

Embodied Reading

Proposed working group, MLA Convention, Seattle, WA

Jan. 9-12 2020

<https://mla.confex.com/mla/2020/webprogrampreliminary/Paper8576.html>

Taking a cue from recent developments in somatic psychology toward *embodied listening* and *embodied speaking*, in this working group we will explore *embodied reading* as a practice that attends to bodily sensation and affective response as they emerge in the process of reading. For scholars engaged with materials that describe traumatic encounters—from the archive of slavery to the autopsy of Michael Brown to memoirs of sexual violence—a choice presents itself. Do I bracket my own revulsion, discomfort, boredom, rage, or pain? We invite papers that explore what happens when, instead of ignoring or suppressing the vagaries of sensation, we attend to bodily affects: to the catch of the breath the moment we learn where and how the bullet entered the body; to the tightening of the belly as we read of the deadly blow that struck the young girl. As a critical or scholarly practice, embodied reading accomplishes nothing, produces nothing: it is not so much an alternative to reading close or distant, deep or surface, but rather constitutes a place of commencement from which other critical reading modalities might follow. Embodied reading offers a new locus of attention from which scholarly practice becomes, perhaps, more sustainable, more connected to the rhythms of daily experience, of being-in-the-world. Please send 250-word abstracts to ccutchin@berkeley.edu by March 15. We invite papers on topics that (for example):

- attend to the affective or bodily experience of reading triggering material (literary, archival, or journalistic)
- reflect on one's own personal experience of integrating embodiment practice, meditation, or other therapeutic techniques with literary scholarship
- consider new developments in somatic psychology as they relate to literary studies
- theorize how embodied reading can emerge in the classroom setting
- situate embodied reading in relationship to e.g., disability studies, queer studies, or memory studies
- examine the relationship between the reader's embodied experience and the emergence of meaning in the literary or filmic text