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Towards a Somatic Narratology: Enactivism and its Implications for Literary Studies in Max Blecher's Modernist Legacy

Abstract: Within Romanian prose of the first half of the twentieth century, Max Blecher literature occupies a singular position in the narration of the body, representing corporeality as prior to any determinate form of thought. In his prose, embodied memory and perception as a mode of knowledge intersect to configure a body that actively generates its own cognitive processes. Drawing on the explanatory model of 4E cognition, articulated in terms of embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended cognition, and following the methodology of enactivism, a postcognitivist approach, this study employs a somatic framework to analyze Max Blecher's modernist prose. In the first part, I analyse the enactivist methodology in relation to literary studies and propose the concept of somatic narratology. In the second part, starting from the enactivist hypothesis that perception is a bodily activity, I explore Blecher's perspectivism through the relationship it constructs with the body and the environment.

Keywords: 4E Cognition; Enactivism; Embodiement; Embodied Memory; Perception; Somatic Narratology; Modernism; Max Blecher.

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“We have to let bodies tell us their story.
We need a theory of bodies.”¹

To claim that the Cognitive Sciences have gained momentum in the twenty-first century has become a critical commonplace. What is less evident, however, is that the once relatively homogeneous field of traditional cognitivism has in recent decades been increasingly displaced by 4E cognition²: an approach that has emerged as a response not only to “classical disembodied cognitivism”³, but in some cases also to embodied cognition⁴. 4E cognition constitutes a broad, flexible, and at the same time promising explanatory framework that remains insufficiently problematized and therefore under-theorized. It expands the analysis of mind and cognition beyond the notion of the *embodied* by introducing three additional dimensions: *embedded*, *enactive*, and *extended*. *Embodied* emphasizes the relation of interdependence between body and mind; *embedded* foregrounds the role of the environment in shaping emotions and psychological states; *enactive* highlights the dynamic dimension of the body and the primacy of movement in

the logic of embodied mind; and *extended* takes into account external objects that become integral components (and triggers) of the cognitive system⁶.

Within the framework of 4E cognition, a branch of the Cognitive Sciences that has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years across disciplines such as psychology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, and robotics, enactivism has emerged as a significant theoretical orientation. As Herman notes, enactivists, or postcognitivists (in his terms), distinguish themselves from traditional cognitivists by rejecting “internalist, sandwich models of cognition as an interior buffer space between, on the one hand, perceptual inputs and, on the other, output that takes the form of behaviors or actions”⁷.

For enactivists such as Alva Noë (*Action in Perception*, 2004) and Elena Clare Cuffari, Ezequiel Di Paolo, and Hanne De Jaegher (*Linguistic Bodies: The Continuity Between Life and Language*, 2018), the body, understood as *organic, sensorimotor, and/or intersubjective*⁸, interacts with the environment and with other bodies through the sensorimotor system, that is a network integrating sensory organs and neural pathways that enables perception, movement, and coordinated action. The body is thus “active and on scene, participating, whenever and wherever you go”⁹, remaining conscious of its own enaction and sensations.

Rooted in Cartesian and behaviorist traditions, two prevalent interpretive biases are subjected to systematic critique by the enactivist approach (and, more broadly, by models proposed within 4E cognition): (1) the conception of the body as a machine (the computer model of mind), and (2) the

localization and confinement of cognitive processes exclusively within the brain. Positioned at the intersection of cybernetics, phenomenology, pragmatism, and biophilosophy, enactivism emphasizes not only the embodied nature of the individual (a concern it shares with traditional cognitivism), but also the relational dynamics that the body sustains with its environment and with other bodies. Formulated by enactivists, the concept of “intercorporeality” articulates empirical findings indicating that human bodies are intrinsically oriented toward interaction: the sensorimotor system develops as an “intersubjective body”¹⁰. Within this ongoing process of interaction – or “coregulation”¹¹, in enactivist terms – human experience emerges through a dialectical interplay between the “individual sense-making”, the organism’s autonomous embodied engagement with the world, and “participatory sense-making”¹², the co-creation of meaning that arises through interaction with other agents.

In terms of aesthetic reception (and, by extension, literary reception), on the one hand, such a theory of the body reorients critical emphasis away from the much-contested autonomy of the aesthetic toward a grounded mode of engagement with the artistic object, one that is shaped by social, historical, cultural, and economic conditions. On the other hand, it moves beyond a central dichotomy of twentieth-century aesthetic theory between *meaning* (understood semiotically) and *experience* (understood somatically). From an enactivist perspective, bodily experience is constitutive of subjectivity: meaning emerges through enactive processes in which the embodied subject generates sense for itself and for others through its

mode of existence as Dasein, that is, through being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) as an integral dimension of lived experience. Enactivists refer to this mode of interaction as “coregulation” and conceptualize it as a sensorimotor phenomenon that occurs when “two autonomous agents regulate both their own coupling with the environment and their mutual coupling”¹³. Nonetheless, beyond the conceptual and terminological proliferation that has marked the social sciences and humanities over the past two decades, an important insight emphasized by enactivists and largely neglected by predominantly representational and Cartesian approaches to literature is that “bodies are unfinished, always becoming”¹⁴, being fundamentally “processual, relational, and situated”¹⁵.

Against the backdrop of modernist reading frameworks grounded in *the inward turn*¹⁶, and thus in a retreat into interiority and cognition that conceives of the body as a completed project, we propose a critical framework that approaches the fictional body according to the parameters that enactivism attributes to the *organic*, *sensorimotor*, and *intersubjective* body. Understood as a body in becoming (*processual*), as socially constituted (*relational*, *intersubjective*), and as embedded within a specific spatiotemporal, historical, and cultural context (*situated*), the fictional body may be understood as functioning as a generative principle not only of content but also of the organization of textual logic – that is, of form. This perspective grounds what we term somatic narratology, conceived both as a continuation of and as a critical response to cognitive narratology, as formulated by David Herman¹⁷, which is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates

classical narratology, literary studies, and cognitive science to investigate fictional minds and their interaction with the reader’s cognition, examining how readers comprehend and interpret narratives.

Somatic narratology foregrounds first-person narration, wherein the narrator is fully present and reflexively aware of their own embodied experience. Given that the body dynamics plays a central role in somatic narratology, the boundary between fiction and non-fiction is frequently blurred. A text can never be merely a novel, insofar as the narrator’s bodily experience anchors the narrative in empirical reality. In the case of Max Blecher’s prose, although the three works exhibit varying degrees of fictionalization – *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată* (1936) being regarded as a novel, *Inimi cicatrizate* (1937) as an autobiographical novel, and *Vizuina luminată* (1971) as a sanatorium journal – it is the narrator’s embodied experience that unifies these texts, situating all three on the threshold between fiction (novel) and non-fiction (autobiography).

From an enactivist perspective, the fictional body is enactive along two dimensions: perception and memory. This paper focuses on perception, conceived as encompassing the lived body alongside the temporal and cognitive dimensions of memory, insofar as these shape the narrator’s embodied engagement with the world. From this perspective, somatic narratology elucidates how embodied subjectivity informs both narrative content and textual logic.

According to enactivist frameworks, perception is not an internal representation generated in the brain by the perceptual system, as posited by computational

theories of vision. Rather, it is understood as a form of “skillful bodily activity”¹⁸. This does not imply that visual experiences are converted into experiences of other senses; instead, perception arises from the way “sensations co-vary or would co-vary with actual or possible movements”¹⁹. For example, as stated by Alva Noë²⁰, perceiving the spatial layout of a room is not simply a matter of registering tactile or proprioceptive sensations in isolation. Perception does not arise from isolated sensory inputs; rather, it emerges through the dynamic interplay between bodily sensations and sensorimotor knowledge. As an individual moves attentively through space, the body continuously modulates and interprets sensory feedback, enabling the apprehension of objects and the organization of the surrounding environment. In this sense, perception is an embodied, active process, in which sensations acquire significance only insofar as they are coordinated with actual or potential movements (including remembered ones), resulting in a coherent awareness of spatial structure. This process relies both on the immediate presence of the body and on a reactivation of bodily memory, highlighting the inseparability of experience and embodiment. Literature, in turn, provides a particularly effective medium for rendering this dialectic of the body visible, functioning simultaneously as a site for the development of interdisciplinary methodologies that integrate insights from embodied cognition and narrative analysis.

The second part of this paper examines Max Blecher’s oeuvre from an enactivist perspective in order to show how an embodiment-centered approach to modernist literature allows for the articulation

of a somatic narratology. I argue that when the body of the reader and that of the narrator or character converge within what enactivist theory terms *participatory sense-making* (and what narratology would describe as an act of identificatory engagement), narrative functions not merely as “a tool for thinking”²¹, but, more decisively, as a medium for thinking the body, thereby fostering reflexive awareness of embodiment and of one’s own experience of pain. As David Morris observes, writers who narrativize pain “tell a story about pain that differs significantly from the traditional medical account and helps to reveal its limitations”²². Such narratives exceed the explanatory frameworks of anatomy, individual psychology, or specific historical junctures, operating instead as discourses on an experience that typically remains underarticulated within social life: pain. Since pain largely remains underarticulated within social discourse, owing to its ontological resistance to linguistic expression²³, literary representations of pain do not merely risk distorting the experience they seek to describe²⁴; rather, they possess the capacity to generate new experiential configurations of bodily pain.

Situated, to varying degrees, at the intersection of fiction (the novel) and non-fiction (autobiography), all three works articulate the narrator’s and the author’s experience of illness, tracing in parallel the gradual emergence and transformation of pain. Initially, pain manifests as states of confusion and faintness, accompanied by distinctive olfactory sensations that foreshadow its onset (*Întâmplări în irealitate imediată*). It is subsequently reconfigured through an aquatic imaginary (jellyfish, hydra, fish), suggesting a body that

progressively sinks as the disease advances and therapeutic interventions intensify (*Inimi cicatrizate*). In its final articulation, pain is figured as an ultimate gesture of endurance and lucidity in the face of death (*Vizuina luminată*).

In *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, the onset of illness during childhood and adolescence is retrospectively reconstructed within an atmosphere marked by confusion, prefiguring both fainting episodes and the eventual diagnosis of Pott's disease, a form of osteoarticular tuberculosis affecting the spinal column. *Inimi cicatrizate* provides a realist depiction of the disease's progression and of the protagonist's lived experience in the Berck sanatorium. There, the young Emanuel strives to participate in formative aspects of life despite the immobilization of his body in a plaster cast used as a therapeutic device, his mobility being limited to a wheeled stretcher. *Vizuina luminată* takes the form of an sanatorium diary, in which the narrator records everyday life in the sanatorium, his confrontation with the life-threatening illness, and the gradual emergence of an awareness of his own mortality.

Radu Țeposu's monograph *Suferințele tânărului Blecher [The Sorrows of Young Blecher]* (1996) – the first comprehensive critical study devoted to the modernist author in Romanian literary historiography – constitutes a paradigmatic example of participatory reading, one that engages the reader's corporeal experience and thereby anticipates the principles of a somatic narratology. In the concluding section of this monograph, composed during Țeposu's retreat in a monastic cell at the Bistrița Monastery, the critic records the following experience:

As I was drafting the final sentences of the essay on Blecher, my body was suddenly invaded by a metallic faintness. My blood was no longer animated by swift, surging fish, but seemed instead obstructed by barbed-wire efflorescence. (...) These barbed-wire growths were climbing toward my shoulder, attempting to scale the clavicle. For a moment, I believed I was succumbing to mere fancy – that the sufferings of the young Blecher, about whom I had been writing for an entire week, had passed onto the page and, from there, into my own body. I thought I was simply exhausted, afflicted by a general depletion of being²⁵.

What Țeposu documents here is of particular relevance for the present study, namely the dual “transfer of perspective”²⁶ that somatic narratology presupposes in accordance with enactivist principles. On one level, this involves *intercorporeality* and fictional *coregulation*: the reciprocal shaping of interactions between bodies and their environment, and the relational dynamics established between the fictional body and the empirical body of the reader. On another level, it entails the simultaneous individual and *participatory sense-making* of the reader. Three observations are especially noteworthy in this respect. First, Țeposu, as reader, experiences a form of fainting or corporeal invasion that parallels the embodied experiences of the narrator in Blecher's novels. Second, the aquatic imaginary (first thoroughly analysed by Diana Adamek²⁷) also emerges in Țeposu's account, albeit in a contrasting register. In Blecher, motifs such as jellyfish

(*Întâmplări...*, *Inimi cicatrizate*), hydra tentacles (*Întâmplări...*), or aquarium-like display cases (*Vizuina luminată*) signify the dissolution of corporeal boundaries, not through decay but as the dispersion of bodily matter in a process of submersion, reflecting the instability and fluidity of the embodied self. In Țeposu, by contrast, the bodily reaction occurs within a state of peaceful, normative corporeal equilibrium, in which the body is figuratively “animated by swift, surging fish”, conveying a sense of vitality and healthy embodiment. Whereas in Blecher the aquatic imagery evokes the fragmentation and dispersal of the corporeal subject, in Țeposu it underscores the fullness and resilience of the embodied reader, highlighting the participatory, but non-empathetic engagement with the text.

Drawing on enactivism as a paradigm of 4E cognition, I further advance a reading centered on the modernist body in Max Blecher’s work. Blecher was cut short by an early death, but left a concise yet suggestive oeuvre that attests to his literary potential.



In a world where “there is neither network, nor contour, nor subject”²⁸, but only wax statues, plaster bodies, and “small ornaments and domestic objects”²⁹, as Diana Adamek emphasizes, the only comprehensible reality is that of the body. Yet Blecher’s literature should not be interpreted in terms of an inward turn, meaning a “journey into the interior of the body” in which “the human body is the «den» illuminated by the mind”³⁰. Within Romanian prose of the first half of the twentieth century, Max Blecher literature occupies

a singular position in the narration of the body, representing corporeality as prior to any determinate form of thought, and as a locus of memory whose expression exceeds the intelligibility accessible to consciousness. Such memory is shaped by the perceiver’s sensorimotor capacities, namely, the set of skills through which sensory perception and bodily action are coordinated, enabling the subject to actively explore, interpret, and engage with the surrounding world. For instance, in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, perception is inseparable from the static spaces of memory, which are often accursed sites (“locuri blestemate”) or spatially marked locations where fainting episodes occur, such as streets, rooms, houses, gardens, or parks. In this sense, perception is conceived dialectically. On the one hand, it functions as the condition for the existence of objects and of the accursed spaces; on the other, it is itself an object among other objects, constructed from the “flesh” of the spaces and objects that the body traverses, touches, and senses: “(...) strong adhesions bound me to them, with invisible anastomoses that made me, like the other objects, an object of the room itself, in the same way that an organ grafted onto living flesh, through subtle exchanges of substances, integrates into an unfamiliar body”³¹. This osmosis with the objects of the room accounts for a body so thoroughly embedded into its environment that emotions and mental states cannot be conceived independently of it: the joy of the objects’ new existence is experienced as the narrator’s own exhilaration at existing within “a new halo”³².

Another comprehensive and distinctly Proustian example appears at the opening of *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, where

the pivot between a moment of reverie and a crisis of identity, one that distorts the contours of all objects and renders them indistinguishable, is determined by the narrator's actual gaze. Following the insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the enactivists, this gaze should not be understood as an internal representation produced in the brain by the perceptual system, as computational theories of perception would suggest, but rather as "a kind of skillful bodily activity"³³, and an embodied means of knowledge. It is the body that perceives the osmosis with the objects in the room, and it is likewise the body that experiences the "sensation of the world receding"³⁴ in the moments preceding fainting episodes (*Întâmplări...*). This constitutes a significant innovation in the history of Romanian literature, in which narrative form is governed neither by reference to historical reality, as in realist novels, nor by the psychological interiority of characters, as in interwar literature, but by a form of memory that is fundamentally embodied:

All thoughts, all memories, and all visions that I saw beyond my eyelids sank, submerged, into the same warm darkness inside the skin, which absorbed them without a trace. In this warm temperature and in this nameless intimacy, they lay perfectly indistinguishable and capable of merging with one another: all memories, all feelings, everything I had ever believed important in our lives³⁵.

The embodied memory identifies the potential sites of crisis: "Crises occurred more easily and more frequently in enclosed rooms. (...) The room itself seemed to

prepare for it [i.e., the fainting episode]: a warm and welcoming intimacy seeped from the walls, flowing over all the furniture and objects"³⁶. It is also the bodily memory – understood, following Alva Noë, as "experience," that is, the body's implicit knowledge intertwined with its current relation to objects and the accursed spaces – that gives significance to odors and other sensory stimuli, such as the perception of dampness, thereby demonstrating how meaning emerges through the body's ongoing engagement with its environment. There is no universal or fixed odor of dampness; its significance varies according to context and the body's present and past experiences. Most often, smells in Blecher's prose adhere to a naturalistic imaginary and carry a negative connotation, signaling either fainting episodes (*Întâmplări...*), bodily decay in contrast to the aquatic imaginary (*Inimi cicatrizate*), or the body's preparation for death (*Vizuina luminată*). Across these three works, there is a progression from external to internal perception. In *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, the narrative registers the odors of rotting vegetables, dampness, and mold in the air. In *Inimi cicatrizate*, the sensory focus shifts to the pungent smell of algae and decay, mold-scented plaster (associated with the body), foul bodily excretions, and the putrefaction of jellyfish. Finally, in *Vizuina luminată*, the olfactory register becomes even more intimate and macabre, encompassing the stench of a dead horse and the skull of a horse in which the sanatorium-bound narrator takes refuge.

According to Alva Noë, "perceptual content"³⁷ is not analogous to the content of a static image; rather, in vision, as in touch, it is acquired through "active inquiry and

exploration³⁸. This does not suggest that vision is replaced by the sense of touch; rather, it indicates that visual experience is inextricably intertwined with our holistic, embodied existence as living, flesh-and-blood beings. Perception involves more than merely receiving sensory impressions; it entails sensations that are understood within the context of the body's engagement with its environment. The form of an object is thus not established by a mental representation within the brain, nor exclusively by the tactile feedback it generates in the hands or feet; rather, it emerges from the manner in which sensations are produced through deliberate sensorimotor exploration of space.

An illustrative example of this embodied, sensorimotor mode of perception can be found in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, where the narrator recollects childhood explorations beneath the covers, noting that the most remote and vivid memories are intertwined with early sexual curiosity. The movement of a lantern under the sheet, the folds of the fabric, and the subtle valleys formed between them are apprehended sensorimotorically, as the body's ongoing sensations and movements actively constitute the perception of these forms. These recollections demonstrate how Blecher's prose enacts a memory that is inseparable from the body's interaction with objects and space, highlighting the centrality of corporeal experience in shaping narrative.

A similar approach is taken toward the experience of color from a phenomenological standpoint. According to the enactivist Alva Noë, color perception is shaped by four interrelated factors: the geometry of viewing, the lighting conditions, the

chromatic properties of surrounding surfaces, and the presence of contrasting objects³⁹. Since literature continuously enacts and renders perceptible the dialectic of the body (both past and present), this framework is particularly pertinent for literary analysis. A striking example of such phenomenological experience of color is found in *Vizuina luminată*, where, although the narrator attributes his impressions to a "continuous interior illumination", the perception of color is primarily determined by the body's spatial position within the room, subsequently influenced by the horizontal posture of the immobilized narrator, and further modulated by ambient lighting and the visual contrasts created by surrounding objects:

When I evoke a memory with my eyes closed and it re-emerges with the intensity of its original reality; when, at other times, scenes and events that never actually occurred pass through my mind with the same intensity and in the same convincing light; when, opening my eyes, I look around on a sunny afternoon and all the colors and forms of the day surge into my vision like fountains – the fine, scattered green of the grass, the glossy, silk-like yellow of the dahlias, and the child-like blue of the forget-me-nots, which responds to the intense, smooth blue of the sky, so deep and uniform that its mystery envelops my mind in a haze of lucid vertigo – when memories, burrows, and decor drift in this manner across and beyond my eyelids, I often ask myself with great emotion what the meaning of this continuous interior illumination might be

and how much of the world it constitutes, only to find that the answer is invariably as discouraging as it is inexorable...⁴⁰.

The narrator's perception is shaped by what his body does, can do, and is prepared to do. This principle holds across Blecher's oeuvre: in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, the body engages in continuous exploratory movement through the town and its surroundings; in *Inimi cicatrizate* and *Vizuina luminată*, the narrator's bodily movement within the sanatorium, immobilized in a plaster cast, is facilitated by a wheeled carriage. Even when constrained by immobility, the Blecherian body remains fundamentally enactive: through perception (*embodiment*), through interaction with others (*coregulation*), through the body's immersion in its environment (*embedded*), and through the use of the carriage (*extended cognition*).

This study does not address the social, and thus intersubjective, dimension of the Blecherian body, as discussions of environmental interdependence are extensive. As such, the focus remains on the environment, specifically on how the carriage and the cast function as mediators, enabling the body to enact and explore its surroundings despite physical limitations, while remaining sensitive to the influences of the same environment. This interaction exemplifies what Richard Menary calls a "symmetric influence", wherein "the inner and outer features have a mutually constraining causal influence on one another that unfolds over time"⁴¹.

Unlike the protagonists of other early twentieth-century Romanian literature, such as Maxențiu in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's *Concert din muzică de Bach*

[*A Bach Concert*, 1927], who are preoccupied with their bodily suffering, or the frequently cited self-constructed victims exemplified by the narrators of Kafka and Thomas Mann, Blecher's narrator resists self-pity. His body is not a passive locus of degradation; rather, it is *processual, relational, and situated*, actively thinking through movement and immersion in the environment. Whether in the autobiographical fiction *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, the highly dialogic *Inimi cicatrizate*, or the reflective *Vizuina luminată*, the position of the speaking body is always clear: where it is located (on the street, by the sea, on the dunes, in the sanatorium, at the landfill, at the city's edge, or in the commercial district), what it observes, what it touches, and what it feels at each moment.

Empirical evidence supports a central claim of enactivist theory, namely that "normal vision depends not only on movement of the body relative to the environment, but on self-actuated movement"⁴². A paradigmatic example is the case of Ian Waterman, documented by the sociologist Jonathan Cole (1991). After contracting a virus in childhood, Waterman developed a rare neuropathy: although his motor system remained intact, he lost all sensation from the neck down, except for pain. The only means by which he could engage with and control his body was through active perception. However, if he was positioned so that he could no longer see his body, or if the lights were turned off, his bodily functioning would collapse⁴³. This example is particularly instructive for understanding the narrator's embodied experience in Max Blecher's oeuvre. In his work, the body is always within the narrator's visual field, and, as in the case of Waterman, its

absence would signify a withdrawal from conscious awareness.

A second significant reason for invoking the previous example is that, particularly in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, narrative perspective is largely constituted through the body's movement within its environment, to the extent that the surrounding space frequently appears as an extension of the self: "Around me stretched the muddy lot. This was my authentic flesh, stripped of clothes, stripped of skin, stripped of muscle, stripped down to the mud"⁴⁴. Of particular importance is the narrator's desire to experience the world through the viewpoint of a dog, that he presses his head into the plush of an armchair until it causes him pain, or that he indulges in the meticulous examination of a turnip, with his head resting upon some old sacks, leg over leg⁴⁵, as if watching television. The Blecherian body, first that of the child in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, then of the young Emanuel in *Inimi cicatrizate*, and later the resigned adult in *Vizuina luminată* penetrates and engages with objects and environments in the same manner that Holban's narrator enters the minds of beloved women through memory. Things, plants, and animals communicate with the narrator to the same degree as humans do, because, for Blecher's narrator, it is the body that mediates contact with the material and affective world. Conceived not as a mere surface or interface but as a platform of exchange and proximity, the body provides access to the inner life of the self and ensures that even the ostensibly static elements in Blecher's novels remain dynamic. A particularly illustrative instance of this embodied dynamism is provided by the rooms in which childhood

fainting episodes occur, as vividly recalled by the narrator:

In closed rooms, however, the crises occurred more easily and more frequently. (...) The room itself seemed to prepare for him [the faint]: a warm and welcoming intimacy filtered from the walls, flowing over all the furniture and objects. (...) I looked with open eyes at everything around me, yet the objects lost their usual meaning; a new existence bathed them. (...) But not only that: the objects were seized by a true frenzy of freedom. They became independent of one another, yet this independence did not signify mere isolation, but an ecstatic exaltation⁴⁶.

This is a body that both feels and internalizes all that it experiences, for which episodes of fainting are prefigured by moments in which objects seem to align in order to withstand corporeal contingency: "the courtyard became a kind of salon, and I felt increasingly light within it. All the objects made desperate efforts not to sink into obscurity"⁴⁷. For this body, movement and mobility primarily entail the ongoing recalibration and reorganization of perceptual experience. What is decisive for Blecher's narrator – whether the child exploring the world in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, the ailing young man in *Inimi cicatrizate* moving by carriage, or the adult chronicler in the sanatorium diary *Vizuina luminată* – is not the traversal of long distances, but the selective, attentive manner in which he apprehends, records, and assimilates the spaces he encounters daily, first within the immediate surroundings of the home (*Întâmplări...*) and later

within the spatial confines of the sanatorium (*Inimi cicatrizate, Vizuina luminată*).

The only form of long-distance bodily movement in space is writing. Through writing, Blecher extends the memory of “accursed spaces” into the realms of the fantastic (e.g., the scene with the police dogs in *Vizuina luminată*), dreams, and technical realism (mediated by modern technologies such as photography and cinema) (*Întâmplări...*), which liberates the character from the confines of a Kantian subjectivity. The Blecherian narrator does not become what he recollects through an intellectual process; rather, he is repeatedly reconstituted, after each crisis (*Întâmplări*), following the application or removal of a cast (*Inimi cicatrizate*), or after surgical procedures (*Vizuina luminată*), as a body among other bodies, a body that must reconstruct its contours and restore the sense of stability of the world’s sensible surface. An illustrative passage capturing Emanuel’s attempt to regain possession of his body appears in *Inimi cicatrizate*, during the removal of his cast:

When he opened his eyes a little, Emanuel found that a territory of skin had come up small and pink from beneath the filth. As a child, on rainy days, he would wait with the same impatience for the asphalt to dry on the pavements so he could watch clear spots appearing... Slowly, the strip of cleanliness grew over his chest, then his thighs... Ecstatically Emanuel touched the skin with his fingers. Its former tactility reawakened, like a calligraphy of tiny, precise trickles running and snaking below the surface. He wanted to leap off the stretcher-bed and take

off at a run, anywhere, on the beach, naked, clean, luminous...

Eva [i.e. the nurse] helped him put on his shirt, then the rest of his clothes. They fluttered about him now like scarves; the shirt found no intimate point of contact with his body; it seemed to float in its entirety above his flesh, with its new-born, slightly sensitive skin⁴⁸.



The Blecherian diluted body, which seeks to reconstitute itself through a memory that simultaneously closes and opens it to/into the world, emerges in interwar literature as the consequence of three factors, each linked to specific historical moments through which modernism must be correlated with modernity. First, there is the dehumanization and anomization brought about by the First World War. It is worth noting that *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată* was published in 1936, a year of peak creativity for local (and not only local) modernism. Second, there is the transformation of the individual into an impersonal subject on the industrial production line. A particularly striking example, beyond frequent references to cinema, lies in the narrator’s photograph in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, which is said to have circulated globally before reaching the narrator’s provincial town. Third, the discursivization of the body is informed by developments in empiricist psychology, which, by the end of the nineteenth century, “cast doubt on the separation between subjectivity and the physical world”⁴⁹.

The conclusions of the present study can be summarized in at least four points: 1. The humanities and social sciences have

witnessed a proliferation of concepts in recent years, leading to a conceptual inflation that often compels scholars to revisit, recycle, and adapt earlier theoretical frameworks. The renewed attention to the concept of modernism, for instance, is both an effect of this inflation and a consequence of the current focus on discussions of modernity, which also signals the decline of postmodernism as a discourse of change⁵⁰. Enactivism, however, foregrounds a type of attention distinct from that offered by gender studies or ecocriticism, insofar as it provides a methodological framework for reading the body in literature without relying on thematic differentiation or positive discrimination. The enactive approach paves the way for the development of what we have termed somatic narratology, applicable across genres and historical periods. Within this framework, the body is not merely a thematic motif or symbolic device, but it is understood as an agent within the text. It occupies space and time in the narrative, sometimes lingering, sometimes moving, at times blending seamlessly with its surroundings, and constantly interacting with other environments, objects, and bodies. By conceptualizing the body in this dynamic, somatic narratology allows for the analysis of literary texts in terms of embodied perception, agency, and intersubjective engagement, rather than through conventional thematic or formal distinctions. 2. The three dimensions of 4E cognition explored here – *embedded*, *embodied*, and *enactive* – highlight a relationship in Blecher's work that has thus far received insufficient critical attention: the reciprocal relationship between perception – conceived as bodily activity intertwined with memory – and the environment, understood both as natural and

domestic space, structured and imbued with objects, colors, and light. This attention is all the more significant given that the subject of analysis is male. Contemporary critical analysis tends to focus predominantly on the sexualized, ailing, and aging female body, often overlooking the fact that men are similarly subjected to comparable pressures and challenges. 3. Within the context of Romanian literary history, Blecherian memory extends beyond the voluntary, Proustian model of affective memory by privileging an embodied memory that is enacted and continually reactivated through perception. Unlike traditional approaches that prioritize reflection or introspection, this memory emphasizes the bodily and sensorimotor dimensions of experience, highlighting how sensation, perception and movement shape recollection. Moreover, it opens up a new line of inquiry in Romanian literary studies: the exploration of corporeal memory. This perspective allows scholars to examine how lived experience, physical vulnerability, and the materiality of the body are inscribed in literary texts, offering fresh methodological tools for analyzing the interplay between narrative, perception, and the sensory dimensions of human experience. 4. With respect to the enactivist methodology, this study highlights through the application of perceptual theories to literature the need for further theoretical development concerning not only the lived, present body, but also the memory of the body – a dimension that has remained largely underexplored within the Cognitive Sciences. Thus, I argue not only that literature benefits from the interdisciplinary methodology provided by enactivism, but also that Cognitive Sciences could gain substantially from a rigorous analysis of fiction.

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NOTES

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