



Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry (Modern & Contemporary Poetics)

Peter Middleton

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A dynamic account of the history, practice, and theory of poetry as performance.

Distant Reading considers poetry as performance, offers new insights into its popularity, and proposes a new history of its origins. It also explores related issues concerning the reception of poetry, the impact of the computer on how we read poetry, the persistence of the letter "I" in poems by avant-garde poets, the strangeness of the line-break as a demand on the reader's attention, and the idea of the reader as consumer. These themes are connected by a historically contextualized and theoretically sophisticated discussion of contemporary American and British poets continuing to work in the modernist tradition.

The introductory essay establishes a new methodology that transforms close reading into what Middleton calls "distant reading," interpretive reading that acknowledges the distances that texts travel from their point of composition to readers in other geographical and historical locations. It indicates that poetic innovation is often driven by a desire on the part of the poet to make this distance do cultural work in the meanings that the poem generates.

Ultimately, *Distant Reading* treats poetry as a cultural practice that is always situated within specific sites of performance—recited on stage, displayed in magazines, laid out on a page, scrolled on the computer screen—rather than as a transcendent cloud of meaning tethered only to its words.

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