

The Number Readers

Text and Music

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Computer Graphics

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Programming Assistant

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Voices

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Marjan Sax

Carol Bloom

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Production Realized at **STEIM**

CODES

Codes which are transmitted without being understood
Codes which are read but no longer written
Codes which have no key
Codes which can be read but not written
Codes which cant be broken
Codes which you break without knowing how
Codes which say what you think
Codes which make no sense to unbelievers
Codes you can decode or not depending on taste
Codes which are written but not read
Julius Caesar's code to confuse the Gauls = $c + 3 \text{Mod} 24$
Codes which don't need to be broken.
Code as reason contradicting itself
Codes as disorder arising out of perfect order
Coding coded information
Coding versus shuffling the deck
Codes which can be read more than two ways
Codes we all learn to break
Codes to protect property
Code for code's sake
Self-Reproducing codes
Anything which can't be coded

| | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 00662 | 33507 | 60030 | 06333 |
| 50643 | 87698 | 51775 | 41738 |
| 88984 | 40514 | 55756 | 83127 |
| 96227 | 39163 | 18887 | 51640 |
| 08283 | 01283 | 40655 | 75070 |
| 26836 | 43526 | 22328 | 37382 |
| 60649 | 02906 | 70867 | 68023 |
| 08078 | 45130 | 10599 | 08780 |
| 39465 | ende | 75402 | 30272 |
| 98833 | | 40922 | 86438 |
| | | 39128 | ende |

received 3.370Mhz 22:20 hours UTC.

The Number Readers

Each evening for more than three years now at 19.00, 19.30, 20.00, 20.30... hours UTC, on frequencies of 3.215 3.225, 3.355 and 3.365 MHz, I have heard transmissions of women's voices reading numbers in German. They begin with great precision on the hour and half hour, sometimes preceded by electronic chime patterns. The numbers are in regular groups of five to eight digits, each group repeated twice. Some broadcasts use automatic playback of a recorded voice while others are read plain. The same voices appear regularly on the same frequencies. Often Spanish or Czech readers are heard on these same frequencies. No nation or agency has claimed authorship of these broadcasts.

Walking at night by the canals in Amsterdam, I became aware of a particular woman regularly sitting in the front window of an well-kept old house. It is a fine room, uncluttered with furniture, in the front of the house, facing the water. She is a woman in her late fifties. The table at which she sits is an antique piece but still welcomes homely use. Each night she sits with a pad of paper and a portable radio, an old model with a telescoping antenna. The room is lit only by a hooded table lamp. She sits in the semi-darkness, almost without motion, appearing neither to read nor write. There is often a book on the table beside the pad and pencil. It could be the same book each night, sometimes closed sometimes open with a card holding the page. On the left side of the room there is a staircase to a small balcony with another table and lamp. Occasionally she sits here with her radio.

It is in fact the quality of the light in that room which first drew my attention to this listener. My walks in her neighborhood were on random evenings, hence only after many months did I realize how reliably she kept this vigil. Also only after some time did the synchrony of the number code broadcasts with the woman's vigils occur to me.

Technical Notes: The Number Readers is a piece for live computer-driven electronics, video and spoken text. The music in this performance is produced in real time by digital signal processing software developed by Joel Ryan and a sound specialization system developed for a Yamaha digital mixer by Rolf Boer and Joel Ryan. The video graphics were designed by Barbara Pyle while a resident at **STEIM**. It was first performed at the Shaffy Theater Amsterdam in May 1988. Special thanks to the technical staff of **STEIM** especially Nico Bes and Paul Speenderman for their support of this project.