Reading Literature as a Haptic Art: The Work of Wisdom in the Modernism of Williams and Chekhov

Ronald Schleifer (University of Oklahoma)

Literature – like the aural and visual arts of music and painting – is often understood as trafficking in sounds and images. But "haptic" arts involved with touching – dance, gastronomy, even caricature, one can argue – can help us understand literature, and particularly modernist literature, as situated in the world rather than participating in what the Romantic tradition calls a "disinterested" experience. Touch – and the neurological engagements of what is called "proprioception" – help us discover our place in the world. For this reason, I believe, John Dewey, in his book *Art as Experience*, has profoundly described aesthetic experience as "happiness and delight [that] come to be through a fulfillment that reaches to the depths of our being – one that is an adjustment of our whole being with the conditions of existence." Haptic artistic and literary engagements with the world work to "adjust" us with the conditions of experience, and we can discover in modernist literary texts – William Carlos Williams playful gastronomical poem "This is Just to Say" and Anton Chekhov's modernist-realist account of the creation and destruction of fellow-feeling in "Enemies" – a worldly sense of how touch builds tools, shapes our place in the world, and informs the modernist arts. Bringing together Williams' small poem about eating fruit and Chekhov's powerful short story, which examines the quality of empathy and fellow-feeling in the face of death and bereavement, allows us to understand literature and the arts more generally as participating in what I call "worldly" wisdom. The haptic arts situate us in the world; they relate individuals and communities of individuals to the conditions of "worldly" existence.

As such, I hope to suggest in this short presentation an understanding of the ways in which wisdom might grow out of our engagements with the world. One might grasp a sense of wisdom by noting that

Wisdom manifests itself in understandings, feelings, and actions that promote the well-being of human individuals and communities – and, indeed, that promote the well-being of all living creatures, our environment, and adjustments between life and environment. In doing so, wisdom is based upon apprehensions of the past and the future of human generations. In this, it is always timely.

Embedded in this discussion of literature, wisdom, and well-being is Aristotle's ancient notion of *phronesis*, which is translated into English as both "practical reasoning" and "practical wisdom." Aristotle's examples in *The Nicomachean Ethics* are navigation, a haptic art that situates us in the world; and medicine, another haptic art that governs the sense of the world of Chekhov and Williams – both practicing physicians. In one study of hands-on engagements of touch, Richard Kearney talks about "the carnal wisdom of tactility." Moreover, Walter Benjamin, in his essay "The Storyteller," contends that storytelling – usually stories told by elders to your people – creates a kind of wisdom, what he calls "the epic side of truth." For Benjamin – but also for Chekhov and Williams – wisdom is not true, once and for all: rather wisdom participates in worldly care-taking, the old taking care of the young, the young talking care of the old; husbands and wives taking care of one another, as in Williams' poem or the failure of caretaking, as in Chekhov's story of "Enemies." Teachers, doctors, sometimes strangers, take care of the young. And in turn, the young take care of their elders. Wisdom,

then, if it means anything in our varied adjustments with the conditions of existence, describes intergenerational care-taking that forms the foundations of the well-being of human life.

BIO

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"Experiencing Samuel Beckett's Aesthetic of Stimulation in Solitary and Communal Readings of the Novels: *Stimmung* and Attunement"

Céline Thobois-Gupta (Independent Artist/Dramaturg)

Samuel Beckett's late play *Ohio Impromptu* presents a Reader and a Listener laboriously progressing through a story in which "Little is left to tell" (Beckett, 1982); the reading is often interrupted by Listener's knocks – a non-verbal stimulus signalling that the reading should either be interrupted or the final words repeated. This process – both guiding the reading and the dramaturgy of the play – appears in Beckett's oeuvre as an intensification and synthesis of the reading experiences that he crafted for his readership in the novels as early as the 1930s.

Indeed, Beckett's aesthetic of stimulation – both responding to and resisting literary modernism's "politics of the reflex" (Wientzen, 2021) – transforms the act of reading into a fully embodied cognitive process, in which the agentic reader is led to revel and wrestle with words and the material object of the book. The sensory quality of Beckett's prose enacts what Hans Ulricht Gumbrecht (2008) conceptualises as *Stimmung* (atmosphere), thus converting text into climate through the act of reading. In other words, reading Beckett's prose can be experienced as a performative "attunement" between the reader and the linguistic environment during which "world-making" occurs (Tsing, 2015).

In this paper, I will explore how Beckett's "word-assemblages" function as stimuli in response to which readers co-create a world where they are already enmeshed – a ritual through which one can experience their "ecological being" (Morton, 2018). This study will be focused on my solitary readings of Beckett's *Comment c'est / How It Is*, as well as the TCD Beckett Reading Group's communal reading of the same text.

Sub-Saharan African Somaestheics in War Writing of Francophone African Literature

Xie Fei (East China Normal University)

Before the Négritude movement in the 1930s, representations of Africa in Francophone literature about Africa were overwhelmingly from colonial authors, and framed within their exotic, racialized and dehumanizing imagination. Since its inception, Francophone African literature has sought to define African identity, with the Black body becoming one of its most contested and symbolically charged sites. “In Africa today, the subject who accomplishes the age and validates it, who lives and espouses his/her contemporaneousness (...) is first a subject who has an experience of ‘living in the concrete world.’ (...) his/her ‘living in the concrete world’ involves, and is evaluated by, his/her eyes, ears, mouth—in short, his/her flesh, his/her body.”(Mbembe, 2001: 27) The Négritude movement marked a decisive break by asserting Black cultural identity, with the body and its somatic embodiment emerging as a symbolically and aesthetically revolutionary site of decolonial resistance. In this way, this article investigates the ever-evolving function of somaesthetics in Sub-Saharan African war narratives and how representations of the Black body function as a complex site for negotiating African subjectivity in colonial, anti-colonial, and postcolonial contexts.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space, Achille Mbembe’s postcolonial theory of the simulacrum and absent Africa and mobility studies, this paper investigates how Francophone African war literature negotiates racial identification and historical violence while revealing the limits of constructing a stable, essential African identity through embodied poetics. The Black body, in these texts, simultaneously functions as a material, war-ravaged flesh and a symbolic, postcolonial construct—what Mbembe calls a simulacrum in the mirror. It is within the fissures between these two dimensions that African identity as a mobile, fragmented, and irreducible formation emerges. This study follows a diachronic structure across three major phases: the Négritude movement, anti-colonial war literature, and post-independence trauma narratives. Through representative authors and texts—Léopold Sédar Senghor’s war poetry, Mongo Beti’s guerrilla fiction, and Ahmadou Kourouma’s Allah n’est pas obligé—the paper explores how each period articulates the African body differently, reflecting broader shifts in identity formations.

In the poetry of the Négritude movement, exemplified by Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Black body of Senegalese Tirailleurs in World War I is recuperated from colonial erasure through synecdochic images of skin, torsos, and feet, symbolizing African traditional values. These texts employ somaesthetic strategies (nomination and repetition), drawing on oral traditions to construct an embodied narrative style that opposes colonial representations. However, the collective body remains trapped in a binary relationship with colonial whiteness. As Achille Mbembe argues, these early representations “flow(s) from there being hardly ever any discourse about Africa for itself”(2001:10), and they are a mirror image or a “mediation” imposed by colonial modernity, unable to fully articulate an autonomous African subjectivity.

Moving beyond the paradox of constructing “négritude” (Blackness) in the alterity of “whiteness,” the writer argues that in order to gain political independence, it is necessary to create a body that is above both the colonial discourse and the traditional authority, carrying an independent African identity that did not exist before. The anti-colonial narratives like those of Mongo Beti transforms the Black body into a mobile, insurgent agent emphasizing resistance to both colonial oppression and restrictive traditional norms through guerrilla warfare. The fighters’ bodies traverse colonial roads and traditional spaces in order to generate a ambivalence. On the one hand, they construct a nationalist collective identity in a walking, defiant movement; on the other hand, the corporealized relationship that the characters establish with mobile individuals

and places further transcends the dichotomies of black and white, traditional and modern, and male and female. Beti's writing about the guerrilla body represents the "assimilation tous azimuts(assimilation of all kinds)"(Djiffack, 2000:190) emphasised by Mouralis in Beti's works. It inhabits what Bhabha calls a "Third Space," contesting the idea of purity, such as colonial objectification and nationalist essentialism. In particular, the anonymous, justice-driven mobilities of Beti's female guerrillas expose the impossibility of singular African subjectivity, making possible the narrative articulation of African subjectivities no longer bound to static, essentialist models.

Post-independence narratives, exemplified by Ahmadou Kourouma, depict bodies fractured by civil war and postcolonial violence. In *Allah n'est pas obligé(2000)*, the child soldier Birahima embodies a more hybrid subjectivity, both victim and perpetrator, caught in the unresolved legacies of colonialism, post-colonial identity, and traumatic war memory. The fragmented language, playful subversion of linguistic norms and polyphonic narrative mirror the physical and psychic fragmentation of the post-colonial individual bodies. These individual and plurial bodies resist coherent representation, embodying what Mbembe describes as the equivocality of Africa's image—simultaneously absent, visible, and ungraspable. However, "fluctuations and indeterminacy do not necessarily amount to lack of order. Every representation of an unstable world cannot automatically be subsumed under the heading 'chaos'"(Mbembe, 2001:17). Here, African identity is no longer conceived as a unified essence but as a mobile, disjointed, and continually negotiated formation.

By tracing these evolving representations of the body, this article demonstrates how Francophone African war literature transitions from reproducing colonial image, to disrupting it through mobile, insurgent body, and finally to approach fractured, plural, and irreducible identities. It offers a materialized and tangible approach for understanding postcolonial African identity not as an achieved essence but as a dynamic, embodied negotiation staged in the fissures between physical flesh and symbolic representation. It is in the "impossible" representations of African identity, full of self-constructing and self-deconstructing tensions, that Francophone African literature continues to show its vitality.

Performing the Crude: Amateurism and Modernism in Contemporary Chinese Theatre

Chaomei Chen (Soochow University)

Ever since the onset of Chinese literary and cultural modernization at the turn of the twentieth century, the shadow of realism continues to have considerable rhetorical and socio-political impacts. How do socialist realism, modernism, and amateurism interweave with one another in the development of modern Chinese theatre (*huaju*)? How can we define the renewed relationship between modernism and amateurism in the postsocialist present? I argue that amateurism redefines the notions of "professionalism" and modernism in contemporary Chinese theatre through crudeness, in terms of the performing body, the theatrical public space, and "draft theatre". I will take the Shanghai-based amateur theatre troupe Grass Stage as a case study to analyse these aspects of theatrical modernism in postsocialist, postrevolutionary Chinese theatre.

The Chinese "socialist realism", deriving from Soviet literature and cultural policy, is primarily originated from the socialist literary and artistic aesthetics defined by Mao Zedong's

"Yan'an Talks" in 1942. Haunting Chinese writers and artists throughout Mao's China and even until this day, Mao's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* (Yan'an Wenyi Huitan) has set the keynote of "socialist realism" in Chinese literature and arts. The monopoly of "socialist realism", together with the influx of Western cultural concepts and practices, accounts for the emergence of modernism in the post-Cultural Revolution and early-reform era, which ushered in the "exploration theatre" (*tansuo xiju*) movement in the early 1980s as well as more bold theatrical experiments in the 1990s. Different from the anti-socialist-realism experiments initiated in the "exploration theatre" movement in the 1980s and further developed in the 1990s, the post-millennium Chinese theatre witnessed a "postsocialist realism", which differentiates "theatre of the real" from "realist drama" (McGrath 236; Ferrari, "From Realist" 100-103).

Regarding the relationship between modernism and amateurism, modern Chinese theatre (*huaju*), different from traditional *xiqu* (the so-called "Chinese opera"), originated from amateuristic experiments by Chinese students educated in Japan, Europe, or the United States. However, as theatrical modernization evolved and became mature in the 1990s, the theatre market has been dominated by "professional" theatre companies and graduates from theatre or arts academies. The theatre scene has been gradually losing its edge in terms of social critique and less representing the marginalized groups in a "realistic" manner. Hence, the post-millennium Chinese theatre witnessed an emerging form of "amateur" theatre groups or individuals and a different understanding of "the real".

The Shanghai-based Grass Stage, founded in 2005, was an amateur troupe created by Zhao Chuan, Liu Yang, and their friends, for a collectively created performance, *The 38th Parallel (38 Xian Youxi)*. Although plenty of studies have been devoted to Grass Stage, especially its production of *World Factory*, a systematic comparison between this troupe and Western theatre practices and between different versions of Grass Stage's *World Factory* has yet to be inquired. In particular, firstly, the directors Zhao Chuan and Zoë Svendsen met in Shanghai in 2010, which initiated the cooperation between their theatre companies to produce two plays with the same subject of "world factory", based on their fieldwork and research in the histories of industrial revolution and capitalist globalization in UK and China as well as the lived experiences of factory workers and managers in contemporary China. Svendsen's London-based theatre company METIS later produced a play called *World Factory: The Shirt* (2015-2016), which attracted much less academic attention compared with Grass Stage's *World Factory*. Given with such a transnational and transcultural collaboration, a comparison between the two deserves more academic attention to offer additional perspectives to the resurgent academic inquires of "theatre as public sphere". Secondly, Grass Stage's *World Factory* have undergone tremendous transformations over the three years, under the influence of their involvement with actual factory workers in the Shenzhen city and elsewhere.

"How can comparativist studies challenge our ways of thinking about key ideas in performance research and enrich our understanding of the global situation in which we live?" asked Janelle Reinelt in her investigation of the public sphere in a globalized age (Reinelt 2011: 16). Echoing Reinelt's inquiry, my comparative research on China and UK also attempts to answer this question from the postrevolutionary Chinese perspective where the cultural sphere is increasingly de-politicized. By comparing these two productions and theatre collectives, I will probe into how public spaces can be actualized or disrupted by different dramaturgical practices. Such an exploration also engenders a rethinking of the paradigm of intercultural collaboration, which is usually Western-biased, instead of vice versa as in my case studies. How do the ambitions to generate public spaces in the Grass Stage and METIS end up in different directions

and afterlives in the two cultures? How does the intercultural and global collaboration and conversation between the two theatre collectives engender a unique "global public sphere" in terms of theatre arts? Shifting the recent academic interests in theatrical public space, which has been largely confined to Western theatre scholarship (Reinelt 2011; Tompkins 2014; Balme 2014), to the postrevolutionary Chinese context, I will also take the two productions as case studies to investigate how performance, as an artistic alternative to "civil space", can rehearse and reimagine "other" possibilities through creating different versions of public spaces in contemporary China and UK.

Tailoring the Amorphous "protoform": Mina Loy's Textural Design and Modernist Somaesthetics

Bowen Wang (Shanghai Jiao Tong University)

This paper examines Mina Loy's lifelong obsession with fashion, form, and the body as a mode of modernist somaesthetic expression and intermedial experimentation. Born into a middle-class London household, Loy experienced firsthand the conflicting values of her bicultural upbringing. Her Hungarian-Jewish father, Sigmund Löwy, encouraged her artistic curiosity and intellectual independence, while her English-Christian mother, Julia, instilled in her the Victorian ideals of domesticity, moral discipline, and conformity. Loy's eventual departure from England – pursuing professional training and a cosmopolitan lifestyle in Munich, Paris, Florence, and New York – could be understood as both a personal and aesthetic rupture from the patriarchal and national constraints of her early life. Therefore, this paper argues that Loy's nomadic movements across geographies and disciplines constitute not only an existential rejection of British bourgeois norms, but also a redefinition of identity through the logic of the "protoform" – an amorphous, unstable matrix from which new shapes, bodies, and meanings could be produced and remediated.

The concept of the "protoform" finds a powerful allegory in the figure of the tailor, a profession held by Loy's father and explicitly thematised in her experimental autobiografictional poem, *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*. The tailor, within this context, is not barely a tradesman but a modernist artist-figure: one who deconstructs and reassembles fabric in ways that mirror Loy's own intermedial poetics. The tailor's practice of cutting, shaping, and reconfiguring textile becomes a potent metaphor for Loy's hybrid aesthetic methodology, where language, image, and materiality converge. By viewing the act of tailoring as an embodied and processual art, Loy displaces traditional, rigid artforms with provisional and performative structures that foreground the agency of the artist and the mutability of the body.

Additionally, Loy's archival layouts of women's clothing designs and unpublished writings on fashion emphasise this sustained investment in the somatic dimensions of artistic form. Far from being peripheral, her dress and other designs inform a poetics of bodily metamorphosis, gender transgression, and cultural hybridity. As this paper will demonstrate, Loy's fashion drawings and textual experiments work in tandem to challenge normative boundaries – between media (text vs. image), gender roles (masculine vs. feminine), and cultural affiliations (Englishness vs. cosmopolitanism). Her notion of tailoring thus becomes a practice of

continual self-making and self-remediating, where identities are not fixed but perpetually refashioned through formal invention and material transformation.

This reading situates Loy within broader debates in modernist studies about the relationship between aesthetic form and bodily experience. Drawing on theories of somaesthetics, new formalism, and intermediality, the paper reconsiders Loy's artistic output not as fragmented or marginal, but as a coherent and radical mode of corporeal modernism. Her tailoring of form – both literal and metaphorical – emerges as a dynamic site where body and text(ure) intersect to stage acts of creative re-embodiment and epistemological renewal. By doing so, Mina Loy contributes a vital, materially-grounded perspective to modernist experiments with the boundaries of language, identity, and the body.

Resonant Traces: Time, Space, and the Materiality of Sound in Beckett and Lucier

Logutov Andrey (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt)

This paper explores the relationship between sound, embodiment, and subjectivity through a comparative analysis of two seminal twentieth-century works: Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and Alvin Lucier's sound composition *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969). Although emerging from distinct artistic traditions - modernist theater and experimental music respectively - both works interrogate the materiality of recorded sound and its role in shaping the self. They do so not merely by representing memory or presence but by staging a process of sonic inscription in which bodies and voices are transformed by the media that record and replay them. My central claim is that these works foreground the trace: a resonant imprint that is at once physical and affective, temporal and spatial. In doing so, they challenge conventional understandings of identity, memory, and presence, and offer a deeply embodied model of subjectivity that is both fractured and participatory.

This focus on the trace enables a dialogue between the notions of *embodiment* and *modernism*. Rather than viewing modernism simply as a movement of aesthetic autonomy or formal innovation, I draw on interpretations that emphasize its engagement with media technologies, sensory experience, and the instability of the subject. Likewise, embodiment here is not restricted to the biological or phenomenological body, but is understood as the process by which experience is inscribed in material supports - such as magnetic tape or reverberant space - and how these supports feed back into lived experience. In both Beckett and Lucier, embodiment emerges not as a stable presence but as a recursive and mediated event: a play of resonances, disjunctions, and dissolutions across time and space.

Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* is structured around the annual ritual of re-listening and re-recording. The aging protagonist, Krapp, plays back excerpts from diaries recorded onto magnetic tape decades earlier, then records a new reflection. What unfolds is not a straightforward narrative of a life but a dramatization of how memory, identity, and voice are reshaped by the medium itself. The hisses, clicks, and warps of the old tape recordings are not incidental - they mark time's material passage and serve as audible signs of decay, interruption, and loss. Krapp's present self listens with skepticism, sarcasm, and pain to the aspirations and emotional investments of his younger self. Yet he cannot escape the temporal loop created by the act of recording. Time resonates - literally - in his voice, which is layered, fractured, and haunted

by the mechanical reproduction of earlier selves. This resonance is not merely metaphorical; it is inscribed in the sound of the tape, in its rhythms and distortions. The body becomes audible through its temporal traces, even as it slips away.

The viewer is not outside this process. The material presence of the tape recorder on stage, the bodily gestures of rewinding and fast-forwarding, and the sonic contrast between youthful and aged voices all invite the spectator to reflect on the mediated nature of identity. The moment of listening - shared by Krapp and the audience - becomes a site where embodiment is refracted through memory and medium. We are not simply observers of Krapp's alienation; we are implicated in it. Our own memories, attachments, and distances are drawn into the logic of the tape.

Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room* works with a similarly recursive logic but stages it through space rather than time. In this minimalist composition, Lucier records a short spoken text in a room and then repeatedly plays back the recording while re-recording it. Over time, the intelligibility of his speech dissolves, leaving only the resonant frequencies of the room itself. The architectural features of the space become active filters, reshaping the voice until it loses all semantic and personal specificity. What remains is not silence but a resonant field of harmonics - an acoustic imprint of the room's physical structure.

Whereas Beckett stages the temporal erosion of self through magnetic tape, Lucier stages its spatial dissolution through architectural resonance. Both works enact a process of sonic abstraction, yet they do so in ways that are profoundly embodied. In Lucier's case, the voice does not disappear; it becomes space. The reverberations carry with them a ghostly imprint of speech, a spectral presence that implicates the listener in its unfolding. Listening becomes an act of spatial awareness, of bodily attunement to vibrations, echoes, and decay. The listener, like the speaker, becomes part of the room's acoustics. Subjectivity dissolves not in death but in vibration.

Placing Beckett and Lucier side by side allows us to trace a genealogy of sonic modernism that is attentive to material supports, media processes, and embodied transformations. Both works resist the logic of stable selfhood. They reveal how technological mediation - not merely of image or text, but of sound - can transform the experience of time and space. Importantly, they do so not by denying embodiment but by relocating it. The body is no longer the guarantor of presence; it is what is inscribed, echoed, fragmented, or dissolved in the medium. This, I argue, is a crucial insight of modernism when reread through the lens of sound and media theory: that embodiment is not essence but process, not presence but trace.

Ultimately, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *I Am Sitting in a Room* invite us to rethink the relationship between sound, self, and technology in deeply material terms. They show that the modernist concern with memory, alienation, and identity is not abstract or disembodied, but mediated through concrete, sensory, and technical means. The "I" that speaks, listens, and records is always already mediated - not only by language but by tape heads, room acoustics, frequencies, and feedback loops. In these resonant traces, embodiment becomes audible.

A Mind of Winter: Modernists' Thermal Imaginary

Venediktova Tatiana (Lomonosov Moscow State University)

Thermoceptive experience – which is to say, sensitivity to temperature differences – is built into the sensory fibres of our skin and is visceral yet affectively charged. Through metaphor and inference, it is related to the imagination and knowledge formations. We shall explore some instances of the aesthetic of the cold which, I propose, is definitive of the modernists' literary and cultural imaginary. Modernist literary culture is intent on exploring at close quarters the self-world (or body-environment) border - where the figural is slipping into literal and the latter deliteralized through resonance.

What physiologists describe as cold pain is broad in range and also highly suggestive. It may connote anything between discomfort and the fear of imminent death. Metaphoric field worked by modernists implies human exposure to cold as a force, alien and alienating, "atmospheric" in more than one sense. The utter vulnerability of individual life to cold i.e. the absence of the heat of life – implies the imperative for human imagination to test its power or resistance. Of great interest to modernists is the frontier of radical and riskful experimentation, its potential for creative destruction or creation that implies destruction.

We shall focus on the two poems conceived in America and in Russia – one, Wallace Stevens's "The Snow Man" (1921) describes a kind of a metaphysical experiment in an outdoor laboratory of wind-filled icy emptiness; and the other, Alexander Blok's "The Twelve" (1918), describes a street survival experiment in a revolutionary snow vortex. In both the exposure to cold serves as an ultimate test pushing poetic consciousness to the erasure of subjectivity or to the verge of self-annihilation. As the slate is cleaned of convention, lyrical self- projection, and every other kind of "pathetic fallacy," what remains is a faint possibility as well as the necessity for poetry/consciousness to reinvent itself working from "the Nothing" or what Roland Barthes calls "zero degree writing."

The two poets were "age-mates" in more than one sense. Both reflected on the violence of historical reality, its capacity to destroy "the power of the mind over the possibilities of things" (W. Stevens' definition of imagination). In his later years (Stevens lived well into the 1950s while Blok died in 1921) he was distantly fascinated by the radical ideologies of his time, particularly their tendency to produce power-hungry heroic myths. Myths are still the work of imagination though in many ways opposite to that of poetry. In his poem "Examination of a Hero in the Time of War" (first published in April 1942) Stevens describes a hero as one made "of winter's/ Iciest core" whose consciousness is wedded to the impersonal cold of history. A poet's ambition, however, is to "discover winter and know it well" i.e. to incorporate and survive decreation. Poetic imagination seems "always at the end of the era" - produced from a hiatus between no longer and not yet.

BIO

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Wandering through The Modernist Text: Reader as Flaneur (the Case of Virginia Woolf)

Morzhenkova Natalia (Huaqiao University, China)

Who are/were modernism's readers? In what way do they read modernist literature? One of the most permanent cliches about modernist literature is its reader-unfriendly nature. This way of thinking about readability of modernist literature goes back to Eliot's and Pound's ideas about the notion of the literary text as an autonomous and impersonal structure that exists independently from a historical reader and a living author. Eliot's views encouraged the New Critics to assume that Modernism was the best illustration of their perspective that a literary work is an isolated whole that shouldn't be contaminated with any fallacies of individual readers with their actual experiences. Following World War I, modernism had a key role in the institutionalization of literature as a university subject that required interpretation; literature was no longer viewed as a universally accessible source of amusement. It took modernism to constitute literature as a field of inquiry that was, as Terry Eagleton puts it, "unpleasant enough to qualify as a proper academic pursuit."

The way the modernists themselves (Woolf, Proust, Hesse, etc.) describe reading as an almost ecstatic sensory experience (the word "pleasure" is crucial) contrasts sharply with the conventional view that modernists are extremely challenging to read, and that modernism emerged when "reading became grim" (Richard Poirier). However, the modernists' use of sensory metaphors in their writing on reading does not align well with the notion that reading is a highly cerebral activity.

Maybe we read modernists texts (and, more significantly, teach them) too tendentiously, relying too much on the cliché that modernist pleasure is akin to intellectual pleasure of solving the puzzle? Let's look at the case of Virigina Woolf. Her obsession with reading and her strong interest in the cultural development of the common reader were evident throughout her literary career. In 1925, Woolf published a collection of her reviews titled *The Common Reader,* which in 1932 was followed by *The Common Reader: Second Series*. The titles allude to Samuel Johnson. However, if Samuel Johnson's "common reader" is marked by such the Enlightenment virtue as "common sense", "uncorrupted by literary prejudices" Woolf's one is remarkable for his ability to "reads for his own pleasure" "guided by an instinct" rather than for "knowledge or correct the opinions of others."

In her essay **"**How Should One Read a Book?" that concludes the 2nd volume of *The Common Reader* pleasure is declared the most valuable benefit we derive from reading. In a mocking tone she remarks that knowledge and the improvement of mind are also important goals of reading, especially if we consider "how to provide an adequate pension for one's widow." For her sensual reader, reading is an exclusively pleasurable activity that does not involve any practical utility. She constructs this image of a sensual reader as opposed to an enlightened reader, who reads books in his pursuit of knowledge and the development of rational judgements.

Woolf frequently connects reading to the kinaesthetic and visual experiences of a flaneur by presenting it in terms of flâneurism. An early scene from *Mrs. Dalloway* provides a good example of this point. As she passes a bookshop on her route to her well-known chore of "buying flowers herself," Clarrissa Dalloway is distracted by a volume of Shakespeare. Reading the lines from Cymbeline "Fear no more the heat o' the sun/nor the furious winter's rages" is integrated

into her flaneur - like sojourning, where reading, strolling, remembering, dreaming, and observing all come together. In this episode Woolf turns around a well-known metaphor of the flâneur as a city reader. Making the reader acting as a flaneur who searches for sensual experience rather than abstract knowledge, she presents the act of reading as a visual encounter and affective experience that blends the kinaesthetic and the speculative, the immediately perceived and the imaginative.

In the abovementioned essay, Woolf defines creative reading through paradoxical "reading without reading" and through the kinesthetic metaphor of reading as walking through a city-book. Walking without any distinct purpose and observing without judgement, her reader appears as both a flaneur and voyeur who kinesthetically participates in reading through the body. This mode of embodied reading is opposed to the concept of reading as purely intellectual activity, performed in the ivory tower, in a literary sanctuary, where the intellectual could read silently and effectively.

Later in this essay, Woolf distinguishes "actual reading" and "after reading." In the process of actual reading, we are too involved to judge. She describes it in terms of very intense physical contact ("*the friction of reading").* However, the second stage ("after reading") when "*the book takes on a definite shape*" in our mind is also described by Woolf as some kind of epiphanic revelation rather than the result of purposeful and conscious thinking. While the first stage is described as pleasant flâneurism, the "after reading" is also associated with some physical and sensory activities that are at first sight unrelated to reading.

It is interesting to note that her description of these two stages of reading which leads to the assemblage of parts in the whole book, that "*floats to the top of the mind*" sounds as a recognizable description of the hermeneutic circle. Both the flaneur as an interpreter of an urban space and a reader walking between the alleys and bye-streets of letters both move around the hermeneutic circle of unceasing movement between outward and inward, occasional details and patterns. The metaphor of flaneurism with its amalgam of the outward and the inward moves that combine journey through the city space with the topography of imagination and affects reveals Woolf's approach to reading as embodied experience.

It is worth mentioning that Woolf does not separate reading and writing, declaring that "to read a book well, one should read it as if one were writing it." If her flaneur-like reader she describes in her essay **"**How Should One Read a Book?" (1926), her essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" (1930) is totally devoted to the embodied experience of the flaneur-narrator-artist.

To read Woolf through the lenses of the embodied framework can be an effective perspective to overcome the clash between inward and outward approaches to Woolf's fiction, between the contrasting ideas that her fiction was encouraged by her introspective tendency to withdraw into herself or by her great interest in the material world around her. The figure of flaneur can be a productive point to reveal that for Woolf, the shaky connections between the inner and exterior worlds, the physical and cerebral, were the source of her embodied literary experience.

Fleshing Out Literature: Atmospheric Variations in Film Adaptations of *A Streetcar Named Desire*

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In the contemporary media landscape (modernist) prose and poetry frequently get adapted and exist in an immense number of transmedia forms (film and theatre adaptations, audiobooks, and video games). Through adaptations, verbal texts are – literally – embodied, with fleshly enacted characters and events, which are concretized and acquire gravity. However, adapted re-readings are embodied at least twice. All re-enactments are grounded in us: "they delight the eye, resonate in the ear, and appeal to the skin" (Richard 2021, p. 12) and only then acquire meanings and aesthetic significance.

Film adaptations have been studied from many perspectives (narratological, intertextual, intermedial, cognitivist, and phenomenological). As Kamilla Elliott puts it in her book *Theorizing Adaptation*, "adaptation is an interactive, relational process that changes entities to suit new environments" (Elliott 2020, p. 198). In analyzing this interactive process, more has to be said about the viewers' / ex-readers' "sensuous elaborations" (to use Susan Sontag's phrase). How are sensuous delights / resonances / appeals mediated? One of the answers might be found in the contemporary atmosphere research (Hermann Schmitz, Gernot Böhme, Tonino Griffero, Steffen Hven, Julian Hanich, Rick Warner). I will rely upon Hven's idea of "atmospheric perception" for the "initial, pre-reflective apprehension of the affective charge of the cinematic diegesis" (Hven 2022, p. 41) that happens before narrative comprehension. Films (and film adaptations) design atmospheres, using many expressive means of film poetics.

Unlike non-adapted material, new versions of well-known stories design atmospheres palimpsestically, looking back and forth at the same time. While a lot has been said about how film adaptations repeat and vary narratives, motifs and meanings, there is still a necessity to discuss how adaptations "weave" new atmospheres – affectively charged interfaces between us and seemingly familiar stories.

Adaptations of Tennessee Williams's plays present a very welcoming material for the atmosphere research. A late modernist poet of the theatre, Williams exists in dialogue with many theatrical and cinematic trends that stress the significance of the atmospherically plastic (from the Symbolist theatre to the avant-garde cinema), the atmospherically radiant (from Anton and Mikhail Chekhov to Method acting), and the atmospherically fluid. Registering the vague, the vanishing, and the ephemeral, Williams designed his own late-modernist atmospheric poetics that keeps bringing our attention to how the feelings are felt, how they are shared, and how important they are for the environments we exist in.

To illustrate how an atmosphere is designed, I will look at different principles of weaving affectively charged environments in two seminal film adaptations of a Williams classic, Elia Kazan's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine*.

Kazan stages a conflict relying upon the theatricality of space. Apart from what Ch. Geraghty wrote about the emphasis on dialogue, heavily stylized settings, changes of the editing conventions, the use of the moving camera, and the emphasis on the actor (Geraghty 2007), there is a use of an atmospheric potential of a confined space, which accumulates feelings and energies (that lead to a violent closure). Allen opens up the space, which stops being theatrically cramped and – instead – turns into a cinematic environment of more fluid feelings (Williams's play undergoes "psychotherapy" acquiring a less pessimistic ending). Kazan condenses effects, relying upon three principles: over-layering atmospheres, creating atmospheric suspense, and designing clashes of atmospheres. Allen focuses on the drift: at the center of this process is the element of confronting one's past – accessing buried memories and exploiting their meanings in

order to heal. To design atmospheres, Allen relies upon free-associations of spaces, temporal systems, and the representation of the central character's issues with breathing. The paper purports to answer the question: how do we remember not the stories but the ways we have felt about them? What do we remember about our atmospheric perceptions? More importantly – how Modernist mythologies evoked by Williams's and Kazan's atmospheric poetics influence Allen's re-reading and his flippancy towards serious Williams's issues (love not as desire but as commodity)?

BIO

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Mina Loy and Others: Affective Mimesis, Fragmented Bodies, and Modernist Somaesthetics

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The paper is supposed to respond to Bowen Wang's presentation, *Tailoring the Amorphous "Protoform": Mina Loy's Textural Design and Modernist Somaesthetics* as an attempt to expand the discussion of modernist somaesthetics. It focuses on a corpus of poetic texts published in the little magazine *Others* (July 1915–August 1915, two issues; print run: 500 copies [Churchill 2006]), including works by Mina Loy (*Love Songs*), Mary Davies (*Songs of a Girl*), Orrick Johns (*Olives*), Alfred Kreymborg (*Variations* and *Overheard in an Asylum*), Skipwith Cannell (*The Coming of Night*), and William C. Williams (*Pastoral* and *The Ogre*). While *Love Songs* was published in the first issue (July 1915), this paper situates Loy's work within a broader textual framework that exemplifies a common poetic trend.

This trend (a) reflects modernist preoccupations with representation and (b) addresses the depiction of the body and the formal means of rendering it. Modernist representation prioritizes the imitation of affective states and experiences over the representation of objects or objective reality [Hassan 1982; Huyssen 1986; Панова / Panova 2001; Armstrong 2005]. What can be termed *affective mimesis* or *communicative mimesis* [Зенкин 2020 / Zenkine 2020] seeks to preserve the immediacy and intensity of experience in aesthetic communication [see also Gumbrecht 2004]. This mimetic strategy is notably, though not exclusively, present in the poetry of *Others,* and this paper examines its manifestations.

More specifically, affective mimesis in these texts is closely tied to the representation of the body as a site where non-, para-, and (som)aesthetic affects converge into a single, complex experience. Examining the representation of the body in *Others* reveals a sharp division between the body as subject—a singular "I" that serves as the source of speech and experience—and its fragmented, dispersed parts, each serving as the locus of distinct affective experiences. Instead of a cohesive narrative of what might be felt through the body as a whole, the reader encounters

isolated sensory perceptions: a gaze, a touch, a gesture arrested in a single moment with minimal context and only a vaguely defined speaking "I" to anchor them.

The reader is invited to inhabit an intense experience of gazing, touching, smelling, and tasting, with this intensity heightened by the formal device of detail- and object-based metaphor. These mundane, everyday objects, presented as metaphorical close-ups, act as intermediaries, transporting the reader into the sensory experience. Through these fragments of bodily perception, the texts challenge the reader to encounter subjectivity without fully identifying with it. For instance, in W.C. Williams's *The Ogre,* the implied subject is a pedophile; in *Love Songs* or Orrick Johns's *Olives,* it is a man or woman in a state of sexual arousal or post-coitus; in Kreymborg's *Overheard in an Asylum,* it is a schizophrenic. By internalizing these fragments of perception through object-based metaphor, the reader engages with the bodily experience while resisting full identification with the subject.

In other words, these texts make bodily experience accessible without necessitating identification. The reader does not align themselves with the pedophile in *The Ogre,* for instance, but still gains access to fragments of the experience. This dynamic of *experiencing without identifying* renders somatic perceptions simultaneously accessible and distanced, enabling dissociation at will. It parallels modernist prosthetic technologies—such as the telephone or radio—that allow one to feel close to the source of communication while maintaining the option to sever the connection [Maude 2009].

If, as Bowen Wang argues, modernist (avant-garde) texts often treat the linguistic signifier as autonomous and divorced from its signified [Wang 2022, 87], here, fragments of bodily perception function similarly. A unit of image (a fragment of sensory experience) operates as an autonomous signifier, severed from the object of its signification: the subject as a cohesive whole. Somatic perceptions form a transposable conglomerate of affective experiences, conveyed and shared through object-based metaphors. This mechanism enables an experience to be disseminated and shared without requiring identification.

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Modernism's *Weird Bodies*: Reading Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) as a (Pre-)Modernist Text

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This paper explores the poetics of body, narrative emotions, and aesthetic experience in *Carmilla* (1872), one of Le Fanu's most popular works. It is a classic Gothic vampire story in which the author addresses the conventions of vampire plots of the late 19th century, but also creates a new vampire mythology that has greatly influenced the subsequent tradition. The audience's interest in this text can be partly explained by its scandalous content: although it was common by then to depict relationship between the vampire and its victim as erotic, the plots where they are both 'young' girls were quite rare. However, it seems that the secret of the story lies in the inventiveness of its narrative structure and the tasks the story poses to the reader. One of the great mysteries of the novella is Carmilla's monstrous body, which was inspired by the previous gothic tradition, but also anticipates new poetics of monstrosity of the 20th century.

Our paper mainly focuses on the notion of *weird body* which we treat as a category of reader's aesthetic experience—the reader's reaction to the narrative discourse and narrative situations modeled by the text. The reader follows the textual cues which prompts him how to adapt to the intra-textual perspective and emotionally react to the events depicted. In the novella, Carmilla's body is experienced as weird not because she is a vampire, but due to the reader's feeling of the *gap* between the discourse of the body and the body itself.

According to Jean-Jacques Courtine, in the culture of modernity "real" monsters (freaks, hunchbacks, etc.) gradually became the objects of scientific study and were subjected to classifications. Simultaneously, a new rhetoric of monstrosity flourishes to entertain the audience by discursive devices and artistic effects [Histoire du corps, 2005]. In the course of the 19th century, literature not only developed new devices for creating the effects of monstrosity, literary monsters created by writers and artists themselves became objects of "quasi"-scientific research. Le Fanu's novella is of particular interest because in it the author successfully demonstrates how the monster can be subordinated to scientific description by naturalizing it in the imaginary world of the text and erasing the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. But a closer look reveals how Le Fanu's vampire resists the disciplining scientific discourse and classification. This is precisely why Carmilla's body is experienced as *weird*. The questions that we want to address is how is this effect created.

To answer this question, we will turn to the theory of narrative emotions, Meir Sternberg identifies three universal narrative emotions: suspense, surprise, curiosity [Sternberg, 2003]. At first glance, the novella as a whole is built on surprise. However, the heroine's surprise ("Carmilla is a vampire!") is not conveyed to the reader, whose interest is based on *curiosity*. But not with the question who is Carmilla since it is obvious from very early in the story who she is (Le Fanu uses already known by then "signs" of a vampire). The reader's curiosity is directed to a deeper question.

According to Suzanne Keen, narrative emotion is created by the reader's immersion in the world of the text and adaptation to the narrative situation [Keen, 2015]. Marco Caracciolo and Karin Kukkonen remind of the complex nature of the process of immersion: imaginary world is made of situations gradually "fleshing out" and unfolding in reader's mind who takes part in them as either a *participant* or an *observer* [Caracciolo, Kukkonen, 2021]. The novella is written if the form of a diary: the heroine recollects her encounter with a vampire which happened almost 10 years ago and focuses primarily on her physical and emotional reactions. Such form allows the narrator to act simultaneously as a participant (and thus convey her immediate bodily experience) and an observer (who reconstructs the past from memory). The text created by the heroine is an experiment in "vampirology", written by someone who survived an encounter with the monster and knows how to defeat it. At the end of the diary, the narrator even places fragments from observations of other "vampire experts," and so completely "disenchants" the monster.

The narrative situation that the text invites the reader to adapt to, however, is different from the described above. An attentive reader will not miss the inconsistencies and discrepancies in the story, indicating that the mystery of the vampire remains unsolved despite the narrator's claims. What exactly did the narrator describe, the reactions to whom or what did she document in such detail—to an individual or a type of creatures, to the monstrous or human in Carmilla? What is Carmilla's real body—the one of a girl, or a feline, or a black substance? What are the stimuli for Carmilla's behavior—does she blindly follow her animal instincts, or is her behavior conscious, or does she obey some supernatural logic? These questions become a source of curiosity, which the text cannot satisfy. The text presents the reader with fragments of contradictory information that cannot be linked together. As a result, Carmilla's body appears to be constantly changing and thus resisting classification.

The "disenchantment" of vampire turns out to be an illusion, a trap set by Carmilla. Victor Sage, one of the leading experts on Le Fanu's work, calls Carmilla's tactics hypnosis: she subjugates the narrator to her will, urges her not to see the inconsistencies in her own story [Sage, 2004]. The reader, however, has a chance to avoid the traps set by the vampire, not to fall under the hypnotic influence. But only if he discerns the weirdness of the vampire's body.

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