An Algorithmic Poem

Mike Edwards

I.

Dead alphabets — stony, mute, uncooperative —
disambiguate, cooking down all that lies between binary
poles to their crystalline communicabilities.
Meanings missed, mistransmitted, petals from a wet
black bough
count and sum the wayward syllables of these lines and
stanzas.
Brautigan's machines of loving grace, watching over us,
stitching javascript to databases
remember our handwriting like other hands.
Ambiguous tactile manipulations
turn meaning into matter, rather than that opposite
progression, in their practices of display:
Marks and metrics, principles of passing moments;
itertations of machines compiling their own code, their
keys hand-punched, material devices made
from sets of syllables.
Stanzas serving as cogs in a text, cogs no more than an
example of scansion's digital calculus: robots
wind metonymically through their serial turns and
transformations and displacements, edging
aside meaning:
Are we not weary of ardent ways?
These irregular abstractions
turn and ratchet, syllable by syllable in their incremental
spondees and trochees, until there is no last
enjambment
to start again, cycle the switch and so reorder the order,
switching the cycle: as one, the blank screens

II.

sing, Frederick Winslow Taylor's automated rhapsodes,
and singing turn us toward
marks and metrics, principles of passing moments.
Stanzas serving as cogs in a text, cogs no more than an
example of scansion's digital calculus: robots
disambiguate, cooking down all that lies between binary
poles to their crystalline communicabilities.
Our minds, intelligences,
count, and count again; count, and count again; sum,
carry, and decrement the counter to zero:
meanings missed, mistransmitted, petals from a wet
black bough.
Memories of the TRS-80, Commodore 64, Atari 800,
itertations of machines compiling their own code, their
keys hand-punched, material devices made
from sets of syllables
neither scan nor rhyme.
Dead alphabets — stony, mute, uncooperative —
scripts that call to mind the surge of memory, the
accumulative weights of words
count and sum the wayward syllables of these lines and
stanzas.
These bits, these beats
turn and ratchet, syllable by syllable in their incremental
spondees and trochees, until there is no last
enjambment
to end before ending.
III.

Brautigan’s machines of loving grace, watching over us, stitching Javascript to databases
count, and count again; count, and count again; sum, carry, and decrement the counter to zero;
mark and meter, divide and quantize, asking how much in each at given lengths.
Memories of the TRS-80, Commodore 64, Atari 800 sing, Frederick Winslow Taylor’s automated rhapsodes, and singing turn us toward
stanzas serving as cogs in a text, cogs no more than an example of scansion’s digital calculus: robots
surge and crash, pushing upward, rise and recede in flowing urge and ebb.
Groups of beings: poems, readers, teachers, scholars — all counters, computers —
turn meaning into matter, rather than that opposite progression, in their practices of display.
Scripts that call to mind the surge of memory — the accumulative weights of words —
disambiguate, cooking down all that lies between binary poles to their crystalline communicabilities.
Iterations of machines compiling their own code, their keys hand-punched, material devices made
from sets of syllables,
wind metonymically through their serial turns and transformations and displacements, edging aside meaning.
These circuitous and reflexive ideas without referents turn and ratchet, syllable by syllable in their incremental spondees and trochees, until there is no last enjambment
to start again, cycle the switch and so reorder the order, switching the cycle: as one, the blank screens
remember our handwriting like other hands.
Groups of beings: poems, readers, teachers, scholars —
all counters, computers,
memories of the TRS-80, Commodore 64, Atari 800 —
count and sum the wayward syllables of these lines and stanzas
and demand
our minds, intelligences
to start again, cycle the switch and so reorder the order, switching the cycle: as one, the blank screens
count, and count again; count, and count again; sum, carry, and decrement the counter to zero.
Meanings missed, mistransmitted, petals from a wet black bough
mark and meter, divide and quantize, asking how much in each at given lengths.
Iterations of machines compiling their own code, their keys hand-punched, material devices made
from sets of syllables,
ambiguous tactile manipulations,
wind metonymically through their serial turns and transformations and displacements, edging aside meaning.
These games
turn and ratchet, syllable by syllable in their incremental spondees and trochees, until there is no last enjambment
to end before ending.

IV.

Lines
wind metonymically through their serial turns and transformations and displacements, edging aside meaning;
remember our handwriting like other hands;
turn meaning into matter, rather than that opposite progression, in their practices of display.
Our minds, intelligences
count and sum the wayward syllables of these lines and stanzas;
disambiguate, cooking down all that lies between binary poles to their crystalline communicabilities;
surge and crash, pushing upward, rise and recede in flowing urge and ebb;
mark and meter, divide and quantize, asking how much in each at given lengths.
Sing, Frederick Winslow Taylor’s automated rhapsodes, and singing turn us toward
dead alphabets — stony, mute, uncooperative — and demand:
count, and count again; count, and count again; sum, carry, and decrement the counter to zero.
Are we not weary of ardent ways?
Turn and ratchet, syllable by syllable in their incremental spondees and trochees, until there is no last enjambment.