Universität Stuttgart
Institute of Literary Studies
Department of English Literatures and Cultures

Phantasmal Intersubjectivity: Co-Presence and the *Emersivity* of Literary Characters

Dr Marco Bernini
(Durham University)

Guest lecture
Wednesday 2 Dec 2020
9:45-11:15
Online (Webex)

If you are interested in attending, please contact Prof Dr Sibylle Baumbach
(sibylle. baumbach@ilw.uni-stuttgart.de)

http://lucilejousmet.com/immersion/

In a study we have conducted with 400 readers of the 2014 Edinburgh Book Festival (Bernini, M; Alderson-Day, B., Fernyhough, C. 2017. "Uncharted Features of Reading: Voices, Characters, and Crossing of Experiences," Consciousness and Cognition), we were surprised to find that 20% of the readers reported to experience the presence of fictional characters outside of the immediate context of reading. I have suggested to call this phenomenon 'experiential crossing,' because characters seem to cross the boundary of the storyworlds and accompany or "stay with" the reader in real-world situations. This crossing seems to be spontaneously activated by a wide range of triggers (mainly contextual or affective); to have a complex phenomenology (characters are perceived either as silent, auditory, multi-sensory or conceptual presences); and show different degrees of felt presence in the reader's minds, or even in their physical environment. This type of imaginative or 'phantasmal' emersion is experientially and theoretically intriguing and complex, because it raises important issues regarding the possibility of entertaining in the real world intersubjective relations with non-actual beings or, what I will call a 'phantasmal intersubjecitivty.' To date, cognitive literary studies (and in particular, theories of immersion; Gerrig 1993; Zwaan 2008; Angeles Martinez 2014; Ryan 2015) have focused exclusively on the other direction of transit: namely, on how our real past experiences can sustain, enhance or modify our experience of a literary narrative (or its storyworld immersivity). By contrast, how fictional elements from a storyworld can surface or transmigrate into real life cognition has been basically ignored. Building on, and adapting models of narrative immersion, the lecture will present a theory and a model for what will be called the *emersivity* of literary characters.