

Moved by Movement in Novels: Phenomenological Approaches

September 9–10, 2021, International Online Workshop, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

In the U.K., people bought ca. 5,2% more books in 2020 than in the previous year ([The Guardian 25 Jan 2021](#)). This increase suggests that some readers apparently read and travelled more in their imagination during the period of restricted mobility. This workshop takes the curious phenomenon of sedentary readers' imaginary travel as a cue for the examination of the relation of movement and novel reading.

From traveling to tapping fingers—readers imaginatively participate in a host of physical activities through the activation of embodiment in narratives while their bodies remain relatively still. In the process of reading, novel readers can be moved emotionally to spontaneous laughter or tears. Yet why are not all readers moved by the same textual cues, and under what circumstances do narratives fail to move their audiences? A phenomenological approach to the creation of reading experiences offers a method to investigate the points of contact and collision between moving and being moved. The

workshop aims to examine how representation of kinaesthesia in novels and readers' somatic awareness interact to create an embodied reading experience.



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A father reading a novel with an affecting plot to his wife and daughters. Drawing, ca. 1810 (?).

Sketching Society.

How does the wide spectrum of physical actions in novels—ranging from the small scale of fidgeting to various physical exertions like running or fighting—facilitate the progression of plot and characterize individuals? What role do the configurations of motor action play in such reading experiences? To what extent do representations of physical movement enhance readers' visceral engagement with fiction? How does intradiegetic movement affect readers' lived bodies? The theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricœur, two prominent French philosophers of phenomenology, form the basis of this online workshop's investigation of corporeal motion in narratives. According to Merleau-Ponty, physical movement and sensory perception are intertwined and underpin the body's relation with the world: "for the subject, the beginning of kinetic movement is, like perception, an original manner of relating to an object" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 103). Likewise, Ricœur's concept of refiguration posits that readers' involvement in and reactions to narratives spark active engagement:

Reading appears by turns as an interruption in the course of action and as a new impetus to action. These two perspectives on reading result directly from its confrontation and connection between the imaginary world of the text and the actual world of readers. To the extent that readers subordinate their expectations to those developed by the text, they

themselves become unreal to a degree comparable to the unreality of the fictive world toward which they emigrate. [...] On the other hand, inasmuch as readers incorporate—little matter whether consciously or unconsciously—into their vision of the world the lessons of their readings, in order to increase the prior readability of this vision, then the reading is for them something other than a place where they come to rest; it is a medium they cross through (Ricœur, *Time and Narrative* III: 179).

By focusing on the convergence of these two theories, this online workshop not only scrutinizes how phenomenology offers a crucial perspective in understanding different modes of reading but also highlights the overlap and mutual influence between movement of the body and emotion, as derived from the Latin root *emovere* to imply agitating, stirring up, disturbing, and moving outward.

This online workshop contributes to prior research on the conceptualization of narratives' transmission of emotions via configurations of embodied mobility and contact by examining and problematizing concrete examples of the movement of bodies in novels. We invite contributions from literary and cultural studies in reader reception and aesthetics, narrative theory, mobility studies, philosophy of literature and other areas of study. We welcome culturally and historically situated contributions in areas ranging from the early eighteenth century until contemporary literature, and/or theoretical considerations. Areas of special theoretical interest include:

- **Aesthetics and aesthetic experience** – The investigation of the nature of beauty in the history of literary criticism
- **Aesthetics of reception** – The conceptualization of reading experiences revolving around aesthetic distance
- **Aisthesis and kinaesthesia** – Phenomenological approaches to perception, movement, and the verbal representation thereof
- **Attachment** – Affirmative approaches to the imagination in criticism as proposed in the debate about critique and postcritique
- **Chiasmus and phenomenology of reading** – Reading experiences in which readers' being is immersed in or absorbed by a text
- **Experientiality** – Narrative's quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience and enactivist perspectives
- **Hermeneutical phenomenology** – The processes in which readers' (embodied) disposition changes through the text, particularly in Paul Ricœur's model of refiguration
- **Narrative empathy** – Narrative-induced sharing of feeling and perspective-taking
- **Transmission of affect** – Exchanges of affects and emotions in feminist cultural studies, in particular exchanges between bodies as well as the sensation of being moved or emotionally touched by invented stories

Abstract submission: Please submit your abstract for a presentation (no more than 300 words) and a brief biography (max. 100 words) to moved2021@gmx.de.

Deadline for submission of abstracts is June 15, 2021.

The notification of acceptance will be sent by June 30.

Online format: The online workshop aims to inspire dialogue and discussion between the contributors. Therefore we dedicate most of our synchronous time to questions and answers on speakers' pre-circulated papers. The workshop will consist of two virtual meetings, which will run for around 3 hours

in the early afternoon (CEST) each day. We kindly ask delegates who present papers to pre-circulate written papers or audio/visual presentations based on papers (2000 words max.) on our secure workshop platform by August 31, 2021, which will be available *only to fellow delegates of the workshop*. That way, workshop participants can read the presentations ahead of time at their convenience and then engage actively in Q&A discussions during the synchronous conference meeting.

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