Kurt Cobain's Journals: Transcribed

By: Whitney Davis
"THE SUN IS GONE, BUT I HAVE A LIGHT."

Kurt Cobain
Project Goal

Is it possible to track an individual's mental turn toward violent acts, such as suicide, through a corpora of their personal writings? This project proposes that, through computational linguistics and the application of textual markup language on an individual's corpus of personal writings, it may be possible to textually map a person's unwritten thoughts.
Methodology

Through the use of TEI text markup language (Textual Encoding Initiative), first transcribe the personal correspondence corpora of the subject. Next, create a list of "Red Flag" words to search for. Lastly, using the created list of search words, process the corpora through a textual analysis software for study.
Kurt Cobain, lead singer and guitarist of NIRVANA, lead a highly publicized life. Throughout his life, he amassed a large collection of personal writings contained within various journals. In 1994, Cobain committed suicide. After his death, a large corpora of his personal writings were published, making him an ideal individual for this study.
"Journals" by Kurt Cobain was published by Riverhead Books in 2002. This book contains a collection of Cobain's personal writings and drawings spanning the whole of his career as a musician with NIRVANA. Though dates are largely not included, the collection is approximately organized chronologically. As a whole, the 286 pages included are nearly all handwritten by Cobain.
Though the collection contains writings on everything from playlists, to personal letters, here is an example of a piece of creative fiction from Cobain's "Journals". This page, which contains some of the most legible handwriting from Cobain, details the acts of the fictional serial killer created by Cobain, Chuck Taylor, and the character's suicide note.
After a rote transcribing of Cobain's "Journals", a "Cleaned Up" version is produced for computational textual analysis to be performed. Essentially, this means that instances of handwritten deletion or insertion, incorrect spelling or punctuation, and formatting were all corrected in order for the online text analysis of Voyant to occur accurately.
Rote Markup vs. "Cleaned Up"

Original: Chuck Taylor

Throughout the periods of 1976 to 1983, a man by the name of Chuck Taylor brutally sexually tortured nine women, one man and one 13 yr old boy, within the area of Greater Los Angeles.

In comparison to other so called "celebrity" murders one wouldn't think of Chuck's case as a record setting toll of victims, in mathematical sense, (no" yet in ritualistic highly detailed, well planned taste for the bizarre (yes". Chuck's story hasn't become the most well known folk tale as had Ed Geine, simply because facts haven't been revealed as in-depth until now, where Ed Geine may have worn his victims skin and ate their flesh, Chuck did that and far exceeded Ed's descriptiveness for his own so called ceremony. Chuck recorded every day of his waking life.

Suicide note found with Chuck Taylor's body. Feb. 17, 1983:
To whom it may concern,

Please excuse Chuck's absense from life. I do not expect anyone's sorrow for my death, maybe relief if anything. I can't describe what mental illness is. I've tried and tried with writings and doctors any my only conclusion is satan has taken over my soul and mind, please use my brain as an example and try to find out what's wrong - like the guy in Texas who shot those people in the tower. To all the relatives and friends of my victims I'm deeply sorry I'm very sorry. HA, HA, HA, I'm not sorry HA. HAHAA, HA mother fuckers cunt! Chuck Taylor not a basketball star.

Cleaned Up: Chuck Taylor

Throughout the periods of 1976 to 1983, a man by the name of Chuck Taylor brutally sexually tortured nine women, one man and one 13 yr old boy, within the area of Greater Los Angeles.

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suicide note found with Chuck Taylors body  feb. 17, 1983</p>

To whom it may concern,</p>

Please excuse Chucks absence from life. I I do not expect anyones sorrow for my death maybe relief if anything. I can’t describe what mental illness is. I’ve tried and tried with writings and doctors and my only conclusion is Satan has taken over my soul and mind, please use my brain as an example and try to find out whats wrong, like the Guy in texas who shot those people in the Tower. to all the relatives & friends of my victims Im deeply sorry Im very sorry. Ha HA HA Im not sorry HA HA HAHA HA you motherfuckers cunt!</div>
Red Flag (Suicidal) Language

die
died
dying
death
deaths
kill
killers
killer
kills
klling
killed
bury
buried
buries
burying
murder
murdered
murders
murdering
blood
bloods
bledied
bloody
hurt
hurts
hurting
suicide
suicides
rape
raper
rapers
raping
raped
knife
knives
pain
pains
painful
painfully
paining
agony
excruciating
fuck
fuckin'
fucker
fuckers
fucks
fucked
fucking
spew
spewed
spewing
drunk
drunken
drank
drink
drinking
drug

drugs
junkie
junky
heroine
addiction
addicted
addiciting
addicts
shoot
shoots
shots
shooting
disturb
disturbing
disturbed
cries
problem
problems
cry
cried

crying
tears
tear
shame
shamed
shaming
shamefulness
ashamed
embarrass
embarrassed
embarrassing
escape
escaping
escaped
escapism
cruel
gay
gays
queer
queers
Red Flag (Suicidal) Language

- homophobe
- homophobic
- homophobia
- homosexual
- fag
- fags
- faggot
- bitch
- bitches
- misogynist
- misogyny
- KKK
- sore
- sores
- wound
- wounds
- wounding
- wounded
- oppress
- oppressors
- oppressed
- oppressing
- terror
- terrorists
- terrorizing
- fear
- fright
- fears
- frighening
- feared
- mean
- angry
- hate
- hated
- hateful
- guilt
- guilty
- sad
- sadistic
- sadened
- sadening
- sadness
- violent
- violently
- violence
- abort
- abortions
- bomb
- ghost
- demon
- ghosts
- demons
- devil
- devils
- satan
- satanic
- dumb
- stupid
- stupidest
- idiot
- idiots
- lame
- puny
- wimpy
- stress
- stressed
- sick
- sickness
- sickening
- disease
- diseases
- stomach
- stomachs
- stomach’s
- ulcer
- inflamed
- vomit
- vomiting
- vomitted
- bile
- hit
- punch
- corporate
- gun
- bullet
- conspiracy
- conspiracies
- venom
- venomous
- disrespect
- disrespects
- disrespected
- violate
- violated
- violating
- pills
- excuse
- excuses
- escape
Voyant Software Text Analysis
Voyant: drug*
Voyant: pain
Voyant: addict*
Voyant: guilt*
Voyant: dead
Conclusion

With the exception of the grouping of various iterations of the word "fuck", a clear increase in "Red Flag" language in the later half of Kurt Cobain's career. While these findings are not enough to definitively conclude that Cobain was consciously or subconsciously thinking about suicide more so as his career progressed, the increase in the frequency of his use of language that may point toward thoughts of suicide can clearly be mapped.
The End!