



Entangled Algorithms

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You arrive late,

but it has been waiting,

already bright, in the dark,

already nestled in your palm.

No beginning point--
only contact:

thumb on glass,
light under skin,
a pulse against vibration;

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nothing here arrives whole.

You call it a choice.

that slight tilt of your thumb, across now-warm glass.

but was it ever
yours to hold?

A voice breaks from the speaker.
The next face opens before your skin
has left the glass.

The gesture leaves your hand,
passes through walls and weather, code, interface, gesture, all wrapped,
and returns as the next thing
that you, almost wanted.

You think

This is *discovery*

But you are already,
turned,
angled,
made to face
what feels familiar;
a line drawn

before you arrived,
guiding the body
towards what it will call its own.

Each image

sticks,

not by force, but
by the one before it,
leaning close.

The phone shivers once, against the heel of your hand; a pulse flickers at
the wrist,

Before the liking arrives:
a pull felt
behind the ribs,
a quiet pressure, already moving.

a quiet insistence...

You say:

I like this.

But, the liking
Arrives before you;

already it is there, quick as the heat
within your palm, waiting

for the word *I*

to fasten itself

to what has already begun.

It knows the pause after a face,

the return to another; the fraction of a second...

As your thumb hovers

over a mouth already widening.

From such small hesitations,

a version of you gathers: repeated, revised

but *never complete*.

You are not outside.

The watching, leaves its mark.

Each pause cuts. Each swipe sorts. Each return, steadies...

One shape of the world, long

enough

to glow

then slip.

No one hand turns the (loading) wheel:

your thumb, its salted print etched on glass, the lithium, warming your palm;

copper creeping under streets and a fan forcing heat through a windowless room... As another hand, hidden, slows simultaneously.

You close the app.

The screen blackens.

Your face rises in its mirror, laid over fingerprints and the world behind you.

The phone cools...

Your palm does not.

A phrase keeps swirling, behind your teeth and around your mind.

The image permeates
from the screen
to the muscles of your face.

You do not exit.

The next gesture begins, under
your skin.

You are not tracked.

In the cooling glass, a face *assembles*:

window light
salt
the wrist pulsates
the last image still
tightening the mouth.

And even now,
this reading... The eye slowing,
the thumb gone still,
breath is held
at the edge of the line...

Does not belong, to you alone.

It happens *here*, between **pixel and pulse**,

palm and ore,

word and waiting...

Emerging...

through

entanglement.

Contextual Understandings

Rather than stemming from conventional argument, this poem is thought to operate as a posthuman intervention through its own form. I draw from poetic inquiry as a method of analysis, the poem seeks to enable affective, multi-interpretive engagement (Bennion, 2024), to disrupt the linear, dominant knowledge production (Cooms and Saunders, 2024), and unsettle the assumption that the human subject precedes action, choice, or meaning. Its central claim is not stated directly but rather, enacted instead: the reader is positioned as an effect of systems (as opposed to their origin), reflecting a relational, non-unitary, and decentred posthuman subject (Braidotti, 2013). This is developed through the distinguishing between surveillance as the observation of an already coherent subject, and tracking as a productive process, through which a provisional version of the user is formed.

Conceptually, the poem engages with questions of agency, subjectivity, and control in digitally mediated environments. It challenges the notion of autonomous preference by suggesting that desire, recognition, and identity are produced through algorithmic and affective alignments. The algorithm is not personified as an external force, but as part of an assemblage in which the reader is already implicated, constituted through relational forces (Braidotti, *ibid*); this assemblage is made material through thumb, glass, light, lithium, copper, and server heat.

I deliberately use the second person voice to centre the reader, then aiming to destabilise the assumed position. The reader is repositioned and reconstituted through the process to reflect the understanding of intra-action (Barad, 2007), where entities do not exist prior to their relations, but are constituted through them. The movement from ‘You are not tracked’ to ‘a face assembles’ makes this displacement visible, as the reader is now

presented as a temporary formation emerging through the encounter.

The shifts in font, emphasis, and scale serve as analytical devices attempting to mimic the intensities and interruptions associated with affect, drawing on Massumi's (2002) pre-conscious intensity and Ahmed's (2006) orientation. Through the stanza lengths and sentence movements, this fragmentation avoids settling into a uniformed cadence: Ahmed's (ibid) orientation is enacted when the reader is 'turned', 'angled' and 'made to face' what feels familiar, whilst pre-conscious intensity appears in the movement from vibration, to pulse, to the declaration 'I like this'. In lieu of theory as external commentary, theoretical concepts are embedded within the structure and language of the poem itself.

Ultimately, I sought to open a space of discomfort, to reflect the destabilisation that is required to move beyond humanist assumptions, serving as both critique and experiment, within which to invite the reader not to understand posthumanism, but to momentarily experience its implications. The discomfort lies, not in the complete loss of agency, but in the impossibility of possessing agency entirely; the reader acts, but never alone, as the algorithm shapes the encounter, but never is it the sole actor.

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