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Critique. Division. An Archaeology of Separation and a Salvaging Etymology

The goal of this essay is twofold: firstly, it is a description a post-critical tendency within the contemporary, Anglo-American humanities; secondly, it presents propositions which broaden the boundaries current in the post-critical current, which lead to the replacement of critical sci-entificity with an affirmation of everyday readerly affects. The claims regarding the rejection of a criticism based on suspicion, formulated by, among others, Rita Felski, accentuate the elite character of reading, the goal of which is the unveiling of the economi-co-political entan-glement of the text as a product of historical reality. The distrust towards the surface of the text and the illusion of aesthetic autonomy, central for cultural studies, raised the critical atti-tude to the rank of an activity that is revelatory and privileged. The opponents of an unmask-ing criticism underline its limitations—unmasking reveals the ultimate source of every cultural production, the logic of capitalism, the total character of which leaves no chance for change. In defense of change, and in the hope of restoring to literature a widespread interest, there appear tendencies which bring back the individual experience of reading, the basis of which is to be aesthetic pleasure, freed from the historical context and its determinants. In the article, examples

of such tendencies will be pointed out, as also will be their consequences caused by the elevation and universalisation of non-professional reading. The rejection of the political task of criticism leads to the questioning of its anti-systemic potential; in turn, the apotheosis of suspicion paralyses the postulative dimension of criticism. For this reason, in the last part of the essay, I propose going beyond oppositional conceptualisations in the direction of a criti-cism that is situated and material, and whose model, in my rendering, is subordinated knowledge.

Keywords: Post-critique, hermeneutics of suspicion, symptomatic reading, affective criticism, subordinated knowledge

As Fredric Jameson wrote in 1981, "If everything were transparent, then no ideology would be possible, and no domination either . . ." (Jameson 2002: 46). Only, the society of late capitalism − integrated by the circulation of news and information—is addicted to language, the vehicle of mystification, which masks the contradictions of real social relations. Without this sublimating veil—ideology—social tensions, and longings impossible to satisfy, would paralyse the function of the systematic order. Cultural artefacts, those fictions taming the world, are, therefore, symbolic forms; thus, they refer to the conditions of their own production, which are concealed in signs, represented textually, always mediated by language and visible only through a deciphering reading. Indicating the non-independence of immediately available meanings, the American critic explained why the interpretation of a text can never be satisfied with what is visible on the surface, and must seek a deeper meaning, beneath the apparently legible communication, in which the source of the socio-political conditions of that very communication is encoded. The procedure of interpretation, if it is to reach the political unconscious, must take into consideration the need "to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code" (Jameson 2002: 45). Following, up to a certain point, an Althusserian symptomatic reading (Althusser, Balibar 1970: 29), Jameson placed an accent upon the significance of what is absent at the surface, but which determines existence of this surface, in a hidden form that demands deciphering. The stronger voice, which belongs to the strong critical subject, penetrates to the ideological character of the text, as to a relation between form (the aesthetic dimension) and structures of social rules and hierarchies, in order to unveil the conditions of their fictional unification. A critique which is insufficiently penetrating, and incomplete as a procedure of disillusionment, remains at the surface of the text; it naively assumes the text's legibility and autonomy as an isolated aesthetic object. Such a critique renders the hegemonic voice of the text apparently neutral, conserves its singularity and, ultimately, separates it from its complex relations with what has been silenced in the course of the historical process. In such oppositionally arranged positions, the weakness of such a critical gesture confirms the hierarchies accumulated within the artefact, and accepts the authority of the dominant narrative, beneath which it fails to discern repressed differences and marginalised contra-narratives (Jameson 2002: 76).

Fredric Jameson's wager, and his ideal of critical perspicacity, were strengthened by the horizon of an emancipatory utopia: the hermeneutics of suspicion became a promise of change, since—by systematically

unveiling the rules operative in the cultural field of forces—it initiated the possibility of dissent to their totalising claims (Jameson 2002: 91). Rooted within a Marxist and psychoanalytic lexicon, the interventionist critique, postulated by Jameson, strengthened American critical theory, providing New Historicism, feminist theory, and queer theory with an influential analytic method, based upon a scholarly suspicion that, while deepening meanings, at the same time does not abandon action and does not shun a faith in the possibility of changing the future (Jameson 1998: 54). From this also, there reverberate—throughout the diverse discourses of cultural scholarship in the twilight of the 20th century—the common meanings of concepts, emerging from the Jamesonian imperative "Always historicize!" (North 2017: 11), which are fundamental to the engaged humanities: "the political unconscious," "repressed meaning" (Bordwell 1991: 72), the "text as symptom," and the description of reading as sensitive with respect to dissembling and understatement, and of the critical attitude as one of ruthless de-naturalisation (Butler 2008: 249). The sum of the meanings of the formulations here catalogued, comprises the specific status of scholars of literature, whose task is the discovery of those moments in language that are disclosive of hidden meanings, mechanisms, influences and connections. "What is denied, excluded, or ignored turns out to be fundamental and foundational; whatever seems to be last turns out to be first. Repression, in short, gives critics a never-ending job to do; it ensures the immanence of meaning and guarantees there are salient secrets to be discovered." (Felski 2014: 59). Thus, the critical attitude is here identical with the disposition of the researcher, in other words, with the recognition of the historicity of the text, which demands to be revealed and included within the practice of interpretation.

This "scholary turn" within Anglo-American literary studies, as characterised by the attitude of Joseph North discussed above (North 2017: 9), embodies progressive thought and practice, in contrast to an earlier tendency, namely the aesthetic-formalist approach dominant until the middle of the 20th Century, which characterised the conservative paradigm of New Criticism (in the United States) or the criticism inspired by the formalism of Frank Raymond Leavis (in Great Britain). This was conservative, because it abstracted from historicity, and was founded upon an essentialist, apolitical, universal and elitist treatment of the text, which was interpreted through concepts inherited from the Kantian aesthetic tradition. The movement below the surface of the text, postulated by Jameson, towards its hidden socio-political determinants involved, therefore, a divorce from a universalising reading, which treated the aesthetic code as something constant and unchanging.

For my purposes, two dimensions of this genealogy of the critical attitude—barely sketched here—remain essential. Firstly, I am interested in the later fortunes of the surface of signs and meanings, abandoned together with the Kantian aesthetic tradition. Secondly, however, I would like to examine the understanding and consequences of the "scientificity" ascribed to the historicising and unmasking disposition. This is because there exists a relation between the appreciation of the critical attitude as an activity that is based on suspicion and on penetrating mere appearances, and the model of a knowledge, at the level of which the hierarchies of critical practice are established. Do we, after all, lose something at the moment when what passes for the truly critical and scientific is understood exclusively as a division[1] enabling an exposure, while a capacity for unmasking appearances becomes a synonym for knowledge? The following sketch is an attempt to trace changes in critical and theoretical lexicons, which were performed in the Anglo-American humanities with the intention of weakening the hegemony of the hermeneutics of suspicion.

The source of these changes is a conviction concerning a crisis in the critical humanities, which are incapable of reviving a communal and future-proposing imagination. The wager of my text is, however, the indication that suggestion for a rejection of critical suspicion often lead to apologias for individual affects, which are not so much formative of community as, rather, preserving of the existing rules of a neo-liberal reality. For, the demands for a de-professionalisation of critical practices, to which I will draw attention in my reflections, are, in essence, motivated by a hope of recovering meaning within the already existing system, which deprived criticism of its symbolic capital (Breu 2018: 1). The problem lies in this, that the activities serving its recovery ground the irreversibility and intransgressibility of the neo-liberal order.

Whence, then, derives the faith in the efficacy of non-suspicious criticism? What strategies of reading are supposed to revive a widespread interest in the humanities? And, finally, how to lead critical practice beyond ritually inverted opposition between scientificity and deprofessionalisation?

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1 Connected, in any case, with the etymology of the word "criticism", which refers back to the Greek verb *krinein*, the linguistic core of which refers to winnowing of grain, the separation of the seed from the chaff, and thus to division, to the distinguishing and choice of that which is true or real (Didi-Huberman 2016: 361–362).

The sympton is *passé* (and yet it exists)

In the last decades, a certain portion of the Western cultural humanities performed a methodological volta, in turning attention to aesthetic categories that had earlier been dismissed. Yet, this is not, as one of the pioneers of this turn back—the feminist literary scholar Isobel Armstrong—argued in the 90's, a return to the idealistic and individualistic categories of Kantian aesthetics, happily sent to the junk room of false universals by Terry Eagleton, Pierre Bourdieu or Paul de Man (Armstrong 2000: 45)[2]. Believing in the validity of and need for a return of reflection upon the aesthetic dimension of the text, Armstrong—and other scholars, diverse with respect to their scholarly orientations—thus sought for other genealogies of aesthetics, which would serve the transgression of the limits imposed by the domination of the neo-idealistic perspective. The construction of these genealogies occurs in connection with various sub-fields of theory: for example, research on affects (Isobel Armstrong, Lauren Berlant), philosophical New Materialism (Estelle Barrett, Barbara Bolt, Simon O'Sullivan), or New Formalism (Caroline Levine, Angela Leighton)—to enumerate barely a few of the theoretical marriages that are to different degrees essential and variously exploited today.

In the broadest sense, what unites them is the need to shift scholarly attention from the vertical movement beneath the surface of appearances to horizontal distributions, in other words, the Rancièrean "distribution of the sensible." The lexicon of the French philosopher is not accidental here. For, the symbolic patricide of Louis Althusser (the patron of the symptomatic searching for that which is hidden)[3] lies at the heart of Jacques Rancière's intellectual idiom, which consistently rejects a thought founded on suspicion. This, in turn, makes the author of *Proleta-*

2 Armstrong, recognising the charges against the aesthetic tradition of Kant, formulated from a Marxist position, at the same time indicated the lack of alternative aesthetic proposals. According to her, the anti-aesthetic position does not take advantage of a chance to rethink aesthetics, which does not have to restrict itself exclusively to the compromised neo-Kantian lineage (Armstrong 2000: 54–55).

3 As Jerzy Franczak writes, ritual patricide is bound up with a radical opposition with respect to Althusserian scientism and the "discourse of order," marking out hierarchies (intellectuals vs. workers) precisely through the central principle of the symptomatological procedure. This is because its characteristic feature is the establishment and maintenance of the relation of rule, which strengthens the authority of the philosopher as the one who is able to recognise the mechanism of illusion and, through the reading of symptoms, to achieve the overcoming of illusion (Franczak 2017: 12–15).

rian Nights an exceptionally influential figure in the sphere of those scholars who approach *aesthesis* precisely along the paths trodden by Rancière, and who, by the same token, further develop the aesthetic conclusions of Spinoza. This perspective can be grasped by means of the formulation that *aesthesis* is "both (…) that which is felt and (…) that which is to be felt by the others" (Robson 2005: 166).

The conventional transition (conventional because the logic of linear progress has no application here, on account of the constellatory character of the currents and research within the humanities) from a symptomatological critique—which engages in unmasking and heroizes the critical authority—to a horizontal critique and one that is, in the Jamesonian sense, *weak*[4], indicates a return to the rhetoric of empancipatory promises, effectively pacified by the principle of authority governing a criticism based on suspicion. Bruno Latour wrote about this authority with unconcealed derision, having in mind the relation of criticism to the demystifying and anti-fetishistic attitude: "The role of the critic is then to show that what the naive believers are doing with objects is simply a projection of their wishes onto a material entity that does nothing at all by itself." "And then," writes Latour, "the courageous critic, who alone remains aware and attentive, who never sleeps, turns those false objects into fetishes that are supposed to be nothing but mere empty white screens on which is projected the power of society, domination, whatever" (Latour 2014: 13). The power of disclosure encouraged a rhetoric of specialist, professional activity, supported by a knowledge deposited and expressed in a language allowing for judgements upon truth and illusion, or, in other words, a knowledge belonging to a conceptual tradition contained within the frame of the conceptual pair *technē* and *epistēmē*[5].

4 Jameson recognized as "weak" an interpretation motivated by an ethical disposition. An ethics of reading, as he argued, universalizes the category of experience, granting to it unchanging properties, which allow one to believe in the individual identity of the text. An ethical reading begins from a question about the meaning of the text, which one can pose only then when we abandon the historical and institutional conditions of the production of both individual and collective identities (Jameson 2002:44).

5 As Ewa Klekot writes, the pair *technē* (practical knowledge, based upon experience, and art) and *epistēmē* (knowledge of unchanging things), distinguished by Aristotle, combines the possibility of linguistic representation, foundation upon logical principles, and universality. Whereas, in opposition to them, *mētis* is a specific, situated knowledge, about which she writes in a latter part of her text (Klekot 2015).

Practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge are linked by a hierarchical relations—*technē* follows the rules estanlished by *episteme* and, therefore produces only that which theory, based upon a knowledge of unchanging things, had earlier laid out. *Technē* materializes and makes concrete theory, to which it is subordinate and whose primacy it confirms, through which *technē* itself becomes a temporary form, concealing the real and unchanging principles according to which it proceeds. The antinomy of these two concepts, in essence, legitimates that status of cognition as a penetrating through changeable, temporally formed materialisations, towards the fundamental principles of theoretical knowledge.

The emancipatory promise could not pass the test of a critique aimed at disillusionment, for this—in the extreme variant described in 1995 by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick—is a paranoid practice, or a specific intellectual procedure having a tautological character (it must continually find proofs of its legitimacy, and thus confirm as conclusions its own earlier accepted assumptions). The activity of paranoia, as Sedgwick argues, is the activity of a strong theory—one that is anticipatory, bound up with negative affects, and which believes in the power of disclosure and the privileged position of the one who performs this disclosure.

> The paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends, in addition, on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these un-veilings. What is the basis for assuming that it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self--contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent? (Sedgwick 2003: 141)

Having posed this question, Sedgwick came to the conclusion that the adoption of the paranoid attitude does not leave room for changing the world; for this reason, she reformulated her own project from the perspective of a possible reparation, proposing, in the place of hierarchy, the affective community of readers. A community that also reconfigures the status and dimensions of a knowledge closely connected to, rather than separated from, affect. The consequence of this reconfiguration turned out to be the opening of a field of different questions, with regard to knowledge itself, its production, the conditions of its activity and the ways in which it might be possessed. Thus, Sedgwick undertook a transition away from such questions as:

> Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know? to the further questions: What does knowledge do—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? How, in

> short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects? (Sedgwick 2003: 124)

It would be difficult to treat Sedgwick's diagnosis as particularly subversive—for, in the discovery that knowledge "acts" rather than "exists," one can hear familiar Foucauldian tones. Nevertheless, what remains essential, especially from the perspective of literary studies, is the fact that Sedgwick's theses undermined faith in the power of disclosure as the ultimate gesture unveiling the original conditions of a given literary production. "Unveiling," as the author of *Between Men* purported to persuade readers, is an expression implying the gradual removal from reality (both textual and material) of that which veils its structure and masks its original, irreconcilable contradictions.

Bruno Latour also drew attention to this gesture of symptomatological reduction, postulating, along with this, a form of criticism different from the reductionist one. A decade after the publication of the queer literary scholar's anti-suspicion manifesto, the French critic reminded us, in 2004, of the meaning of her doubts, presenting, at the same time, different dimensions of them—consistent with his own, web-like (rather than hierarchical) vision of reality and emerging from this vision's model of science. The Latourian project was aimed at the Enlightenment foundation of research with respect to the world and to the production of a knowledge understood descriptively; which, as a description of facts, is an excellent tool—as he argued — "for *debunking* quite a lot of beliefs, powers, and illusions" (Latour 2004: 232). This Enlightenment ideal turned out, however, to be paralyzing with regard to the need to fill the place left by these debunked illusions. For this reason, Latour, like Sedgwick earlier, posed questions about the possibility of discovering other critical tools − now not only unmasking delusions and unveiling facts, but also serving the construction and strengthening of a connection with the world and its diverse actors. Latour made into a model of this kind of criticism the thinking machine of Allan Turing— the computer —which processes received data, mediates human activities, links them, and generates new qualities. The computer is not a figure of the heroic critic, who "show[s] that what the naïve believers are doing with objects is simply a projection of their wishes onto a material entity that does nothing at all by itself (Latour 2004: 237–238); rather, it is a model of a criticism that is anti-heroic, which assists emancipatory activities not by severing bonds, but by strengthening them. Criticism, Latour argued in this manifesto, should ultimately be an amplification, and not a removal, of meanings.

It is symptomatic that Rita Felski also formulated her anti-suspicion project by means of the rhetoric of the manifesto, by drawing out the consequences of the findings of both Sedgwick and Latour. *The Uses of Literature*, from 2008, is a distinctive "manifesto for positive aesthetics" (Butter 2009); however, it is non-dogmatic manifesto, since as the author herself declares, already in the introduction:

> This is an odd manifesto as manifestos go, neither fish nor fowl, an awkward, ungainly creature that ill-fits its parentage. In one sense it conforms perfectly to type: one-sided, skew-eyed, it harps on one thing, plays only one note, gives one half of the story. […] Yet the manifestos of the avant-garde were driven by the fury of their againstness [. . .] What follows is, in this sense, an un-manifesto: a negation of a negation, an act of yea-saying not nay-saying, a thought experiment that seeks to advocate, not denigrate. (Felski 2008: 1)

Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading" and Latour's, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam" equally fulfilled the function of the manifesto as offensive, conflictual manifestations of a struggle with symptomatological critique. In contrast, Felski constructs her voice along the lines of an affirmative declaration—a critical articulation in the spirit of the resignification, postulated by Latour, of the meaning of critique itself—and as protective, preserving and strengthening. The choice of the manifesto, as a non-scientific genre, harmonises with the retreat from scientificity—identified with the procedures of symptomatological deduction—which is formulated in all three examples. Felski underlines, in any case, the necessity of endowing the theory of literature with common sense categories, weakening, as it were, the hegemony of theoretical operations, which are always ready to disarm common knowledge of its naivety. Nevertheless, the problem lies in this, that the author of *Uses of Literature* does not so much destabilise the hegemony of critical suspicion, as, rather, reverse the direction of evaluation in favour of an affirmation of the individual act of reading. She replaces the authority of the heroic critic with the central figure of the non-professional reader, dismisses the method of scholarly suspicion in favour of the affects of the individual—which are non-scientific, non-dogmatic and are "derided by the hermeneutics of suspicion" (Baron-Milian 2017: 177) Ultimately, however, Felski does not seem to be interested in overcoming the impasse of a criticism based upon—in Sedgwick's terms—a paranoid confirmation of one's own assumptions. Since, she proposes its replacement by a distinctive apologetics for readerly everydayness and the individuality of experience. The abandonment of the attitude of suspicion

—accused, here, of an instrumentalisation of literature as an object, and not a source of knowledge (Felski 2016: 15)—leads, ultimately, to a praise of the autonomy of the text, the privileging of which is supposed to return to literature its cognitive function, which is lost in discourses that treat texts as the symptoms of social and political forces external to them.

The project of the transgression of the limits of symptomatology, formulated by this enthusiast of post-criticism, turns out, therefore, to be unsuccessful, since—despite her declarations—it adopts the paranoid logic and arises in accordance with its assumptions. Felski repeats the fundamental gesture of her adversaries; like the fathers of suspicion, Marx and Freud, with respect to the ostensibly enlightened but in essence naïve pseudo-critics of their time, so also the author of *The Limits of Critique* unmasks the entanglements and deficiency of the criticism that she wants to abandon[6]. In essence, then, she remains within the spiral of an unmasking analysis, the effectiveness of which she confirms, in making use of the style of rhetorical polarisation it elaborated, which creates an antagonism between critical attitudes, and by the same token, excludes their connectivity and the possibility of making use of the findings worked out in the context of both dispositions.

Felski's proposal is, however, significant to this extent, that it displays the fundamental difficulty with a potential expansion of the dimensions of criticism, when the tool of this postulated expansion is a dualistic reductionism. For this reductionism admits only a bivalent stretching between a criticism which reveals ideological entanglements, founded upon constructivist assumptions, and a criticism which recognizes the agency of the text or artefact, its capacity not only to register, but also to transform social reality. Post-criticism, in such a version, ultimately restores the sense that affective community of readers is located beyond a historical context, which is produced only situationally in the act of reading. The problem with a critical position thus defined lies, however, in the fact that one can think of a an egalitarian affective criticism only when the politico-economic forces of neo-liberal fantasy are excluded along with the context of both the text and its reading.

6 Hal Foster drew attention to this mechanism, commenting on the error which is inherent in the thought of Latour, and which reproduces the anti-fetishistic tendencies, which he unmasked in a critique oriented around suspicion (Foster 2015: 165).

Criticism Outmaneuvered

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Thus, perhaps what is needed is not so much a criticism other than the symptomatological, but rather a non-dualistic orientation with regard to the complexity of the critical operation. Today, models for such an orientation are provided by new materialist perspectives, which—alongside a whole variety of particular discourses and with respect to their differently defined research aims—are characterised by the need to broaden binary conceptualisations. Disregarding here many doubts and ambiguities multiplying around New Materialism[7], from the perspective of the critical ethos of interest to me, what is essential is that the reflections of scholars of this trend do not so much privilege the material (at the cost of a methodology oriented to the social and cultural) as, rather, display the coexistence of material processes and semiotic-discursive structures (Golańska 2019: 206). These new materialist orientations do not prescribe a turn away from post-structuralist methods and epistemological assumptions, but rather broaden them to include material processes, which are equally as essential for practices of generating meanings as the cultural activities hitherto privileged. Thus, they do not lead, at least not declaratively, to reduction, but rather to an intensification of relations and a multiplication of connections between non-hierarchically conceived orders. In this way, the material ceases to be solely an object subjected to discursive reimagining, and becomes also an active factor influencing formulations and possibilities of articulation. Thus, it is not only—to speak according to Jameson's rhetoric—disclosure of ideological structures of power and meaning, but also transforms these structures.

This reaching for the fundamental—but, of necessity, here only touched upon—assumptions of the ontology of New Materialism, is promising for critical thought also in view of the perspective it offers concerning changes in the definition and production of knowledge. This is because intellectual operations are not universal and—in contrast to the objects subjected to them—unchanging; rather, on account of their embodied character, they do not allow of being separated from place, from what is local and relational, or from contact with what is simultaneously material and semiotic.

Yet, as much as the invocation of new materialist formulations comes with a certain ease, to the same extent their capacity to function as

7 Especially the key question of the transfer of concepts from quantum physics to research in the humanities (Derra 2018: 145–146).

critical-interpretive strategies suggests somewhat more numerous doubts, which increase all the more, if one restricts them to the medium of the text and to the practices of reading[8]. Nevertheless, as certain revivers of aesthetic categories in the context of literature show successfully, the medium of the text has the potential to generate relational links and non-dualistic poetics.

Isobel Armstrong, to whom I have already referred, successfully combined Marxist materialism, or a hermeneutics of suspicion, with a perspective closer to New Materialism; while, at the centre, where both methods intertwine, she placed glass. *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830–1880* (2008) is a monumental analysis of the diverse representations of glass in the culture of 19th century England. Armstrong looked equally to historical documents—(statements by workers, employed in British glassworks, but also the voices of the owners of those glassworks), from which she extracted the economic-political class relations revealing themselves in contact with the material—and to literary texts, as being a part of the material world, simultaneously human and non-human, and resonating "glass culture," emerging from the observation of matter, but also transforming it, because they broaden the material imaginary. The key position of glass—a material that has its own concrete properties and, by the same token, is amenable to human transformations—in specific historical circumstances, allowed this scholar to reorganise textual hierarchies, thus exhibiting complicated relations between the materiality of the literary medium and the materiality of the raw materials incorporated by it. Relations, and this the essential thing, which are not exhibited from the perspective of a unifying and synthesising research, the effect of which could have been a general theory of the representation of glass and of a modernising Great Britain. The relations emerging from *Victorian Glassworlds* are not the result of a pacification of obvious differences between media and

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8 In the case of spatial and visual arts, the medium appears to incline more towards transmedially oriented concepts of new materialist ontology, which reconfigures the relations between diverse instances and levels of artistic activities. The new materialist perspective in Polish literary studies reveals itself most intensely in the form of interpretive strategies of concrete texts, and therefore functions more often as a lexicon of concepts and of tools for reading, than within the perspective of an ontological reimagining of the status of literature itself. The proposals for such a relocation of the text concentrate mainly upon poetic practices, which do not only thematise the problems extracted within the discourses of new materialism, but above all make use of the findings of these discourses for a reimagining of their own medium and its dynamics, in relation to other actors within the natural-cultural community.

materials, or between the language of the text and the material world made present within it. They are, rather, distinct braids and entanglements of heterogeneous forms and materials, each of which possesses its own attributes and potentialities, but also has a capacity for situationally linking itself with the properties of another medium. Not so much through hidden kinship, in an animistic spirit, and the original, mythical identity of an energetic matter, as through the fact of coexistence in a historically mutable temporality.

The production of interim connections between diversified artistic articulations, goes beyond the ethos of a criticism founded on suspicion, which reduces visibility and legibility to a symptom, demanding an analysis of the ideological structures of power and knowledge. And yet, alongside this, a criticism that takes into consideration the new materialist revision of ontology may successfully avoid the error of an inverted dualism and of the fetishisation of individual affect in opposition to a social instrumentalisation of the text. Paranoid practices, as Sedgwick herself admitted, are indispensable when what is at stake is the recognition and naming of the canons of violence, subordination and the power which commands them; and, thus, when a naïve trust in the apparent transparency of the text would risk conceding the rightness of the violence hidden within it and the perpetuation of its invisibility. Nonetheless, the reduction of the critical attitude to the act of disclosure risks reducing it to the search for a common source, equating heterogeneous artistic articulations and weakening their openness to mutual contamination. For this reason, or so it seems, she should add to a hermeneutics of suspicion a "hermeneutics of susceptibility," which pursues the entanglements, the multi-levelled relations of texts, materials, meanings and affects, both individual and communal, that are in contact with one another. Such a hermeneutics, as the originator of this conception, Anne Anlin Cheng, explains, does not dampen the dynamics of entangling poetics—it does not isolate them, but neither does it reduce them to commonality (Cheng 2009: 101–102), since it discerns the potential of critical practice in a pursuit of the plurality of entangled qualities. Ultimately, such a criticism exposes itself to contamination—it becomes impure, but, through this, potentially subversive, since it disarms the mechanisms that legitimate every declaration of methodological coherence, just as much that which is suspicious, as that which, having abandoned suspicion, wants to be only affirmation.

Critical division, *krinein*, combines the philosophical effort to recognise truth and falsity with the work of the farmer, who distinguishes seed from chaff, and thus the etymology of "critique" weaves together

an intellectual operation with the culture of cultivation:

> To criticise, riddle, sieve: we are thus in the presence of a process; here thought cooperates with a gesture, a gesture with a tool, and the tool with precisely the material that we must sieve, 'riddle', or 'criticise'. There are many kinds of sieve and riddle, each adapted to a particular use, whether in agriculture, philosophy, patisserie, or mineral prospecting. But in each case, we are presented with material sieved by a tool, with a tool set in motion by a gesture, and a gesture mobilised by thought (Didi-Huberman 2017: 254)

The radicality of the critical gesture does not ultimately lie in a merciless unmasking of that which is insufficiently aware and thus naïve, but rather in the subversiveness of *mētis*—a situated knowledge gained thanks to an observation of changing material conditions. *Mētis* and critique are linked by a surprising context. The American political scientist James C. Scott, refers to *mētis* when he describes the activities of peasant communities, activities which assist their survival in the face of a changing nature and its unpredictability. The impossibility of mastering the dynamics of the environment—writes Scott—did not allow for the adoption of universal principles and scientific theories, the codified purity of which guaranteed unchanging rules, but which, precisely on account of their purity—or else, their separation from the material context—made them ineffective in the face of reimaginations of that context (Scott 1998: 311).

Mētis surpassed, by its effectiveness, such abstract formulas, thanks to its implication in the materiality of the world. As a practice deprived of a universal theoretical basis, situated knowledge demanded carefulness and a familiarity with context, which verified, but also narrowed, the efficacy of the activities undertaken. Thus, making use of *mētis* excluded the appeal to normative standards, while the local reach of knowledge limited possibility of making its results normative. Of necessity, therefore, this was a knowledge obtained through participation, not intellectual distance. However, the participatory character of knowledge assumed a confrontation with danger—the undertaking of risk and the possibility of disaster in the face of unpredictable events. The possibility of their survival, therefore, on the capacity to analyse past failures, their circumstances and the activities undertaken with regard these. Context was indispensable for *mētis*, not as a normative point of reference, but as a vehicle of change.

With regard to the status of criticism, central for my article, the anti-systematic character of *mētis* allows one to transcend beyond the frame of a discourse stretched between a suspicious criticism and one

which makes proposals. For, the example of situated knowledge shows that an analysis of the historical transformations of a given context is a work oriented to the future, which there is no way to reconcile with a universal and homogenous picture, from the totalising character of which we are protected by attachment to the local character of action.

The prospective and local dimension of *mētis* elicits its reparative potential—this is a knowledge open to mistakes, accidents and sudden situational transformations, which there is no way to take into account from the standpoint of a universal system. This last maintains its persistence thanks to transhistorical rules, abstracting from contingency, which it subordinates by means of rigid, paranoid explanations. The mutability of *mētis* makes of it a form of knowledge from which the reparative reading postulated by Sedgewick can emerge, as subversive with regard to the paranoid model, because it is open to surprising moments and situational, rather than total, solutions. From a perspective that is programatically suspicious, it is easy to overlook the effectiveness of improvised motifs—like the camp parody mentioned by Sedgwick—the use of which may indicate, each time, a meaning at that time invisible, when aesthetic subversions are only a symptom confirming a politics of exclusion. A situated knowledge requires sensitivity and attention with regard to even marginal phenomena, since it is from the observation of these that further activity arises. For the queer project of reparative reading, this attention is the basis for going beyond the paranoid impasse and an opportunity to formulate a more affirmative and communal experience of reading. The local activity of agrarian communities, based upon cooperation—about which Scott wrote—in an inclusive program of reparative reading, becomes the source of a non-expert and bottom-up practice of reading.

A critical practice, treated as a form of *mētis* would, therefore, be an analogous oscillation between a contextual-historical symptomatology and a projection of a future exceeding former limitations. A consciousness of place is, for such a criticism, indispensable, because economic-cultural conditions are decisive with regard to the efficacy of critical gestures. For, neither a universal suspicion, nor equally a total, post-critical affirmation will save criticism, in a world whose dominating force is maintenance of faith in the impassability of the present.

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Abstrakt: Cel tekstu jest podwójny: po pierwsze, jest on opisem postkrytycznej

tendencji we współczesnej humanistyce anglo-amerykańskiej, po drugie – w tekście przedstawione zostaną propozycje poszerzające obecne w nurcie postkrytycznym ograniczenia, prowadzące do zastąpienia krytycznej naukowości afirmacją codziennych afektów czytelniczych. Postulaty odrzucenia krytyki podejrzliwej, formułowane m.in. przez Ritę Felski, akcentują elitarny charakter czytania, którego celem ma być odsłonięcie ekonomiczno-politycznego uwikłania tekstu jako wytworu historycznej rzeczywistości. Centralna dla badań kulturowych nieufność wobec powierzchni tekstu i iluzji estetycznej autonomii, wyniosła postawę krytyczną do rangi działania rewelatorskiego i uprzywilejowanego. Przeciwnicy i przeciwniczki demaskatorskiej krytyki podkreślają jej ograniczenia – demaskacja odsłania ostateczne źródło każdej produkcji kulturowej – logikę kapitału, której totalność nie pozostawia szans na zmianę. W obronie zmiany i w nadziei na przywrócenie literaturze powszechnego zainteresowania, pojawiają się tendencje przywracające indywidualne doświadczenie lektury, którego podstawą ma być estetyczna przyjemność, uwolniona od kontekstu historycznego i jego determinant. W niniejszym tekście wskazane zostaną przykłady takich tendencji, jak również ich konsekwencje, wynikające z uwznioślenia i uniwersalizowania nieprofesjonalnego czytania. Odrzucenie politycznego zadania krytyki prowadzi do zakwestionowania jej antysystemowego potencjału, z kolei apoteoza podejrzliwości paraliżuje wymiar postulatywny. Dlatego w ostatniej części tekstu proponuję wyjście poza opozycyjne konceptualizacje w kierunku krytyki umiejscowionej i materialnej, której modelem czynię kategorię wiedzy podporządkowanej.

Słowa kluczowe: postkrytyka, krytyka podejrzliwa, czytanie symptomatyczne, krytyka afektywna, wiedza podprządkowana