



Scripting Reading Motions: The Codex and the Computer as Self-Reflexive Machines (MIT Press)

By Manuel Portela

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In *Scripting Reading Motions*, Manuel Portela explores the expressive use of book forms and programmable media in experimental works of both print and electronic literature and finds a self-conscious play with the dynamics of reading and writing. Portela examines a series of print and digital works by Johanna Drucker, Mark Z. Danielewski, Rui Torres, Jim Andrews, and others, for the insights they yield about the semiotic and interpretive actions through which readers produce meaning when interacting with codes. Analyzing these works as embodiments and simulations of the motions of reading, Portela pays particular attention to the ways in which awareness of eye movements and haptic interactions in both print and electronic media feeds back onto the material and semantic layers of the works. These feedbacks, he argues, sustain self-reflexive loops that link the body of the reader to the embodied work. Readers' haptic actions and eye movements coconstitute the object that they are reading.

Portela discusses typographic and graphic marks as choreographic notations for reading movements; examines digital recreations of experimental print literary artifacts; considers reading motions in kinetic and generated texts; analyzes the relationship of bibliographic, linguistic, and narrative coding in Danielewski's novel-poem, *Only Revolutions*; and describes emergent meanings in interactive textual instruments. The expressive use of print and programmable media, Portela shows, offers a powerful model of the semiotic, interpretive, and affective operations embodied in reading processes.

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- Sales Rank: #3337829 in Books
- Published on: 2013-09-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .69" w x 6.00" l, 1.51 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 424 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Manuel Portela's *Scripting Reading Motions* is the most sophisticated and comprehensive analysis we have so far of the interactions between embodied reading practices, semiotic and bibliographic codes, and the textual engines of print books and digital literature. Covering a diverse range of texts, including artists' books by Johanna Drucker, Jim Andrews' digital kinetic poems, and Mark Danielewski's print book *Only Revolutions*, Portela demonstrates the depth and complexities of reading across media. *Scripting Reading Motions* is a must-read for anyone interested in how contemporary reading practices are evolving in the digital age.

(N. Katherine Hayles, Professor of Literature, Duke University)

Can anyone go on reading and writing today without noticing all the ways that text itself is changing? Not after encountering *Scripting Reading Motions*. Manuel Portela's book is a welcome reminder that literary self-consciousness has a long history -- one that is now being revised, recycled, and rewritten by Portela and the authors he encounters. Armstrong & Tippet, Cayley & Howe, Danielewski, Drucker, Foer, Jhave Johnston, Melo e Castro, Memmott, Montfort, Nelson, Nichol, Pessoa, Phillips, Stefans, Strickland, Tavares, Tomasula, and Torres: when grouped together, writers like these represent something more than the next big thing on the literary and cultural scene. When we read on screens, our words and works are themselves set in motion, no less a part of a temporal unfolding than we are. By returning a sense of temporality to the present, Portela in this book indicates a route towards real historical change, and the transformation of literature within and by the current media environment.

(Joseph Tabbi, author of *Postmodern Sublime* and *Cognitive Fictions*; Director at the Electronic Literature Organization)

About the Author

Manuel Portela is Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, where he is Director of the Doctoral Program in Advanced Studies in the Materialities of Literature.

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