# Read the Unreadable

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* It is important to note that my chosen reference, *I Read Where I Am: Exploring New Information Cultures*, is a collection of 82 essays. In this writing, I focus particularly on three of them: *Watching, Formerly Reading* by Max Bruinsma, *Reading Surroundings* by Koert van Mensvoort, and *I Read More Than Ever* by Erwin Blom.

Since Unit 2, I have been continuously exploring the dimensional changes between objects, images, and texts. In this process, I enjoy using physical materials as media to test whether the meaning of the same object remains unchanged when presented in different ways, just like *One and Three Chairs*. As I play between the transformations of space, plane, and object, and think about how objects carry multidimensional experiences, the novel *Flatland* naturally became my source of inspiration and the subject of my early experiments. However, rather than focusing on the story itself, I am more interested in the reflections brought by my reading experience. The dimensions carried by the medium of the book itself seem even more intriguing.

As my visual experiments developed, the act of reading the same book through different mediums and formats constantly expanded my understanding of both the book and reading. Through continuous iterations, I finally focused my perspective on reading itself, exploring how reading happens across different dimensions. Nowadays, we access information through screens, which means the word "reading" has already moved beyond its original associations with *text* and *book*, becoming a new way of perceiving.

This process resonated with Max Bruinsma's statement: *What we used to call 'watching' seems increasingly like what we once called 'reading'.* In contemporary visual culture, reading no longer merely means decoding symbols and constructing meaning, and watching no longer simply refers to receiving impressions or perceiving images. The boundary between the two, or the difference between text and image, is gradually disappearing, merging into the same system of meaning production. The normalization of visuality and the ubiquity of digital interfaces have made every viewer into a new kind of reader. "Reading" no longer belongs only to text but has become a cross-media form of cognition. We *read* words, and we also *read* images. At this point, the form of the book as a medium has also expanded accordingly. Can a screen be considered a kind of bookpage? But it is important to note that this layering of digital interfaces onto the form of the book, in my view, does not imply the retreat of printed matter.

These new understanding prompted me to ask: **How can we understand reading as a multidimensional event that flows between text, image, and interface (space)?**

I believe reading is an event because it is generative and situated, rather than a mechanical act of turning pages. Every time you open a book, your gesture, emotion, and surrounding environment change, generating a new reading experience. Each occurrence of reading brings new meanings and effects. This is also why I believe that reading should not be dematerialized. When we talk about reading a book, we cannot simply talk about *reading a book*. We must also discuss how to pick up a book, how to touch it, how to turn its pages, how to silently read it in our minds. It is not merely an act but a grammar that involves time, objects, and space. Koert van Mensvoort raised an interesting question in his essay: *How did we read 40,000 years ago?* At that time, there were no media as we understand them today. But, we were still reading. We read our surroundings, the landscape, and the sky. In other words, reading was never limited to decoding text or images, but was a way of perceiving and decoding the world. So, when discussing the dimensions of reading, would it not be interesting to trace a movement like *reading text → reading screens → back to reading surroundings*? It feels like a return of perception.

However, Koert van Mensvoort also implicitly expressed uncertainty about the appeal of printed matter. Through his notions of *the past of reading* and *the future of reading*, he suggests that print is merely an intermediary period, which I do not agree with. His narrative appears to call for a return to the origin of reading, but in fact it is based on an unreliable assumption that reading evolves linearly. He believes the next step in the development of reading is the digital age of augmented reality, where the world is no

longer something to be touched or traversed, but a data layer that can be annotated, recognized, and superimposed. When the physical environment becomes an interface, perceiving data layers becomes the future of reading.

The reason I question this view is that it overlooks reading as a deep structure of human interaction with materiality. Reading cannot take place only on interfaces. Even when we read through screens, our gestures, operations, and surroundings are still part of the reading process. Therefore, the *back to reading surroundings* I mentioned earlier does not mean a return to the natural environment, but refers to perceiving the context of our reading — the situation we are in at the moment when reading occurs. What I aim to explore is a kind of multidimensional reading and experience of information that goes beyond content itself, occurring across different media, environments, and people, where all elements overlap and interact.

As I gradually updated my own definition of reading, I recalled the project I made in Year 1 for *Methods of Cataloguing*, titled *Unreadable Library*. I was surprised that, after a year, my focus had returned to reading, but with a completely new understanding. In the past, I explored the *unreadable* parts of a book beyond its content, such as folds, stamps, or traces left by previous readers. Now, I believe these are also parts of a book that can be read. Just like *the medium is the message*, the context is the content. They are also readable. This is the charm of printed matter: its materiality can preserve time, objects, and actions, and reading events occur within this very thickness. At this point, our reading objects can expand to encompass the entire system of appearances in the world. Reading becomes a broader process of perception ↔ decoding.

Erwin Blom, in his essay, also expresses a negative attitude toward printed matter. He sees print as a kind of constraint, an outdated authority that once monopolized reading matter. I understand his tone of "farewell to print," since digital media offer more immediate and personalized reading experiences, and new media are often seen as dynamic and decentralized reading spaces. However, *swiping screens makes our world more superficial. Human life gains depth through thing-relations. Thing-relations bring us together physically and create connections.* This connection is friction. When I read *Designing Friction*, I strongly agreed with its affirmation of the significance of friction. The existence of printed matter allows friction to continue to occur during reading, not only between words, but also between people and text, and among people themselves. I have personally experienced this because I read my references both as e-books and as printed books. Since each essay is relatively short, and I need to compare their arguments, I often have to jump between sections. With the printed book, I can fold corners or place my fingers between pages to locate passages more effectively, interacting with the book physically. But when I read the e-book, the pages are flat. I can only navigate through the table of contents again and again, and the friction between me and the book seems to disappear. Therefore, for reading, the connectivity of printed matter is irreplaceable. This convinced me that even in this digital age, printed matter remains crucial for reading. As philosopher Miriam Rasch argues, *complete removal of friction means standing still.* Reading should not be dematerialized. Perhaps the difference today is that, as designers, we no longer design *books* as objects. We design *reading*, we design *friction*.

Therefore, in this unit, my goal is to design a series of reading events on printed media. Through an ever-generating and open-ended collection of events, I hope to let reading flow from text to interface, from content to environment, from visual recognition to the decoding of the world. When this collection is printed and bound, every audience will, in turn, read my reading, creating endless possibilities for connection.

Just as the title of my chosen reference suggests, *I Read Where I Am*, when reading in my definition becomes a form of perception and decoding in a broader sense, it means that I am indeed reading at every moment. The 82 essays in this book are all responses to the act of reading. In a way, they are the authors' *reading* of reading. The multiple interpretations of the same subject by different people construct the dimensionality of the book. In the dialogues surrounding reading across different scales, depths, and types, I see a network being formed. Perhaps this is what I understand as the meaning of triangulating.