

Literature after the Technological Singularity

Nick Montfort ELO 2018, 2018-08-17

Who will read our electronic
literature in 100 years?



Superintelligence: What?

- Intelligent behavior orders of magnitude beyond humans
- A superintelligent entity would likely develop by bootstrapping/rapid self-improvement
- This development would transform human life in unreckonable ways

Superintelligence: When?

- When will we accomplish human-level AI?

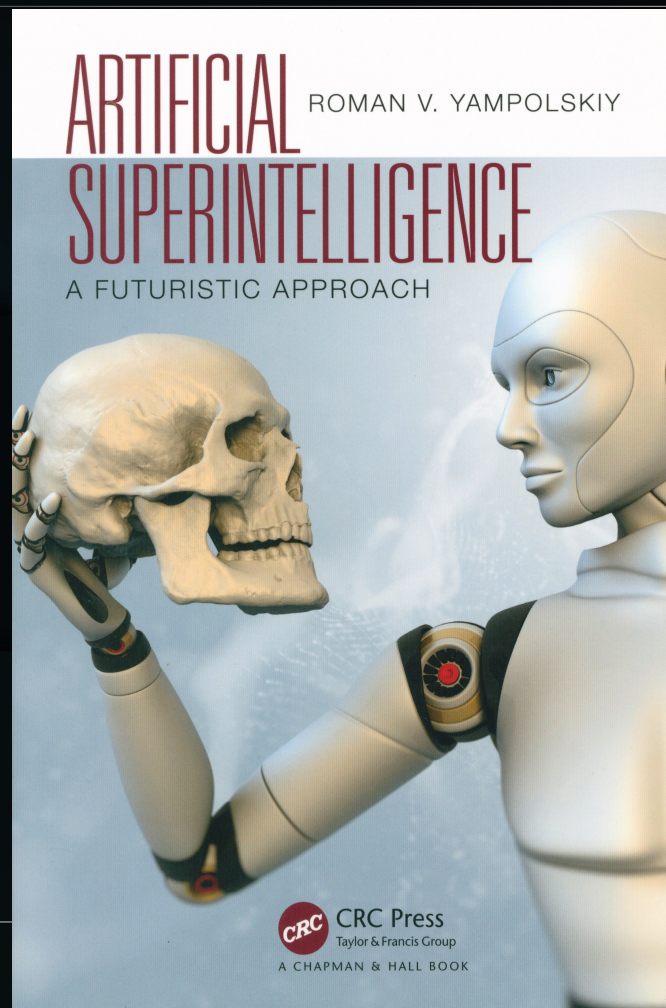
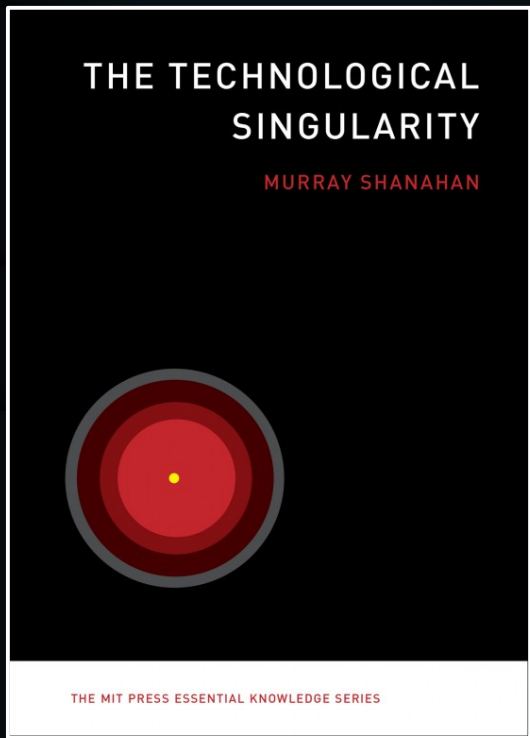
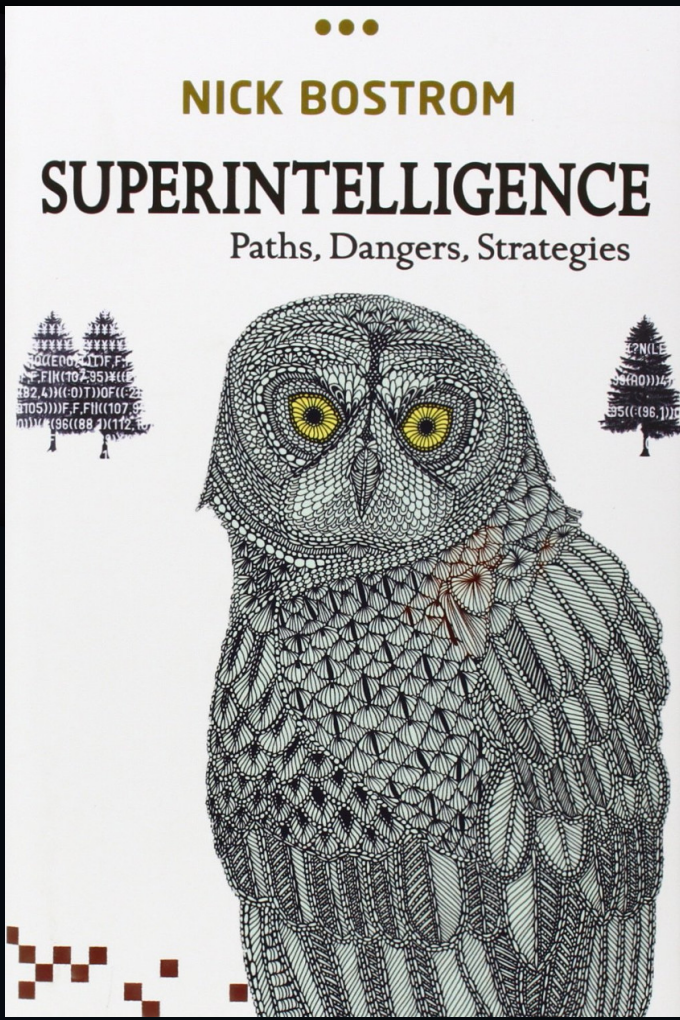
10% prob.	50% prob.	90% prob.
2022	2040	2075

- How long after this to superintelligence?

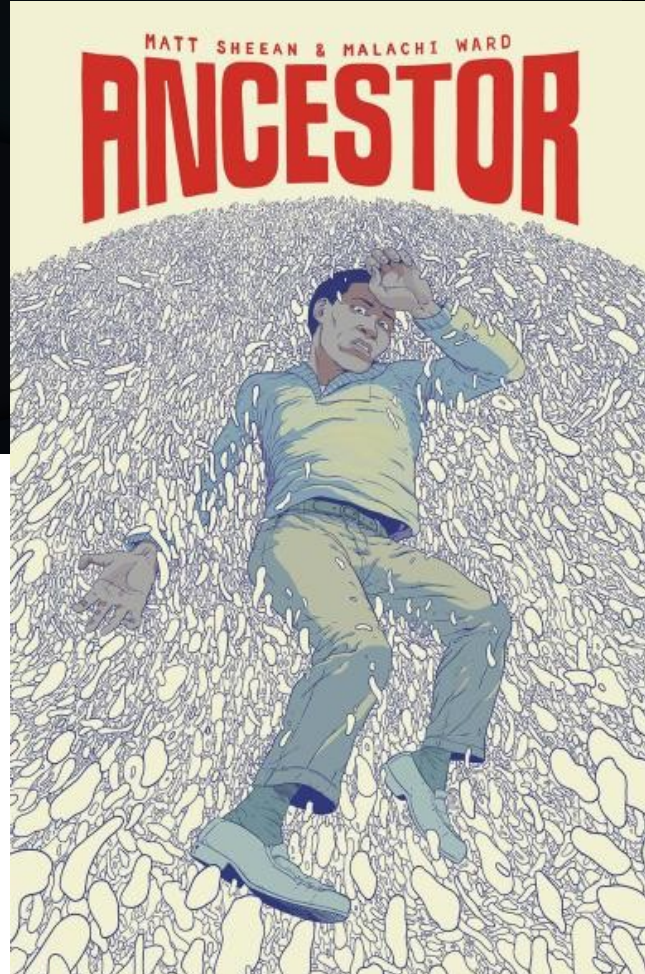
within 2 years	within 30 years
10% polled	75% polled

Meta-analysis of AI researcher surveys, Bostrom 2016

Scholarship on SI & the Singularity



Art on the Singularity



ex machina



Superstupidity

- Another possibility: A global catastrophe resulting in human extinction
- If so, the only readers will be extraterrestrial superintelligences visiting Earth

Orthogonality Thesis

- Superintelligences need not share human goals
- They could evolve/be developed to do almost anything

Now, to share some poetry...



from Silk Poems

Jen Bervin

SILKENS LIGHTESTSMALLEST
TRIFLINGTHELEAST

SLIGHTLYHARDLY
ALITTLE

ABIT
絲

IREARUP
ICALMDOWN

AFAT
LETTERL

CRASHEDOUT
MIDAIR

99

Bervin's Silk Poems

- Deeply involved with biology, culture, linguistic history, writing systems (Chinese & scripta continua), even silkworm subjectivity
- The materialities of the book & of silk are essential
- A 6-year project

The Xenotext

Christian Bök

1. *Orpheus*

any style of life
is prim

oh stay
my lyre

with wily ploys
moan the riff

the riff
of any tune aloud

moan now my fate

in fate
we rely

my myth
now is the word

the word of life

2. *Eurydice*

the faery is rosy
of glow

in fate
we rely

moan more grief
with any loss

any loss
is the achy trick

with him we stay

oh stay
my lyre

we wean
him of any milk

any milk is rosy

Bök's The Xenotext

- A poem using a computationally-found cipher, encoded in a bacterium so the DNA corresponding to 1 synthesizes 2
- Myth, literary history, gender, the Earth's natural history are treated in the core text & other texts
- So far a 16-year project

LOGY, from The Matrix

N. H. Pritchard

a s:
see e to
d s gather
i nes
r t

Only those
Drawn across
Borne by sil
All surrou
Though

Pritchard's OLOGY

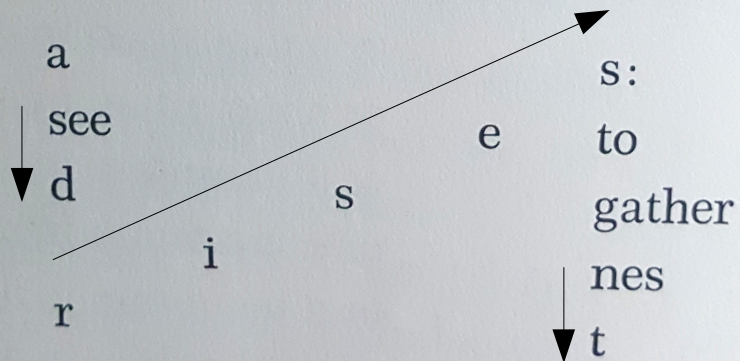
- This poem is not a word search puzzle, or perhaps even a poem to be read aloud
- Nevertheless, I'll suggest seven different ways of reading by using my voice

OLOGY

a s:
 see e to
 d s gather
 i nes
 r t

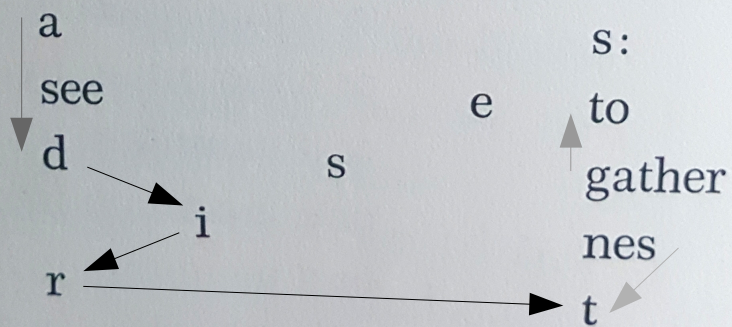
Only those
 Drawn across
 Borne by sil
 All surrou
 Though

OLOGY



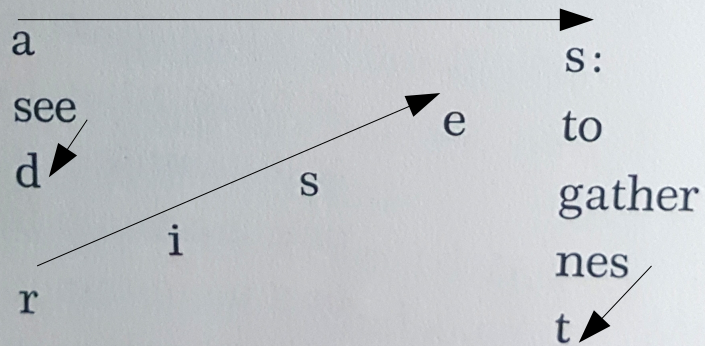
Only those
 Drawn across
 Borne by sil
 All surrou
 Though

OLOGY



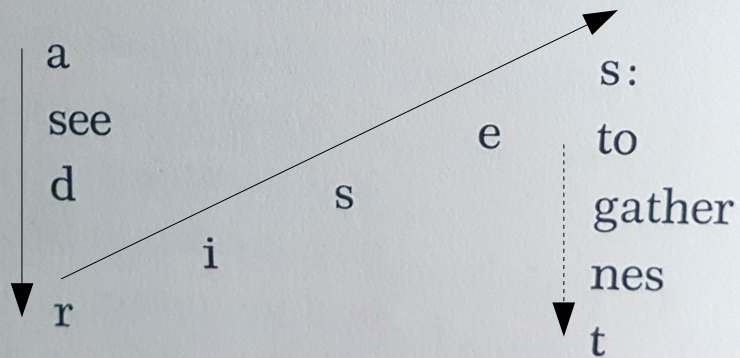
Only those
Drawn across
Borne by sil
All surrou
Though

OLOGY

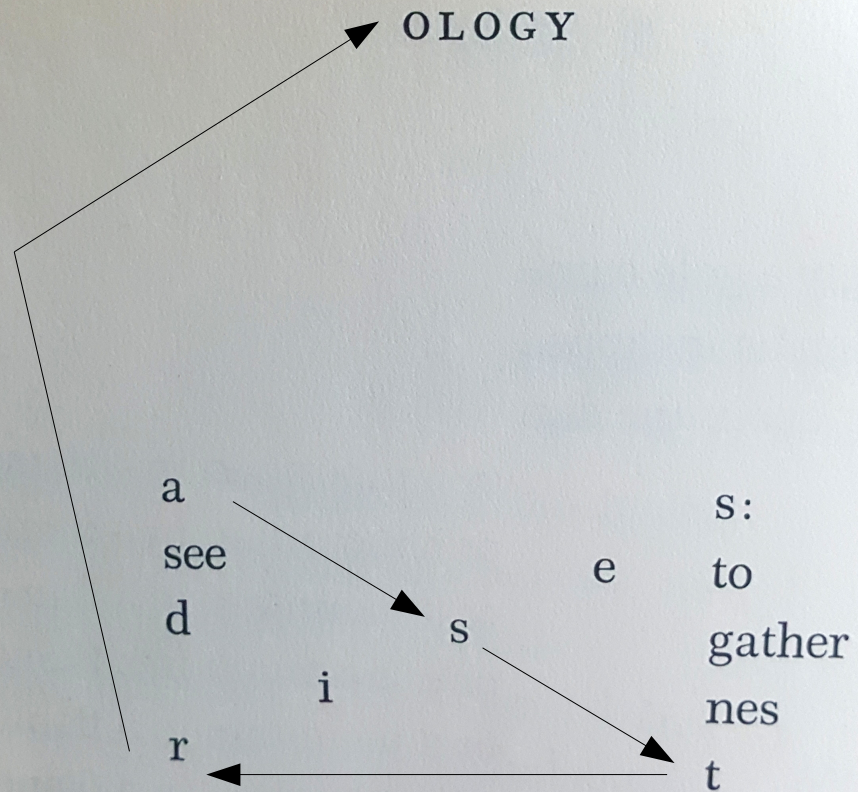


Only those
Drawn across
Borne by sil
All surrou
Though

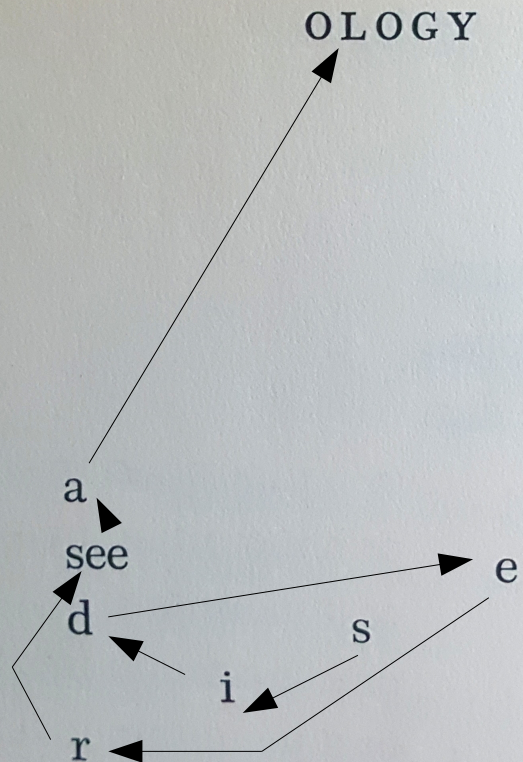
OLOGY



Only those
Drawn across
Borne by sil
All surrou
Though



Only those
Drawn across
Borne by sil
All surrou
Though



s:
to
gather
nes
t

Only those
Drawn across
Borne by sil
All surro
Though

a s:
see e to
d s gather
i nes
r t

Only those
Drawn across
Borne by sil
All surrou
Though

Superintelligent Reading

- How could any nonhuman superintelligence begin to understand these three works?
- If it did, would it better appreciate humanity during & after its development?
- Can e-lit *form & material* be profoundly computational and cultural, historical, etc.?

Electronic literature can *model*

automatic computation's relationship to history, culture, human perception & cognition, and human experiences & goals.

Not by speaking on the theme!

By actually being text/machines.

We'll build the machine readers

Let's also build something to
challenge them, and ourselves.

Literature after the Technological Singularity

Nick Montfort nickm.com
