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**STORYTELLING AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE EMBODIED
MIND: SPACE AND MOVEMENT IN NARRATIVES**

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SUMMARY OF THESESES

The goals of the dissertation

This doctoral thesis has several goals. The most general among them is to facilitate a dialogue between the supposedly opposing fields of the sciences and the humanities. I plan to do that with an integration of literary theory (narratology in particular) and neurosciences (neuropsychology in particular). This endeavor results in a literary theoretical framework that attempts to contribute to the well-established theories of cognitive poetics with what is to be called neuronarratology. I am particularly interested in the ways nonvisual perceptions of space and motion and their roles in human cognition may take part in the functioning of narratives, which, in cognitive narratology are to be understood as fundamental structures of human cognition. In order to do this, I examine 20th century and contemporary American narratives, which foreground the subjective experience of space and motion in human cognition in different ways. A particular category of novels called *neuronovels* have proven especially useful for such an investigation. The corpus that I have worked with consists of seven stories: Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist* and "The Ivory Acrobat," Vladimir Nabokov's *The Original of Laura* and *Invitation to a Beheading* (compared with Edgar Allan Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum"), Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, and Jonathan Lethem's *Motherless Brooklyn*.

Many of the most important terms of narratology are deeply intertwined with the concepts of perception, yet their definitions were created before cognitive theories or neurology started to theorize human perception. In the works that I analyze, I trace the ways the strongly embodied subjective experiences of space and motion (provided by the focalizer characters) contribute to the construction and therefore the effect of the narratives, and attempt to gain a deeper understanding of these narrative concepts with the help of the theories and findings of cognitive science and neuropsychology.

In my literary analyses I look for aspects of human embodiment that potentially influence the production of meaning. My hypothesis is that in narration information can be organized according to structures of embodiment, for instance the fundamental experience of living in a body that navigates in space, and the mode of organization, which, in the case of narratives becomes traceable in narrative discourse and potentially contribute to the production of meaning on a presymbolic level. Therefore, although it is impossible to predict what an individual reader's experience is going to be, what I am outlining is an aspect or a level of the experience that precedes symbolic meaning, and that I call the potential raw material of meaning.

The methodology of the dissertation

Cognitive poetics chiefly investigates the production of meaning, keeping in mind the hypothesis that literary works are necessarily influenced by the architecture of human consciousness. Regarding this issue, two approaches (integrated with narratology) form the backbone of the method I apply in my analyses: second-generation cognitive science and

neurology. The former foregrounds different aspects of human embodiment while the latter focuses on brain processes.

I am interested in the possible functions and roles embodied experiences of space and motion may have in the construction of narratives, especially in the construction of narrative space, the organization of discourse structures and, through the problems of focalization, narration. The dissertation is necessarily interdisciplinary and theoretical. I largely focus on narrating consciousness. While the notion of consciousness is still very much debated to say the least, the theories of embodied cognition have become quite substantial. These theories offer an answer to the mind-body problem, which is fundamentally the problem of the ontology of a “thinking thing” as Lawrence Shapiro puts it.

My research attempts to contribute to these theories, also called “second generation cognitive theories”. These approaches understand human cognition as a part of the dynamic mind-body-environment system. In my understanding, it would be more fruitful to consider the theories of the field of neuropsychology to investigate the mind-body problem, because neuropsychology attempts to examine the connections between the workings of the brain and the psyche. I will reconsider the workings of narratological concepts through the examination of the roles of nonvisual spatial perception and spatial experience in the workings of narratives, especially narrative understanding. In my analyses I rely on a model of narrative comprehension that is to be imagined according to Richard Walsh as a process that feeds from numerous more or less intertwined cognitive processes, which all have their individual way of meaning construction. I also find the interdisciplinary method necessary because I agree with Sommer, who claims that narrative theories could not fully explain everything that needs to be explained in connection with narratives, since in the reading process one constructs symbolic meaning through an extremely complex process of comprehension that it built as a result of the workings of several mental processes.

Cognitive poetics is the latest theoretical endeavor that investigates the construction of the meaning of a literary work of art. Importantly, this construction of meaning is assumed to make use of the same cognitive functions with the help of which humans make sense of their everyday life. Although, with this assumption, literary theory imports the problems of consciousness and embodiment from cognitive science. The Cartesian idea of the duality of a machine-like and rationally controlled body, and an also mechanically operating, rational, but not material mind has dominated, and quite widely still dominates our conceptualizations of the human being. However, this approach excludes the processes of the body and the environment from the conceptualization of cognition. Second generation cognitive science offers an alternative to these theories, where the body and the environment are also considered as vital components of human cognition. The aim of contemporary cognitive science is now to describe human consciousness in a way that explains how it is grounded in embodiment, including the way the way humans function in their environment.

Second generation cognitive narratology has begun to theorize narratives according to this view. In my dissertation I attempt to contribute to this branch of cognitive narratology, by considering the neuropsychology of spatial experiences. Monika Fludernik understands narrativity “as mediated human experientiality” and shifts the focus of narratology from the “event” to the “experience”. What I am interested in is the embodied experience of space and motion, especially in connection with the (heavily embodied) emotions of fear and anxiety, because these emotions entail peculiar, often abnormal, alienated spatial experiences, which potentially highlight previously overlooked narrative phenomena.

The principles of spatial coding are extremely difficult to trace partly because there are diverse sources from which we gain information as regards to space. In this dissertation I focus on nonvisual perception. The conceptualization of spaces subserves other domains of human cognition such as emotion, language, or other forms of interpersonal interaction. I am particularly interested in the way it contributes to the functioning of language, and, through it, that of narratives.

Theorists of second-generation cognitive science, who place the emphasis on embodied experience, imagine abstract cognitive processes as being built on and feeding from lower level, simple cognitive processes. One of these fundamental, low level processes is arguably the construction of spatial experience and orientation in space. Preverbal conceptual representation is chiefly composed of information derived from the body, so much so that according to the neuropsychology of spatial experience, human mental development fundamentally evolves from spatial concepts.

The most influential theory that attempts to explain this hypothesis is that of image schemas, one of the most important embodied anchors of the human conceptual system. Considering the role of image schemas in narrative understanding is important and may help us reconsider the conceptualization of schemas in narratology so that we may understand them as more dynamic, therefore more natural. The majority of the stories that I analyze are very similar in the sense that they are concerned with negative emotions, especially different kinds of fear and anxiety. Spatial experience and the experiencer's state of mind mutually influence each other in complicated ways. These significant aspects and parts of stories do not affect the reader in and of themselves, but in interaction with other characteristics of the story as well as numerous reader variables. Since the structures that I discuss in this dissertation are strongly connected to preverbal and presymbolic levels of cognition it is very likely that they only provide a feeling of an atmosphere rather than clear symbolic meaning or easily reportable opinion about the given literary works, which are quite ambiguous and confusing on the level of topic and events as well, hence, in the analyzed stories they often hinder the construction of symbolic meaning, or, in fact, make its construction impossible.

However, I find this level of understanding narratives crucial because human cognition always involves such a level. Episodic memories, which we constantly rely on, consist of so-called episodic elements, which are regarded as vital units of the cognitive system in general, as Martin Conway explains. The episodic elements, just like image schemas, are "non-verbal and sensory-perceptual in nature". Richard Walsh claims that in the course of understanding a narrative there are always several modes of cognition involved, such as spatial cognition. Nabokov assumed that imagination and memory work in the same way. Today it seems that researchers of memory, neuropsychology and cognitive science have proven his point. Narrative, according to second generation cognitive narratologist, Yanna Popova, needs to be imagined chiefly as a pattern of human cognition that aids the production of meaning.

In this dissertation I am interested in the conceptualization of the representations of problematic, deautomatized perception of space and motion in literary works. In my analyses I rely on textual features which are accessible through close reading. In the literary analyses of this thesis, I will concentrate on the representations of literary characters' embodied experiences. The literary characters one has the most access to are the narrator and the focalizer character.

The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation has two parts. The first discusses the theoretical background and the methodology, and the second consists of the analyses of the novels. To properly contextualize my project, I believe it is important to outline the history and the present state of the field, and where it might be heading. Narratology, which started as literary theory in the first half of the 20th century, has gone through an exponential growth and pluralization in the past decades, due to which narratology is often interdisciplinary today.

One of its most successful current trends is cognitive narratology. In the second chapter, I provide a brief history of the studies of human cognition and explain how cognitive science became relevant in literary theory as a part of the so-called *Babelization* of the discipline. My understanding of human cognition and consciousness is primarily influenced by second-generation cognitive science. This approach imagines all forms of cognition as inherently embodied, often placing special emphasis on sense perceptions, which “link” human consciousness through the body to the environment of the body. As a final step of specifying my method, I introduce the field of neuro-narratology, which attempts to apply the findings and results gained by neurologists to help answer the questions of storytelling. I believe, within the neurosciences, it is currently neuropsychology that is the most useful discipline in the investigation of narratives. In the last part of the second chapter I outline on the one hand, the most important narratological categories the revision of which would be desirable, such as narrative space, discourse structures, narration, and schemas, and on the other hand, the theories which could prove useful is literary analyses, such as the perception of space, the role of spatial experience in cognition and language use in general, and the potential deficits and other problems of spatial experience.

The second part of the dissertation starts with a transitory chapter. In this chapter, I examine Nabokov’s last, unfinished novel, *The Original of Laura*, where I consider different conceptualizations of embodiment. While some of the aspects discussed in the analysis of this multimodal novel are the concerns of corporeal narratology rather than cognitive narratology, I see this chapter as an introduction of several problems that I will deal with in the rest of this dissertation. One of my most important concerns in the remaining analyses are phenomena other than language, and characteristics of texts and stories, which are difficult to pinpoint on the level of words, but which, as the analysis of *Laura* testifies, are observable in an unfinished work as well.

In chapter four, I analyse a rather early Nabokov novel and a short story by Edgar Allen Poe, with a focus on sense perceptions, and the embodied experience of anxiety and fear (of death). I claim that besides the author’s techniques of representation of sense perceptions, and the vocabulary of his works, the patterns of dynamic structures and mechanisms of perception may occasionally structure and motivate his stories even on the level of the plot, thereby contributing to the entirety of the production of meaning a reader carries out when reading his stories.

The fifth chapter includes two analyses of two DeLillo stories. The first is *The Body Artist*. Aesthetic experiences carry patterns which are based on our embodied nature. I trace these in literary fiction by contrasting textual phenomena with bodily experience by attempting to use the theories of image schemas and cognitive metaphors in narrative theories. I assume that there is a strong relationship between the structure and the effect of literary texts, and that the experience of having, living, and being a body plays a crucial role in it. In this chapter I aim at tracing the possible somatic experiences of the reader of literary fiction and defining their role and significance in the process of reading. The second half of the chapter is the analysis of “The

Ivory Acrobat,” a short story about a music teacher, who suffers from pathological fear of the aftershocks of an earthquake. The narrative space of the story is in fact the spatial experience of the protagonist, which keeps narrowing as her anxiety gets worse and worse. “The Ivory Acrobat” can be read as the “fictional expression” of an unstable psychological state, which, not unlike in *The Body Artist*, is enacted through the body of a character. Here, through concentrating on characters’ bodies, DeLillo is abandoning meaning for the sake of impulse, therefore reaching beyond symbolic systems.

In the sixth chapter, I examine the ways *House of Leaves* creates a complex experience of uncertainty both with its themes and content, such as fear and other mental problems, and its form and structure. These phenomena are often deeply intertwined with concepts of spatiality. Besides that, the novel seems to construct an especially strong and influential engagement with its reader, which I believe is due to its multimodal nature and its peculiar strategies of narration. The novel presents an extremely unpredictable story on the level of events, narrative space, and narration as well, and produces a constant and, I believe, uniquely complex uncertainty in the reader. What “scares” the reader are not terrible events or twists, but the fact that there are very few twists in the book where the reader can tell exactly what happened and that is the result of it. It seems to grasp and represent a state of human cognition when a schema has proven inappropriate and when the new schema has not been found or constructed yet. I believe this is in connection with the reader’s sense of anxiety through the lack of *epistemic control* that the reader is afforded by the novel.

In the last chapter I examine Jonathan Lethem’s *Motherless Brooklyn*, a crime story, which employs a detective with Tourette’s syndrome, where the discussions of the syndrome and the symptoms that concern high level processes of consciousness such as language use are often discussed through the processes of the somatosensory system. The condition of the narrator produces a pluralization of the narration. The syndrome leads Lionel’s investigation and narration on the side-tracks from time to time, and it results in a peculiar interplay between different modes of narration. Lethem’s narrative seems to follow the structures of embodied experience, not unlike *The Body Artist*. *Motherless Brooklyn* “embodies” the nervous excess of energy that characterizes Tourette’s syndrome. The plot seems to be the manifestation of the excess of energy, which is stopped from time to time then jumps ahead in a random direction, while at the same time it also embodies the compulsive logic that keeps returning to certain points.

The results of the investigation and possibilities of further research

The dissertation has developed a new methodology that accounts for numerous theories and findings of neurology that can be relevant for the study of narratives. I have integrated the theories of episodic memory, attempt to further Richard Walsh’ model of narrative understanding as a process consisting of several cognitive functions, including nonvisual perceptions, especially proprioception and ego-centric spatial experience.

I imagine plot structures are motivated by presymbolic, embodied experiences. Narrative structures are traditionally conceptualized as high level, abstract cognitive structures, in this sense they are to be imagined to be based on nonverbal, sensorimotor patterns. This theory is in line with Martin A. Conway’s studies about imagination and (episodic) memory, and the theory of image schemas. All of these theories attempt to account for the role of embodiment in human cognition. Embodiment appears to have a powerful role in the creation of symbolic meaning at

an early stage of the process of the production of meaning. Therefore, structures and functions of embodiment seem to function as the raw material of meaning in narratives.

All the analyzed narratives create uncertainty through the pluralization of possible events through ambiguous narration (*Invitation to a Beheading*) or disnarration (*The Body Artist, House of Leaves*), the representations of narrative space usually through the focalizer character's body. I understand these phenomena as expressions of natural cognitive processes instead of artistic expression, and therefore linking narratives more directly to other processes of human cognition.

Importantly, I do not claim that embodiment is present in all narratives to the same extent. I find it crucial in the development of neuronarratology to choose the narratives, the analysis of which is possible with the method of close reading as well. For this purpose, I believe, neuronovels provide excellent material because they tend to foreground deficits in narration, in the case of my analyses alienated or deautomatized perceptions, which highlight the way embodiment takes part in cognition and therefore in the workings of narrative intelligence.

In the broadest sense the dissertation is an attempt to contribute to the genuine dialogue between the sciences and the humanities. I believe it happens when not only concepts are borrowed but more general views are integrated into one field from another. I hope that the way I attempted to model the conceptualization of narrative (discourse) structures and narrative understanding with the help of the theories of navigating and exploring our environment through our bodies is such an attempt. In return, I believe, fictive and nonfictive narratives' power to capture subjective human experience will become more influential in psychology and medical treatments, where the phenomenology and subjective experience of both mental and physical illnesses have become more popular in the past few decades.

I see two potential further ways of future research regarding this project besides analyzing more literary works with similar methods, which is also needed considering the present (infant) stage of neuro-narratology. One would be to carry out empirical research to test whether these aspects of a literary work indeed contribute to the production of meaning making, which would be very difficult due to the fact that the majority of the process of meaning-making is unconscious. However examinations of, different kinds of disnarration, some of which, I suppose, have very different cognitive backgrounds, would be necessary to carry out, and that investigation needs to start with integrating of cognitive and neurological theories of imagination, lying, planning, etc. in the literary theories of storytelling. Another way to help develop neuro-narratology, if one is interested in problematic, in the traditional sense dysfunctional or pathologic ways of storytelling, could be to carry out analyses of (fictive or nonfictive) narratives produced by individuals who live with diagnosed mental or neurological disorders, and possibly contrast these narratives with analyses of literary works such as the ones I have analyzed here. Such research could significantly contribute to our understanding of natural narratives and the ways they function, and through that, a deeper understanding of human cognition.

WORKS PERTAINING TO THE DISSERTATION'S TOPIC

1. "Kinetózis Don De Lillo *The Body Artist* című regényében. Olvasás és testi tapasztalás". *FILOLÓGIAI KÖZLÖNY* 62:(3) pp. 140-153. (2016)
2. "I am Lauren. But Less and Less": Corporeal Narratological Aspects in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*" Vajda Zoltán (szerk.) *Tehetségek a tudomány horizontján: válogatás a Szegedi Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kara hallgatóinak tudományos munkáiból*. Szeged: SZTE BTK. pp. 19-37. (2014)
3. "Corporeality and Mediality in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Original of Laura*" In Péter Gaál-Szabó szerk. *Intertextuality, Intersubjectivity, and Narrative Identity*. Cambridge, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. pp. 33-46. (2017)
4. "'[P]ure, dumb canine instinct'. Narrative Space and Motion(lessness) in Don DeLillo's 'The Ivory Acrobat'" In László, Sári B., Ágnes Zsófia Kovács szerk. *Space, Gender, and the Gaze in Literature and Art*. Cambridge, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. pp 47-62. (2017)
5. „Kinetosis in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*: Tracing the Somatic Experiences of the Reader.” In Budziak, Anna, Katarzyna Lisowska, Jarosław Woźniak szerk. *Literature, Performance Studies, and Somaesthetics: Studies in Agency and Embodiement*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. (2017)
6. Lilla Farmasi, Attila Kiss, Szendi István. „The Narrative Facilitation of Recovery. The Application of Narrative Theories in a Group Therapy for Patients with Schizophrenia” In *DIEGESIS* 7:(1) pp. 1-18. (2018)
7. ”Söbb a temminél’. A neuronarratológia lehetőségei és egy Tourette- szindrómás tudaton keresztül épült történetvilág” In Horváth Márta, Szabó Erzsébet szerk. *Hogyan olvasunk krimit? Új perspektívák a detektívtörténet kutatásában*. pp: 130-156. (2019)

LIST OF CONFERENCE PAPERS GIVEN ON THE SUBJECT OF THE DISSERTATION

1. "Tracing the Somatic Experiences of the Reader: Kinetosis in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*". *The International Conference "Performance studies – literary studies – somaesthetics"*. Wrocław, 2014.12.12-14.
2. "Corporeality and Mediality in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Original of Laura*" *12th Biennial Conference of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English*. Debrecen, 2015.01.29-31.
3. "The Reader in Nabokov's *The Original of Laura*" *International Society for Intermedial Studies Conference #2 „Play/Perform/Participate"*. Utrecht, 2015.04.16-18.
4. "Resistance to History: DeLillo Stories with Temporality of Their Own" „*Fiction Rescues History*" *DeLillo Conference in Paris*. Paris, 2016.02.18-20.

5. “To breathe the dust of this painted life”: Modes of Engaging the Senses in Vladimir Nabokov’s Novels” *‘Do the Senses Make Sense?’: The Five Senses in Nabokov’s Work. Nabokov International Conference.* Biarritz, 2016.04. 28-05.01.
6. Storytelling and the Perceptions of the Embodied Mind: Space(s) and Movement(s) in Narratives. The ESSE Doctoral Symposium, Thessaloniki, 2017. August 28-29.
7. Storytelling and the Perceptions of the Embodied Mind: Dynamic Narrative Structures in Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. The 5th International Conference of the European Narratology Network, Prague, 2017. September 13-15.