday Michael and Christian Matthiessen. 1999. *Construing Experience through Meaning: A Language-Based Approach to Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hutchins, Edwin. 1995. *Cognition in the Wild*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Hutchins, Edwin. 2014. “The Cultural Ecosystem of Human Cognition.” *Philosophical Psychology* 27 (1): 34–49.
- Ingold, Tim. 2024. “On Being Tasked with the Problem of Inhabiting the Page.” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 13 (2): 1–7.
- Ingold, Tim. 2022. *Imagining for Real: Essays on Creation, Attention and Correspondence*. London: Routledge.
- Kono, Tetsuya. 2022. “A Meteorological or Oceanographic Approach to the Self: An Interpretation of the ‘Gap’ of Zeami.” <http://www.ensoseminars.com/presentations/past50/>. Accessed 20 October 2022.
- Malafouris, Lambros. 2024. *How Things Shape the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Mangen, Anne, Gérard Olivier, and Jean-Luc Velay. 2019. “Comparing Comprehension of a Long Text Read in Print Book and on Kindle: Where in the Text and When in the Story?” *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (38): 1–11.
- Morioka, Masayoshi. 2015. “How to Create MA—the living pause—in the Landscape of the Mind: The Wisdom of Noh Theatre.” *International Journal for Dialogical Science* 9 (1): 81–95.
- OECD. 2023. “Decline in Educational Performance only Partly Attributable to the COVID-19 Pandemic.” <https://www.oecd.org/newsroom/decline-in-educationalperformanceonlypartlyattributable-to-the-covid-19-pandemic.htm>.
- Stewart, John. 2019. *Breathing Life into Biology*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Sutton, John. forthcoming. “Affective, Cognitive, and Ecological Components of Joint Expertise in Collaborative Embodied Skills.” In *Expertise: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Mirko Farina, Andrea Lavazza and Duncan Pritchard. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Trasmundi, Sarah Bro. 2020. *Errors and Interaction: A Cognitive Ethnography of Emergency Medicine*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Trasmundi, Sarah Bro, Edward Baggs, Juan Toro, and Sune Vork Steffensen. 2024. “Grounding Expertise: The Case of Reading as a Non-Well-Defined Task Domain.” *Social Epistemology* 38 (1): 13–27.
- Trasmundi, Sarah Bro and Sune Vork Steffensen. 2024. “Dialogical Cognition.” *Language Sciences* 103: 101637.
- Trasmundi, Sarah Bro and Juan Toro. 2023. “Mind Wandering in Reading: An Embodied Approach.” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 17: 1061437.
- Trasmundi, Sarah Bro, Juan Toro and Anne Mangen. 2022. “Human Pacemakers and Experiential Reading.” *Frontiers in Communication* 7: 897043.
- Trasmundi, Sarah Bro, Lydia Kokkola, Theresa Schilhab and Anne Mangen. 2021. “A Distributed Perspective on Reading: Implications for Education.” *Language Sciences* 84: 101355.
- Trasmundi, Sarah Bro and Stephen J. Cowley. 2020. “Reading: How Readers Beget Imagining.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11: 1–12. 531682.
- Wig, Stååle, Anne Mangen, Freyja Holm-Tourisen, Frank Hakemulder and Sarah Bro Trasmundi. forthcoming. “Flow and Longform Reading: An Embodied Cognitive Perspective.” *Cognitive Semiotics*.
- Wolf, Maryanne. 2018. *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*. New York: HarperCollins.