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## **Draft: Creative Reading in the Broadest Sense.**

### **Ten Suggestions for Teaching Literature**

We have long known that we rarely read literary texts in their entirety. But reading is so much more than just grasping signs with the mind. Nevertheless, reading a text completely is our ideal, which also characterizes the teaching of literature. I would like to use ten suggestions to outline a creative reading in which the narrative connections in a text play less of a role than its material surface and literal and bookish, sensual and tangible components.

#didacticofliterature #literatureinthepublicsphere #creativereading #before moderation

#### **1. Preliminary consideration: What reading can be**

We have long known that we rarely read literary texts in their entirety, from beginning to end, character by character, word by word, sentence by sentence, page by page, chapter by chapter. Reading can be – for example – minimalist, maximalist, punctual, serial, analytical, constructive (1), distracted (2), cross mapping (3), distant and close at the same time (4), partial, potential, imposed, intentional, postponed, avoided, feigned, substituted, complete, continuous, interrupted, improving, remembered or writing (5).

Reading is so much more than just grasping signs with the mind, it is empathizing, painting, appropriating, observing, thinking, dreaming, drifting, not thinking, forgetting, crossing out, excerpting, rewriting, reconstructing, deconstructing, trying out, writing oneself, rereading, reading aloud, reading silently, not reading.

Reading – like writing – is a creative way of “experiencing the world twice”: “once with what is written in its material and visual form (writing, scribbles, traces on a surface,

pixels on a screen), once with what this writing can mean and entail (recalled events, people, stories, states).” (6). Nevertheless, reading a text completely and as accurately as possible, grasping a coherent meaning, is our ideal, which also characterizes the teaching of literature. Even then, when it is considered as a creative act, because when we read we put ourselves in the shoes of characters and develop them further: “Creative Reading is the process in which a student can read beyond the text” (7) This kind of reader identification and engagement is not based on what a text does with its language – and thus: how it is made –, but on what it seems to represent: a story that we can believe to be true. 1964, Susan Sontag took this going beyond the text through empathy and interpretation as the starting point for her famous essay “Against Interpretation”:

Even in modern times, when most artists and critics have discarded the theory of art as representation of an outer reality in favor of the theory of art as subjective expression, the main feature of the mimetic theory persists. Whether we conceive of the work of art on the model of a picture (art as a picture of reality) or on the model of a statement (art as the statement of the artist), content still comes first. The content may have changed. It may now be less figurative, less lucidly realistic. But it is still assumed that a work of art is its content. Or, as it's usually put today, that a work of art by definition says something. (“What X is saying is ...,” “What X is trying to say is . . .,” “What X said is . . .” etc., etc.) (8)

1976, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, made a “modest proposal to protect young people from the products of poetry, which was directed against the practice of interpretation in German lessons”:

If ten people read a literary text, ten different readings will result. [...] In this sense, the reader is always right. No one can take away their freedom to make the use of a text that suits them. This freedom includes turning the pages back and forth, skipping entire passages, reading sentences against the grain, misunderstanding them, changing them, spinning them out and embellishing them with all kinds of associations, drawing conclusions from the text that the

text knows nothing about, being annoyed by it, delighted by it, forgetting it, plagiarizing it and throwing the book it is in into the corner at any time. Reading is an anarchic act. (9)

Sontag's intervention and Enzensberger's proposal can therefore be used to derive many more ways of reading than the ten reading exercises that I would like to formulate in the following chapter as suggestions for a way of teaching literature in which the narrative connections in a text play less of a role than its material surface and literal and bookish, sensual and tangible components.

## **2. Ten suggestions to read literature**

*surfaces.* Close your eyes in front of a text, and then: blink, follow the shadows and the light. Literature is more than something you have in black and white and can carry home with confidence.

*from one point.* Find a place on a book page, a comma for example, or a letter, then later a word – what lines can be drawn from there to other places on that page?

*just one sentence.* If literature is something that can trigger an infinite process of experiences in us, then every sentence in it is infinite. Therefore: read just one sentence for a week.

*overwrite.* Take a text you love or hate and replace every word – but not the punctuation! – with your own word. How does this strange house of the text shine in your colors?

*wallpaper.* Copy your favorite page in a book so that it fills an entire wall in your room and place or hang things in front of it that match it or give individual words a new – your very own – meaning.

*pile.* You should read more than one book, but don't even feel like reading just one. Put all the books in a pile, take the second one from the top and start reading from the page you happen to have opened. If this page doesn't grab you, open another page and then a third. Then put this book down and look at the top and bottom books in the pile in the same way. Then stop reading and lie down on your bed to daydream: which pages have stayed in your memory and is unforgettable because of one word or one sentence or the whole page?

*sensory swap.* Transform the text you are reading into something that can only be heard. Which words do you need, where do sounds, rhythms and noises suffice? Can some texts be smelled better than heard or seen?

*waving and dancing.* Now transform the text you are reading into gestures and movements. Can you dance the text with your whole body or is it easier to just wave your hands?

*little goose feet.* “Gänsefüßchen” also means quotation marks in German. Literary texts are always texts in quotation marks. What is written here is formulated from an invented role. Invented, fictitious, not real characters speak here. In literature, animals, trees and stones can also speak. Sometimes these quotation marks are visible, sometimes not. Circle all quotation marks in a text and be sensitive, but not touchy. How do quotation marks change words and sentences? What changes when you cross out or reposition these quotation marks?

*in addition.* Read concentrically, not just focused. Look around you, stand on one leg for a minute, walk through the woods and into the mountains, dream yourself up and down, breathe in and out, read everything that falls into your hands or lies at your feet. And if you enjoy it: read it completely and carefully. But only then.

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