

This is about reading, so I thought I'd start off with a few lines that I've enjoyed reading:

-The Doritos packet takes a huge sword from behind the back of its bag and decapitates the young man.

-If we hadn't burnt the library of Alexandria then we'd have reached the Alpha Centauri (star system) by now and all the spaceships would have Greek writing on them.

-Me and my brothers say bollocks.

-Photographs form a magic circle around us in the shape of the photographic universe.

-Nobody enjoys pretzels in caves.

-I used to be 8cm high and I lived in an antique furniture shop.

In a discussion with John Berger, Susan Sontag once said:

“Since Flaubert, we have been very interested (as writers and as readers) and very moved by a sort of off center detail, an unexpected detail. Flaubert in Madame Bovary describing Charles looking at the back of Emma's neck, for instance; or the angle of her elbow as she poured a pitcher of milk. We look for the angular or the eccentric detail as illustrating some kind of independent sensual effect, which is what we're looking for in storytelling...”

I once read a book in which a character experiences a moment of such shame and embarrassment that a small golden object appears in the room. When I read publicly I often scan the room for this gold object.

I once read a book in which there was a lion on the deck of a boat. The lion looked tired. A grid placed before the lion quartered him, each quarter was then subdivided into 16 squares for a total of 64 squares. The cubes I imagined as ice cube size. I arranged the cubes in a straight line on the floor of my bedroom.

I was once high on magic mushrooms and I tried to read a book. Tiny white strobe lights were running along every sentence from left to right. It was like lights pulsing on an exotic jellyfish. Highly recommended.

When Karl Lagerfeld reads a book he rips out every page he has finished with, so he's always on the first page.

Yoko Ono suggested counting the words in a book instead of reading them normally.

When we read a block of text for the first time, we have no clue what the upcoming sentences will say. It could be seen as brave or stupid to read, since, if we haven't read the sentences before, we don't really know what we're getting mixed up in. The composer Alexander Scriabin thought that there existed a tune which could be played on the piano which would end time, which I sort of believe in a non-believing way about sentences too. Goethe's famous book "The Sufferings of Young Werther" led to around 2000 readers committing suicide, with some dressed in the same blue coat and yellow trousers as the hero Werther. Did some people read this book knowing the risks, thinking they were not susceptible, and then committing suicide?

There might be sentences which would make us lose our sanity if we ever read them. Perhaps some sentences would cause instant death. That might be a little too Japanese horror film but it is likely there are sentences which exist about us online which would have catastrophic results if we ever read them. These sentences are probably on phones all around us now, close to hand but thankfully forever hidden. The other side of this is that there are probably hidden compliments which have been written about us all, which we'll never be allowed to read. Sentences which would make us happier than we've ever been before. Erotic masterpiece haikus about you written by the last person you would expect. These sentences might be just as damaging to read as the hidden insults. There are also top secret government files which we aren't allowed to see. I once knew someone who worked in the Pentagon and he wasn't allowed to tell his wife anything that he did at work. She didn't even know what his job was. I was interested in how they spoke at dinner. It was quite normal. I tried to read him. Nothing.

My brother Stephen was once reading *The Three Musketeers* in a pub when a fight broke out in real life. My brother continued reading the book because as this bar brawl was unfolding he

realised that the sword fight which was happening in the book was far more interesting. Each reader imagines their own particular level of detail. A friend of mine told me he never pictures anything when he reads, he is just reading the words and the words are pretty much all that there is. That might be seen as purist reading. No imagined rooms, no imagined physical people or objects. The words themselves are everything, like a universe made up of letters only. Pythagoras thought that every number was a separate eternal entity living in a super-sensible heaven. Letters on the other hand, seem to live in a nonsensical, scruffy shuffling version heaven. Often stories don't include large amounts of detail about room interiors. In literature the vast majority of interior design is left entirely for us to conjure up. If we physically built the rooms and places which we imagine as we read, what would these bizarre places look like? I imagine they'd be quite hauntingly bare, stark rooms. Are Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen's reading experiences infinitely richer than mine?

As this reading goes on and on you switch off from what I'm saying because in a slight panic you realise you've lost the keys to your home. Your heart rate picks up a little bit. You root around and find your key fob: everything's there. Nothing's lost after all. But the feeling remains. You start to realise that what you'd imagined is a different set of keys, keys which you never really thought about before. You realise, sort of crazily, that the only way to find these new, more important keys is to search through books. It doesn't make sense but it's clear to you that the keys are hidden somewhere in a sentence in a book... You slowly realise with my voice as a sort of background mumble that these keys are for a house which you 100% own outright, although you've never actually seen, you've not imagined this house at any time before, but it's out there. Its existence is a shock to you. The house is beautiful in ways no architect has ever been able to Auto cad. What's inside it? I don't know. But this could be, as you snap awake now, this could what reading is. The search for a set of unknown keys to an unknown home.