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Editor's Introduction to the Issue in Focus: *A Series of Theoretical Studies on Reading*

Presented in this section is a special forum that offers fresh philosophical and theoretical perspectives on various forms and levels of reading practices today.

Kyoo Lee's stimulating lead essay, "A Close-up: On U, the Reader InOutside," with a spirited response by Marjorie Perloff, "Microreading/Microwriting," these innovative interventions from two of the most original theorists today set off the conversation.

Two other, forthcoming essays in the next issue respond to Lee's paradigm-shifting prompt, and we plan to continue the series with invited contributions to the conversation that would emerge through these two opening "scenes" of meta-reading.

We hope that the dialogic platform initiated here will generate some dynamic discussions and innovative perspectives on this timeless art of textual encountering.

A Close-up: On U, the Reader InOutside

Kyoo Lee

Abstract: Where, or who, is the "close reader" today in the age of imMEDIAted information overflow? This essay introduces a new figure, the "inoutside reader," focusing on its interstitially interactive ambiguity, its selfie-like subjectivity (simultaneously subjective and objective). Seen and seeing through the "window," the inoutside reader that often counter-reads as well is called and calling "you" out there and in here; neither exactly an insider nor definitely an outsider but "openly" invited as one or those of you (*vous*) freely generated and liberally generalized as such, "U" in the net-work, this data-point-like transistor-reader, acts like a butterfly on the window. The bookish reader, more classically sedentary, "closely" and "deeply" "responsive" to the text, is not lost in this bidirectional analog-digital migratory process but rather entrenched therein, emerging as a sort of instantly recalibrated, (de-)compressed super(ficial)-reader. Reading (X) goes on.

Keywords: you; close reading; in/outside reading; counter-reading; Paul de Man; Stéphane Mallarmé; mediatic

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标题: 一个特写: 论你, 内-外部读者

摘要: 在今天, 在这个即时中介化(imMEDIAted)信息溢出的时代, 谁是“细读者”, “细读者”又在哪里? 本文引入了一个新形象: “内-外部读者”, 这一形象要强调的是其间隙互动的模糊性, 亦即其自拍式的主客观性(同时既是主观又是客观的)。“内-外部”读者透过“窗口”被看到并看到, 他们通常也是反-读者, 他们既被召唤又召唤你离开彼处来到此处; 确切地说, 他们不是内部者, 但确定的是, 他们不是外部者, 而是被“公开地”邀请作为你们中的某人或某些人, 这都是些被自由创生而成, 并被宽泛归纳成如此存在的人, 构成互联网中的“原你(U)”, 这一数据点式的晶体管-读者, 其行动就像一只窗口上的蝴蝶。书虫式读者, 以更经典的坐姿, “细致”和“深入”地对文本做出“回应”, 他们在这种双向模拟-数字迁移过程中并没有丢失, 而是隐藏于其中的壕沟, 并作为一种即时重新校准的、(解)压缩的超(表面)读者而浮现融入。阅读(倍增)继续。

关键词: 你; 细读; 内外部阅读; 反阅读; 保罗·德·曼; 斯泰凡·马拉美; 媒介的

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“Never Forget”

“NEVER FORGET”, wrote the President of a country on this day, Tuesday, May 23, 2017, in the guest book at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Israel he visited partly to feed his twitter followers; “IT IS A GREAT HONOR TO BE HERE WITH ALL OF MY FRIENDS—SO AMAZING AND WILL NEVER FORGET!” (Silverstein)

What? Whether it is the Holocaust or the visit to the museum, the conspicuous absence of the textual object, grammatical and contextual, remains telling — resonating otherwise too. Something seems forgotten in the “never forget”, an often-cited historical imperative “willfully” recycled into the speech-active superlative, a turn that sounds — and does — more like “forget about it”; besides, whose, who’s, forgetting, remembering this, whatever “it” is? For whom does the bell toll for the eclipsed *subject* (subject & object)?

Am I making this up? Reading it too closely? Reading something into it too much, too quickly? Or, in fact, will a closer reading help one understand “it”, the “thing” circling away when circled

around, this elusive loop of *subjective* evacuation? This push & pull of a wondering mind at the door of reading, however unsettling or slight, seems at least to bring some stability to the wandering eye now riveted if rather distractingly.

One thing for sure, somehow reading goes on or else must. I, for one, neither a friend nor a foe, am impelled, compelled, to read it ... again; and again not necessarily an implied or a compliant reader, although potentially part of the piles of co-flocking, auto-liking “followers” including spambots and all kinds of fake account holders factored into the total count at any fluctuating second of the day, I, one of the humanoid eyeballs following the move charting the Internet planes of collective streams of consciousness, too, come to register and relay it so as in part to memorialize this “AMAZING” text “!”. Like it or not, believe it or not, I, the reader in passing, having already entered into an electromagnetic field of reading including hyper-reading, am just walking into a mediatised set-up, all typed and hyped. *Just?* Well, twitter-doped or counter-duped by the psychopolitical theatrics, in any event, when relating to this imMEDIAted textual event, I, a transbioreceiver-reader, happen to

happen in some ways anyway; this “holder” of attention, however cursory or temporary, whether actively agential or topologically tautological, willing or unwilling, still have to take up or would be prompted to assume the position of the addressee structurally inscribed therein, through which “it”, the content to process, is delivered and processed into a site/sight/cite-specific bit, in this case a soundbite.

As Huck Finn says, “you don’t know about me, but that ain’t no matter”, as long as “you” are addressed in some ways, moral, socio-political, psychological, what have you:

You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. (Twain 1)

In other words, what matters is telling, in the telling, in the act of telling X, transporting it:

Ishmael addresses me directly (“Call me Ishmael”), and though I am sometimes at Ishmael’s side, at other points I am high above him [...]. Or he addresses a generalized “me,” i. e., readers. [...] A novel invites our interpretive skills, but it also invites our minds to wander. The reading imagination is loosely associative — but it is not random. (Mendelsund 296)

Again, this narrativized “invitation”, while sounding interpersonal, is not so much personal or even impersonal as auto-(hetero-)affective. Attention, Shoppers! — we are happy to serve you, for it is you we love; yet at the end of the day, this “you” promiscuously promised is better understood in

psychomediatic terms, topoanalytically. It has nothing to do with you the flesh-and-blood person reading especially when it sets you up by involving you the second person shared, commonly addressed, by the first and the third in any given text. In such discursive theatrics of Proustian desires and the consequential aporia of narcissism, as observed by Barbara Johnson (*The Feminist Difference* 46), the astute reader of Toys R Us (Johnson, *Persons* 5), the mediated message of “selfobjects” in the process of transferal transversal, i. e., “‘what you are is valuable’” constantly turns into novel *and* “archaic demands” (for love), a hermeneutic “open wound,” itself perma-hollow each time addressed since it is the constant in the social contract of any text thus formed.

Further along, if “everything in the world exists to end up as a book (*Le monde est fait pour aboutir à un beau livre*)” (Mallarmé 226) as Stéphane Mallarmé is often quoted as saying, there will be a reader or two — another and maybe another set (in case the first disappears). If “everything is a burned book” (Bolaño 666) as Hans is also quoted saying, the young man in Roberto Bolaño’s eschatological epic, *2666: A Novel*, if every book is going to be double-fried into data, a contemporization of the Mallaremean book (*ibookish?*) to come, every book thingy of nature & culture & every transcodable, transferable, transportable IoT (Internet of Things), all the floating and circulating bits and pieces, google-able and google-izable, semio-capitalized forget-me-not nuggets of info will be “booked” somewhere or book-ended including its potential teleportability itself, *itself*. Where the book goes, literally or metaphorically, whether into our phones or bones or some twilight zones is also at once a question of *and* for the reader-carrier; not only what, who, where the reader is, with some minimal “sense” of agency retained somewhere somehow, but how to address, locate, register “you/U” the reader, the subject pole from which one bears some sort of witness to this very moment of instant, constant worldly origination, constitution,

disintegration, all in transition and transIT — and again how, what, why exactly?

To Read on — DeMandingly “Closely”

One might be a born reader but no one is born reading.

Once out, one reads — on to no end, regardless, heedlessly, almost heedlessly, un-heard-of-viously, not unlike the Hegelian Sphinx, the other side of “the symbol of the symbolic itself” (Hegel 360; Derrida 99), a parental figure that also generates all parenthetical offshoots at its (tangential [or do I mean tangential]) root, which would return to the parent in the form of hauntology, the silent crawl of being behind, around and across ontology nice and bright for the time being. Forget the root, the *parent* hesis, too, as in remembering to move on, saying “forget about it”. The remaining body cut off from the head, the mobile head then becomes the remainder-reminder of the (w) hole “thing”, embodying a dialectic turned on its head, so to speak. Reading as an event or a post-eventual (inter-) act, falling and arising constantly somewhere between the two, emerges as an eventual act or enactment, a task of bridging or even *the*, even if still unnamable. Here, I am recalling Paul de Man relating to G. W. F. Hegel relating to Sphinx in the ancient riddle, with all the readers there blindly proceeding as, getting processed into, the vocal markers of “the grammatical subject cut off from its consciousness, the poetic analysis cut off from its hermeneutic function” (*The Resistance to Theory* 70), “it” being the intertext(ual milieu or traffic or subcontinent) formed around the chain of readings carried through these figure(head)s — yes, please (excuse all these parentheses, master, if you will).

One “merely reads” (24) no matter what, to replay de Man’s “wild card” (Gasché 7) of reading, himself a wildcat reader whose “smile”, some say, is “halfway between a Cheshire cat’s and a rictus of suppressed gastrointestinal pain”

(Freedman) which I, a second-hand observer-reader at a generational and archivally mediated distance as well, can only literally or literarily “monumentalize” by merely mobilizing it. I mean, what do I remember here except remembering and what can I call *myself* except a re-caller? That is, I as an untimely Hermeneutic transporter walking into the mobile carpet of reading, can only remember and recall without remembering and recalling it in “person” while registering the intricate, arabesque simplicity of textured bodies — a metaphor de Man himself deploys to describe or rather *describe* Roland Barthes, “a monumental Cheshire cat” (*The Resistance to Theory* 175), a figure Geoffrey Hartman too evokes as somewhat part and parcel of a necessarily “nihilist” process in “the work of reading [...] a sullen art reacting against modern iconomania” (Hartman 187), a “serialized [...] labor of the negative” (188), of undoing and redoing. This version of post-dialectical art of reading including reading de Man, which de Man renders more mechanical, positively negative or negatively positive, remains “dead” consistent and persistent to the point of its material crystallization, non-referentialized meta-literization.

Time to read — again and again: radically materially quotidianizing the “high” modernist attention to the almost syntax-and-context-proof self-referentiality of time-consciousness, de Man returns to such a self-splitting mode and moment of time at once intensified and interminable. Its postwar modernity, its post-Kantian reversion to a kind of apriority already epochally clouded if not dead dead, appears retro-Kantian in its categorical impulse, almost pre- in its quasi-transcendental resistance to theory (*The Resistance to Theory* 3) it still prosthetically relies on. Is this a case of vicious circularity? Or virtuous even? One is left wondering. In any case, this aporetic convolution, an irreducible afterlife of reading that unfolds and ends like a book, at times exploding like a time bomb where time usually just squatting suddenly swirls and squeaks. This crypto-retro-call for a “mere reading”

at such signposts of time going extratemporaneous, one last duty of reading that would last as one hopes, something of a last resort that becomes the first recollection, occurs like or *as* part of “material events” (Cohen xv); and today, I mean to this day thinking of that day, I find those traces of deconstructive, infrared materialization of reading, of post-factual “archival” reading, in particular, still potent inasmuch as its blind insightfulness or insightful blindness — even if this once-turbo-charged trope of deconstruction seems now rather deflated by its own eventual self-mummification — allows interstitial spacing within and around the text inspected at every stage or step of the way.

At the end of the day, I am merely asking this, just wondering again, as I wander into various scenes of silent, surprising, scandalous, and nowadays often sportified reading on a daily basis: what would it mean for one to do “a mere reading” “practically” also as in praxis or incisive counter-praxis and do it well enough in the age of daily fresh fakery and disposably mediated truths, where the epistemological distinction between knowledge and information, if still there, is not that significant or not even merely relevant? Plato & Company, with associates such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, etc., in it, would turn in its grave, which, however, is beside the point, as one might point out. Fair enough, my point still is: given those myriad gaps and gaping (w) holes in the fabric of the signified universethat constantly needs to “garden” (Waldrop 2) (and at times [avant-] guarded), at least a well-spaced and -timed close-up on any datapoint could “do the job” of reading — yes?

As de Man notes in reference to the work of Reuben Brower, the scholar-teacher of reading in the 1950–70s:

Mere reading, it turns out, prior to any theory, is able to transform critical discourse in a manner that would appear deeply subversive to those who think of the teaching of literature as a substitute for the

teaching of theology, ethics, psychology, or intellectual history. Close reading accomplishes this often in spite of itself because it cannot fail to respond to structures of language which it is the more or less secret aim of literary teaching to keep hidden. (*The Resistance to Theory* 24)

Such a close reading, not exactly closed, did and does open up a new vista of textual space while spacing itself in the form of a chronotopological intervention as well as invention. This then-experimental model of textual access that began to upset and reset the epochal *modus operandi* also practically unleashed critical and creative energies in the world of literary and theoretical criticism especially in the post-war Anglo-American academe. The world of deconstructive theory and philosophy, in turn, still living through the so-called de Man Affair *inter alia* (the archival scandal and trauma of deadly time repeatedly restaging its powerful manifold mereness, messy bareness), is not irrelevant to the Holocaust “never to be forgotten”, and such a story and history, while only folded in here, crucially contextualizes the line of thinking I am following in the following.

“Close-Listeningly” InsideOut & InOutside

My scope, narrower and smaller, however, is almost micro-philopoetic, kind of zen-focused.

[...] more interesting to me is a poetry that problematizes everything — the poet, the poem, the language itself. because if you are actually looking closely it becomes clear that all these things really are problems and what’s a poem to do if not look closely? (Fischer 204)

Reading as “close listening” (Bernstein 3), detecting, holding, connecting; I am interested in

the current location, as a site-specific act, of “close reading”, this very one possible act of quiet, elastic, phenomenological yet highly mobile bracketing one can perform in the age of techno-sobjective evacuation and wireless disappearance of IoT. What and how does one hear in and through the mini-multi-walled and faceted clamor of things and beings including no-things? In this figure of adaptively attentive “mere reader” 2.0, what I find myself zooming in on is its generative auto-dislocationality or locatedness itself, its glocational distributability and mutability, the actuality of its distributed mutations included. I am after a flexi-inventive, intertextual, interfacial intervener-cum-convener, an “interstitially” (Lee 466) interlocutory inOutsider, a borderline reader-smuggler, a good one (!) at that.

When I turn to this type and level of nano-literalized “interface”, “the point of transition between different mediatic layers within any nested system” (Galloway 936), what I try to do is to spot and secure some minimal sense of transitional, transportational, transformative agency, although not the anthropo-phenomenalized “face” per se. I am in and out here to look for a kind of mutely telecommunicative, tele-i-phonized contemporary cousin to the close reader or transcoder, its analytic presence conceived broadly, metonymically, epigenetically, as some sort of intruding insider of all times. What I have in mind (and perhaps in my body too) is “an inside ® that is out of it” (Ronell ix, ® added): this re-calling re-reader from within is a host-cum-guest or a host-turning-into-a guest and vice versa in the sense that “a host is a guest, and a guest is a host” (Miller 442) especially in the autopoietic world of constitutive polysemy and polyphony. The reader-listener here and there in the twilight zone of being (-meant or meant-to be) lives on, accommodating, sorting through and surviving all sorts of chains of misreading including the auto-ambiguation of the text, where a narrative narrates itself and an image imagines itself through the reader’s eye and ear, bypassing and surpassing the

narcissistic yoking and housing of the (one and only) meaning that misses this minimal truth, the fact of the matter, namely, that the reader, one (of the other) here, is after all “merely reading”.

Close (ly attuned) to the bordered land of sense-making, the mere (ly metered) reader I envisage is always in motion, paying well-timed and scaled “attention to the philological or rhetorical devices of language” (*The Resistance to Theory* 24), its virtues and virtuosity both coming from cultivating the executively “focused attention [...] necessary to process the tiny syllables and sounds within words and the many semantic categories like human, plant, and temple” (Wolf 34). In that sense, I am writing with and about the one reading this thing, performing a conceptual close-up on the good old “close reader” where a more media-literate contempo-figure can be cut out, as sampled above.

This musing, in part on you in me and vice versa, accentuates the interstitial ambiguity and auto-ambiguating productivity of U-topos in the age of iPhonic imMEDIation. Emerging here, as previewed, is a figure of the inOutside reader seen and seeing through the “window”, neither exactly an insider nor definitely an outsider, neither simply uninvited nor disinvited, not even disingenuously or just diplomatically included, but “openly” invited indeed as one of (those of) you (*vous*) if only as a sort of gray-zoned literary party extra freely generated and liberally generalized with no specific expectations or implicit obligations to contribute to interfaced textual eventuation and expansion, i. e., the work of network (ing). Again, neither just disenfranchised nor unjustly excluded if still on the fringe or margin, but more subtly structurally, impersonally incorporated into and addressed through “net-neutrally” open-ended, multi-channeled telecomm-unity, this spectralized spectatorial figure of the other reader or the reader of the other, if not there there à la Stein, is still lodged or proceeding there “otherwise” infinitesimally, digitinfinitely, roving in a shadow that could be quieter and cooler,

even roomier — like the other corner of the table at the Mad Tea Party in Alice's Wonderland, where, as she rightly, "indignantly," points out, "'There's plenty of room!'" :

"It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited," said the March Hare.

"I didn't know it was your table," said Alice; "it's laid for a great many more than three." (Carroll 70-71)

The more the merrier . . . this "third" (plus more) being or inter-being entering, relaying and enriching the reciprocal economy of a(n inter)text, the datapoint-like transistor-reader, a gardening butterfly on the window, in turn, energizes the auto-framing margins of any given or emerging texts with elastic immediacy, critical literacy and mobile agency: the guest-reader in transit turns into a malleable, meta-liquid ma®ker of a datalogical nexuses, inhabiting and charting the agora of aggregated texts and texters "in here and out there" including, for instance, instagrammatological followers who would have "reddit" in trans *IT*, all inOut for a ride, paid or free, invested or diverted, either way or anyway. Always inter-playing, partying, part-ing, self-partioning, self-archiving at such nodal pressure points of hermeneutic self-traversal is a socially-inflected, serially intermediated, composite figure of the reader, *the* reader that there is or else should be, as I hope, not just socially or even solitarily but strategically, structurally . . . slidingly and stealthily too: the more canonical "bookish" characters enmeshed with the text "closely" or "deeply" with ethico-aesthetical "responsiveness" are now merging, e-merging, not exactly lost, but rather more virally virtually, into the ones scanning the "surface" at a "distance", nice and slow quickly, nice and quick slowly, the last two of which are more in sync with the algorithmic subjectivity of the reader today including the "e-book readers" reading the readers in co-

screened recursive loops.

Interfacially, Interstitially, Incisively, Connecting the Dots All Over Again

Such an interfacial, elastic radar-reader arriving expectedly "unexpectedly" (Liu) in and out of "the scene in which every scene has its origin in languageless invisibility" (Quignard 7), such "a ceaselessly active actuality" itself as a kind of self in itself — still tied to the micro-humanoid called homunculus once entertained in the Cartesian theatre of solo-rationalism now seemingly back in the newly (i-or-U-) masked forms and figures of the AI, android, avatar, meme, Siri, Sophia, etc. — can become a transmitter for bi-directional power flow, generating and regulating a "quotological" (Regier 10) shock, "you dear reader [...], the target" (Regier 10) as George Sand is heard saying. The pressured (absent) presence and *pharmakonic* present of resident alterity associated with this infrared inOutside reader lying on the outskirts of the text folded into or across its epicenter, suddenly closing in on its-other-self angularly, incandescently, is part and parcel of incitatory instability and excitatory experience one is likely to face at any moment as a writer or reader or both; constitutively and simultaneously elastic reading and writing — slower, faster, narrower, broader — rendered possible by the interfacially intermediatized platforms and networks of communication further facilitates the broadening of the reader's hermeneutic horizon and semiotic capacity.

Consider this case that went "viral": a digitally-assisted close-up on, paired with a slow-motioned narrative build-up toward, the masterly swiftness of the swatting hand of the First Lady of the U. S. on the red carpet quietly controlling the First Gentleman(?)'s unwanted public (attempt at) hand grabbing as seen, analyzed and intensely discussed — sensationalized, semiotized, satirized — on TV/ the internet. Clearly, "the relationship between the

camera and the object changes and thus our relationship (as viewers) to the object has changed" (Mendelsund 280) elastically in such a way that, for instance, almost instantly shifted and forever altered the public perception on the much (un-) veiled relationship between the two very familiar characters, the coupled subject, an often-cited and constantly updated item in the world of techno-semiocapitalism. Instructive to note, in this connection, is this first rule in *Slow Reading in a Hurried Age*:

Books take up the reader who takes them up. They address the person "holding me now in hand" (so Whitman describes the reader who, joined with him, inquires into a new mystery, his poem). Books are trying to tell you something. The better the book, the more urgent its message, and the more patiently you are called on to listen. (Mikics 61)

Listen, I'd only add to this book-talk: if slow & close reading remains vitally important in a fast-moving world of techno-drive, in fact, slower, closer, more analytic-synthetic reading can be facilitated and augmented by such techno-prosthetic reading devices as the camera.

One who can zoom in on the meaning of a hand gesture of the first lady in question while immediately connecting it to the big data on, for example, gendered body language and power differentials would be a model in/Outside reader, a reader of the minefield interfaces and interstices whose practice is not only "close and distant" (Van de Ven) in a synthetic manner but fast and fastidious. The readerly in/Outsider's cultivated intuition and capacity for (and against) the Franco Morettian "pattern (mis) recognition" (Steyerl) would switch the otherwise *merely*, inertly, even "poisonously" (Waters) aggregated data into a living tree of knowledge, especially its (un) documented "shadows" (Steyerl), those bits &

pieces "unscrambable" only by some simple "Gestalt Realism" as Hito Steyerl wryly conjures it. Truly in the age of the imperative quantification and biometric politicization of the worldly bodies on the planetary scale, where the inexorable march of numbers keeps swallowing, "crunching", processing, fabricating what is or used to be called meaning while discharging, rendering politically disposable, its psychocultural and sociohistorical cores it ends up progressively covering up with all that glitters and gibbers, the mere act, not even a subtle art, of "stop-and-read", of reading them out, inside out, out loud, loud and clear, this vital act in itself of certain fidelity, however vague, might be a performance fast-fading.

Yet, I find myself rereading today, wishing to re-remember what the President said to the Pope, on his visit to Vatican the following day, March 24, 2017: their meeting bookended with the Presidential remark, "Thank you. Thank you. I won't forget what you said" (Landler and Horowitz). And they are exchanging gifts, a boxed set of five first edition books by Martin Luther King Jr. and a set of the Pope's 184-page 2015 encyclical on climate change along with a signed copy of his words from the last World Peace Day, and as the cameras flash, the President is saying, "I'll be reading them". On that positive note, I am still looking for more promising notes one could use to go on reading and counter-reading, more reasons to read on — haltingly, really, interstitially, interfacially, intermittently ok too, between and beyond and across the lines, even alone but better still alone together. I mean, there is at least the last trump card of reading, "never forget".

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