

SANAS Symposium and AGM
University of Bern, Unitobler F-121
Friday 26 May 2023, 9.30-17.30
Organized by Dr. Sofie Behluli and Malaika Sutter

Reading Reading: Contemporary Literary Practices

1. ABSTRACT

We are constantly engaged in processes of reading. We read literary texts, historical sources, film and other media, political moods and affects, and shifting social formations. Amongst the plethora of reading strategies available to us, close reading is perhaps the most widely known and most accepted one in literary studies. Other approaches to texts include ‘paranoid’ and ‘reparative reading’ (Sedgwick 1997), ‘distant reading’ (Moretti 2000), ‘wide reading’ (Hallet 2010), and ‘surface reading’ (Best and Marcus 2009), to name just a few. Two contemporary critics who are engaged with the notion of reading today are Eugenie Brinkema (MIT) and Charlotte Terrell (Oxford). Their work is engaged with ‘reading reading’, that is to say, with understanding the mechanisms, habits, affects and ideologies of interpretation itself. Touching upon affective and formal aspects of texts, Brinkema takes a ‘radical formalist’ approach in her books *The Forms of the Affects* (2014) and *Life-Destroying Diagrams* (2022). Ultimately, she proposes thinking or reading *from* form. In a similar vein to Brinkema, Charlotte Terrell focuses on ‘critical enchantment’ and reflects on the different, interweaving registers of reading and writing. She is interested not only in close reading primary sources, but also in reading the various agents that feed into their production, dissemination and reception. In other words, Brinkema and Terrell examine the relationship between reading communities, affects, forms, and politics – but in different ways. This symposium aims to bring these two contemporary reading approaches into a dialogue and invites us to think about reading as a critical *and* everyday practice.

2. SPEAKERS



Eugenie Brinkema Eugenie Brinkema is Professor of Contemporary Literature and Media at the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology**. Her research in film and media studies focuses on violence, affect, sexuality, aesthetics, and ethics. In dialogue with critical theory and continental philosophy, she argues for the speculative value of formalist readings in texts ranging from horror films to works of the new European extremism, from gonzo pornography to contemporary photography. Her articles have appeared in numerous journals, including *Angelaki*, *Camera Obscura*, *Criticism*, *differences*, *Discourse*, *film-philosophy*, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, *LIT*, *qui parle*, and *World*

Picture. Her books include *The Forms of the Affects* (2014) and *Life-Destroying Diagrams* (2022), both published with Duke University Press.

Address: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Literature Section, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Room 14N-407, Cambridge, MA 02139, United States of America

Email: brinkema@mit.edu



Charlotte Terrell is a Junior Research Fellow at the **University of Oxford**, researching fiction and the novel across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She has particular interests in writing about the overlap between producers and consumers of literature, the structures of belief and enchantment elicited by (or described within) fiction, and more recently, literary histories of publishing and editorial work. She is currently working on her first monograph, *Critical Enchantments*, a study of literary fictions which both articulate modes of aesthetic enchantment and reproduce aspects of literary criticism--close reading, etymological attention, citation, lecturing, essay writing, research. Through reading the

fiction and authorial personae of Nicola Barker, J. M. Coetzee, Toni Morrison, Ali Smith and Colson Whitehead, *Critical Enchantments* charts how these novels spend considerable time modelling competing projections of reception and readership and asks what this proximity between literary production and literary consumption can tell us about the role of enchantment in demarcating distinct audiences and intellectual communities.

Address: University of Oxford, English Faculty, St. Cross Building, Manor Rd, Oxford OX1 3UQ, United Kingdom

Email: charlotte.terrell@worc.ox.ac.uk