

The aesthetics of text. A personal note

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The aesthetics of text A personal note

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Playing UNO with my three-year old daughter, having just read some articles on the aesthetics and iconicity of text, I am stunned by my vain purchase of UNO Junior. But let me explain:

As most families we had UNO, the card game, at home. One day I decided to try it out with my daughter and thus we played UNO for “Erwachsene” – as my daughter says, for adults. It went unexpectedly well even though on the box it says that it is for kids over seven.



After a couple of weeks, in one of our shopping trips – to the kids store that is – we found UNO for kids, called UNO Junior. Excited, both my daughter and me, we purchased it.



As one can easily see from the pictures above, UNO Junior certainly seems more suited for kids (3+ as claimed): images of animals are combined with the colors and the numbers creating a feast for the eyes and perhaps facilitating the game for kids so young. We went back home with me hoping to spend our afternoon playing with the new card game especially for kids. But my hopes diminished the moment we started playing. She didn't seem more interested in the images; it didn't really make any difference in her perception of notations. She was still talking about the numbers, paying little if any attention to the images of animals. Dumbfounded, I found something else for her to play with.

A few days later, in the evening, I was exploring some art applications for iPads, and found the aesthetiscope: "an augmented reality app created to help human beings parse original works of art, explore satire, and understand reality". This is a relatively new application, an "art viewing assistant" for iPads, iPhones and androids, created by the visual artist Erin Ko. Searching for "aesthetiscope" on the web, an article caught my attention: "The Aesthetiscope: Visualizing Aesthetic Readings of Text in Color Space", written in 2005 by two well-known computer scientists from the MIT Media Lab, Hugo Liu and Pattie Maes. In it the authors create the Aesthetiscope: "an artwork whose grid of colors are dynamically generated from aesthetic readings of an inputted poem or song, to illustrate the power and potential of going beyond literal understandings of text." They show that text can be read not only objectively but also aesthetically, triggering apart from thought, feelings, intuition and sensation (cf. Carl Jung's four ways of interpreting reality). And at that moment it struck me: written notations, numbers and letters, have indeed an iconicity, so strong that appealed to a three-year old's aesthetics. Text and color were enough to trigger that. 10 Euros spent with no apparent reason but for marketing (at least for the *Erwachsene*).