

**The Words and Worlds of Literary Narrative:
The Trade-off between Verbal Presence and Direct Presence in the Activity of Reading**

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we can have mental images without reading,
or we can read without experiencing mental images,
but imaginal activity as part of reading is common
and a matter of degree. (Sadoski and Paivio 2001: 53)

This chapter deals with the embodied mind of the reader and the ways in which it spontaneously responds to the sensorimotor qualities elicited by literary narrative. The aim is to begin filling a gap in the scholarship on narrative reading. Although most scholars would agree that narratives make readers experience processes beyond conceptual thought, namely various kinds of sensorimotor imagery, few have looked into how such vicarious perceptions are structured and prompted. While elaborating on and revising some of the scant suggestions about this topic, my chapter draws upon a variety of findings stemming mainly from outside the domain of literature, for example, from experimental psychology and neuroscience, evolutionary anthropology, philosophy of perception, and history.

The opening section disputes the notion, endorsed by much of narrative theory, that the reading of literary narrative is functionally analogous to an act of communication, where communication stands for the transfer of thought and conceptual information. The next section offers a basic typology of the sensorimotor effects of reading, which fall outside such a narrowly communication-based model of literary narrative. Possible psychophysiological, experiential, and text-linguistic underpinnings are discussed. A main typological distinction is drawn between those sensorimotor effects pertaining to the narrative *qua* verbal utterance (*verbal presence*) and those sensorimotor effects pertaining to the imaginary physical world(s) of the story (*direct presence*). While verbal presence refers to the reader's vicarious perception of the voices of narrators and characters, direct presence refers to the emulated

sensorimotor experience of the imaginary worlds that the narrators' and characters' utterances refer to. The third section further elaborates on how, or by which kinds of narrative content and structure, direct presence may be prompted. The final section addresses some of the observational and historical caveats that must be attached to any theoretical inquiry made into the sensorimotor effects of reading. As a preliminary for further research, a few ideas about the model's potential for empirical validation are put forward. A brief, tentative history of the sensorimotor benefits of literary narrative reading is then outlined.

The main hypotheses are the following: Contrary to common assumption, the reader's body participates in imagining the world(s) of the story to such a degree that bodily movement is frequently emulated from an enactive first-person perspective rather than visualized from the perspective of a passive beholder. As a consequence, references to bodily movement have a unique capacity to make the reader vicariously perceive the world(s) of the story. However, where the reader is prone to vicariously hearing the narrative as if read out loud, perception of the world(s) of the story is backgrounded due to the mutually exclusive relationship between verbal presence and direct presence. While the world(s) of the story seem to constitute the main object of reader imagery today, vicarious listening may have dominated reader imagery until around the turn of the twentieth century.

Phenomenal Presence of the World in Language: Some Prerequisites

The functions of natural language are many. I will open this section by isolating two of them, but I will further focus on only one—namely, the capacity to make absent phenomena present to the senses. I will argue that this function, albeit often overlooked, becomes vital whenever language is used and processed aesthetically.

Whether oral or written, language is generally assumed to communicate information, where information stands for snippets of higher-level conceptual knowledge. This view of language seems to inform the research methodologies of most narrative theorists, regardless of whether they come from a hermeneutic or narratological perspective. Hermeneutic approaches look into the concepts that are communicated—directly or indirectly. Narratological approaches look into the means of such communication—as employed by the narrator, character, implied author, and so forth. Although it is now common to define narrative in versatile categories such as Monika Fludernik's *experientiality* (Fludernik 1996), the main focus is still on reflective if not conceptual thought. Diverse theoretical works such

as those of Lisa Zunshine (2006), David Herman (2009), and many others deal with how it is represented in and structured by narrative and how it is involved in the process of reading. The more or less undivided interest in the narrowly communicative aspects of language use is remarkable, because language does much more than convey conceptual information. It has a unique capacity to substitute for absent bodies (i.e. any sensible objects in physical space) and forces. It emulates preconceptual phenomena. The effects of this capacity on the mind of the comprehender will hereafter be referred to as *phenomenal presence*, or simply *presence*.

According to a recent theory proposed by evolutionary anthropologist Robin Dunbar (2003), emulating the presence of absent bodies and forces is literally what our linguistic skills evolved for. An advanced extension of inarticulate communal singing, language is believed to have developed due to a dramatic increase in the size of social groups. Once the mean social group size surpassed a certain number of individuals, the distant ancestors of humans were no longer capable of maintaining a proportionally advantageous number of allies by the bodily act of grooming alone. Producing articulate sounds instead, they acquired an ability to manage their social relations without having to physically attend to one individual at a time. Thus, in Dunbar's account, language, rather than having evolved from abstract, that is, highly conceptual, visual gestures (as suggested in previous research), came into being in order to replace the preconceptual bodily action of touching.

Although gradually overruled by more complex functions, such sensorimotor benefits have by no means vanished from language. For instance, when an expectant mother and father talk about how small their unborn baby is, they usually do not want to communicate information about the size of their offspring. Rather, their primary goal is to emulate in their minds the physical presence of the baby they are so eager to meet, with all the sensorimotor (and affective) processes it entails. This aspect of their discourse holds irrespective of how they converse, whether orally or in writing. However, should their intimate conversation take place in writing, for instance in a computerized chat interface, their minds may at times (i.e. for fractions of a second) refocus on yet another form of presence—the presence of the partner's absent voice. My suggestion here is that, in the reading of literary narratives, the sensorimotor and, in a sense, primordial benefits of language have not only been exceptionally well preserved, but their workings actually precede the reader's mental construction of the storytelling scenario itself.

Phenomenal Presence in Theory: Verbal vs. Direct

As hinted at by the above example of mundane linguistic behavior, phenomenal presence in reading is split into two elementary forms. One, hereafter to be called *verbal presence*, pertains to the written *word* as vicariously voiced in the mind of the reader by an imaginary speaker. The other, hereafter to be called *direct presence*, pertains to phenomena (bodies, forces) of the *world(s)* the imaginary speaker's words refer to—worlds emulated in the mind of the reader. The former kind of presence concerns chiefly the sense of hearing and has not been systematically treated within the realms of narrative theory, where the term *voice* is used as a metaphor, without phenomenal implications (see e.g. Aczel 1998). The latter mode of presence, in the scant theoretical corpus hitherto produced on the topic, has been explicitly linked mainly to the senses of sight and hearing, with some cursory acknowledgement of the other exteroceptive senses (smell, touch, and taste).

The reader may alternate between the two forms of presence in the course of a reading session or read a single narrative passage twice, inclining first toward one and then toward the other. More often than not, the stylistic tuning of the text will make the decisions for the reader, prompting in each instant the most aesthetically rewarding strategy of processing. Whereas flashes of mute visual imagery with narratorial voice-over may occur in longer pauses between clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and so forth (i.e. offline), in the ongoing (online) process of reading as such there will probably be a significant degree of instantaneous trade-off between verbal and direct presence. That is, on the level of conscious or near-conscious experience, one of the forms will always remain backgrounded unless the reader possesses exceptional attentional skills.¹ Needless to say, any visualization of a narrative passage *qua* utterance, consisting of a visual image of the speaker rather than that of the contents of the speaker's utterance, remains unaffected by the attentional trade-off between verbal and direct presence. On the contrary, in the kind of mundane readerly/writerly situation mentioned in the previous section, verbal presence beyond audition is highly probable due to mutual familiarity. In the reading of literary narrative, dialogue and embedded narration may be especially well suited for prompting instances of such a multimodal variety of verbal presence, making the reader visualize the speaker and the situation in which the speaker's words are being uttered.

Subvocalization (i.e. the matching of sounds to signs in silent reading), which is constitutive of verbal presence, may occur irrespective of the inferred identity or ontological status of the imaginary voice—be it the author, an omniscient narrator, a marginal character,

a free-floating consciousness, or an empty deictic center, whatever narratological concept is applicable. No textual markers of overt vocalization are necessary. Explicit signs of a passage representing verbalized thought as opposed to speech should not preclude verbal presence, since research suggests that some form of subvocalizing may be inherent to silent reading (for a review, see Abramson and Goldinger 1997). As for the psychophysiological substrates feeding into verbal presence, more specifically, similarities of format have been found between actual speech and its *acoustic representation* (also known as *auditory imagery*). For instance, behavioral experiments conducted by cognitive psychologists Marianne Abramson and Stephen D. Goldinger with readers of English have shown that the phonetic length of words substantively affects the time required for processing. These findings suggest that the acoustic foundations of silent reading literally consist of an *inner speech* of sorts, rather than of an abstract phonological code (see also Ehrich 2006).

Given that inner speech is proposed to be intrinsic (to some extent) to silent reading in general, verbal presence as used here refers in particular to those instances in which inner speech is driven toward the threshold of the reader's consciousness, especially if tinted by individual voicing that is different than the reader's own. Arguably, such instances occur more frequently in literary rather than nonliterary reading. Among possible facilitating conditions, the following seem most self-evident: direct discourse, compelling rhythm, and perceived realism of speech.

Unlike verbal presence, direct presence, or theoretical notions closely related to direct presence, have had some outspoken advocates throughout the history of modern narrative theory, such as Percy Lubbock, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Thor Grünbaum. Lubbock handles the matter of presence in what has remained the standard way: “(T)he art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shown*, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself” (1921: 62); “His object is to place the scene before us, so that we may take it in like a picture gradually unrolled or a drama enacted” (65).ⁱⁱ The reader is assumed to vicariously observe the imaginary world of the story from the position of a passive and detached beholder. Lubbock does not provide much detail about which textual devices may prompt the effect or how it is psychophysiological or experientially structured. By implication, the addressed sensorimotor modalities amount to sight and hearing.

As part of her treatise on narrative immersion,ⁱⁱⁱ Marie-Laure Ryan theorizes direct presence under the label of *spatio-temporal immersion* (Ryan 2001: 130-139). In contrast to Lubbock, she rids spatio-temporal immersion of the sensorimotor detachment entailed by the age-old metaphor of theatrical spectatorship. Instead, she refers to ways of “transporting the

reader onto the scene” (130). Ryan provides specific suggestions as to how spatio-temporal immersion may be cued by the text, although she does not offer an account of its psychophysiological or experiential foundations. What is symptomatic about the prompting mechanisms Ryan enumerates—namely, adverbial deictic shift, present tense, and second-person narration—is that they all consist of subtle devices of narrative construction. Meanwhile, the phenomenal substance proper of direct presence, that which is *given* in language rather than constructed, remains unexplored. As will soon become evident, I have chosen to proceed differently, giving theoretical priority to narrative content in a rather trivial sense.

In Ryan’s study, the addressed sensorimotor modalities do not receive systematic treatment. However, Ryan’s remarks on the matter, along with her choice of literary examples, suggests a sensorimotor array limited to the exteroceptive senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. Despite her use of the transportation metaphor, any notion of direct presence extractable from her theory is basically reducible to a presence *of the imaginary world* alone in front of (or at best around) a mentally attached but nevertheless physically *passive* beholder. Here lies another difference between Ryan’s theory of spatio-temporal immersion, Lubbock’s idea of “showing,” and similar concepts hitherto proposed, on the one hand, and my theory of direct presence on the other. In my definition, direct presence is a fully reciprocal phenomenon—the reader becomes as physically present in the imaginary world as the imaginary world becomes physically present in front of and around the reader. The difference is not merely one of nomenclature. Rather, it stems from a broader redefinition of what the reader’s mind is and how the sensorimotor benefits of language accrue to the reading process.

Direct Presence of the Reader in the World: Psychophysiological, Experiential, and Text-Linguistic Underpinnings

Those narrative theorists who in some way or another address direct presence have a propensity to illustrate their points using literary excerpts taken either from Gustave Flaubert’s 1857 novel *Madame Bovary* (e.g. Lubbock, Ryan) or from Alain Robbe-Grillet’s 1957 novel *Jealousy (La Jalousie)* (e.g. Ryan, Grünbaum)—two French novels famous for being steeped in sensorimotor detail. I will follow these theorists’ choice of literary examples,

using a passage from each of the texts in order to highlight the distinctiveness of my own approach.

(1) Flaubert

They had been sitting over the meal for two hours and a half. Artémise the serving-girl, listlessly dragging her carpet slippers over the flagstones, brought in the plates one at a time, failed to remember or understand anything she was told, and kept leaving the billiard-room door open so that the latch banged against the wall.

While he talked, *Léon had unconsciously placed his foot on the bar of Madame Bovary's chair*. She was wearing a little blue silk neckerchief which kept her goffered cambric collar as stiff as a ruff, and when she moved her head, the lower part of her face sank down into the linen or rose gracefully out of it. (Flaubert 1995: 97; emphasis added)

(2) Robbe-Grillet

In broad daylight, the contrast of the two shades of gray—that of the naked wood and that, somewhat lighter, of the remaining paint—creates complicated figures with angular, almost serrated outlines. On the top of the handrail, there are only scattered, protruding islands formed by the last vestiges of paint. On the balusters, though, it is the unpainted areas, much smaller and generally located toward the middle of the uprights, which constitute the spots, here incised, where the fingers recognize the vertical grain of the wood. At the edge of the patches, new scales of the paint are easy to chip off; it is enough to slip a fingernail beneath the projecting edge and pry it up by bending the first joint of the finger; the resistance is scarcely perceptible. (Robbe-Grillet 1965: 48; emphasis added)

In a recent contribution to presence-related narratology, Thor Grünbaum (2007) argues that, due to the reader's tacit knowledge of their biomechanics, renditions of simple bodily actions—as in Flaubert's "Léon had unconsciously placed his foot..."—are visualized in reading with exceptional ease. Overall, Grünbaum's thesis is meant to dispute the imprecise yet common assumption that perceived phenomenal vividness is directly proportional to the degree of static visual detail provided in a description (see e.g. Nünning 2007: 113). I agree with Grünbaum when it comes to the importance of bodily actions for direct presence. However, I suggest that the reader's knowledge of these actions is so deeply grounded in the

reader's body that, rather than being visualized from the viewpoint of a passive third-person observer, the actions in question are emulated from an *enactive*, first-person perspective.

Direct Presence beyond Exteroception^{iv}

I assume that the reader experiences, mostly—but not always—without noticing, the phenomenon of *motor resonance* (also known as *motor simulation*). Motor resonance refers to the actual covert movement that has been unequivocally proven to occur when isolated literal (i.e. non-metaphorical, non-idiomatic) sentences referring to bodily movement are processed (Fischer and Zwaan 2008). Neuroimaging evidence produced by the research teams of Lisa Aziz-Zadeh (Aziz-Zadeh et al. 2006) and Ana Raposo (Raposo et al. 2009) implies that, when reading clauses such as Robbe-Grillet's “pry it up by bending the first joint of the finger,” the motor and pre-motor areas of the reader's cortex become somatotopically activated, emulating finger movement specifically. As for behavioral evidence, when readers in experiments conducted by Rolf A. Zwaan and others were asked to perform a motor task in order to make their way through a sentence referring to bodily movement, their reading and motor performances interfered with one another (Zwaan, Taylor and de Boer 2010; Taylor and Zwaan 2008; Taylor, Lev-Ari and Zwaan 2008). Convergent results have been obtained from a first neuroimaging study, carried out by Nicole Speer and colleagues, in which the experimental stimuli consisted of longer narrative passages (Speer et al. 2009). Importantly, measurements of augmented physiological reactivity (so-called *effluent leakage*) in guided imagery experiments indicate that language has the capacity to stimulate more extended parts of the motor system than the cortex alone—including muscles and proprioceptive receptors. During action imagery, these experiments have shown increased muscle tension (Cuthbert, Vrana and Bradley 1991).

The overarching theories of language to which the above findings have given support are referred to as “grounded,” “embodied,” or “perceptual,” or alternatively as “theories of simulation/resonance” (cf. the enactivist model introduced by Caracciolo in this volume). They are increasingly acknowledged by cognitive scientists worldwide as part of the broader theoretical frameworks of *embodiment*, *grounded cognition*, and *situated cognition*. The labels are not interchangeable, but all of them signal an effort to falsify the enduring assumption that human mental activity is fully amodal. When applied to direct presence in literary narrative, these theories seem to suggest that readers, by means of their embodied minds, are physically present and engaged in the imaginary world of the story in ways

extending beyond exteroception, with *the motor and proprioceptive modes* (the senses of limb and organ position, velocity, effort, acceleration, balance, etc.) just as exposed to vicarious stimulation as the exteroceptive senses.

Motor resonance is intrinsic to language processing in general. However, there are many reasons to assume—as in the case of inner speech and verbal presence—that, in the reading of literary narrative in particular, motor resonance is continuously driven toward the threshold of the reader's consciousness. Based on my own experience, I further suggest that it does not always remain pre-reflective. Literary narratives can elicit a level of sensorimotor activity that is not only amenable to guided self-report but also attracts the attention of the reader. Such instances of literary reading may even provide some of the strongest evidence in favor of a hypothesis currently advocated by physiologists-cum-philosophers such as Vittorio Gallese (2000) and Marc Jeannerod (2006). They contend that motor imagery and actual movement literally form one experiential continuum and that motor imagery is actual movement that merely lacks an overt execution phase.

Transitive Bodily Movement as a Prompter of Multimodal Direct Presence

Since resonance in language processing has also been identified for sensorimotor modalities other than movement (e.g. Zwaan 2004), my focus on the motor mode alone calls for an explanation: I believe that motor resonance is unique in its potential to make the reader feel physically present in the imaginary world. Hypothetically, the wider the range of sensorimotor modalities simultaneously active in the reader's mind while he or she engages with a literary narrative, the more compelling the image of the world(s) presented by that narrative will be. However, imagery does not seem to come to the mind in neatly synchronized multimodal packages. Particularly, the short-lived imagery elicited in the linear act of reading differs substantially from the structure of real world experience, without the discrete sensorimotor modality tracks necessarily overlapping or fitting into any preconceived model of spatiotemporal order. Given these prerequisites, I suggest that, of all linguistic expressions addressing the senses, references to bodily movement have the best ability to offset the linearity of language. They impose on the reader's imagery a world-like order by way of emulating agency, which automatically entails a first-person perspective. A first-person perspective in turn entails instantaneous sensorimotor unity (encompassing *both* proprio- and exteroception), prompting the most phenomenally replete kind of direct presence achievable.

What lies behind this accentuation of the motor mode, apart from introspection, is a philosophically and scientifically informed view of movement, interaction, and agency as formative of and intrinsic to all actual perception. “The world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction,” Alva Noë asserts (2006: 1). Noë is one of the philosophers who have recently made an effort to reconcile the two domains of knowledge in order to advocate the centrality of bodily movement in perception, cognition, experience, and subjectivity. Drawing upon behavioral evidence, Noë argues that vision in the sense of a conscious experience of the size, shape, voluminousness, and distance of an object is always based on the perceiver's previous eye and body movements related to that or a similar object. As for the scientific branch of this broad approach to mind-world interactions, both neuroimaging and behavioral evidence suggest that the mere process of visually attending to an object is partly based on covert preparation of a bodily action to be performed in connection with that object (Rizzolatti and Gallese 1988). Moreover, the processing of images and names of manipulable artifacts has been found to elicit covert motor activity corresponding to fixed patterns of interaction (so-called *canonical affordances*) with the artifacts in question (Martin 2007; Glover et al. 2004; Borghi 2005).

If the physical world we live in is not truly perceived and experienced unless interacted with via bodily movement, then the reader's sense of having physically entered a tangible world should somehow be connected to narrative renditions of bodily movement.^v However, unlike Grünbaum, I am not suggesting that all simple bodily actions have an equal potential to tease the reader's sensorimotor imagery. There is a particular reason why the leaning of Léon's foot toward the bar of Madame Bovary's chair is underscored above, whereas the movements of Madame Bovary's head, mentioned just a few clauses later, are not. I suggest that the imaginary world is unlikely to feel tangible and present unless physical stimuli that can be interacted with are mentioned (or strongly implied), that is, unless the furnishing of the imaginary world is reached, grasped, manipulated, leaned against, and so forth. In other words, the most stimulating movements of all should be *transitive movements*. This applies particularly to transitive movements that are *object-directed*, as opposed to self-, person-, or animal-directed. Unlike images and names of man-made artifacts and other inanimate objects, images and names of animate beings have not been found to stimulate covert motor activity. The difference has been explained by the fact that animate beings usually afford a more flexible range of interactions, thus having no canonical affordances in a strong sense of the term (e.g. Borghi 2005: 29).

As indicated, scientists and philosophers alike currently view perception as an auxiliary of action. I suggest that, in the linear process of reading, the relation is often the reverse: the object-directed movement of a literary character—and its first-person, enactive emulation run by the embodied mind of the reader—can, especially under certain conditions to which I will now turn, prompt a vivid multimodal image of the imaginary world that the character's movement is being performed in and upon.

Multimodal Direct Presence: Further Facilitating Conditions

Despite sharing a comparable prominence of what is commonly called description (i.e. a verbal representation of spatial particulars and their phenomenal properties), Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* represent two fundamentally different narrative styles. Given the evidence cited above, the presence-promoting effect of transitive bodily movement should indeed operate, on spontaneous reading, across all kinds of narration, focalization, possible-world ontology, hermeneutic implication, or whatever distinctive features there are to be isolated by narrative theory. However, presence via the emulation of transitive bodily movements may be significantly enhanced by certain conditions and prerequisites (and inhibited by their opposites) pertaining to narrative content and structure. Relevant conditions and prerequisites include the following:

First, the more familiar the transitive bodily movement and object in question are to the reader and the more canonical and semantically sensible the movement is in relation to the object, the stronger the multimodal direct presence will be. Of the two literary excerpts quoted above, Flaubert may comply with this prerequisite to a higher degree than Robbe-Grillet. Second, in order for the reference to transitive bodily movement to elicit multimodal direct presence, it should be comparably *dynamically veracious*. That is, the time the text passage takes to read should be commensurable with the duration of the movement as performed in the real world. Generally speaking, dynamic veracity may be more readily perceived as applying to punctual (“had unconsciously placed his foot”) rather than iterative (“brought in the plates one at a time”) verbal constructions. This condition is partially met in both literary excerpts (see also Zwaan 2008).

Third, in order for the reference to transitive bodily movement to elicit multimodal direct presence, the movement in question should be rendered as a *volitional* movement. Volitional movements entail particular attentional focus on the environment interacted with

(Allport 1987), which is absent from reflexive or otherwise unintended movements. This condition is strictly met in Robbe-Grillet.

Fourth, in order for the reference to transitive bodily movement to induce multimodal direct presence, the bodily movement referred to and its sensory outcome must not be excessively conceptualized, that is, defamiliarized, in relation to real world experience. Otherwise, the reader may refocus on the linguistic medium instead and switch to a form of verbal presence. A comparably unmarked proportion between, on the one hand, the exteroceptive aspects of the narrated event, and, on the other hand, its proprioceptive and motor aspects—which largely escape natural verbalization—must be sustained. This condition is met in various degrees in both literary excerpts. Fifth, any detailed exteroceptive description of the object interacted with should ideally *precede* and not follow the reference to bodily movement, so that the movement itself can tie together the various sensorimotor modalities involved into a transitory unitary perspective. This condition is met in the Robbe-Grillet passage.

Sixth, in order for the reference to transitive bodily movement to have any of the instantaneous impact outlined above, it must appear as comparably *marked* in relation to the narrative passage immediately preceding it. In a narrative passage consisting mainly or even solely of references to bodily movement, the motor mode may become subject to phenomenal habituation (and, on the conceptual side, a means of pronounced aesthetic foregrounding), and its capacity to prompt multimodal direct presence may therefore decrease. The markedness condition is met to varying degrees in both literary excerpts. Seventh, in order for the literary narrative as a whole to retain a *stable level* of direct presence, references to bodily movement must be evenly distributed throughout but moderately dosed. This condition is not met in either Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*. Both abound in detailed visual descriptions that press against the limits of conceptualization, while passages like those quoted above are relatively sparse. One example of a literary narrative complying with this condition is, to credit yet another French novel, Jean-Philippe Toussaint's 1988 text *Camera (L'appareil-photo)*. The text of *Camera* is continuously dynamized—and its reader and imaginary world made strongly present to each other—by means of explicit references to transitive bodily movement:

(3) Toussaint

As she was really cold, she got up, a coat covering her shoulders, and, pushing aside [du bras = with her arm] a chintz curtain, left to look for another portable heater in a tiny dark storage room, where, in a shower no longer used, next to an azure anorak dangling on a hanger, were stacked several piles of papers. She had asked me to follow her to help her look and, while I pensively flipped through some old registration applications in the darkness, she moved a poorly closed box spilling over with orange parking cones and found [attira vers nous = pulled toward us] a small propane tank for cooking topped with a little radiator with a grilled front. (Toussaint 2008: 22; emphasis added)^{vi}

The effects listed in this and previous sections readily combine with the effects of other presence-promoting elements of narrative structure, such as those proposed by Ryan. For example, the presence-promoting potential of the above passage may increase if the following is added: “Come and help. She shows me where to hold it. So here I was, pulling a propane heater out of a box.” The reader's multimodal imagery, stimulated as it is by the basic contents (the action of lifting an object of a certain weight, form, and size) alone, may then be further enhanced by particular elements of construction, namely, by an (admittedly awkward) admixture of adverbial deictic shift (“here”), present tense (“shows”), and second-person address (“come”). These presence-promoting devices, in turn, might lose some or most of their impact if they were employed to represent a content less familiar to the reader than a series of mundane bodily movements. To the extent that reading is an embodied activity, it is thus reasonable to strive for a theory of direct presence in which content is treated before construction. Indeed, as far as linguistic representations of phenomena (objects and forces) are concerned, the experimental evidence reviewed above seems to suggest that few sorts of words are as widely and deeply familiar to readers as are laconic references to transitive bodily movement.

Phenomenal Presence in Evidence: Observational and Historical Issues

The neuroimaging and behavioral setups employed by researchers investigating inner speech or sensorimotor resonance are based on very limited sets of textual stimuli. Technical

constraints do not allow the use of larger segments of complex literary discourse, not to speak of the paradigms' limitations when it comes to accounting for phenomenal presence *qua* experience, reflective or pre-reflective. However, experimental methods of the kind used in guided imagery tasks may be applicable in localizing direct presence, which may prove to entail a kind of efferent leakage (i.e. augmented physiological reactivity, such as increased muscle tension). As for the textual stimuli used to explore aspects of presence, researchers will need to factor in two problematic—and language-specific—contrasts: between explicit and inferred presence-promoting cues, on the one hand, and between encoded and emergent (i.e. untraceable to the actual wording of the text) sensorimotor imagery, on the other hand. Experiments mapping the distribution and intensity of verbal rather than direct presence may be even more difficult to design, since auditory imagery does not “leak.” While it is possible to observe subvocalization via measurements of increased activity in the silent reader's vocal musculature, voices in the reader's mind cannot be directly recorded.

Whenever subjective experience is to be laid bare, introspection is indispensable. Hence, introspective self-report, whether in the form of spontaneous verbal protocol or questionnaire data, will be a necessary complement to any psychophysiological or behavioral setup. Some of the paradigms elaborated by empirical narrative studies provide solid methodological foundations to build on in designing such experiments. They also hew closer to veridical reading situations, as compared to the experiments of traditional cognitive psychology. For instance, the framework of psychonarratology proposed by Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon (2003) allows us to trace meaningful variation in readers' responses to discrete textual cues. In Bortolussi and Dixon's experiments, competing versions of a narrative text are produced, and readers' accounts of their experience are then interpreted in relation to the feature that has been manipulated. But given the preconceptual character of phenomenal presence, it may be difficult to determine how much of the verbalized readerly experience really is elicited in the course of reading (online) and how much of it arises during the process of retrieval (offline) used to fill out the questionnaire. In any case, no paradigm will fully eliminate the risk of an experimenter demand effect, and any paradigm will end up defining correlations rather than causalities.

What may perhaps seem even more pressing from the viewpoint of theoretical narrative studies are the caveats made necessary by the possible historical variability of readers' responses across different epochs. Neither cognitive science nor empirical studies of literary response can do anything about the fact that they are limited to samples of contemporary readership. If the psychophysiological substrates of reading have been found to

vary synchronically across today's cultures (Saenger 2000: 1-6), then it is more than likely that they have also been changing diachronically within the broadly conceived Western modernity (say, post-Gutenberg European and American culture) that sets the norms and boundaries of most narrative theory. We cannot produce experimental evidence of how silent reading was structured on a psychophysiological level in the past. What we can do is speculate about how it was experienced by means of deduction from the antecedents of narrative theory such as ancient rhetoric, from historians' accounts of reading practices, and from the evolution of literary narrative as such. The three perspectives seem to converge.

In rhetoric, poetics, and other writings prefiguring narrative theory, as well as in historical scholarship dealing with the practices of reading, references to the preconceptual benefits of reading in general—and phenomenal presence in particular—are rare. Lubbock's figure of speech comparing the creative process to putting events before one's eyes dates back to pre-Aristotelian antiquity (Halliwell 2002: 20). However, a systematic account of how that process is meant to affect reception was not put forward. Rather, as far as explicit mentions of the discrete sensorimotor modalities are concerned, aural qualities enhancing verbal presence seem clearly to prevail, starting with Aristotle's (1995: 123) comments on how Homer evokes characters' voices and continuing throughout medieval and early modern accounts of reading, whether out loud or silently, as a largely aural experience (Ong 2002: 119). Although the quality of poetic *vividness* (*enargeia*), most famously addressed by Demetrius (1995: 473-79) and occasionally invoked in post-medieval rhetorical writing (see e.g. Alexander 2010), was commonly understood to entail a readerly vision of sorts, it is unclear whether the term was ever used to denote direct presence in my sense, or even in the sense of Lubbock's showing (i.e. divorced from conceptual thought). Apart from one single reference to the visual, Demetrius himself seems to present vividness as a matter of vicarious hearing pertaining mainly to verbal presence and of the reader's affect and higher judgment. In sum, mentions of sensorimotor processes relevant for direct presence seem to be relatively sparse in older theoretical writings, and it is unlikely that they would be able to capture what the experience of direct presence is like today.

To turn to the history of reading practices, cultural theoretician Walter J. Ong (2002: 155-157) asserts that literary narrative did not emancipate itself from classical, orality-driven rhetoric until as late as the 1800s. In accordance with his assertion, contemporary historians of reading suggest that the engrossed reader of the sentimental era still engaged in narrative texts as if they were instances of codified oral (and, one may thus assume, largely aural) narration, while seeking imaginary friendship with the author or protagonist (see Wittmann

1999: 295-97). This sort of reading strategy seems largely to favor verbal presence over direct presence. Furthermore, when embodied reader response was theorized by aestheticians and physiological literary critics Edward Bain, Grant Allen, and others working in the latter half of the nineteenth century (see Dames 2007: 25-69), these authors did not define readerly embodiment (such as muscular tension or neural excitation) in ways that would account for the sensorimotor benefits entailed by direct presence. Rather, presence was assumed to result from rhythm of speech, speed of narration, and other characteristics of the narrative *qua* verbal utterance—yet another fact pointing up how verbal presence constituted the standard of sensorimotor readerly experience.

Finally, clues about readers' experiences of presence can be gleaned from the evolution of literary narrative itself. Since any generalizations regarding the history of (post-Gutenberg, Western) literary style would require rigorous corpus-based cross-linguistic analyses, the following observations relate to the limited yet widely influential canon of the French novel. In this connection, it is interesting to note that it was not until the nineteenth century that renditions of transitive bodily movement began to occur on a more regular basis. They seem to have made a sudden appearance as part of an overall shift of content, a movement away from the sublime and universal toward the particular, quotidian, and experiential. This shift, which can be traced back to the scenic craftsmanship of Flaubert, must have had consequences for readerly expectations regarding the two forms of phenomenal presence and the distribution of attention between them. More specifically, the shift toward the quotidian and the experiential may have relocated the readers' focus from verbal presence to direct presence. Moreover, there are many reasons to believe that this same shift had gradually yet irreversibly modified the practice of literary reading in general, including the reading of pre-1800 narrative, making it an ever more "directly" phenomenal and multimodally embodied activity.

On the level of narrative structure, the gradual exploitation of sensorimotor experience was paralleled by a phasing out of the omniscient narrator (who had still routinely addressed the "dear reader" at the beginning of the nineteenth century) and of other oral residues such as a linear, moral-driven plot. In other words, it was accompanied by a significant loss in overt prompters of verbal presence, and hence by a loss in similarity to communication narrowly defined. This was a matter of necessity rather than coincidence: in a successful rendering of sensorimotor experience proper, there is no point or conceptual knowledge to be communicated, solely the seemingly unmediated (at least for fractions of a second) phenomenal benefits entailed by direct presence. As long as oral language respects the rules

of higher-level conceptual communication—the rules that are flouted by the parents-to-be mentioned in the beginning of this essay—sensorimotor detail as provided for instance in the above excerpt from Toussaint's *Camera* is rarely heard.

Last but not least, the period in which such sensorimotor detail surfaced in the French novel roughly coincides with the moment in the history of reading when literary narratives, too, ceased to be commonly heard. Despite the fact that mentions of silent reading date back to the times of Saint Augustine and that silent reading was widespread in certain contexts by the end of the Middle Ages (Saenger 2000), reading aloud was presumably the mode in which literary narratives were received by a substantial part of the European public until as late as the nineteenth century (Lyons 1999: 342-44). Throughout the 1800s there is abundant evidence that authors explicitly envisioned their novels to be read aloud and that they even read their own prose aloud when writing. Around 1900, collective practices of reading aloud (in forms considered largely uncustomary only a few decades later) still occurred on a regular basis (Ong 2002: 146; 154). The subsequent abrupt disappearance of reading aloud may have further reinforced the shift in phenomenal sensitivity imposed on the reader's mind by the novelties of literary style. It may have made vicarious voicing less readily accessible.

Assuming that the hypothesis of an attentional trade-off between verbal and direct presence is correct, preliminary evidence thus suggests that direct presence is not only historically determined but also a fairly recent phenomenon. This is true at least for direct presence in its stronger forms, which make the reader feel physically present in the imaginary world of the story. In this case, the notion of presence, also known as “*being there*”, is used as in interactive media studies (see e.g. Schubert, Biocca and Regenbrecht 2001). Ironically, although the experience of direct presence coincides with the rise of modern narrative theory itself, both theoretical and empirical studies continue to disregard it, along with its more senior but equally disregarded verbal counterpart. This essay is a first step toward recognizing—and analyzing—the role of these modes of phenomenal presence in the activity of reading.

i

It has also been suggested that the two processes are mutually constraining on cognitive levels prior to consciousness (see Fischer and Zwaan 2008, 837).

ii

As is apparent from Lubbock's appeal to drama, the concept of showing crosscuts the distinction between direct presence and verbal presence (in its multimodal variety).

iii

Immersion, an umbrella term encompassing—apart from what I define as presence—a variety of effects, such as suspense, affective arousal and other emotional responses, cognitive flow, or susceptibility to belief change, is sometimes used to denote direct presence. A similarly broad concept often conflated with direct presence is transportation (see e.g. Gerrig 1998).

iv

The arguments presented in the following three subsections are further elaborated elsewhere (Kuzmičová 2012).

v

Experimental studies have shown that spatial modeling in reading (i.e. the deliberate retrieval of spatial information from memory) is also facilitated when the reader expects a story character to move (Rapp, Klug and Taylor 2006). Spatial modeling should not be confused with direct presence.

vi

My corrections appear in brackets and are based on the French original (Toussaint 1988: 25).

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