

Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik

## **Enacting Embodied Events in Narrative Processing.**

**Bio:** Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik Ph.D. is a literary theorist and head of the Historical Poetics Department at the Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Science, Warsaw. She is the author of two monographs (*Poetyka i antropologia. Cykl podolski W. Odojewskiego*, Kraków 2004; *Poetyka intersubiektywności. Kognitywistyczna teoria narracji a proza XX wieku*, Toruń 2012) and a co-editor of *W sieci modernizmu. Poetyka – historia literatury – krytyka literacka*, Warszawa 2017.

**Abstract:** In this paper, I would like to discuss the status of particular subclass of events in cognitive narratology: embodied events connected with bodily movements of fictional characters. I will refer to some possible interconnections between current issues in the study of social cognition and the latest debates in narrative studies. I will address opportunities for developing an enactive approach to processing narrative events, with particular reference to the corporeal motion and the concept of bodily simulation. Such an approach could help account for the representation and tracking of events by readers engaged in the embodied experience of reading. I find new approaches to cognition highly inspiring for future research on the intersubjective nature of narrative and for the further development of empirical studies on reader responses to literature.

## Event in literary theory

Let me begin with a quotation from Brian Boyd's *On the Origin of Stories*: "Language can report events so well because our overwhelming interest in human actions has itself shaped language."<sup>1</sup> This evolutionary approach to fictional events may be compared with current cognitive research on linguistic representations of eventfulness. Jeff Loucks and Eric Pederson explain the significance of event categorization in language:

Motion events play a central role in people's representation of the world. Not only is our perception of motion events crucial for safely navigating through the world and key to our survival; our conceptual understanding of motion events is necessary for interpreting other people's behaviors, and for accurately communicating important aspects of an event to others.<sup>2</sup>

These two quotations each correspond with two important premises of my stance: 1) linguistic event representations may be traced back to the preverbal experiences of humankind and 2) human action (intentional or not) is itself a prototypical model for an event. In this paper, I would like to discuss the status of events in cognitive narratology, since this will take us beyond the notion of an event as a set of formal units or devices within a story. In classical (I mean formal and structuralist) narratology, events were treated as a salient element of narrative, defined as a representation of change, dependent or not on humans and human agency<sup>3</sup>. Abstract qualities, in particular sequentiality and causality unfolding in time, were considered as basic features of narrative as

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Boyd, *On the Origins of Stories. Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 2009, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Loucks, Eric Pederson, *Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Categorization of complex motion events, w: Event Representation in Language and Cognition*, red. Jürgen Bohnemeyer, Eric Pederson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> David Herman, *States, Events, and Actions*, w: idem, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2002, p. 27-52.

such, and as the constituents of plot<sup>4</sup>. For Tzvetan Todorow<sup>5</sup> or Gerard Prince,<sup>6</sup> narrative eventfulness leads from a certain stasis *via* dynamic disruption or modification to restoration of the primary static phase. This schema also serves as a minimal definition of a story. Most of these text-oriented or sentence-oriented narrative theories (including Propp's pre-formalist studies, Russian Formalist works, Eastern European and French structuralists and their followers) analyzed the event structure in terms of grammatical relations. Thus, the key questions for this tradition of events analysis were: how should the basic units of narrative information be defined? What are the rules by which they may be combined? What are the typologies of events? How is event structure related to literary genre? David Herman's *Story Logic* provides a comprehensive summary of the main trends in this direction of study.<sup>7</sup>

New attempts to understand narrative eventfulness began with the idea that narrative is not simply a combination of formal devices, but also a way of structuring and comprehending the human experience. This notion of narrative traces back to William Labov and Joshua Waletzky's studies on oral personal storytelling and its subjective markers (evaluation mechanisms, the hierarchy of events, impressions of agency).<sup>8</sup> It was extended by Wallace Chafe, who showed how people store and retrieve information blocks in order to verbalize their experience of the flow of time as it unfolds.<sup>9</sup> Roger Schank and Robert Abelson investigated memory structures that encode stereotypical activities and situations (scripts, frames, scenarios), enabling later access and re-use of

---

<sup>4</sup> Peter Hühn, *Event and Eventfulness*, w: *Handbook of Narratology*, red. Peter Hühn, John Pier, Wolf Schmid, Berlin New York: De Gruyter 2009, p. 80-97.

<sup>5</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Grammaire du "Décaméron"*, The Hague: Mouton 1969.

<sup>6</sup> Gerard Prince, *A Grammar of Stories*, The Hague: Mouton 1973.

<sup>7</sup> See also: Janusz Badio, *Construal and Linguistic Coding of Narrative Events*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Labov, William and Joshua Waletzky, *Narrative analysis*, w: *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, red. June Helm, Seattle: University of Washington Press 1967, p. 12-44.

<sup>9</sup> *The Pear Story: Cognitive, Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production*, red. Wallace Chafe, Norwood, New York: Ablex 1980.

these units of generalizable knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Jerome Bruner also developed the idea that human consciousness has a narrative mode.<sup>11</sup> In all these theories, event perception is regarded as a sense-making strategy involving short and long-term memory, perception and knowledge structures. Moreover, the event as such cannot be detached from everyday cognitive strategies for understanding human agency in social environments.

Building on this body of research, cognitive narratologists have provided manifold accounts of how readers relate to fictional agents in narratives. The common thread between their different descriptions is the idea that literary characters are processed using similar cognitive strategies for sense-making to those we apply in our everyday interactions.<sup>12</sup> Cognitive narratologists highlight the strong connection between events and the inner motivations behind the actions of a human-like subject. Comprehending the causality and sequentiality of events depends on the reader's interpretation of the mental background behind the behavior, emotions, goals and intentions of the characters. So an event in the plot may be nothing more than a change of mind. An event may be limited to change within the fictional person's consciousness, to emotional or bodily states. It does not have to be a series of scenes.

Yet, the way we relate to fictional characters engaged in complex and evolving networks of social interactions is only one level of narrative interaction. What is equally important is the level of interaction inscribed in the flow of the narrator's speech, which is in fact at the very core of narrative itself. As Marisa

---

<sup>10</sup> Roger Schank, Robert Abelson, *Scripts, plans, goals, and understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 1977.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds. Possible Worlds*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1987.

<sup>12</sup> See the works of narratologists who explore the relationships between event and intentionality/experientiality of human-like agent: Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural Narratology*, London: Routledge 1996, p. 15-19; Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, s. 36-44; Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press 2006, p. 3-43; Marie-Laure Ryan, *Toward a Definition of Narrative*, in *Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, s. 26-33; David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, Willey Blackwell: Chichester 2009, p. 128-160.

Bortolussi and Peter Dixon explain: “the reader processes the text on the assumption that the narrator is signaling events and causal chains. What readers understand as a sequence of events is not implied by the text, but what the narrator invites the reader to infer”.<sup>13</sup> Within this theoretical framework, telling and understanding a story is always a collaborative task, which may be described in terms of social cognition mechanisms. While reading, a reader mentally represents a subject (narrator) speaking about the actions of other agents, who perceive and interpret one another’s behavior. Here, we may want to stress the similarities between the narrator-reader relationship and speaker-listener cooperation in everyday face-to-face conversation. A narrative is not only a representation of events: it also offers the reader simulated interaction with speaking, perceiving and co-operating subjects. This line of narratological study could provide a bridge between the literary theory of eventfulness and the enactive theory of cognition.

### **The enactive theory of cognition**

Enactivism has been developing for over twenty years. This approach to human cognition stresses the cognitive meaning of physical activity, by bodies in contact with their human and natural environments. Shaun Gallagher has identified three general propositions common to enactivist theories: 1) a person’s mental states are expressed in their behaviors; 2) the usual human posture toward the other is not that of an observer, but an interactive second-person stance; 3) cognition is linked directly to our embodied engagement with the other.<sup>14</sup> From this perspective, interacting with others or perceiving objects

---

<sup>13</sup> Marisa Bortolussi, Peter Dixon, *Psychonarratology. Foundation for Empirical Study of Literary Response*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 119.

<sup>14</sup> S. Gallagher, *Strong Interaction and Self Agency*, w: “Humana Mente” 2011, iss. 15 *Agency: From Embodied Cognition to Free Will*, red. Duccio Manetti, Silvano Zipoli Caiani, p. 59.

and performing motor actions with them are also sense-making strategies.<sup>15</sup> Collaborative embodied interactions constitute a human way of understanding the world around us. Sensorimotor engagement (through joint intentionality, joint action, joint attention) and co-participation in multipersonal physical and mental activities<sup>16</sup> direct our production and transmission of shared significance. Empirical findings have shown that motor cognition may be a leading element in the emergence of social cognition and the evolution of the human mind.<sup>17</sup> There is much empirical evidence of how the experience of co-participation in action via observation is realized within the human brain.<sup>18</sup> Enactivists point out that merely observing or imagining somebody performing an action facilitates the sensorimotor system of the observer, who is not simply a passive recipient of the stimuli.

Our constant interactions and alignments with others are now a major research focus in the cognitive sciences.<sup>19</sup> Sensorimotor experience is the basis for recognizing goals and motivation, predicting future actions and attributing inner states. Intentional agency cannot be studied beyond the context of interaction between agents. Face-to-face contact should be considered as the paradigm of the human cognitive stance: embodied, social and interactive in nature. Moreover, cognition is not simply the processing of information, but an action executed in relation to other co-acting humans. There is much empirical evidence that suggests that the embodied simulation of someone else's actions

---

<sup>15</sup> See Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, Eleanor Rosch, *Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1991; *Enaction: Toward a new Paradigm of Cognitive Science*, red. Stewart John., Olivier Gapenne J., Ezequiel Di Paolo, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2010; *Embodiment, Enaction and Culture. Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*. red. Christoph Durt, Thomas Fuchs, Christian Tewes, Cambridge MA: MIT Press 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Hanne De Jaegher, Ezequiel Di Paolo, *Participatory Sense-making: An Enactive Approach to Social Cognition*, "Phenomenology and Cognitive Science" 2007, vol. 6, p. 485-507.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Tomasello, *The Natural History of Human Thinking*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Giacomo Riolatti, Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Giovanna Colombetti, *The Feeling Body, Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*, Cambridge 2014.

(imagined or observed) grounds our implicit understanding of the other's behaviors, goals and intentions, while at the same time helping us to maintain a coherent and unique sense of self.<sup>20</sup>

### **Embodied events in literature**

There are new approaches to narratology which follow enactive premises and present narrative comprehension as a process of participatory sense-making.<sup>21</sup> According to these frameworks, the reader reconstructs not only what is happening in the story, but also *how* it is being enacted. Embodied simulation of the bodily actions of fictional characters (a pre-reflective experience facilitating reading acts) is seen as enabling direct understanding of their behavior. Imaginative participation in the characters' bodily actions is one of the basic meaning-making strategies of narrative understanding.<sup>22</sup> Here, I would like to emphasize a particular element of narrative: the linguistic representation of bodily states, which can be conceived as goal-oriented motor acts. I consider these descriptions highly meaningful for understanding the chains of events in a story, because they evoke the everyday experience of making inferences with regard to the real people we observe and with whom we interact. Even conventional descriptions of body language or nonverbal communication markers assist the reader's recognition of goal and intention-

---

<sup>20</sup> There is growing body of research devoted to embodied simulation (as a concept – to some extent – competitory to mental simulation) I refer just to exemplary works concerned with second-person perspective I am particularly interested in: Vittorio Gallese, *Bodily selves in relation: embodied simulation as second-person perspective on intersubjectivity*, "Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society: Biological Sciences", 2014, vol. 369, p. 1-12; Leonhard Schilbach, Bert Timmermans, *Toward a Second-person Neuroscience*, "Behavioral and Brain Sciences" 2013, vol. 36, p. 393-462.

<sup>21</sup> Marco Caracciolo, *Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*. Berlin Boston: de Gruyter 2014; Yana Popova, *Stories, Meaning, and Experience. Narrativity and Enaction*, New York London: Routledge 2015.

<sup>22</sup> This stance is grounded in embodied cognition approach to linguistic meaning and language processing. The empirical evidence shows that action representations (beneath sentence-level or text-level units) activate listener/reader's motor simulation. Manuel de Vega calls that kind of reader response *embodied inference*, idem, *Toward an Embodied Approach to Inferences in Comprehension: the Case of Action Language*. w: *Inferences during Reading*, red. Edward O'Brien, Anne Cook, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015, pp. 182-209.

directed behaviors on the part of fictional characters.<sup>23</sup> Such narrative clauses combine two important functions: they stimulate goal-tracking and action-prediction while also encouraging the reader to engage in mindreading strategies. Indeed, these representations of shared embodied actions enable the reader to feel as if she were experiencing something of the experience of the fictional minds themselves.

Narrative descriptions of bodily goal-oriented actions may also trigger the activation of these mental processes when reading. In contrast to traditional representations of 'body language' (physical traits such as gesture, posture, facial expression, tone or timbre of voice), however, these narrative structures are not so clearly rhetorical or persuasive.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, they appear to activate the reader's pre-reflective action sequencing and her bodily resonance with the psychosomatic states of the characters. It would be worth investigating this issue as part of the long-running debate concerning the main marker of character construction, which has polarized narratologists between 'action and agency' or 'interiority and consciousness' adherents.<sup>25</sup>

Affective narratology proposes one of the most comprehensible explanations of the link between body and mind. It explores how embodied emotions fundamentally overwhelm and organize the narratives we create, and how they provoke emotions in readers or listeners.<sup>26</sup> Emotions and actions are powerfully contagious and the human experience of embodiment is their common background. The step from the embodied acting theory of character

---

<sup>23</sup> Barbara Korte, *Body Language in Literature*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1997; Justine Cassell, David McNeil, *Gesture and the Poetics of Prose*, w: *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, red. Marie-Laure Ryan, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2004, p. 108-138.

<sup>24</sup> On perceptual simulation as a link between literal and figural see Guillemette Bolens, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2012.

<sup>25</sup> For more details on that discussion see G. Babb, *Where the Bodies are Buried: Cartesian Dispositions in Narrative Theories of Character*, "Narrative" 2002, vol. 10, no 3, s. 195-221. See also: David Punday, *Narrative Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Narratology*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Patric Colm Hogan, *Affective Narratology. The Emotional Structure of Stories*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2011.



to the enactive approach to imaginary character-reader interaction helps us to understand how narrative texts speak to our bodily reactions and influence our social experiences. Taking this step means challenging a well-developed and established tradition of embodiment studies. It also means re-contextualizing the body, to take into account studies of human cooperation and the cognitive approach to co-participation in action.

When the notion of bodily action in narrative is so reframed, proprioceptive and kinesthetic experiences are seen not simply in terms of motor activities, but as a vehicle for meaning and as part of the way we make inferences about our social surroundings in the everyday world. Physical features of human movement (manner, direction, pace, fluidity) that can be viewed from a distance or imagined have a fully expressive power and rich communicative potential. The recognition of movements executed to accomplish a specific motor task, such as approaching, holding and manipulating objects, may be treated as a minimal scenario within the causal chains of the world around, and as a direct link to a particular goal. I would call such embodied scripts of action development *bodily scripts*, to stress their functional similarities with Schank and Abelson's scripts and scenarios, understood as units of cultural knowledge. Another useful term for such motion series could be *collective body memory*, as proposed by Thomas Fuchs, who deals with the interbodily basis and units of collective memory.<sup>27</sup> Fuchs reconstructed the innate and cultural bodily reactions and practices that form the shared meaningful frame of human deliberate and undeliberate interactions. What is more, these elements of "motor cognition"<sup>28</sup> function as a basis for action perception, event

---

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Fuchs, *Collective Body Memories*, w: *Embodiment, Enaction, Culture*, red. Christoph Durt, Thomas Fuchs, Christian Tewes, Cambridge MA: MIT Press 2017, p. 333-352.

<sup>28</sup> Vittorio Gallese, *Bodily Selves in Relation: Embodied Simulation as Second-person Perspective on Intersubjectivity*, "Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society B: Biological Sciences" 2014, 369 (1644), p. 1-12.

anticipation and sequencing. Thus, embodied event processing becomes part not only of the reader's temporal, causal and logical sequencing, but also of her visceral, sensual and emotional resonance with fictional characters.

Michael Bamberg has presented recently an interesting example of how the notion of sensorimotor elements can be applied to visual narratives. He showed how visual signs of changing states of mind become a significant component in such narratives and how they operate on the level of *bodily/corporal immersion*.<sup>29</sup> Bamberg offers a basic typology of micro cues that can be functionally compared to bodily scripts: directionality of movement, movement and posture, facial expression and direction of gaze. He stresses the implicit narrative function of such microcues: their emotional impact on the reader/viewer is the effect of resonance mediated primarily through our bodies (and to a lesser degree by rationality).

By now, it should be apparent that these narrative parts can be considered as strong linguistic and semantic connections between event structure and characterization. I also treat such narrative parts as part of the nexus between the fictional mind and the development of action, an important cue for the reader's construction of meaning. This enables the event-character relation to be theorized in a new and innovative way. If we incorporate the concept of *shared* embodied action in narrative theory, we will better understand how narrative texts really influence our embodied experience of reading. On the ground of narrative theory, the concept of shared embodied action exemplifies how the actions of goal-oriented fictional characters stimulate simultaneously the body and mind of the reader. The experience of *sharing* is underpinned by two assumptions regarding 1) the social, intersubjective and cooperative

---

<sup>29</sup> I refer to Bamberg's key-note lecture that was given at TEPEN 2 Conference *Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives on Events and Narrative* (11-12<sup>th</sup> of May, 2018, Lodz): *The Role of Change-of-states Representations for 'Narrative Empathy' and 'Emotion Transportation' in Audiovisual Narratives*.

nature of cognition and 2) the relevance of the interactive component of cognition. Thus, the immersive potential of literary reading consists not only of emotional and aesthetic engagement, but to some extent includes a real vibrant experience of visceral co-acting. As Yana Popova argues, embodiment is not sufficient to explain a reader's engagement in a story; it is co-action that makes reading a truly immersive activity:

Agency is prior to action and literary interpretation is continually created by readers not in the form of reproduced textual patterns (plots or structure), nor passive automatic dispositions or affordances but as a shared agency, as a constant attunement to the assumed agency of another.<sup>30</sup>

Immersion thus has much in common with co-participation. Indeed, I would claim that the linguistic representation of corporal micro cues may also be important for our processing of events and actions (imagined or recognized) while reading, since they also stimulate the pre-reflective mechanism of bodily simulation. This direct link between the actions of both the observer and the observed is established because "sensorimotor experiences serve as the basis for the formation of categories and concepts concerning our phenomenology of action."<sup>31</sup>

Let me now analyze a few examples of such embodied events in literature. I would like to explain how a character's simple body motions are understood immediately by other characters or by a narrator. In such cases, even a brief physical action implies temporal and casual relations and provides clues for subsequent event patterns. So, causal inferences may be made by a reader on the basis a single bodily movement. In literary narrative, an event may or may

---

<sup>30</sup> Yana Popova, *Narrativity and Enaction: the Social Nature of Literary Narrative Understanding*, "Frontiers of Psychology", 2014, vol. 5, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Manetti, Zipoli Caiani, *Introduction. Agency: From Embodied Cognition to Free Will*, w: *Agency*. op. cit. p. IX.

not be connected with an episode or scene sequence which is part of the macro-narrative design. Rather, the reader's processing of a narrative event can begin with an attempt to understand the simplest bodily reactions and movements of a character through fictional space. Resonance can support action prediction, so it plays an important role in the reader's economy of expectations and suspense. From this perspective, many linguistic forms (lexical and syntactical, e.g. semantic components of motion definition) may represent this innate human "interactive attunement."<sup>32</sup> The represented actions provide the reader with insight into the fictional character's emotions and sensations. This is why literary reading and responses to literature should be interpreted as a form of joint action:<sup>33</sup> a shared mental activity based on shared attention, shared intentions and shared dispositions. Imaginary participation in somebody else's action is to be considered cognitively equal to attributing inner states (emotions, feelings, intentions) to another. The reading body knows – at some level – what the fictional others will do.

A reader's virtual body on the scene of fictional events (where Mary-Laure Ryan places to the visceral aspects of immersive reading<sup>34</sup>) mediates this kind of motor resonance. The immersive power of sensing a human body (watching, hearing or touching) is inevitably directed at meaningful social coupling. Let me quote two short passages of *Jacob's Room* by Virginia Woolf, in which we may find an explicit example of this cognitive strategy. Woolf's prose is one of the most significant examples of the stream of consciousness technique and<sup>35</sup> how the depth of psychology is linked with the visible surface of human actions

---

<sup>32</sup> Gallagher's term, *idem*, p. 60

<sup>33</sup> Natalie Sebanz, Harold Bekkering, Günther Knoblich, *Joint action: bodies and minds moving together*, "Trends in Cognitive Sciences" 2008, vol. 10, no 2, pp. 70-76.

<sup>34</sup> Mary-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality. Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*, London and Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 2001, p. 120-139.

<sup>35</sup> David Dowling, *Mrs. Dalloway. Mapping Streams of Consciousness*, Boston: Twayne Publishers 1991.

embedded in a social context. Characterization emerges from the perception of bodily actions, not only from inner speech or representations of thought.

“Mrs. Flanders set her meal down, clucked for the hens, went bustling about the orchard, and was seen from over the way by Mrs. Cranch, who, beating her mat against the wall, held it for a moment suspended while she observed to Mrs. Page next door that Mrs. Flanders was in the orchard with the chickens.[...] ‘Now she’s going up the hill with little John,’ said Mrs. Cranch to Mrs. Garfit, shaking her mat for the last time.

‘Scarborough’ Mrs. Flanders wrote on the envelope. But a stamp? She ferreted in her bag; then held it up mouth downwards; then fumbled in her lap, all so vigorously that Charles Steele in the Panama hat suspended his paint-brush. [...] Here was that woman moving—actually going to get up—confound her!”<sup>36</sup>

In both passages, the bodily actions or sensations of one character constitute the real basis upon which comprehension of the fictional state of affairs is constructed. Mrs. Flanders’ intention to go uphill is inferred by several neighbors observing her. This very simple motor action is recognized as purposeful, and provides the introduction to a long episode in which she and little John visit a Roman fortress. The image of Mrs. Flanders going up the hill also marks a shift of perspective. The passage starts from her perspective but switches to the shared perception of the neighbors. In the second passage, the noises made by Mrs. Flanders catch the attention of the artist, who is observing her from a distance. In both cases, a simple motor act provides the observer with a pre-reflective understanding of the behavior and of the basic mental state (goals, intentions, emotions) of the agent. These embodied events are relevant units of narrative information which help drive the story forward.

---

<sup>36</sup>V. Woolf, *Jacob’s Room* [1922]: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5670/pg5670-images.html> (accessed 25.06.2018).

The concept of enactment is especially effective for explaining the uniqueness of second-person narration. Despite becoming increasingly common in practice as a mode of literary expression, there is still some disagreement among critics as to how the second-person narrative mode might best be understood in theory. Let me quote in this context a short passage from Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*:

"All this simply means that, having rapidly glanced over the titles of the volumes displayed in the bookshop, you have turned toward a stack of *If on a winter's night a traveler* fresh off the press, you have grasped a copy, and you have carried it to the cashier so that your right to own it can be established. You cast another bewildered look at the books around you (or, rather: it was the books that looked at you, with the bewildered gaze of dogs who, from their cages in the city pound, see a former companion go off on the leash of his master, come to rescue him), and out you went."<sup>37</sup>

In my view, second-person (especially so called second-person narration proper<sup>38</sup>) narration is a particularly interesting case of literary participatory sense-making. As demonstrated in the excerpt from *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, the peculiar persuasiveness of this form is rooted in the embodied simulation of someone else's actions. In the excerpt above, the narrating *I* cannot slip away from the field of perception of the narrative *you* – they share the direction of gaze (looking at the object, looking around), the path of movement, the manner of movement (rapidly grasping a copy of the book). I would even propose that second-person narration might be described as the linguistic *marking* of a character's actions and as an invitation to re-enact those movements and accompanying inner states. Marking as a very specific

---

<sup>37</sup> Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* [1979], English translation by William Weaver, San Diego London: Harvest Book 1981, p. 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> B. Morrissette was the first to characterize this subclass of second-person narration; Bruce Morrissette, *Narrative 'You' in Contemporary Literature*, "Comparative Literature Studies" 1965, vol. 2, iss.1, pp.1-24.

multipersonal cognitive task has become an intriguing focus of research in many fields, from language acquisition to dance studies and design studies,<sup>39</sup> as it can enhance memory and the integration of multiple motor activities.

This new perspective on co-action or cooperation between agents sheds fresh light on a recurring problem posed by second-person narration: why should anybody report a series of events or mental states to 'you', when supposedly you are either experiencing them right at that moment or you have already experienced them? The possible answer is that by telling (or re-telling) a story, the narrator can cognize the acting agent in a different way. The teller acquires the participant's knowledge of the state of affairs (knowledge *how* rather than knowledge of *what*), and challenges the reader's observational stance. The reader's insight into someone else's perspective comes from the simultaneous enactment of the sequence of their actions. The 'you' is an active actor on the narrative stage, whose intentional actions change the course of the storyline. The act of narrating events is temporally synchronized with the actions of the protagonist, as if the narrator were mirroring her physical and psychological acts. From this point of view, what second-person narration provides is primarily a linguistic representation of sharing and enacting the actions and experiences of another. Thus, such a narrative form might even be described as a re-enacted consciousness.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

Based on a theory of enactment, I have introduced the concept of an embodied event, which it is hoped will contribute to further studies on the nexus of

---

<sup>39</sup> David Kirsh, *How Marking in Dance Constitutes Thinking with the Body*, "Versus" 2011, vol. 113-115, pp. 179-210.

<sup>40</sup> Caracciolo suggests replacing the concept of representation of consciousness with that of enacting fictional minds. However, he does not characterize second-person narration in any more detailed way. See, Caracciolo, *op. cit.*, pp.110-130.

fictional minds and action in narrative. As we have seen, the simulation of human bodies in motion activates the reader's pre-reflexive capacity to predict actions and comprehend the goals and intentions of characters. Shared intercorporeality provides a significant experiential framework for the conceptualization of reading as a joint performance by resonating bodies.<sup>41</sup> Finally, the question can be posed of the historical poetics of embodied events in literary narratives. It would be worth studying how particular narrative patterns of bodily reactions have changed over time and within different narrative conventions.

---

<sup>41</sup>A. Kužmičova, *The Words and Worlds of Literary Narrative. The trade-off between verbal presence and direct presence in the activity of reading*, w: *Stories and Minds. Cognitive Approaches to Literary Narrative*, red. Lars Bernaerts, Luc Herman, Dirk De Geest, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2013, s. 107–128.