

Script/Bodies

Embodied Texts in Situations of Reading (Cavafy, Karyotakis, Ritsos, Papacharalampos)

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Για τη Μαριλίζα Μητσού

In one miniature narration in his posthumously published monumental montage novel *Legende* (Legend, 1999), Ronald M. Schernikau narrates a visit to a public library by his autofictional character “ulla’s nephew”:¹

|10| **space and silence** | and into the space and silence enters ulla’s nephew. tall cabinets along the walls with books, from them paper and writing. and this writing, the meaning.

|11| the writing that says something. what the writing says, it says to you. what the writing says, you change it yourself. what the writing reads is you. you read what the writing is for you. the writing reads you.

|12| tall cabinets with books and silence. lots of carpet dark and worn, very silent the people finally, and they read and search and find and read. inside the books the meaning. (Schernikau 2019: 494f; author’s translation)

Framed by descriptions of the space and the activities carried out in it (in |10| and |12|) a few sentences (in |11|) take up the interaction between a text and a reader. Meaning (*the writing says something*) and address (*it says to you*) are first located in the text. But the process of reading involves the reader with their own capability of producing meaning and with their own intentionality (*changing what the writing says*). This reciprocity of address in the reading process leads to a surprising inversion of the positions of reading as we are used to thinking them in the formulation “the writing reads you.” Schernikau’s attention to the spatial surroundings and bodily presence of others in the framing of this short passage, but also to the concrete

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form in which text materializes—*writing on paper*—point to the reciprocal exchange of reading being situated in a concrete situation of embodied co-presence.²

I want to take this meditation on reading as a starting point for thinking about the bodily dimension in the reciprocity of reading. The question that sets the coordinates for the following is: How do the bodies of the reader and the text interact in the situation of reading? In this article, I want to account for the situation of reading by starting from the interaction of the materialized form in which the text occurs and my bodily experiencing. I argue that the text's material form—I will call it the script body—can be understood as an equivalent of a lived body (*Leib*), insofar as it is a body oriented toward the reader's lived body. After outlining the theoretical problem and clarifying the theoretical framework of my argument, I turn to poems of four 20th to 21st century Greek writers to explore the various ways in which these poems gesture toward their script bodies. I end with a short conclusion.

This chapter seeks to set out some preliminary conceptual considerations for a larger project of re-modelling reading as a situation. It therefore aims to think literary texts in a way that could be of use in the framework of such a project. I consider this a necessary step in preparation for work that I wish to do in the future. In this chapter, my experiencing in reading situations does not come into full view yet. My aim is to establish the specificities of the script bodies I deal with in situations of reading as a first step toward a theoretical model and a different reading practice that account for the lived body and the experiencing inherent in any situation of reading.

1. Reading as an Embodied Situation

Reader response and reception theory focus on the reader. Historically, the innovative potential of these theories was precisely to shift the focus from the author and their intention and from the text understood as a static and self-contained structure to the reader as an active and productive agent in the constitution of meaning and the production of aesthetic experience (Eagleton 2008: 64; Willis 2018: 19). This reader, however, is, in reception theory, widely reduced to their mind. As Ika Willis

2 The visit to the library in *Legende* is framed by remarks about the economic conditions of reading: The section before *space and silence* talks about the *tiny room* in which ulla's nephew lives and in which he cannot have his books: "the smaller the room the cheaper"; in the section following *space and silence*, *philharmonic hall*, the meeting of an association of house-owners is interrupted by an activist carrying a banner with the slogan "rent control as a permanent right" (Schernikau 2019: 494f; author's translation). This dimension of economic conditions and their interplay with the situation of reading does not come into view in this article, which focuses on a different aspect, even if I am aware of the necessity of including it in a project of modelling reading as a situation.

notes, “the visual, haptic, imaginative, affective and bodily dimensions of reading have tended to be sidelined in twentieth-century academic and theoretical models of reading in favour of attention to cognitive processes of interpretation and meaning-making” (Willis 2018: 129f).³ Even if there have been attempts to account for the affective, and, less frequently, bodily dimensions of reading in recent years,⁴ literary studies still have not found, as Robyn Warhol puts it, “a language for talking about the reader’s body” (Warhol 2003: ix). And even in Embodied Cognition or Experiential approaches to literary reading, the focus is very much on meaning and the readers’ “experiential backgrounds,” that is, experience readers bring into the reading from elsewhere (Kutsch/Strasen 2019: 67f). How can we account theoretically for the bodily dimensions of reading in terms of meaning and beyond?

In aesthetic experience, meaning is not necessarily the only aspect at play. Drawing on ideas developed in the context of the Research Training Group *Experiencing Gender. Constitution and Transformation of Being in the World* at Bielefeld University,⁵ I posit that *experiencing* plays a key role in aesthetic experience—related to, but potentially also diverging from or even contradicting meaning. Distinguishing *experiencing* (*Erleben*) from *experience* (*Erfahrung*) aims to make it possible to focus on the aspect of the process of bodily sensing and feeling inherent in any practice rooted in a specific situation (König/Erhart 2023; Kallenberg/König/Erhart 2024b; König 2024; König/Wolf 2024). Instead of focusing on the experiential backgrounds that readers bring into reading situations, I suggest attending to the *experiential foreground* of the reading situation. Experiencing in this sense strives towards meaning and the transformation of meaning (König 2024: 123f). Its phenomenal qualities, however, cannot be *reduced* to meaning. Embedded in processes of meaning-making, they are not identical with these processes. As psychoanalytical negative hermeneutics posits, in the psychoanalytical process, meaning is as important as its negation, and understanding can even function as an “imaginary delusion” covering over what resists assimilation by meaning-making (Storck 2012, citation at 24; author’s translation). I suggest that the same holds true for our encounters with literature’s script bodies. I ask how we can account for the bodily dimension of experiencing in reading literature, both in relation to meaning-making and to that which resists assimilation, both on a theoretical level and in terms of individual readings. To account for aesthetic experience, I would suggest it is useful to understand reading as a *situation* in the sense elaborated by the philosopher and psychologist Eugene T. Gendlin.

3 As Willis reminds us, ancient through early modern traditions of thinking about reception had in fact primarily “focussed on the bodily, affective and moral dimensions of reception” (Willis 2018: 10), rather than on meaning and cognition.

4 For an overview see Willis (2018: 128ff).

5 See the Research Training Group’s website <https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/zwe/izg/grk/>

With his concept of situation, Gendlin urges us to think of processes and events not first and foremost in terms of their subjects and objects and the categories they belong to, but as concrete, embodied situations that transgress their components: “We must think the situations because an event is richer than the categories.” (Gendlin 1991: 89) His theoretical claim is to focus on “*interaction first*” and to view “body and environment as one event” (Gendlin 2018: 30; emphasis in original). When I read a poem, I can regard the text as a system of signs and myself as *the reader* and meditate on the qualities of this system of signs and the role *the reader* plays in perceiving, processing and understanding it. From a perspective on reading as a situation, however, I would describe a concrete situation of reading—in this case of a poem from Konstantinos Papacharalampos’s 2018 volume *tria. anthropon istoria* (three. people’s history)—like this:

I am reading the poem in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Reading Room of the British Library, London, on a sunny day in June. The room is relatively quiet. There are many other people working and reading. I am using noise-cancelling headphones to block sounds made by other readers, especially a teenage boy sitting opposite me and hectically going through mathematical exercises, probably in preparation for some sort of exam, from time to time looking at his phone, scrawling and typing. On my desk there are two electronic devices (the computer, I am writing this on, and an iPad), and a stack of books (some of which are cited in the essay on “Script Bodies” I am in the process of writing). Between my sitting body and the computer, lies *tria. anthropon istoria*, not a library copy, but my own, with Papacharalampos’s autograph on the cover page. The book is opened at pages 40 and 41. My lower arms hold the book in position, so I can read and type at the same time. I can feel a tension in my upper body. My typing makes quiet sounds that I cannot hear because of the headphones but which I assume are perceived by other readers. There is no text printed on p. 40. I can see a few wood fibers, slightly darker than the white of the paper, at various positions on the page. Between p. 40 and p. 41 I can discern the thread that binds the book together. The poem is printed on p. 41. Shining through the white parts of the page, I can see a pattern of darker squares printed on pages 42–43, as I discover turning the page for a moment. As I read the poem on page 41, my head is slightly turned right, while my eyes follow the lines, occasionally pausing to take in the poem in its entirety.

This short description is, of course, a radical reduction of the situation I attempt to grasp. There are uncountably many more things going on while I am reading the poem (for instance the sound of the air conditioning system, the pain in my upper back, and the short interaction I had with one of the librarians a few minutes ago). Gendlin posits that a situation has not only many components (many more than one can describe), but that a situation is always “*more than any number of details*” (Gendlin 1991: 89; italics in original). Thus, he understands a situation as a “pre-separated mul-

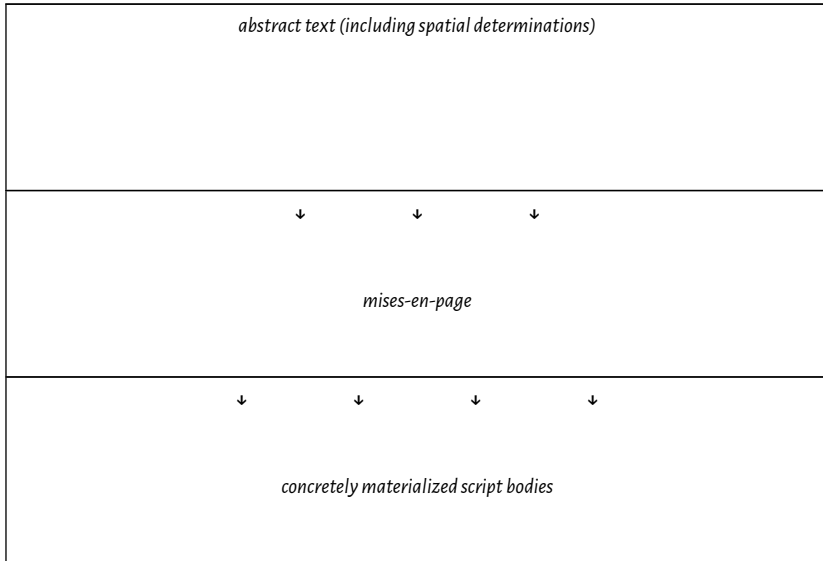
body (*Leib*) (Ette 2019: 357f). However, Barthes does not seem to be referring here to the material qualities of a *concrete* realization of a text, on an individual page of a book. Talking about text here, he seems to have in mind a specific constellation of signs. But he seems to understand signs as abstractable from their material realizations on the pages of books. When Barthes talks about the sensual qualities inherent in the relations between signs, he seems to think of a text abstracted from its concrete realizations—at least he does not differentiate between a text and its material realizations.

I want to take up Barthes's differentiation between the body as an object and the sensual body but connect it with more concrete understandings of the *Textkörper* as in Henrike Lähnemann and Michael Rupp with their emphasis on concrete realizations of a text in a manuscript tradition (Lähnemann/Rupp 2006). To do so, it is necessary to make a distinction: between text (abstract signs) and writing (materially realized signs).⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Früher Apollo" (Early Apollo), for instance, is materially realized in the copies of the first printing of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* (New Poems, Rilke 1907: 1), in the copies of the first volume of the *Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden* (Annotated Edition in Four Volumes) of 1996 (Rilke 1996: 449), and in the copies of the 2006 volume *Die Gedichte* (The Poems, Rilke 2006: 431). The mises-en-page differ between the editions, as do the individual copies' physical conditions. When comparing the texts of the three editions, however, one would rightly arrive at the conclusion that the text they each give is identical. The last statement is true on the level of what I call abstract text and abstract signs (in the sense of *abstractable from individual materializations*). The abstract text (made up of abstract signs) cannot be grasped—therefore I call it abstract; only its material realizations are palpable. But it is a logical necessity to suppose an abstract entity that organizes those aspects of the material realization that make us speak of an identical text. In the modern printing economy, an individual text materializes in different editions, and an edition is made up by the entirety of its copies. In other words, the text is an abstract set of signs that needs to go through a process of mise-en-page in order to materialize in single copies. Text in this sense of an abstract set of signs does not and cannot have a concrete corporeal form, no extension in space, no sensual qualities.

Included in the abstract set of signs that constitutes a text are data that determine its spatial realization in concrete bodies on paper, such as paragraph breaks, verse breaks, titles, epigraphs, stanzas, and more. These data can only be reconstructed from the entirety of the editions of a specific text. In this sense, the abstract set of signs (text) includes spatial determinators. In the terminology proposed here it does not make sense to speak of a *textual body*. What we actually have is the text's

6 My distinction between text and writing is inspired by Roland Barthes' meditation on *écriture* in Barthes 2002, esp. 277ff, 293, 307. My remarks here refer to written literature in the age of print. For pre-print literature, adjustments of terminology would be necessary.

concrete materializations organized by the mises-en-page of its editions. As a consequence of the distinction between text and writing, I suggest calling the concrete bodies readers deal with in reading situations (that is, the bodies with the coffee stains and dog ears) *script bodies*.



I want to briefly exemplify this distinction between text and script body using the poem I was reading in the short vignette above: the poem from Papacharalampos's *tria. anthropon istoria*:⁷ I can render this poem's first three and a half verses by simply putting its signs in a single line and adding information about how it should be formatted (the spatial determinators)—a stand-in image for the abstract text (of course, a single line is also a script body): “the girl walks. girl walks. f[ADD SPACE]alls // the boy walks. boy walks. fa[ADD SPACE]lls // and I at the edge. i cry. i-cry walks no t[ADD SPACE]e // ar falls.” I reconstructed this abstract text from a specific mis-en-page, the one created by the poet himself and technically implemented by the typesetter Ektoras Chatzibekiaris for the only published edition so

7 The necessity of translation complicates the example. For the sake of simplicity, my argument here ignores the issue of translation.

far, with the publisher koukounari⁸ (but we can imagine future and slightly differing mises-en-page). This is the poem's text as embodied in a script body (in the mise-en-page of my quotation)—and this script body is fundamental to the functioning of this poem:

<i>the girl walks. girl walks. f</i>	<i>alls</i>
<i>the boy walks. boy walks. fa</i>	<i>lls</i>
<i>and I at the edge. i cry. i-cry walks. no t</i>	<i>e</i>
<i>ar falls. but i cry. as I haven't cri</i>	<i>ed</i>
<i>before. I always see. everything now I s</i>	<i>ee</i>
<i>but nothing. nothing walks. on the screen.</i>	<i>only-</i>
	<i>i-</i>
	<i>see it.</i>
	<i>and</i>
	<i>:</i>
	<i>I lose my</i>
	<i>words.</i>
	<i>and voiceless</i>
	<i>(i look)</i>

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(Papacharalampos 2018: 41; author's translation)

It is the poem's material embodiment—its use of blank space to separate “falling” parts of words from those “remaining at the edge”—that brings forth this poem's characteristic visual rhythm and charges clusters of letters—*alls*, *lls*, and, above all, the tear-like *e* (*á* in the Greek original)—with a material quality, an intensity that a text can only produce as a script body. The dynamic of falling over the edge—a

8 The poet's original typescript and the rendering in the published book are virtually identical. I am grateful to Konstantinos Papacharalampos for providing me with the original typescript.

dynamic in the poem's embodied dimension—is dramatically emphasized in view of the whole of this script body.

In light of the passage from Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text*, we can now ask: How can we account for Barthes's two body aspects in the script body. Or, put in other words, is the script body just an object (to be measured, commented, interpreted, compared to other script bodies etc.), or is there a sensual quality to the script body—sensual not only in the sense that I, the concrete reader, am spatially positioned towards it, that I can see, smell, touch it, but in the sense of a script body that relates to my *sensing* body? In the following, I want to point out different ways in which poems gesture to specific parts of their script bodies, thus producing areas of intensified corporeality. In concluding, I will relate these examples to my argument about script bodies in reading situations.

3. Script Bodies Pointing to Body Parts

My first example is Constantine P. Cavafy's poem *In the Month of Athyr* (1917). This poem evokes a reading situation; it is a poem about reading (Diamantopoulou 2016: 323). A reader—the poem's speaker—is positioned in front of a tombstone, and tries to decipher it:

I can just read the inscription on this ancient stone.

"Lo[r]d Jesus Christ."	I make out a "So[u]l."
"In the mon[th] of Athyr"	"Lefkio[s] went to sleep."
Where his age is mentioned—	"lived to the age of"—
the Kappa Zeta shows	that he went to sleep a young man.
In the corroded part I see	"Hi[m] . . . Alexandrian."
Then there are three	badly mutilated lines—
though I can pick out a few words,	like "our tea[r]s," "grief,"
then "tears" again,	and "sorrow to [us] his [f]riends."
I think Lefkios	must have been greatly loved
In the month of Athyr	Lefkios went to sleep.

(Cavafy 1992: 77; Greek text: Kavafis 2000: vol. 1: 82)⁹

After the introductory first verse in which the poem's speaker speaks, from the second verse on, the deciphered text is quoted—including editorial symbols ([] and . . .)

9 I modified the English translation insofar as I restored a feature of the Greek original which is abandoned in the quoted translation: the division of each verse into two half-verses.

as used in classical textual philology and epigraphy. The speaker—who reveals themselves as a writer—is careful to represent in the text an object outside of it. The speaker is very precise in documenting the inscription's lacunae and clearly indicates in which instances they conjecture rather than decipher a certain letter. Thus, the speaker's speech or writing very attentively describes a script body (the fictitious stone), while it does not explicitly refer to the poem's own script body. The poem does, however, implicitly draw an analogy between the qualities of its own script body and those of the tombstone. Even if the division of verses into half-verses is a technique that is not unique to this poem but reappears in Cavafy's oeuvre, in this case it mirrors qualities of the object described. As Lilia Diamantopoulou writes, the

typographic arrangement of its verses points to the fragmentary nature of the inscription. [...] [T]he verses are divided into two half-verses which are separated from each other by several blank spaces. This creates a deep, text-free rupture running through the middle of the poem, suggesting that the poem as a whole can be interpreted as a visually represented—broken because ancient—marble stele. (Diamantopoulou 2016: 326; author's translation)

The poem appears to draw an analogy between the tombstone and its own script body. It does not, however, speak of or point to its own body in a pronounced way, as the following poems do.

My first example of such a more pronounced instance of a script body pointing to itself is *Posthumous Fame*, the opening poem of *Elegeia kai satyres* (Elegies and Satires, 1927), the second collection of poems published by Kostas Karyotakis—a younger contemporary of Cavafy:

The infinite universe demands our death,
the crimson mouths of flowers require it too.
Though spring may come once more, it'll leave us again,
and then we won't even be hints of shadows.

The brilliant light of the sun awaits our death.
But we've yet to see that triumphal sunset,
and then from April evenings to take our leave,
heading for the dark kingdoms down there below.

Only our verses [stichoi] can live on after us
a mere ten verses might survive, like [kathos] pigeons
that shipwrecked and castaways release to chance [tychi]
but when they bring the message, it's much too late [kairos].
(Karyotakis 2006: 73; Greek text: Karyotakis 2001: 61)

This poem is divided into three stanzas of four cross-rhymed lines each. In the Greek original, both the first and second stanzas begin with the phrase *To thanato mas*, “Our death,” thus setting the tone for its pessimistic perspective on the ephemerality of life. The interesting turn appears in the third stanza, when the poem speaks of the possibility of resisting death. This stanza is the third quatrain starting with line 9, so the verse that talks about “ten verses” is the poem’s tenth verse. In talking about ten verses at the beginning (in the Greek original) of its tenth verse, the poem treats itself, on one level, as a pheno-text in the sense of the passage quoted from Barthes, as a text that can be measured, whose verses can be counted. With this reference to the pheno-text, a certain tension is introduced in the last stanza: The tenth verse states that only ten verses can remain, but the stanza’s structure introduced by the first and affirmed by the second stanzas makes it necessary to transgress the boundary of ten verses in order to complete the rhyming pattern (the last words of the stanza’s four verses are, in the Greek original, *stichoi* [‘stiçi]—*kathos* [ka’θɔs]—*tychi* [‘tiçi]—*kairos* [ce’rɔs]). By pointing to its tenth line and calling it the last that can remain, the poem introduces a distinction between the first two and the last two verses of this stanza, rendering the closing couplet as hopeless and futile as the pigeons it speaks of. The last two lines speak, as it were, ghostlike, after the poem’s death. The final couplet has a different quality from the poem’s first ten lines, and this quality is produced via the pointing to a location in the text. In the situation of reading, this pointing to a location in the text is materially realized as a pointing to a specific area of the script body, a specific spot on the page that lies in front of me. Thus, in this poem, we encounter a reference to a location in the text (via its measurable parameters) which is, in the situation of reading, transformed into a pointing gesture, or deixis, to an area of the script body. By means of this deixis, the script body is structured in a way that does not make use of spatial devices (such as verse or stanza breaks) but modulates the intensity of different body areas. This intensified part of the script body has the potential of becoming significant in an embodied situation of reading.

In my third example, Cavafy’s 1919 poem *The Afternoon Sun*, a similar deixis to an area of the script body is at play, in this instance, however, not only by way of reference to the measurable parameters of the text or to the script body but also by referring to a kind of spatial relationality akin to the spatiality specific to the lived body of phenomenological theory. In *The Afternoon Sun*, the speaker returns to a room in which they long ago used to visit a lover.¹⁰ The poem is divided into six sections of varying length: from just one to eight verses. The longest section is the third. In describing the room’s space, this section connects the two layers of time, the *here and now* of the speaker’s present visit to the room (which is now one of several rooms in the building being rented out “as offices”) and the *then* of the erotic memory:

10 On the (non-)use of grammatical gender in this poem see Wolf 2024. The observations that follow draw on this essay.

Here, near the door, was the couch,
 a Turkish carpet in front of it.
 Close by, the shelf with two yellow vases.
 On the right—no, opposite—a wardrobe with a mirror.
 In the middle the table where he¹¹ wrote,
 and the three big wicker chairs.
 Beside the window was the bed
 where we made love so many times.
 (Cavafy 1992: 96; Greek text: Kavafis 2000, vol. 2: 13)

Of interest to my argument here is the verse that positions the imagined past table where the lover wrote “[i]n the middle” of the present room. Turning again to the measurable parameters of the script body, I realize that this verse—“In the middle the table where he wrote”—is *in the middle* of the poem’s body: It is the tenth of the poem’s 19 verses. In this verse, the space the poem evokes on the thematic level converges with its own spatial dimension, its script corporeality.

The technique is similar to that employed by Karyotakis, though admittedly more implicit than Karyotakis’s explicit reference to an individual verse: Both poems point to an area of their script bodies by referring to its measurable spatial dimension. What distinguishes this deictic reference to an area of the script body in *The Afternoon Sun* from that in *Posthumous Fame*, however, is its occurrence in the context of a web of spatial relations on the thematic level. I am referring, here, to Karl Bühler’s concept of the deictic function of language. Bühler considers certain elements in language that do not point to shared symbolic meanings but are fundamentally dependent on the speaker’s situation. The words *I* and *here* change their meaning depending on the situation they are uttered in (Bühler 1990: 91–166). The deictic “here [edo]” in the section’s first verse functions as a linguistic device to spatially root all the following relational spatial components—“near,” “in front of,” “[c]lose by,” “[o]n the right—no, opposite,” “[i]n the middle,” “[b]eside.” The system of spatial relations in this section is contingent upon the “here” (*edo*) and thus upon the speaker as the origin, the *origo* in Bühler’s terminology, of the deictic devices, that is, the speaker’s position in space. This is the kind of spatiality specific to the lived body, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty has analyzed it. “[M]y body,” he writes, “appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task.” Thus, the lived body’s spatiality is a “*spatiality of situation*”: “The word ‘here’ applied to my body does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or to external co-ordinates, but the laying down of the first co-ordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the situation of the body in face of its tasks.” (Merleau-

11 As elaborated in Wolf 2024, the subject’s grammatical gender in this verse is not specified in the Greek original. All the English and German translations I am aware of, however, specify it as either male (in most cases) or female (in one case).

Ponty 2005: 114f; italics in original) Seen from this angle, “In the middle” in the poem’s central verse not only allows the thematic space and the spatial dimension of the script body to converge but also connects the speaker’s deictic *edo* with the poem’s implicit deixis to its own center. But whereas the speaker’s deixis is one of *their* space—from my perspective an imagined one—the poem’s deixis operates within the space we—the poem’s script body and my lived body—actually share in the situation of reading. I can relate to the bodily area the poem points to in terms of the spatiality of my lived body: The script body area is located in front of me, slightly downwards, on my desk, between my lower arms, on the right-hand page of the opened book, roughly in the middle of the page. I am lifting my right arm right now, carry my hand towards the page and touch the word “μέση” (*mesi*, middle) with my index finger. I can feel the tender relief of the printed word on the paper.

Such a deictic gesture to the script body is more pronounced in a short poem by Giannis Ritsos, the opening poem of his 1981 poetic cycle *Small Suite in Red Major*:

Words too
are veins
blood flows
within them
when words unite [smigoun]
the paper’s skin
lights up in red [kokkino]
as does
the skin of the man
and the woman.
in the moment of love.
(Rítsos 1982: 19; Greek text: Ritsos 2004: 11)

This poem talks about the contact between words in a text and identifies them with veins filled with flowing blood.¹² It thus portrays the text as an organic, living body. By speaking about the *mixing* of words—the Greek *smigoun* can address both encounter in general and sexual intercourse—this body is characterized as an erotic body in the sense of Barthes’s body that consists “solely of erotic relations.” What appeared as metaphoric speech first, in Ritsos’s poem, is then transformed into an ambivalent reference that is at once metaphoric and not. We can read the paper’s lighting up in red as a continuation of the metaphorical portrayal of the text as a body. But the reference to the paper also alludes to the concrete situation of reading and thus points to the script body, the material realization of text. In terms of the script body, the inflammation is not just metaphorical anymore: the word “κόκκινο” (*kokkino*, red), as a symptom of linguistic intercourse, is actually to be found on

12 My reading draws on Wolf 2023: 210ff.

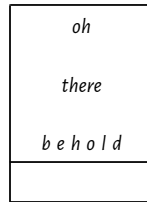
the paper in front of me. In the mise-en-page of the Greek edition, this is taken up by a typographical element in red on the page: The first letter of the book title, “Τὰ ἐρωτικά” (*Erotica*, The Erotic Poems) is given in a bright red (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Ritsos 2004: 11



This poem points to a very specific area of its script body, the word “red,” and connects this deixis with a reference to the materiality of the script body. I am touching the skin of the paper. It feels different.

My final example are poems from two of Papacharalampos's books of poetry, *tria. anthropon istoria* (2018), and *Exchange* (2020), the latter being the London-based Greek poet's first book in English. Since his debut volume *K-On* (2011), Papacharalampos's poetry has been characterized by a pronounced interest in the poem's spatial dimension, in its arrangement on the page. There is certainly a link to his training and professional career as a surveyor (Diamantopoulou 2016: 415). Some of these poems, in which visibility is fundamental to their functioning, are shaped in accordance with the silhouette of the human body. For instance, the poems in the first section of *tria*, titled *WHO?*, take on elongated forms that remind me of Cycladic idols. The first of these poems has a gestural component:



Father

Son

+

Holy Spirit

but after

so many gospels

how do you want now

to

make it

a poem?

(Papacharalampos 2018: 9; author's translation)

The arrangement of the words *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* enacts the gesture of crossing oneself—also alluded to by the “+”—and maps it onto the poem's script body. In my reading of this poem, this is inevitably connected to my reading body and its memories and experiences. It has led me to cross myself several times while reading (this time in London's National Poetry Library), even to turn the opened book from facing my face to facing what is in front of me (a window looking at buildings of the Southbank Center) to understand whether the poem crosses itself the Orthodox way (tapping first the right, then the left shoulder while saying “Holy Spirit”) or the

Catholic way (tapping first left, then right). Unsurprisingly, the poem conforms to the Orthodox tradition.

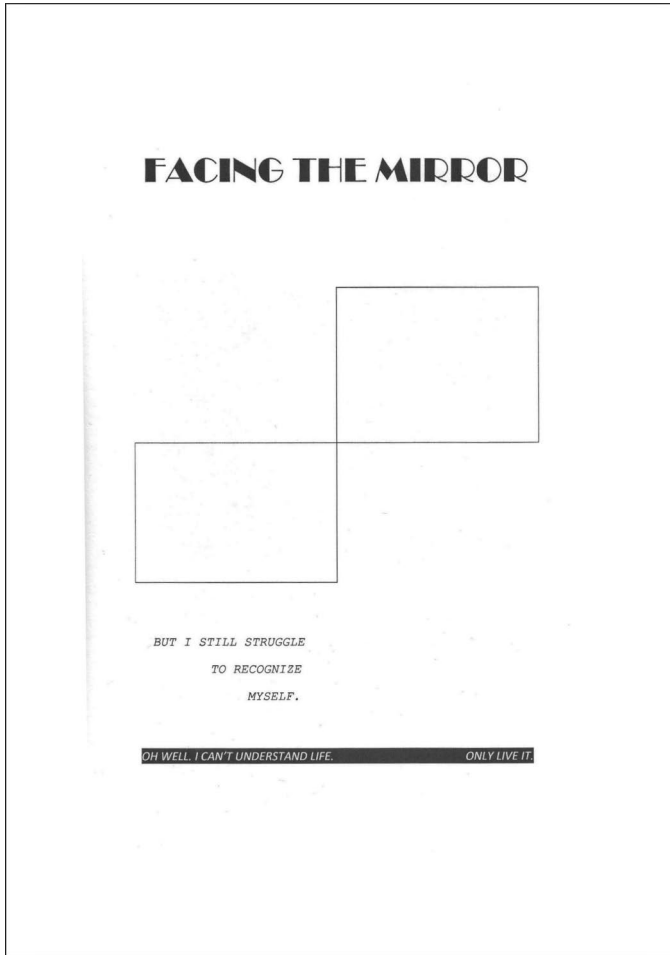
Exchange, however, is Papacharalampos's most radical book in its use of visuality, spatiality, and interactive affordances. Not only does it, like almost all his collections,¹³ make use of typographic variations (different fonts and sizes), spatial arrangement on the page, and graphic elements—sometimes in color—it also incorporates drawings by hand—probably created with a computer mouse—alongside color photography and diagrams. In doing so, it explicitly involves the reader's lived body in its project. One of the first pages of *Exchange* bears the words "FACING THE MIRROR" in bold black print at the top, beneath which readers find a structure of two squares touching at one corner. Below this structure, I read the words

BUT I STILL STRUGGLE
TO RECOGNIZE
MYSELF

And at the bottom of the page, in white print on a black background: "OH WELL. I CAN'T UNDERSTAND LIFE. ONLY LIVE IT." (Papacharalampos 2020: s.p.)

13 The only exception is the most recent book *zesto soma* (warm body, 2021), a collection of relatively traditional (in comparison with Papacharalampos's other books) poems in free verse.

Figure 2: Papacharalampos 2020: s.p.



Who is facing the mirror here? In my encounter with the book, it is inevitably my gaze that is directed toward the page, toward the two empty squares. At the same time, words come to me from the page; the agent who says “I” speaks towards my face. Thus, this page stages and brings about an encounter between its words and my face. While I gaze into the empty squares, the “I” directs its speech toward my face and states that it struggles to recognize itself in my face. The book page acquires the quality of a contact zone of my lived body and the poem’s¹⁴ script (in this case

14 It is questionable if *Exchange* contains poems. In light of the development of Papacharalampos’s writing so far, I would argue that *Exchange* represents a liminal form of poetry—evolving through a progressive engagement with poetic forms but tending toward a dissolution

partially graphical) body. This constellation is modelled after the constellation of the body and its image in the mirror.

This constellation is radicalized later in the book in a series of three consecutive pages. On one double page, there are two seemingly technical diagrams made up of thin colored lines. Beneath the diagrams' titles there is a short legend ascribing number ranges to the colors (blue, for instance, is "0–5"). The first, two-dimensional diagram, titled "What-Is-A-Better-Future," appears to relate parameters of a positive future development to one another ("Balancing," "Technology," and "Environment" on the horizontal axis, "Rights," "Human," and "Advancing" on the vertical). The second diagram, "Meta-Human-God-Like-Love," takes up this structure but turns it three-dimensional. Now the two basic axes build a field from which the structure formed by the colored lines rises (there is no specification for the third axis). Here, the words on the horizontal and vertical axes form a syntagm: "My Hand Reaches Your Hand." Below the diagram there is a scrawly mouse drawing consisting of a curve and several rather chaotic movements. This drawing guides my gaze to the words written below it "*Then dance dance dance*" (Papacharalampos 2020: s.p.). The somewhat ironic tension between the objectifying impetus of the technical diagram and the affective constellation it attempts to capture dissolves into the result of a gestural movement—evidence of the hand that performed it—while the words tentatively identify this movement as a dance. Turning the next page, I face a rectangular frame outlined in a thin black line. The frame occupies the greater part of the page, leaving only a narrow white space outside it. In the frame's top left corner, I read the words: "**Now draw your own map**" (Papacharalampos 2020: s.p.; emphasis in original).

into an art form whose format is the book rather than the poem. See, for an account of artists' books in general, Drucker (2004); on the significance of the Russian and Italian Futurist movements (a central point of reference for Papacharalampos) in the history of the artist's book see Drucker (2004: 46–57); on the relation of poetry and artists' books see Moeglin-Delcroix (1997: 59–96).

Figure 3: Papacharalampos 2020: s.p.

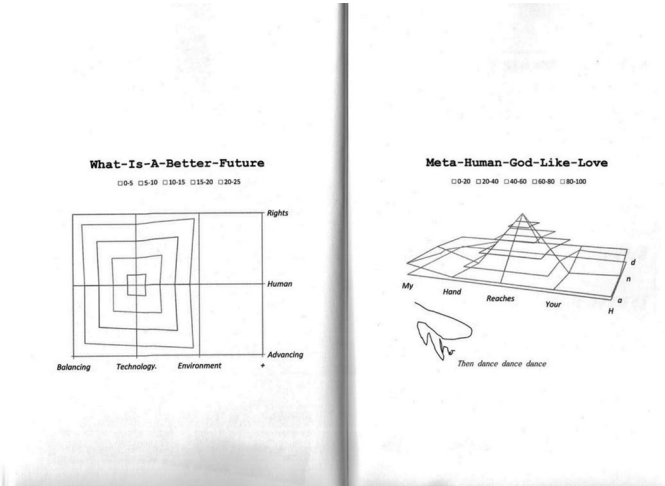
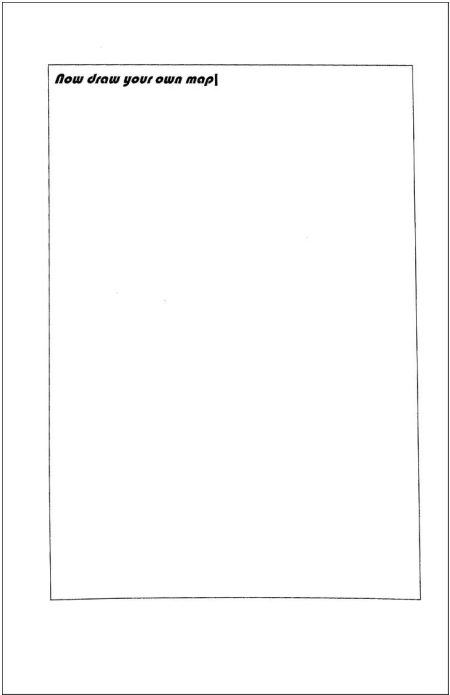


Figure 4: Papacharalampos 2020: s.p.



The sequence of these pages invites me to activate my own body, to draw a diagram, or any kind of “map,” for myself. At the same time, the page can be interpreted as a map in itself, insofar as it attempts to confine my possible drawing gestures to a specific location on the page, mapping my gestures. The white space of the page enclosed by the frame becomes a kind of material interface (itself a graphical script body) that mediates between my lived body’s actions—even if I do not draw but just look—and the books script bodies.¹⁵ I did not draw anything. The white space made me gasp.

4. Conclusion: Script Bodies as Oriented Toward Lived Bodies

The poems by Cavafy, Karyotakis, Ritsos, and Papacharalampos discussed here point, in various degrees of explicitness and concreteness, and in various ways, to specific areas of their script bodies. Thus, they display affordances not only of sensing and perceiving, of meaning-attribution and understanding, but also of embodied, gestural activity. In light of Roman Jakobson’s analysis of the poetic function as the “set (*Einstellung*) toward the MESSAGE as such” and his specification of its effect as a “promoting” of the “palpability of signs” (Jakobson 1981: 25) it is necessary to assume that *all* poetic texts bear an element of deixis toward their signs. From the vantage point according to which texts are embodied in script bodies, this deixis toward the signs always implies a deixis toward the script body. In other words, I deliberately selected particularly striking examples in which certain traits are expressed in an intensified form, which still occur in literary texts in general.

Since language is social, speaking and writing always imply an addressee, be it God, the Big Other, an imagined audience or readership, a single empirical person, or oneself. When texts perform deictic gestures that point to their script bodies, however, this general address becomes specified as *situated*. In this aspect, texts imply a shared situation in which only a deictic gesture can make sense, and thus, they imply that their addressee is a lived body. In the context of the reading situation, the texts’ address is specified as an orientation of the script body toward a lived body. In the situation of reading, my lived body does not (only) encounter an objectified, measurable body—the equivalent of the bodies of physics or geometry, Barthes’s phenotext—it encounters a script body oriented in concrete space toward something (me, the reader’s lived body): an equivalent to the lived body and its specific kind of spatiality.¹⁶ To take up the question asked at the outset of my discussion of examples:

15 For a theoretical account of the interface see Wirth (2025: 72f).

16 I avoid speaking of the intentionality of the script body—even if the etymological connection to the Latin *intentio*, tension, seems quite adequate to denote the orientation towards the reader’s lived body—since in phenomenological theory the concept of intentionality is so

the script body, in its “erotic” aspect, cannot be understood as a sensing body—that would be a mystification. But the script body *can* be seen as *oriented toward* my body, and specifically to my sensing lived body.

Against this backdrop, the value of readers’ experiencing in the situation of reading comes into light. My experiencing in the situation of reading is not merely subjective or contingent. My experiencing interacts with various components of a rich situation, including impulses coming from the oriented script body with which I share a situation.¹⁷ Gendlin writes that “**what each is within an interaction is already affected by the other**” (Gendlin 2018: 31; emphasis in original). Focusing on my bodily experiencing is a way to approach the situation of reading by which both the script body and my lived body are transformed: they “cause each other by ‘original interaffecting’” (ibid.: 31). Thus, experiencing could serve as a methodological key to a mode of reading that takes the embodied dimension of reading seriously. This includes interactive modes of creating meaning. It also includes confrontation with those aspects of aesthetic experience that resist meaning. I can try to make sense of my experience of gasping when confronted with Papacharalampos’s white rectangle. I can try to unfold a sense implied in my experiencing but not yet fit for verbalization (Gendlin 1991). But in the white page’s provocation and my gasping, in my touching the paper, or feeling the letters’ relief, there is also a component of irreducible materiality that exceeds meaning: that triggers processes of meaning-making but also evades them.

closely connected to the notion of consciousness: “Conscious processes are also called *intentional*; but then the word intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness of something” (Husserl 1982: 33; emphasis in original; Merleau-Ponty 2005: xix-xxi).

- 17 It is an open question how to methodologically model and control the employment of experiencing in reading. I want to give only two clues here: First, in the context of the Research Training Group *Experiencing Gender. Constitution and Transformation of Being in the World*, methods adapted from focusing have proven productive to slow down encounters with materials of all kinds and to allow a concentration on experiencing (Deloch 2025). Second, my suggestion that I understand my bodily experiencing as interacting with impulses coming from the script body and use my experiencing as a way to grasp the latter draws on the dynamics of transference and countertransference in psychoanalytical technique and theory. A methodology of reading in the sense suggested here can learn a great deal from psychoanalysis.

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