

Agnieszka Dauksza

Affect in modernistic literature and theory

Summary

The main objective of this work is to provide an interpretation of the aspects of Polish modernistic literature that heretofore have not been recognised. Modernism is understood as a cultural and artistic formation that spanned several decades of the 20th century, developing roughly from the 1920s into the 1960s. Affect, on the other hand, is defined after Brian Massumi as an impressive intensity, an autonomous and embodied psycho-physical quality that is sensed by the subject rather than consciously recorded, distinct from meaningful structures, defying representation and escaping narrative interactions, devoid of structure, yet subject to analysis (in terms of its impact and efficacy). The proposed research of modernistic culture (its products and the processes of its cognition) in the light of the category of affect is founded predominantly on case studies, yet, as a result, it proposes a more universal theoretical overview and introduces new original categories, such as: affective realism, affective pressure, the violence of sensation, relational interpretation, affective criticism, sensed and notional meaning, as well as affective communities.

The author attempts to critically investigate the established belief in the humanities that modernistic literature and art can be divided into intellectual and realist-emphatic trends. The specificity of modernistic representation lies in its constant oscillation between conflicting orders, for which reason the author proposes to refrain from defining yet another trend and instead account for the multiple, diversified, inconsistent, and tension-ridden qualities of Modernism discernible both in individual works as well as on the level of wider formative and cultural tendencies.

The chapter *Affective avant-gardism* is an attempt to redefine current approaches to the avant-garde literature and art, as well as to overcome the dualism in thinking of modern artistic tendencies. The author discusses work which fall outside existing typologies and descriptions. The research proposition, defined as “affective criticism”, is an analysis of modern arts phenomena from the angle of the categories of affect. The proposed model of reading gives an opportunity to single out another, “alternative” modernity, an avant-garde of

the avant-garde, specificity of which is included, among other things, in complicating the tensions between what is intellectual, somatic and emotional.

The chapter on *Bruno Schulz's affective poetics. A reconnaissance* discusses the methods used by Schulz to present affective states in his writing by rendering them into concrete, material figures. The author examines the direct dependence of intra-textual events on intensity and moods. She analyses numerous metamorphoses through the prism of the category of Figure introduced by Deleuze in his *The Logic of Sensation*. Moreover, she addresses the ways in which Schulz provokes his readers to actualise the affective community.

In the chapter, *Performativity as a Device. The Grassroots Methods of Witold Gombrowicz*, the author attempts a reading of Witold Gombrowicz's work through the concept of performativity presented by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In particular, she examines two works: *Virginity* and *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*. Dauksza analyses how and to what purpose Gombrowicz employs the agency of the performative acts, and what the textual consequences of this are. The analysis becomes an opportunity to reflect on the qualities and functions of performativity. It also allows to realise anew the subversive and affective potential of Gombrowicz's work and draw attention to the scale of social criticism conducted by this writer.

In the chapter, *The medium of memory. Leo Lipski's economy of affect*, the author discusses the reasons why Lipski's writing was considered scandalous and why his readers claimed that they could "rather experience it than understand it". The chapter is an attempt to such reading of Leo Lipski which points at the legitimacy of specific, still insufficiently understood and described, convention adopted by the author in question. Lipski's creativity is seen not only as a testimony of searching for his own diction but also as a struggle to overcome postwar deadlock, stepping outside the rhetoric of the inexpressible, incapacity of expression, emptiness, and ultimately an attempt at overcoming the crisis of language and representation. Important in this view is a demonstration of the interdependence of three orders, namely the framework of memory, the matter, and the text. Particularly painful memory about Shoah proves to be foundational to the analysed prose on many levels, both thematic and conceptual, linguistic and stylistic. The author reads the texts that have commonly been considered "incoherent" and "disgusting" as literature organised according to the economy of affect; something that is supposed to touch, move, and hurt the reader, provoke his attentive reading, reflection, and remembrance of the victims of war.

The chapter *Holy Matter. On collecting and gathering in the writings of Kornel Filipowicz* gathers reflections from the intersection of three fields: anthropology of the object, Holocaust studies and studies of the cultural status of collecting and gathering (among others of M. Sommer, B. Latour, K. Pomian). Kornel Filipowicz's prose serves here as a case study within this methodological context. His inclination to accumulate and fascination with material objects are not only visible in his themes or imagery, but they also influence the language and determine the principle of the literary composition.

In the chapter, *The Burden of (Not)Being There: Gombrowicz's Position towards the War and Jews*, in her careful reading of Witold Gombrowicz's novel *Pornografia* the author traces elements that indicate the essential role of passages concerning the war, its impact and consequences. Her affective analysis reveals Gombrowicz's singular obsession with the war, with the lack of agency and with (anti)testimony. A particularly important problem is the presence/absence of Jews in the novel's fictional reality. The author explores Gombrowicz's relationships to Jews and points out how important that relationship is within his work. She also engages his diagnoses and comments postwar Polish society and with his remedies for the spectral status of that formation.

In the chapter, *The affective community of the Warsaw Uprising. On Anna Świrszczyńska's Budowałam barykadę*, the author reconstructs the postwar development of Świrszczyńska's work. She recognises a constantly present theme in her poetry, namely, the feeling of inferiority and social marginalisation. The author investigates the controversies incited by Świrszczyńska and confronts her feminist poetry with poems about the Warsaw Uprising. Next, she analyses the *Budowałam barykadę* volume and interprets the interactions between the Warsaw Uprising militants and the civilians as an affective community at work. She also addresses Świrszczyńska's nostalgia about August 1944 and about its atmosphere of intensity of interpersonal relations, as well as her critique of the alienating society of the 1960s and 70s.

The chapter "*We Who Have Eaten our Hearts and Drunk our Blood.*" *Carnality in Wisława Szymborska's Output* is an attempt at outlining a corporeality concept inherent in Wisława Szymborska's poetic works and feature articles, this essay deals with defective human body that is straitened as part of the evolutionary process; it is juxtaposed with an animal body of limitless opportunities. Effects of stigmatising corporeality with signs of cultural belonging and mechanisms of exclusion of bodies unable to become part of generally accepted standards are discussed. At last, an opportunity is shown for transgressing the dualist

cognitive model through affirmation of carnality as such; with all its drawbacks, it most fully corresponds with the imperfect human being.

In the chapter, *The violence of sensation. Preliminary investigation of affective literature and art*, the author examines the representations that make an impact through shock, violence, and negative affect, and defines their method as “the violence of sensation”. She reconstructs the traditions of art that exert their impact with such powerful means, as well as theoretical and philosophical interpretations of literary and aesthetic violence. Drawing from the concept of Jill Bennett, the author offers a notion of “the levels of violence” and the potential of playing out the trauma in art. She analyses also the practices of KwieKulik duo, especially their work with *Meyers' Encyclopaedia*.

In the chapter, *Fates of Avant-garde Formlessness*, the author considers a formlessness phenomenon which, at first, is understood as a philosophical term (George Bataille's concept), then as aesthetic category (informel painting, Tadeusz Kantor's theatre, Leo Lipski's literature). Commentary is conducted from the perspective of ‘affective criticism’. The author analyses meaning, function and figures which formlessness becomes in different artistic works. Then, the author examines avant-garde interest in formlessness as a manifestation of search and establishment of ‘alternative’ modernity.

In the chapter, *Affective realism. A very preliminary diagnosis*, the author presents the tradition of literary realism and proposes a new category of affective realism, which depends on the context and is a historically variable method of representation that both records the subjective impression of reality, as well as experimentally seeks new means of expression.

A subchapter titled *Becoming accustomed. Miron Białoszewski's (non)commonplace* offers an analysis of Białoszewski's work as affective realism. The author suggests that for the poet, the process of writing is a sphere of experiencing reality. Writing and mediating his own existence through language enables him to sense, think, familiarise, and order his chaotic sensations.

In the chapter, *Emotional Communities. The Project of Relational Interpretation*, the author proposes the model of relational interpretation and postulates the existence of several phases or stages of reception. She discusses the simplifications and generalizations of traditional theories of interpretation, which serve above all to assert the reader's erudition and competence. While the phases of relational interpretation postulated here go beyond purely intellectual procedures, they do not go as far as becoming antagonistic towards them. The point is to overcome the dualism of affect and intellect, and to propose a mode of interpretation that takes into account both affective and intellectual possibilities of cognition.

Among the categories analysed is that of sensed meaning. The author also describes the relationality of each meaning and the relational nature of interpretive processes, which depend on emotional communities in both the cultural and the social sense.