

READING AROUND THE TEXT: ON THE DIVERSITY OF READING PRACTICES IN THE NEW POPULAR LITERARY CULTURE

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Abstract

This article argues for an increased focus within literature didactics on the wide range of reading practices available both within and outside the educational system. One way to achieve this is to drastically shift focus, to concentrate not only on the act of reading, reading strategies and reading types, but on reading practices, as multifaceted offerings. What does it mean to read around the text (a concept borrowed from Italo Calvino)? This formulation of the question forces us to take seriously the framework of reading and other factors, which tend to be marginalized. These factors can include the location of the reader when reading, the text as a physical object, other people, activities and artefacts which become important in reading practices. Examples discussed include Stockholm Reads, Retro Libraries, Literature in the Mall, and Author Cruises. In conclusion, practices of reading around the text deserve much greater interest from L1 didactics research.

Keywords: reading around the text, L1 didactics, reading practice, popular literary culture, collective reading, Actor-Network Theory, pedagogy of literature

1

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Sweden, as in other countries, the notion that reading is in crisis has long been a subject of cultural and educational debate in the political arena¹. An important aspect, of course, is the apparent decline in reading comprehension skills that Swedish students are demonstrating in international assessments such as PISA. A rather gloomy and resigned attitude seems to prevail in the world of literature didactics research, because the research (albeit reluctantly) seems to confirm the diagnosis of crisis. An important background has to do with how L1 Swedish education seems to be in a downward spiral in terms of not fulfilling the ideals stipulated by L1 didactics research: linguistic diversity in the classroom, flourishing discourse on literature, education based on students' own experiences, and work to develop linguistic ability in a broad spectrum of genres and forms of expression. Swedish is probably the school subject on which the most research has been done, and a recurring conclusion is that the subject's rich opportunities for education and language development tend to be reduced to formalized skills training. Often, the conditions for reading literature are emphasized as being particularly dismal (see Bergman 2007, Ewald 2007, Molloy 2002).

The basic idea behind this article is simple. Despite all the gloom and doom, there are quite a few passionate and committed readers, but strangely enough they often find themselves far from the literary-didactic radar². This group includes professional readers such as librarians, critics and literary scholars, but also "ordinary" readers who create more or less formalized reading communities, for example in book circles or on the Internet.

This article argues for an increased focus within literature didactics on the wide range of reading practices available both within and outside the educational system. One way to achieve this is to drastically shift focus, to concentrate not only on the act of reading, reading strategies and reading types, but on reading practices, as multifaceted offerings. This open, somewhat tentative line of inquiry is thus as follows: What does it mean to read around the text (a concept borrowed from Italo

¹ *This article is a heavily expanded version of my plenary-session lecture at the 11th Annual Conference for Didactic Perspectives on Swedish/4th Annual Nordic Conference for Native-language Didactics Research, Göteborg University, 6 December 2013. It was previously published in Swedish as "Att läsa runt omkring texten: Om läspraktikernas mångfald, kritisk paranoia och litteraturdidaktiska glapp", in Maria Jönsson & Anders Öhman (eds.), Litteratur och läsning: Litteraturdidaktikens nya möjligheter. Lund: Studentlitteratur 2015. English translation by Peggy Oscarsson.*

² *This article was produced within the framework of the project "The Dialectics of Immersion. On Professional and Everyday Reading Practices in the New Media Landscape" (2014–2016), which is funded by the Crafoord Foundation and Malmö University. In addition to me, Lotta Bergman (Ph. D.) and doctoral student Erik Karlsson are participants in the project.*

Calvino (1981))? This formulation of the question forces us to take seriously the framework of reading and other factors, which tend to be marginalized within the field of literary studies and in its privileged mode of reading – critical reading. These factors can include the location of the reader when reading, the text as a physical object, other people, activities and artefacts which become important in reading practices. Exploring the diversity of reading practices entails several perspectives: investigating reading practices available outside the educational system; viewing individual reading practices as a multitude of complex entities of which text interpretation is only one; and paying closer attention to the social dimensions of reading. The point is of course not to abandon critical reading, but to make us aware of some of its blind spots. Highlighting and becoming more sensitive to the manifold of reading practices can teach us a lot about passionate reading.

The article begins with a discussion of an example in a novel by Italo Calvino, who demonstrates what reading around a text can mean. A discussion follows about how, in literary theory and literature didactics, the reader has become “disembodied”, and how the range of reading practices has been reduced and at worst has been made invisible. This is followed by a short presentation of theoretical perspectives and sources of inspiration. Four different reading practices are then presented in which reading around the text is a central factor (the Stockholm Reads initiative; Retro Library in Huddinge; Emporia Magasin (an advertising magazine for a shopping mall); author cruises). Here, reading books appears as a passion and a lifestyle, sharing fluid boundaries with a number of other activities and artefacts: home décor, fashion, food, health, travel and so on. A critical analysis of (at least some of) these practices would quickly dismiss them as superficial, commercial and at worst dishonest. But what happens if we rein in our predisposed critical reading, or what cultural theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) provocatively have called our “critical paranoia”, and instead try to interpret and understand the multifaceted network of affects that seem to spring from the reading of literature? The article concludes by presenting some of the implications for teaching literature and research in literature didactics.

2. READING AROUND A TEXT

A beautiful and detailed description of reading can be found in Italo Calvino’s novel *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*:

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, “No, I don’t want to watch TV!” Raise your voice— they won’t hear you otherwise— “I’m reading! I don’t want to be disturbed!” [...] Find the most comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat. Flat on your bac, on your side, on your stomach. In an easy chair, on the sofa, in the rocker, the deck chair, on the hassock. In the hammock, if you have a hammock. On top of your bed, of course, or in the bed.

You can even stand on your hands, head down, in the yoga position. With the book upside down, naturally. (Calvino 1981 p. 3).

Here, Calvino sets in motion an ideal reading experience, in which certain barriers must be removed and in which certain prerequisites must be fulfilled. A relaxed yet concentrated state is required, of which the enemy is distraction – symbolized here by the television – which constantly tries to get our attention and poses a risk of luring us away from the book; indeed this is a common figure put forth by cultural critical analysis. But it's also about getting physically comfortable and able to read, that is, finding the right reading furniture and body position. Calvino is in a fascinating but as-yet unresearched area which the French author Georges Perec (2008), in another interesting text about reading, calls the posturology of reading.

What kind of reading experience is Calvino talking about preparing? “Adjust the light so you won't strain your eyes. Do it now, because once you're absorbed in reading there will be no budging you.” (p. 4). Apparently, the reading experience will be characterized not only by concentration, but also by immersion – the act of becoming engrossed in and mesmerized by the tale. The reading experience should be pleasurable, and Calvino has already hinted at this aspect by emphasizing the need for getting physically comfortable before commencing to read. When the looming threat of the television and all its simpler pleasures has been eliminated, still other potential distractions vie for one's attention: “Try to foresee now everything that might make you interrupt your reading. Cigarettes within reach, if you smoke, and the ashtray. Anything else? Do you have to pee? All right, you know best.” (p. 4). So when do the reading experience truly begin? Well, for the literary figure that is you, the experience has not yet begun in any traditional sense. And the act of reading itself, in the sense of Wolfgang Iser (1992), has definitely not yet begun. But Calvino's point is that the reading experience has in fact begun. Towards the end of this introduction, Calvino describes how the reader has located the novel in a bookshop, among all the other books. Perhaps you start leafing through it, and on the way home on the bus you begin scanning its pages. Once home again, you turn over the book in your hands, study the cover and flyleaves. Calvino calls this reading procedure *the circling of the book or reading around the book*: “Of course, this circling of the book, this reading around it before reading inside it, is a part of the pleasure in a new book” (p. 8f). Reading around the book, as a concept, is used in this article in a broadened sense, encompassing all the surrounding activities, artefacts, locations and actors that are part of the reading experience.

In the introduction to his novel, in which the reader, in a process which is at once obvious and astonishing, becomes part and parcel of the novel itself, Calvino focuses on a broad assortment of qualities in the reading experience which tend to be invisible or dismissed as irrelevant when we talk about reading. He approaches a phenomenology of the reading experience, in which every seemingly unimportant detail can be meaningful; for example, how one might take home the book in a wrapping of cellophane or in a paper bag. Reading becomes not only a mental ac-

tivity but a tactile, visual experience. Why does the article begin with this long overture about Calvino? Because it not only brings attention to some of the phenomena that we very rarely consider when we think about reading, but it also identifies the points at which Calvino's ideal reading experience both joins forces with and takes leave of the privileged and dominant type of reading in the world of literary studies – critical reading (Persson 2012).

There are many similarities between the scene in Calvino's novel and critical reading. Critical reading also demands concentration; it considers competing media as distraction (and at times, from a more ideological perspective, as an enemy of literature), and also takes its starting point in a naturalized, dominant view of reading as a solitary, silent reading of printed text (Long 1993) – a view that Calvino simultaneously confirms and questions. However, the differences are equally important (Persson 2012). First, critical reading usually distances itself from immersive, engrossing reading. Second, critical reading is sceptical to the pleasure and physical aspects of reading. Third, critical reading is quite simply hard work. This can explain why something important is missing from the catalogue of artefacts and activities surrounding Calvino's reading experience (ashtray, visits to the loo etc.). Calvino's scenario lacks a pen and paper (or a laptop, which did not exist at the time he wrote his novel). Writing materials are missing from the picture. Critical reading is just as much a writing process, taking place during the reading process: underlining, notes made in the margins, sticky notes attached to pages, comments in a notebook or on some electronic device. Most importantly, the final product of critical reading is often a written text (a paper, an essay, a written exam), from which not only this process but also the reading experience has been erased. Once again, the point is not to abandon critical reading, but to see that there are other kinds of reading, and other aspects of reading, which deserve our full attention.

3. THE DISEMBODIED READER AND THE OBSCURED READING PRACTICES

As shown by literary scholar Karin Littau, who specialises in areas such as book and film history, reception, adaptation, and translation studies, in modern literary theory the reader is most often a disincorporate, purely theoretical entity; this is paradoxical, considering the recent decades' increasing value placed on precisely the reader's significance for literary construction of meaning:

Especially as formulated in the literary theories of the 1970s, the reader is very much a reader in theory: whether ideal (Culler), informed (Fish), implied (Iser) or textualized (Barthes), this entity is an abstraction who is neither an actual living reader, a flesh and blood being, nor a real historical person, but a transhistorical, transsubjective and transcendental receptor. (Littau 2006 p. 107)

The reader's existence appears to be primarily textual, and in line with the reasoning described above regarding critical reading, the reader only becomes discernible through written clues of some kind. What is remarkable, according to Littau, with reference to Barthes, is how the reader becomes merely a construction, without

history, biography or psychology, but also how the reader will lack intersectional parameters such as class, race and gender (Littau 2006 p. 122). One effective method for producing this theoretical reader is to exclude, obscure or disregard the significance of personal experiences and feelings for the act of reading and the reading experience (cf Persson 2011). Two brief examples from two prominent literary theorists are given here to illustrate this process. One is from Roman Ingarden's *The Literary Work of Art*, first published in 1930, and the other is from Wolfgang Iser's "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach", which was included as a chapter in *The Implied Reader* from 1974.

Early on in Ingarden's *The Literary Work of Art*, there is a chapter titled "Elimination of Factors Extraneous to the Structure of the Literary Work". He names three such extraneous elements: the author's life and psychology, the reader's life and psychology and real-life role models for the elements in the literary text. Ingarden contests the "psychologistic" tendencies in the field of literary research, and writes that the structure of the literary work contains "no qualities, experiences, or mental states whatsoever of the *reader*" (Ingarden 1976 p. 55, my translation). He then contrasts three different types of reading with each other. There is the aesthetic approach, which "is built upon living, spiritual interaction with the work of art" and that the reader can "devote himself or herself to it in immediate observation (which is not at all to be identified with theoretical, objective cognition!)" (Ingarden 1976 p. 55f, my translation). Thus this type of reading does not lack its own form of higher appreciation:

We certainly recognize the aesthetic position – in contrast to the uncultivated reader's strong movement – of a certain contemplative inner peace, an absorption in the work itself, which does not allow us to occupy ourselves with our own experiences. This contemplative peacefulness, which can very well co-exist with the greatest enchantment, does not mean the cold, or more accurately utterly neutral and pure contemplative position which is foreign to every emotion – the position which is characteristic for the purely *theoretical* and rational understanding of an object, and whose consequence is that values of the work of art do not become *phenomenally* visible. (Ingarden 1976 p. 57, my translation).

Ingarden opposes both what he calls the theoretical and uncultivated types of reading. The first seems to lack possibilities for enjoyment, while the latter lets these possibilities take the upper hand. The uncultivated reader:

Devotes himself to his own experiences, indulges in them, and the deeper, more unusual and richer his own state (primarily the released and yet only fantasized emotions) is, the more inclined he is to appreciate the work in question. However, in actuality he does not appreciate it for its own value, owing to this state, is never observed by him at all and which is concealed by the sheer quantity of subjective emotions. (Ingarden 1976 p. 56, my translation)

In the aesthetic position the body is discarded, as well as private emotions, personal experiences and subjective associations. In uncultivated reading these nevertheless run rampant. This is an all-consuming or "gluttonous" reading, in which the literary work as such is in danger of disappearing or being devoured.

Iser (1992) minted the well-known theory of meaning created through interaction between the text and the reader. The structure of the text controls the reader's response, but also contains *Leerstellen*, or gaps, which the reader must fill so that the text can come to life. However, no individual reading can exhaust all the meanings of the work, because "every individual reader will fill in the gaps in his or her own way, and thus rule out all other possibilities" (Iser 1992 p 325, my translation). Iser's description of the role of personal experience in literary communication is a paradox. On the one hand, the successive amalgamation of the various parts of the text involved in the act of reading is a result of "the confluence of the written text and the reader's individual inner self, with its unique history of experience, its own consciousness, its own vistas" (Iser 1992 p. 329, my translation). On the other hand, the reader – as in Ingarden's theory – must put aside his or her own subjective experiences.

Through this involvement, the reader is compelled to open up for the effects of the text, and leave behind any preconceived notions. [...] The reading reflects the structure of the experience, but the price we must pay is that we must exclude the ideas and attitudes that make up our own personality before we can experience the unknown world of the literary text. However, during this process, something happens to us. (Iser 1992 p. 337, my translation).

The foundation of the paradox can be found in the central role which Iser (1992 p. 334ff) assigns to the foreignness created in the act of reading itself. To open up to the reader, the text must conjure up familiar situations and phenomena, only to immediately negate them. During reading, the unknown is thus incorporated with the reader's own experience, but only if this experience and the reader's preconceived notions are put aside during the act of reading itself. "In reality, only by leaving behind the familiar territory of one's own experience can a reader truly participate in the adventure offered by the literary text (Iser 1992 p. 327, my translation). The literary production of meaning entails a discovery of the unformulated and of "that which previously seemed to elude our consciousness" (Iser 1992 p 341, my translation).

As with Ingarden, in this Iser text the reader becomes an abstract entity without gender, age, social class or ethnicity. The act of reading becomes a wholly mental phenomenon, without any material or social foothold. Now, this should not be interpreted as a critique of these theories as such. They were ground-breaking theories in their time, and have had tremendous influence; they still have much to teach us, especially when we reread the original texts and turn away from more recent explanations or critical comments. For example, it is not at all the case that feelings, pleasure and subjective experiences are utterly forbidden – as has often been claimed. However, new critics and others have a strong tendency to categorize them as either relevant or irrelevant. And the criterion of relevance means that emotions and experience shall work from, correspond with and respect the literary work itself. All in all, this leaves no room for reading around the text, and no reasoning about the material and collective framework of reading. Reading is synony-

mous with the individual, silent reading of a printed literary text. The only interruptions which seem to be allowed are textual ones, as when Iser (1992 p. 337), discussing how the reader, through the continuous process of anticipation and retrospection, must continuously revise the choices and decisions made while engaged in the act of reading. A TV or family members creating distractions in the background are not in play here. Ashtrays, reading chairs and visits to the loo are conspicuously absent. It is as if the revolutionizing of art's reception, ushered in by the modern age and which Walter Benjamin, as early as 1936, summarised in the idea of "the absent-minded experience", never happened (Benjamin 1991 p. 86). Michael Taussig describes the most serious blind spot in the notion of undisturbed critical reading in this way: "[I]ts weakness lies in its assuming a contemplative individual when it should, instead, assume a distracted collective reading" (Taussig 1991 p. 152). Later on this article describes some examples of this absent-minded, distracted and collective reception.

So, then, what is the current situation for today's L1 Swedish didactics? In the empirical reception and classroom investigations, the reader is naturally a human being, but still disembodied and still unanalysed in sociocultural terms. In addition, the idea of reading around a text seldom receives much attention. One indication of this is the total absence of this aspect of reading, in both recent large research projects (see e.g. Kåreland (ed.) 2009) and comprehensive critical overviews of the field of L1 Swedish didactics (see e.g. Degerman 2012). There are however exceptions. Reading around a text occupies a larger portion of the literature didactics focusing on younger children. One example is Carina Fast's doctoral thesis, *Seven Children Learn to Read and Write* (2007). From a broadened literacy perspective, Fast analyses the diversity of text-oriented activities in which these children participated as producers and consumers, both in (pre)school and during leisure time. It is really not only about interacting with printed texts, but also about toys and toy catalogues, computer games, drawing, advertising, TV programmes and other sources. In addition, the readers in Fast's study have not only a body, but also gender, age, and varied ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs, as well as parents with different educational and social backgrounds. Fast demonstrates in her thesis that reading around a text was not a background activity, but instead a decisive component in the language development of these children. However, in the case of literature didactics, as readers grow older interest in the activities of reading around text decreases. It is as if reading around a text is something one grows out of.

4. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON READING AROUND A TEXT

Several phenomena which are in fact closely associated with reading end up off the radar – on both the (alleged) individual and collective level. To capture these phenomena, concepts such as the act of reading, type of reading and even the reading experience must be accompanied by a significantly broadened concept of reading

practices. The toolbox of literature didactics must be filled with new theoretical perspectives.

Fiction can teach us quite a bit about reading and literature didactics. It might sound obvious, but literature is not just the object of our study in the traditional sense, either directly through analysis of texts or analysis of implicit readers, or indirectly through examinations of other people's actual reading; it can also function as a source of inspiration for the development of theory. The first theoretical perspective is thus inspired by fiction itself. Borrowing Calvino's notion of reading around a text is, in all modesty, an example of this. Another example is the previously mentioned author Georges Perec. His short essay "Reading: A Socio-Physiological Outline" from 1985 is a rich source for ideas for researching the overlooked aspects of reading. He writes about the significance of the eyes, voice, lips, hands and body position for reading. He also writes about the social spaces of reading and the reading which takes place during movement or a journey. He describes the surroundings, places and disruptions of reading:

Would it not be right in any case to investigate the environments in which we read? Reading isn't merely to read a text, to decipher signs, to survey lines, to explore pages, to traverse a meaning; it isn't merely the abstract communion between author and reader, the mystical marriage between the Idea and the Ear. It is, at the same time, the noise of the Métro, or the swaying of a railway compartment, or the heat of the sun on a beach and the shouts of children playing a little way off, or the sensation of hot water in the bath, or the waiting for sleep... (Perec, 2008, p. 181)

Another important perspective is the critique of critical reading, represented by researchers such as Rita Felski, Karin Littau, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael Warner (for a discussion see Persson 2012). According to these scholars, literary theory operates roughly with two categories: critical reading and ordinary reading (the terms used to describe these activities vary). Critical reading is characterized by its interpretation-centric, text-centric nature; its emphasis on maintaining analytical distance; and its view of reading as something which is disembodied, reflexive and hallmarked by hard work. Ordinary reading is associated with experiencing; it is subjective, embodied, immersive and pleasure-oriented. As Felski (2011) notes, the goal of the critique of critical reading should not result in simply turning upside down the hierarchy of critical reading and reading for pleasure. Instead it is more interesting to try to access the underlying forces and motives of critical reading. This also has dimensions, for example, which are characterized by their own sort of pleasure: reading between the lines, solving various textual puzzles, discovering hidden meanings, and so on.

A third theoretical perspective is comprised by the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). In her article "Context Stinks!" (2011), Felski has turned to this field to find tools for renegotiating how we view reading of fiction. There are two particular components of this theory which are of interest here: the emphasis on non-human actors, and the critique of critical social and cultural theory. According to Latour, there is no underlying social structure and there are no invisible forces working

behind the scenes, like the economy, patriarchy or class structure, which can explain social phenomena such as literature. The social is not a given entity, but instead is something that is continually produced; it becomes visible only when a diverse set of actors are connected in a network. If we take this view, the number of possible actors increases dramatically, and for reading and literature this means that we must heighten our awareness of who these actors are and what relationships they have with each other. It means that the literary text becomes an actor in a network of other actors (objects, institutions, persons, media technologies, places et cetera) and that the text can no longer be Explained (with a capital E) by some underlying Context (with a capital C). As Felski writes:

Artworks can only survive and thrive by making friends, creating allies, attracting disciples, inciting attachments, latching on to receptive hosts. If they are not to fade quickly from view, they must persuade people to hang them on walls, watch them in movie theaters, purchase them on Amazon, dissect them in reviews, debate them with their friends. These networks of alliances, relations, and translations are just as vital to the life of experimental art as to blockbuster fiction, even if the networks vary in kind and what counts as success looks radically different. (Felski 2011 p. 584)

The other component in ANT of interest here can just as well be categorized as critique of critical reading. Latour is almost fierce in his critique of critical sociology and cultural theory, and argues that they have an embarrassing number of things in common with conspiracy theories: invisible yet all-powerful puppet-masters who manipulate the naïve masses for the sake of their own interests and profit. Latour laments the lack of theoretical renewal and the continued dominance of the critical position. How is it possible, then, that everyone is transformed except the critical analysts themselves

Into naïve believers, into fetishists, into hapless victims of domination, while at the same time turning them into the mere superficial consequences of powerful hidden causalities coming from infrastructures whose makeup is never interrogated? All the while being intimately certain that the things really close to our hearts would in no way fit any of those roles. (Latour 2004 p. 243)

The fourth and final perspective focuses on reading of literature as the practice of (pop-culture) consumption. The starting-point here is that literature is now a member of a new media ecosystem, characterized by the increasing convergence of literary, visual and material cultures (Collins 2010 p. 8). Jim Collins has examined the growth of a multi-pronged literary culture which in many ways is distinctly “pop-cultural”. He has studied, for example, book-chain giant Barnes & Noble’s “super-stores”, book clubs, bestsellers and film versions of popular books. In all these contexts, a new way to interact with, talk about and evaluate literature emerges:

I think they are best understood as interdependent components of a popular literary culture that has its own way of identifying a literary experience as such, with its own ways of “talking the talk” of passionate reading, its own modes of circulation and access, and its own authorities to sanction what sort of pleasures are to be enjoyed there. (Collins 2010 p. 8)

This new pop reading culture, embedded in and in continual interaction with a broader media ecosystem, must also be understood as a component in a larger economic and political system – something that Fuller & Rehberg Sedo (2013) and Schultz Nybacka (2011) emphasize far more strongly than does Collins. Readers are increasingly viewed and evaluated as consumers, and reading is increasingly considered in economic terms: as production, consumption, transaction or as a relationship between costs and profits (Schultz Nybacka 2011 p. 26). Using the concept of a reading industry, Fuller och Rehberg Sedo (2013 p. 17) assert that contemporary reading practices are shaped by cultural-political and pro-reading discourses, but also by the book and media industry as well as other commercial and non-profit actors in a complicated, sometimes conflict-filled exchange. Fuller och Rehberg Sedo demonstrate that many of the participants in various “mass reading events” – which are the subject of their study, and which include everything from “the whole city reads” to TV and radio book clubs – express ambivalence in the face of the more commercial aspects of these practices that risk coming into conflict with traditional views of literary value:

Paradoxically, then, MRE:s [mass reading events] are produced as part of popular culture but are often consumed as an aspect of a reading culture in which residual meanings about “quality” (or “highbrow”) fiction and canonical ideas about aesthetics linger on. These notions coexist alongside more recent constructions of what constitutes a “good read” such as a discussable book, or one that the reader can connect to her own life experience. (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2013 p. 48)

A book, however, is not just any product, and not a mere object among objects. The relationship between the economic and aesthetic value of books continues to be sensitive and controversial.

In the new pop-literary culture, the literary arbiters of taste can no longer be assumed to be literary scholars or veteran literary critics from major newspapers. Quite the opposite – the critical analysts of academia are recurring targets of contempt and criticism, for example in the numerous “Lit-lit” novels that both praise and describe reading as a path to pleasure and self-perception (Collins 2010 p. 23ff). In the new media ecosystem, the literary-criticism powers that be have been multiplied, decentralized and relativized.

Thus we have these four perspectives, which of course do not represent all possible perspectives, but which provide us with good opportunities to hone our skills for identifying the characteristics of practices for reading around a text.

5. EXAMPLES OF READING AROUND A TEXT

The following section presents four examples of reading practices which illustrate the blind spots in literary theory and literature didactics previously discussed in this article. We can begin by simply saying that when we talk about reading, we no longer mean only the silent, solitary reading of a printed text. Contemporary literary public spheres (Forslid & Ohlsson (eds., 2009) provide us with countless exam-

ples of how reading is moving from the private reading environment to collective spaces. One example of this is the rise of numerous literary festivals. Poetry slam is another. Author visits to libraries, schools or other public arenas have long been popular, and are increasing in frequency (Bergman & Persson 2013a, b). Book clubs are popping up everywhere – in private homes, libraries and schools, on TV, radio and the Internet ((Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2013, Long 2003, Rydbeck 2012). Literary tourism, with pilgrimages to places associated with renowned authors, has become a fixture in the brand development of many towns and regions (Sjöholm 2011). These reading practices run the gamut from small and informal to mass public events. Often, such practices are combined, and cross-fertilize each other. The following describes four different reading practices in which reading around the text is a central factor.

5.1 Example 1: All-city reads

A striking example of reading practice cross-fertilization on a large scale is the promotion of collective reading projects. Inspired by initiatives in the US based on the so-called One Book, One Community model (OBOC), “Stockholm Reads” is an annual reading project that has taken place for over a decade. The idea is that all Stockholmers shall read the same book, and then meet in various fora to discuss the book. The book selected in 2013 was Lena Andersson’s novel *Var det bra så?* (*Will That Be All?*) In its website, Författarcentrum (Sweden’s national association of professional authors) describes the events as “Stockholm’s biggest reading circle”, whose many activities include “22 reading circles at libraries around the city, and six other events, including ‘Politicians read *Var det bra så?*’ and walking tours of Tensta” (Författarcentrum Öst 2013). Another popular method is to combine reading practices with other art forms. For example, one event during 2013 was a dance interpretation of Stockholm Reads book from that year and previous years:

Five books, four dancers and one actor – books like you’ve never seen them before! During the Stockholm cultural festival, take this unique opportunity to see five Stockholm Reads books interpreted through dance. This is a totally new concept in which dancers and an actor interpret excerpts from the books. The dancers excel in forms such as flamenco, modern/ballet, salsa, house and vogue. The books to be interpreted are *One Eye Red*, *The Confession of a Fool*, *Will That Be All?*, and *Doctor Glas*. (Stockholms stadsbibliotek 2013, my translation)

The collective, the conversations, meetings, (other) actors, concrete locations, movements in the room, bodies, other art forms – all of these seem to play vital roles when reading is no longer a purely individual, mental activity. According to Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, OBOC events offer the possibility of enjoyment which is more emotional and social rather than of a hermeneutic character:

The multiple mediation of the text through various kinds of formal performance by authors and experts, theatrical, cinematic and visual art adaptations, visits to the built or natural environment, and other participants may, of course, add to or alter an individual reader’s interpretation of the selected book. But it is the emotional connections

and social intimacies that these multiple mediations make possible that intensifies the pleasures of learning about the world of the text. (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2013 p. 243)

However, mass reading events such as these can be met with scepticism from representatives of the old literary power structure. Harold Bloom expresses it like this: "I don't like these mass reading bees. It is rather like the idea that we are all going to pop out and eat Chicken McNuggets or something else horrid at once" (Bloom quoted in Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2013 p. 6).

5.2 Example 2: Retro Library

Within the field of book history and certain strands of literary theory, some have called for increased attention to the material nature and physical forms of texts. Everyday readers have of course always known that the physical nature of a book has great significance for the reading experience. However, one cannot underestimate the significance of other, reading-related *objects*. Calvino wrote about both of these aspects in the text discussed earlier. In addition, both figure prominently in a phenomenon called the Retro Library, at Huddinge Library in Sweden. Founder Nina Frid explains:

Why a retro library? [...] We believe that nostalgia for times gone by also creates a desire to understand the ideas, currents, literary trends and authoring that characterized a specific era. The problem today is that it is difficult for a fifties enthusiast to know where to begin looking, in a large bookstore with author's names in alphabetical order. We want to make it easier to find the treasures of granddad's library, by placing them in their context – in a fifties section, among other books from the same period. Of course, close to this section, we also have a fifties vintage armchair and reading lamp. What's more, we think that a book jacket from the fifties can be more beautiful than a vase. (Frid 2012, my translation)

On the library's website are images showing how to use objects to create a sense and atmosphere of a certain era. Advertising flyers, fabrics and signs from a past decade can create an environment for reading. This consists of a reading corner, with objects such as furniture, lamps, bookshelves and a relevant selection of books along with a table featuring magazines. The basic idea seems to be that reading is more than just the meeting of a book and its reader. Reading also has material, tactile, visual and sensual dimensions.

5.3 Example 3: Emporia Magasin (or, Modernism and Marxism Go Shopping)

There are plenty of good reasons to emphasize the material nature of texts and reading practices. However, unexpected things can happen. Perhaps it's not the physical form or packaging of the text that is investigated, but how the physical object, with a kind of diabolical dialectics, enters into unexpected networks, and no longer has anything to do with reading in the traditional sense. A remarkable example of this is Emporia, Malmö's new and rather extravagant shopping centre. Just by chance, in the centre's brochure *Emporia Magasin*, this author found a

piece titled “Colour Graphics”, along with the text “Graphic and colourful – two trends combine to create a beautiful summer explosion! Bright colours to play with, as accent tones or as main colours” (Emporia Magasin nr 3, 2013 p. 16). The piece goes on to present images of 24 products, along with information about prices, brands, and the stores carrying the items. Products include swimwear, sunglasses, sandals, a washing-up brush and paper garland – but also four books: Karl Ove Knausgård’s *My Struggle* Part 5, Astrid Lindgren’s *Stora Emilboken* (collected Emil stories), a new translation of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Nina Björk’s *Happily Ever After*. The piece is bewildering, and almost makes one dizzy. It’s clear that the books have been selected based solely on their design and colour schemes, as well as the implication that books are a pleasant holiday diversion, on the beach or in a hammock. Still, what an odd selection! The gateway work of literary modernism (Joyce), rubbing elbows with a collection of essays that condemn conspicuous consumption (Björk), thrown together with colourful swim shorts and bikinis. It’s no surprise that this set off the alarm bells of critical reading. Is this proof at last of capitalism’s power to incorporate everything – a harbinger of the utter triumph of the commodity aesthetic? However, by suppressing this reaction a bit, the following question presents itself: Is this not a kind of disguised, yet heightened critique of ideology, delivering the unpleasant reminder that even the works of Joyce and Björk are not mere literature in an abstract, lofty sense, but are also artefacts with a designed format and thus products made available in the market?

5.4 Example 4: Author cruises

The next example is that of author cruises. Organizers include major newspapers (such as the Swedish Dagens Nyheter (DN)) and book clubs (such as the Swedish Bonniers Bok Klubb). The goal of these cruises is to combine a pleasant mini-holiday with literary encounters on board an overnight ferry in the Baltic. DN’s cruise in 2013 attracted authors Karin Alvtogen, Maria Sveland, Marina Montelius, Lena Andersson, Stefan Einhorn, Lars Ragnar Forssberg, Liza Marklund and Torgny Lindgren (see Viking Line 2013). This was indeed a broad and eclectic line-up, ranging from members of the Swedish Academy (Lindgren) to authors of international bestsellers (Marklund). The authors talk about their books, with a culture editor and critic as moderators. Of course, signed copies of the authors’ books are available for purchase on board. The first activity on the cruise is a welcome get-together in the Fun Club on Deck 8, where guests can enjoy sparkling wine. During the evening they also eat a meal in the Viking Buffet and Food Garden, along with wine, beer, soft drinks, coffee, or tea. Events such as these certainly exceed the boundaries of high and low culture, as well as culture and commerce, in a number of ways. Still, what is of interest here is the transformation of literary reading into a collective, pleasure-filled experience, in which the presence of real authors, the magic of travel and fine dining create a highly charged network of objects and people. Events like this entail an unashamed advance towards pop and media-cultural prac-

tices: “[O]rganized events incorporate some of the visual spectacle and emotional thrills more usually associated with consuming nonprint media” (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2013 p. 208). They offer a “live” feeling that can also create a temporary sense of community, heightened by being present (ibid. p. 243). Criticizing author cruises is easy – far too easy. It would be more interesting to follow the actors, to map expected and unexpected connections in that temporary network created on board the ferry. However, as Latour writes about the critical impulse: “[I]f you are listening to what people are saying, they will explain at length how and why they are deeply *attached, moved, affected* by the works of art which ‘make them’ feel things. Impossible! Forbidden! To be affected is supposed to be mere affectation” (Latour 2005 p. 236).

So what implications do the four examples and the reading-around approach have for literary teaching and didactics?

6. SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERATURE TEACHING AND LITERATURE DIDACTICS RESEARCH

To summarize the first implication, the situation could be worse. There are many avid readers, but for some reason, we tend not to focus on them. Why do we not focus on them? A quick answer would be because we seldom find such avid readers in schools. Naturally this is a statement that requires some qualification. Avid readers can be found in schools, among both teachers and students, but they tend to disappear in the reports of declining performance, and results of research showing that increasingly fewer people see the point of reading literature.

The second implication is that literature teaching and didactics can learn something from the practices of reading around a text. Of course, this is not primarily about direct imitation of models and methods. Avid readers already practice reading around texts; it is the reluctant reader who must be addressed (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2013). How do you bring about optimal conditions for passionate reading at the same time as you as a teacher are obliged to evaluate and grade exactly these achievements? The challenge is a well-known one within literary pedagogy, and it has not grown less in these times of New Public Management, with increased emphasis on test scores and quantification of knowledge. Yet, it is precisely this challenge that must be accepted. Without passionate readers, there will be no critical readers, and probably no high achievers in large-scale international literacy tests such as PISA either. To try out new and creative ways of mediating literature could be a start. A crucial insight which can be learned from the concept and phenomenon of reading around the text, is precisely that reading has amorphous boundaries to other cultural practices, and that a creative exploration of these boundaries has great aesthetic, and, in extension, also pedagogical, possibilities. This would entail a much broader field of interest in the classroom than the one provided by familiar concepts such as intertextuality and intermediality (both of which, of course, should continue to be studied). A focus on reading around the

text makes way also for an interest in surrounding material factors and practices that are outside the purely textual realm. Pupils and students could, for instance, both be encouraged to investigate already existing practices of reading around the text, and themselves try out and explore countless new ones. In sum, you can derive considerable inspiration and learn quite a bit from these practices. Thus they deserve much more investigation in the context of literature didactics.

What characterizes these reading practices? They are social and collective, rather than individual. They are based on pleasure and enjoyment rather than duty and hard work. They appear to shuttle between a strong individual emotion and immersion on the one hand, and collective distraction on the other. They are a part and parcel of a larger popular culture and consumption culture. They are media-related; that is, they are part of a new media ecosystem in which the book and its reading can no longer be viewed as threatened in some simpler way by newer media. Naturally, various things compete for our time and attention, and the book doesn't always win. However, there are other opportunities for reading. Irrespective of how reading fits into our lives, it must be viewed in terms of its nature as a media experience as such. This is the third implication. Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2013 (p. 248) write that such a conceptualization provides a more multifaceted and finely-tuned picture of reading as it is actually practised through various platforms and technologies.

The fourth implication is that we need to devote much more attention to the actors included in a reading practice. This is about more than just a text and a reader, and it is more than just students and a teacher in a classroom. It is more – and something other – than context. It is a whole network of artefacts, events, activities and affects. This means that we need to augment the emphasis of critical reading on invisibly working forces to include the Actor Network Theory's focus on visible relationships and associations (Latour 2005). As Rita Felski (2011 p. 585) writes, a possible pedagogical consequence of ANT is that everyday reading practices can indeed become visible, and can be subjects of open, curious interest on the part of academia.

This fifth implication is that literature didactics should continue with critical reading. Only in a society liberated from ideology, manipulation and distorted representations by media is critical reading no longer relevant (Jameson 1994). As we know, no such society exists. Nevertheless, critical reading must be balanced and enriched by other reading practices. Or, as Jenny Bergenmar (2010 p. 24) puts it: "We can become more inclusive and less exclusive, more descriptive and less prescriptive".

In summary, we should become more curious about our own and others' impassioned reading. As Fredric Jameson (1992) has emphasized, all texts contain not only an ideological but a utopian dimension. Texts manipulate and seduce, but also offer images – however distorted these images may be – of a better world. "[A]ll contemporary works of art [...] have as their underlying impulse [...] our deepest fantasies about the nature of social life, both as we live it now, and as we feel in

our bones it ought rather to be lived" (Jameson 1992 p. 34). The relationship between ideology and utopia is dialectic, and deserves far more attention than it currently receives. If we take this relationship seriously, then we can take some steps on the way to better understand, promote, and practice a reading characterized by what Latour (2005 p. 253) calls critical proximity – reading that can be simultaneously impassioned and critical.

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