Reading Minds: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Reader-Response Criticism

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Abstract

This thesis brings aspects of research on human consciousness to bear on reader-response criticism. I believe that such an interdisciplinary approach has the potential to provide the theories I consider (and reader-response criticism in general) with a more specific and effective set of conceptual tools for understanding readers, reading processes, and response.

In chapter one of this thesis I consider the precise ways in which approaches to consciousness may communicate with, and specify reader-response criticism. I offer perspectives on works by Stanley Fish (Is There a Text in This Class?), Wolfgang Iser (The Act of Reading), and Roland Barthes (Image, Music, Text) that foreground a common need for specific ‘consciousness components.’ I then offer some preliminary suggestions as to how these consciousness components might be integrated into the existing theories.

I continue in chapter two to construct basic consciousness components for each of the above mentioned reader-response theories. I integrate Daniel Dennett’s (Consciousness Explained) Multiple Drafts Model of consciousness into my discussion of Fish, John Searle’s (The Mystery of Consciousness) concept of objective consciousness into my discussion Iser, and Richard Dawkins’ (The Selfish Gene) concept of memetics into my discussion of Barthes.

I conclude the thesis with a brief discussion of the ways in which textuality based approaches to interpretability redefine the distinctions between readers and texts in ways that are complimentary to my consciousness based approach.
Résumé

Cette thèse apporte aspects de la recherche sur la conscience humaine à porter sur la critique lecture-réponse. Je cria qu’une telle approche interdisciplinaire a le potentiel pour fournir les théories que je considère (et la critique lecture-réponse en général) avec un ensemble plus précis et efficace des outils conceptuels pour mieux comprendre les lecteurs, les processus de lecture, et la réponse.

Dans le premier chapitre de cette thèse je considère la manière précise dont les approches à la conscience peuvent communiquer, et préciser la critique lecteur-réponse. Je vous offre des perspectives sur les œuvres de Stanley Fish (Is There a Text in This Class?), Wolfgang Iser (The Act of Reading), et Roland Barthes (Image, Music, Text) qui servent d’exemple d’un besoin commun pour des “composantes de la conscience.” Ensuite, je présente quelques suggestions préliminaire sur la façon dont ces composantes de la conscience pourraient être intégrées dans les théories existantes.

Je continue dans le deuxième chapitre à bâtir des composantes de base de la conscience pour chacune des théories lecteur-réponse ci-dessus mentionnées. J’incorpore le modèle “Multiple Drafts” de la conscience de Daniel Dennett (Consciousness Explained) dans ma discussion de Stanley Fish, la notion de la conscience objective de John Searle (The Mystery of Consciousness) dans mon analyse de Wolfgang Iser, et le concept de la mimetics de Richard Dawkins (The Selfish Gene) dans ma discussion de Roland Barthes.

En conclusion, je discute le rapport entre les approches basées sur la textualité et la compréhension de texte et comment ci-dessus redéfinit les distinctions entre les lecteurs et les textes de manières qui sont complémentaires à mon approche basée sur la conscience.
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Introduction

‗Who ever anywhere will read these written words?‘

—Stephen Dedalus

I

Since it appears to me to pervade the many potential intersections between philosophies of reading and theories of human consciousness, I am compelled to call your attention to a particular idiosyncrasy of linguistic expression, if I can describe it as such. In a variety of forms, this idiosyncrasy has long been noted by philosophers, literary scholars, and literary artists, but seems always to exert itself (in whatever ways it does) obliquely—an intriguing array of perceptions, or of thoughts, or perhaps of feelings, pervasive and persistent enough to serve as part of the cosmic background of literary expression, but one that seems ostensibly to be of limited value to seekers after static meaning, understanding, interpretation, and a host of other ‘literary’ determinations. Seemingly ineffable, perhaps due to its subtlety and variability, it is somehow recognizable in the words of St. Augustine, who wrote that words which bear likeness to the ‘Word of God’ ‘cannot be uttered in sound nor in thought in the likeness of sound, such as must be done with the word of any language;’"¹ Herman Melville, who wrote that ‘no artistic communication is more than a fraction of what the artist intends;’"² Hermann Hesse (or Siddhartha), who wrote that words ‘do no good to the secret of meaning; everything always immediately, a little falsified, a little foolish;’"³ T.S. Eliot (or J. Alfred Prufrock), who wrote: ‘It


³ Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha (Mineola: Dover, 1999) 78.
is impossible to say just what I mean!”⁴ Martin Heidegger, who began and concluded a famous essay this way: “Language speaks;”⁵ William H. Capitan, who wrote that “what an artist gives us as his intention is subject to the artist’s limitations in putting his intention into words;”⁶ and Samuel Beckett, who wrote that there are “many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said.”⁷ Currently, I think ‘it’—the thing I am writing about, and to which I have attempted to allude by crude and diffuse example—is just somehow a part of literary expression.

Much more than something that I have simply borne in mind while working on this project, this fascinating (and, from a literary scholar’s point of view of, potentially frustrating) array of perceptions, this ‘quality’ that pervades the theoretical intersection between consciousness and reading, is the very perspective that underpins both the claims I will make, and the manner in which I will go about making them. Working from this perspective has affected the philosophical orientation of my project in several ways, the most pertinent of which I will briefly mention here.

My intention, simply stated, is to outline a new way of thinking about reader-response criticism—one that is inextricably bound up with concepts of consciousness. To this end, I venture some claims that I agree may strain my project’s viable scope, but which I believe must be put forth at this initial stage in what may be considered somewhat disconcertingly general terms. On the other hand, I believe this outline has enough philosophical merit, and is capacious

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enough in its claims to evoke further studies that explore specific aspects of the relationship between reading and consciousness in greater detail.

My secondary motive for drawing your attention to the cosmic background of literary expression is my hope that you will be conscious of it—or, your interpretation of it—as you read this text. Insofar as your own personal history (in any of its aspects) helps you to make sense of the material I will engage with below, along with the various perspectives that feed into and from it, I am keen to begin not from a point of full disclosure, but of fully intended disclosure.\(^8\) There is, finally, no need (way?) to jump to concrete conclusions when, as will become clear, we still have hardly found a crack in Nietzsche’s “chamber of consciousness.”\(^9\)

II

Theories of reading that are essentially borne of, and, as a result, both reflect and perpetuate the intellectual products of a single field of study—Critical Theory or Philosophy of Language, for example—are not, in my view, broad enough to accomplish what they set out to accomplish. They are neither conceived nor executed in ways that put them on such epistemological grounds as would allow them to make the claims they claim to make. This is not to suggest that countless theories—the products of years or lifetimes of painstaking research in Critical Theory or Philosophy of Language—have not been, and will not continue to be innovative, perceptive, and useful in current academic paradigms; it is instead to suggest that such theories hedge upon concepts and ideas that they cannot fully express by means the

\(^8\) Joshua Ackerman et. al. have recently suggested that everything we think is somehow tied to the personal experiences we have. See Joshua Ackerman et. al., “Incidental Haptic Sensations Influence Social Judgments and Decisions,” *Science* 328 (2010): 1712-15.

compartmentalised academic vocabulary with which they attempt to express them. It is to suggest that there is embedded within theories of reading that stem from more or less singular branches of learning an illusory link, a disconnect, between expressive intention and practical communication. An essential feature of this project (and, hopefully, many future reader-response projects), therefore, is its interdisciplinarity. I will introduce concepts and theories from consciousness research to reader-response criticism in hopes of drawing attention to the apparent disconnect between expressive intention and practical communication.

III

In what follows I will bring aspects of research on human consciousness to bear on reader-response criticism. I believe that such an interdisciplinary approach has the potential to provide the theories I will consider, and reader-response criticism in general, with a more specific and effective set of conceptual tools for understanding readers, reading processes, and response.

The literary and philosophical theories I will discuss share a basis in phenomenology. For the purposes of this project, the significance of this foundational commonality is twofold. First, it will provide grounds for an inductive study of the reader-response theories I consider. This study will both clarify the terms ‘reader,’ ‘reading process,’ and ‘response,’ and expose the ways in which studies of consciousness may clarify them. Second, it will serve as a common modal ‘language’ in which literary theory and philosophy of mind can interact.
In her introduction to *Reader-Response Criticism*, Jane P. Tompkins remarks that “meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of the reader;” this project will begin to specify literary scholars’ conceptions of “the mind of the reader.”

I will begin by examining the precise ways in which approaches to consciousness may communicate with, and specify reader-response criticism. The work of Stanley Fish (*Is There a Text in This Class?*), Wolfgang Iser (*The Act of Reading*), and Roland Barthes (*Image, Music, Text*) will provide the basis for this examination. Importantly, each of these theorists troubles the idea of objective textuality—a New Critical perspective that casts literary texts as comprehensive objects for the purpose of critical investigation—and begins to reorient the goals of criticism itself by offering “a way of conceiving texts and readers that reorganizes the distinctions between them.” This reorganization, I will argue, must entail a more specific understanding of consciousness. I will rely on Fish, Iser, and Barthes collectively to provide definitional sketches for the terms ‘reader,’ ‘reading process,’ and ‘response.’ I will not, however, attempt to derive strict or final definitions of these terms; I merely wish to offer a renewed perspective on them—one that underscores how important studies of consciousness are to the prospect of formulating such definitions in the first place.

While the reader-response theories I will discuss are each approximately thirty years old, the fact that much criticism has already been carried out on them appeals to me. Since I do not intend to espouse any one of them, but rather to try to show that some continuous theoretical value exists in each of them, I believe the fact that they are relatively well-established serves my purpose.

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11 Tompkins x.
In order to streamline my analysis, I will pair one phenomenological approach to consciousness with each of the above named reader-response critics. Daniel Dennett’s concept of heterophenomenology and his Multiple Drafts Model of consciousness, as he espouses them in his book *Consciousness Explained*, will serve as convenient starting points for my discussion of Fish. I will consider John Searle’s (*The Mystery of Consciousness*) concept of objective consciousness in conjunction with Iser. Finally, I will consider the subject of memetics as Richard Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene*) discusses it in relation to Barthes. I do not intend to offer a technical or comprehensive depiction of consciousness in this paper. Rather, I wish to highlight specific theories and concepts based on their relevance to the reader-response theories in question.

Proceeding from the point of view that the concept of objective textuality is at least limiting as a critical perspective, and that studies of consciousness are essential to the reorganized distinction between texts and readers that must take its place, I will conclude my paper with a brief examination of textuality. Since there is, among many other influences, a particular style of discourse which informs my project, I will scrutinize its “textual condition.”\(^{12}\)

In order to guide this examination, I will adapt the bibliographical approaches of Jerome McGann (*The Textual Condition*) and D. F. McKenzie (*Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*). Central to this analysis will be McKenzie’s assertion that “[w]hatever its metamorphoses, the different physical forms of any text, and the intentions they serve, are relative to a specific time, place and person,”\(^ {13}\) and McGann’s claim that “the textual condition is positively defined


by some specific type of indeterminacy.”¹⁴ These arguments will further my own purpose in that they foreground the inherently unstable, indeterminate, and potentially ambiguous disposition of texts (thus, corroborating my claim against textual objectivity) and, more broadly, the underpinnings of these instabilities, indeterminacies, and ambiguities. Not the least important of these underpinnings, I will argue, is consciousness.

¹⁴ McGann 98.
Reconsidering Interpretive Communities, Blanks, the Wandering Viewpoint, and Text

‘It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.’

—Oscar Wilde

I

In this chapter’s title I reference the primary locations where I believe studies of consciousness might help to specify and, thereby, augment the reader-response projects on which Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, and Roland Barthes embarked in the 1970’s and early 80’s. My aim here is threefold. My first task, and the central focus of this chapter, is to argue that in each of the noted terms, as well as in the language each author employs in order to elucidate and support them, lurks a latent gesture that endows each theory with a kind of non-specific kinship. This gesture may be viewed as a common ‘symptom’ of a particular inadequacy in the conceptual ‘tool-box’ of reader-response criticism relative to each author’s purpose or, more broadly, to his subject. The specific action of this gesture manifests in each author’s need to hyperextend his theoretical discourse (as a means of compensating for missing or unspecified elements) to such an extent that, in each case, the requirement for some specific formulation (whether philosophical, empirical, or both) of consciousness is apparent. I believe that each author’s discourse requires a ‘consciousness component’ in order to achieve the functionality and comprehensibility for which it has the potential. While Fish, Iser, and Barthes each invoke the term quite broadly, and reference it more or less obliquely in order to make theoretical claims that are often parallel to its influence, consciousness seems to me to be a sine qua non condition under which each of their theories subsists. Each author tacitly recognizes that consciousness (not as an inert aspect of the firmament of ‘humanness,’ but rather as the subject of a rapidly
expanding body of interdisciplinary research) is an essential component of his theoretical impetus, and as a foundational concept in reader-response criticism.

At times, the language that Fish, Iser, and Barthes apply in attempts to transmit their claims is strained. Sometimes, perhaps as a partial result of a common need to allow ideas near the threshold of linguistic expression sufficient ‘language’ in which to ‘express,’ their language may even be considered ambiguous.\(^1\) Many of these instances, I suggest, may be viewed as examples of each author’s hyperextension of reader-response criticism. Not coincidentally, these points of expressive torsion are also the locations where studies of consciousness can come to the aid of reader-response criticism by providing clarity and specificity in the form of new—or transplanted—rhetorical and perspectival ‘tools.’ Though consciousness is increasingly the subject of scientific and philosophical inquiry and debate (one of the most compelling aspects of consciousness is the degree of mystery that continues to surround both scientific and philosophical attempts to explain it), I believe certain extant philosophical, scientific, and hybrid formulations can yet relieve much of the afore mentioned tension, acting together as a buttress not only of terminology, but of ways of perceiving reading.\(^2\) Thus, my second task in this chapter is to show how the general kinship between interpretive communities, blanks, the wandering viewpoint, and Text can be positioned in order to allow consciousness to interject

\(^1\) I do not wish to imply that there is something inherently ‘wrong’ with language that, for reasons ranging from disagreement about ‘meaning’ among readers to differences in the purposes for which a particular phrase may be cited in an academic work, is ‘indeterminate’ (here, of course, given more space, an argument about my precise intended meaning for the word ‘indeterminate’ could ensue). On the contrary, from an expressive point of view, I believe indeterminate or ambiguous language can produce fascinating results. From a theoretical point of view, authors such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man, and Jacques Derrida take the question of determinacy as their primary subject. In the present context, however, accepting the possibility that language may only aspire to ‘determinacy’ in the rather basic sense in which I have invoked the term, I wish to draw specific attention to those points where, from an academic standpoint, interpretations of certain phrases or arguments in Fish, Barthes, and Iser’s works might be variable, ambiguous, or even unclear. As I have stated, and as I will continue to show, I consider the phenomenon of indeterminacy/ambiguity to be evidence of Fish, Barthes, and Iser’s attempts to compensate for the lack of a category of information that, in one way or another, must be an essential component of each of their projects.
effectively. Since, as I have implied, these terms were designed by their respective progenitors in theoretical environments that represent consciousness merely as a static ‘fact of life’ (environments that were not designed to scrutinise consciousness itself in significant detail), one of the most valuable concomitants of this task is that it will allow me to build upon (rather than re-create) each theorist’s work by introducing concepts that have been examined by philosophers, neuro-philosophers, and neuro-psychologists during the past thirty years.

I do not suggest, however, that interpretive communities, blanks, the wandering viewpoint, and Text are all identically strained terms begot by means of identical (or even similar) theoretical processes. Neither do I suggest that each may benefit from precisely the same type of interjection (a single, clearly defined concept of consciousness, for example). I suggest instead that Fish, Iser and Barthes’ oblique invocation of consciousness represents a common indicator—a signal that each of these terms together with the arguments in which they are embedded require further investigation of the type I have begun to outline. This is an important distinction, and the perspective from which I will investigate and apply concepts of consciousness in the next chapter. Further, since, from the standpoint of academic research, consciousness is very much a work in progress, I will strive to cast these ‘consciousness components’ as dynamic reinforcing structures—I will ascribe them infintively rather than definitively so as to allow for as much adaptability, alterability, and potential for re-evaluation as possible. My third task in this chapter, then, is to examine closely the functioning of interpretive communities, blanks, the wandering viewpoint, and Text within the theories that contain them in order to make some preliminary determinations about the particular ways in which each term might be specified by studies of consciousness.
Stanley Fish concludes that the category ‘literature’ should survive his essay collection *Is There a Text in This Class?* While Fish retains its categorical status, however, literature is “an open category, not definable by fictionality, or by disregard of propositional truth, or by a predominance of tropes and figures, but simply by what we decide to put into it.”³ Fish’s reader of literature is, in a sense, a maker of literature. This claim, in my view, serves as an appropriate first example of the shift in literary inquiry and analysis that is foundational to my project. Specifically, it is a shift away from New Critical concepts of objective (literary) textuality—upheld (and still widely implemented pedagogically, though the fact may not be acknowledged explicitly)⁴ by scholars who thought that “criticism was an act of approximating in language a work that had objective status, and that its intelligibility and worth were measured by that objectivity”⁵—toward a notion of (literary) textuality as something that must be constituted not only by the text itself, but also by a multiplicity of influences extrinsic to the text.⁶ Though readers of literary texts are undoubtedly prominent among these diverse influences, I cannot invoke the expected term ‘subjective textuality’ at this point to qualify the difference between an objective view of literary texts and Fish’s “open category” of literature. The impossibility of

³ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1980) 11.

⁴ New Critical modes remain popular (if not predominant) in literature classes throughout Canadian high schools and universities, though they are often implemented ‘by default.’ In part because they are implemented this way, New Critical modes have become synonymous with Literature studies in secondary and post-secondary institutions Canada-wide. While worthy of investigation, a complete examination of the implications of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper.


⁶ As will become increasingly clear (especially in my concluding remarks), I do attribute a great deal of importance to aspects of ‘textuality’ that may be considered intrinsic to texts.
such a streamlined oppositional term, one which would balance ‘objective textuality,’ is a result of Fish’s interpretive communities.\(^7\)

In order to stave off charges of complete subjectivism (though, as I will argue, there are other reasons at least as pertinent as this), Fish emphasizes that individual readers are not capable of creating their own independent literatures. Instead, readers are always part of an interpretive community—a community “whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention [a reader] pays and thus the kind of literature “he” “makes.” (The quotation marks indicate that “he” and “makes” are \textit{not} being understood as they would be under a theory of autonomous individual agency).\(^8\) Importantly, interpretive communities constitute and, thereby, dictate individual readers’ interpretive acts and strategies concurrently as they promote and sustain communalized methods of acquiring and processing information among constituent members. They do this by means of their very existence as socially conjured, and socially dependant transmissive infrastructures (parts of what I will later refer to as locally simu-homogenised networked constellations of social functions).\(^9\) I will discuss Fish’s supporting claims for interpretive communities in further detail below. It is more significant for my current purpose, however, that interpretive communities do function through \textit{individual} readers \textit{during} reading processes.\(^10\) This, I suggest, is a crucial point in Fish’s theory where studies of consciousness

\(^7\) For further debate about the New Criticism and objective textuality, see Serge Doubrovsky, \textit{The New Criticism in France} (Chicago: Chicago University, 1973), Murray Krieger, \textit{The New Apologists for Poetry} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1956), Gerald Graff, \textit{Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma} (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1970), and Frank Lentricchia, \textit{After the New Criticism} (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980).

\(^8\) Fish 11.

\(^9\) Fish strongly implies the possibility that interpretive communities function in ways that extend beyond literary interpretation. That is, for Fish, the same interpretive community that governs literary interpretability may also govern behaviour during an interaction with a bank teller or a teacher. While reticent to over-generalise, Fish also suggests that interpretive communities may even be influential enough in their constituents’ mental processes to warrant a discussion of ‘conventional thought.’ I address this point in further detail below.
may intervene productively. The exact theoretical ‘location’ I am interested in specifying is marked out by the difference between a broadly functional definition of interpretive communities—one that, for Fish, must explain the interpretive strategies of individual readers exclusively in terms of the communities of which they are products—and an inquiry into exactly how an individual reader might engage in reading the absence of communal influences.\textsuperscript{11} Put more directly, I am curious about the qualitative aspects of any mental activities that draw upon and/or enact Fish’s interpretive communities during individual reading processes.

At least preliminarily, I believe Fish does acknowledge that a detailed response to such an inquiry is a necessary component of his overall project. Incidentally, the terms of what I take to be his acknowledgement also begin to describe an important difference between the ways in which Fish and Iser view literary texts (and works) and readers. While Iser advocates for an essentially collaborative relationship between reader and text—one that produces a literary work—Fish explains the relationship in more acrimonious terms. Specifically, Fish affirms “the assumption (shared by the formalists) that the text and the reader are independent and competing entities whose spheres of influence and responsibility must be defined and controlled.”\textsuperscript{12} What I am most interested in here, expectedly, is how I might begin to fashion a functional theoretical apparatus (a consciousness component) that could account for the competitive relationship

\textsuperscript{10} I make the point about an interpretive community’s potential influence on individual mental operations perhaps overly transparent here in part to draw out the question of how such communities are inaugurated and sustained. This is a topic that Fish is content to discuss in an intuitive, observational manner and, while I suspect it is worthy of more rigorous theoretical inquiry, with the exception of those aspects which relate to consciousness, I will have to leave most of it to intuition and observation as well.

\textsuperscript{11} Fish’s theoretical discourse is, by necessity, oriented toward envisioning the potential forces and influences of communities \textit{qua} communities. As such, detailed discussions of constituent readers are often subsumed by Fish’s supporting claims for communities.

\textsuperscript{12} Fish 12.
between Fish’s texts and readers by introducing detailed conceptions of how readers read.\textsuperscript{13}

Simply put, I will begin to construct a more specific definition (to use Fish’s term) of Fish’s reader; one capable of shedding light on her “influence and responsibility.” That Fish ponders this need for a more precisely defined relationship between texts and readers at this most general and foundational level, it seems to me, exposes two obvious and specifically oriented points of entry into his theory. The first and most pertinent of these, aimed at defining readers’ roles, has to do with studies of consciousness. The second, aimed at defining texts’ roles, has to do with textuality and social texts, which I will consider further in my concluding remarks.\textsuperscript{14}

According to Fish, the “stronger reading” of his claim for a literary category that “proceeds from a collective decision as to what will count as literature” assumes that a given “subject’s consciousness [is] wholly informed by conventional notions.”\textsuperscript{15} As Fish admits that such a reading “has not quite surfaced,” his argument seems to reach an impasse.\textsuperscript{16} Fish cannot assume an extant community of wholly constituted subjects (wherein each individual consciousness is completely the product of what he refers to as “conventional ways of thinking”) any more than one could advocate for a community of essentially ‘heterogeneous’ individuals, each of whom would always occupy a wholly independent position as a detached observer (always able to negotiate utterly diverse interpretive modes during reading).\textsuperscript{17} Fish is content to

\textsuperscript{13} I am somewhat unclear about Fish’s use of the term ‘control’ as he applies it to the realms of texts and readers (he states that the realms of the text and the reader must be defined and “controlled”). Tentatively, I take the term ‘control’ to be a function of the definitions he seeks for each sphere of influence, but I suspect this may be too rigid an explanation to apply to such a complex inquiry. This point, incidentally, exemplifies the type of indeterminate language to which I allude in the introduction to this chapter.

\textsuperscript{14} For a discussion of reading that reflects Fish’s stance here, see Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} (Berkeley: University of California, 1984).

\textsuperscript{15} Fish 11.

\textsuperscript{16} Fish 11.
let this argument remain “poised between two characterizations of the self.” \(^{18}\) According to the first characterization, the self is wholly constituted by convention in accordance with Fish’s “stronger reading” noted above. According to the second characterisation, the self, while capable of scrutinising modes of conventional thinking, remains bound to implement these modes when engaging in acts of interpretation. No matter where the self lies along the spectrum demarked by these two characterisations, reading processes implemented by individual readers are, for Fish, entirely informed by the community to which an individual belongs. Says Fish, “there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only “ways of reading” that are extensions of community perspectives.” \(^{19}\) Reading processes are literally the defining moments of texts, then, insofar as they are strictly the enactments of communal perspectives.

Notable here is the rapidity with which Fish exposes himself to a host of definitional issues—it is with a consistent lack of precise explanation, for example, that he invokes the terms “consciousness,” “conventional thought,” and “self.” \(^{20}\) Partially in the interest of furthering his argument with consistency and clarity (by minimizing his need to interface with complex and potentially obfuscat ing psychological topics), and partially because reader-response criticism could not (and still does not) define such terms at the time Fish was writing, Fish relies on these

\(^{17}\) Fish 11.

\(^{18}\) Fish 11.

\(^{19}\) Fish 16.

\(^{20}\) Though I follow this statement, which is seemingly focused on a deficiency in Fish’s work, with a possible explanation as to why Fish is beleaguered with certain definitional problems, I must note that I believe Fish’s theory to be more productive and insightful for the types of generalities to which I draw attention here. While Fish’s discourse is ‘broad’ and, thus, must rely on general terms—terms which he could not possibly fully explore in the process of elucidating his primary subject in order to support itself —it draws attention to such terms in ways that invite further investigation and specification. According to my topic, I hope to provide precisely this type of companion analysis to Fish’s work.
terms as ‘infrastructural placeholders.’\textsuperscript{21} That is, while terms such as “consciousness,” “conventional thought,” and “self” are surely necessary to any discussion of literature that takes the mental constitutions of readers as its focus, they are complex enough (perhaps now even more so than when Fish wrote \textit{Is There a Text in This Class?}) to make such a project unfeasibly complicated if it were to attempt to investigate them individually in significant detail. What is most pertinent about this aspect of Fish’s argument, then, is that, by invoking the terms noted above, he is bound to propose a line of inquiry that necessitates a detailed investigation of “consciousness” (as well as of “conventional thought” and “self”) but, practically speaking, cannot pursue it. Instead, retreating from the “stronger reading” of how interpretive communities function through the competing spheres of readers and texts, Fish concludes broadly that “the claims of neither the text nor the reader can be upheld, because neither has the independent status that would make its claim possible.”\textsuperscript{22} As mentioned, I will have space in my conclusion to further consider what Fish describes as the “claims” of the text. Here, I merely wish to point out that, by introducing specific conceptions of consciousness, I will adjust the theoretical environment within which Fish’s theory \textit{can} be viewed such that considerations of readers’ “claims” (to which Fish refers but, again, cannot elaborate) may be made with increased definitional specificity. As I have implied, I believe this type of theoretical environment is a necessary condition for any investigation that takes the precise functioning of Fish’s interpretive communities as its subject.

\textsuperscript{21} While I admit that this statement is a direct assumption, concepts of “consciousness,” “conventional thought,” and “self,” had certainly been the subjects of psychological and philosophical debate long before Fish was writing \textit{Is There a Text in This Class?} My point here is only that they remain opaque in the context of reader-response criticism.

\textsuperscript{22} Fish 12.
Fish concludes that “interpretive strategies are not put into practice after reading; they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is usually assumed, arising from them.” From Fish’s familiar challenge to objective textuality, and from his concerns about formalism—both of which clearly resonate in the claim above—come my impetus to further query his ‘interpretive strategies’ and, more specifically, the mind of the reader. Importantly, the reading strategies that Fish argues “are the shape of reading” are not the reader’s own, so to speak, but rather “proceed...from the interpretive community of which he is a member; they are, in effect, community property, and insofar as they at once enable and limit the operations of his consciousness, he is too.” I have argued that, while Fish’s theory implies ‘parameters’ for a reader’s consciousness, it can offer little information as to their constitution and disposition. Conceptually, Fish believes that interpretive communities dictate (to one degree or another) the collective consciousness of their constituents and, in so doing, influence the interpretive processes in which those constituents may engage. Whatever accuracy and efficacy may be ascribed to this hypothesis would be substantially increased by a supplementary component that would, by inferring community properties from sources that attempt to explain (individual) mental functions, specify what it is that Fish believes is being dictated.

While Fish states that “it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features,” it is essential to bear in mind that individual readers read (or, enact the community’s interpretive strategies). Ostensibly, statements that follow from this point might be considered insoluble with

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23 Fish 13.

24 Fish 14.

25 Fish 14.
Fish’s claim that “the thoughts an individual can think and the mental operations he can perform have their source in some or other interpretive community,” and that, as a result, “he is as much a product of that community (acting as an extension of it) as the meanings it enables him to produce.” It seems to me, however, that this is a mere difference in theoretical focus—a question of the community versus the individual. As I have stated, I believe an examination of the ‘site of enactment’ of reading not only should, but must accompany a more comprehensive version of Fish’s theory. By focusing on what Fish might refer to as the reader’s sphere of influence, I am proposing a ‘bottom-up’ theoretical model (scrutinising communities as functions of the individuals who create/inhabit/sustain them) to accompany his ‘top-down’ model, which foregrounds the influence of the community on the individual.

Of course, just as Fish claims that we all come by the ability to interpret literary works “in the course of acquiring a huge amount of background knowledge” about academic institutional values and various conventions of reading literature, so must we all come by the ability to interpret theoretical works which attempt to address the interpretability of literary works by similar processes. The point regarding literary theories of interpretation then, not surprisingly, nearly merges with Fish’s point about interpretability itself. The “mental operations we can perform,” states Fish, “are limited by the institutions in which we are already embedded. These institutions precede us, and it is only by inhabiting them, or being inhabited by them, that

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26 Fish 14.

27 Incidentally, while I am extremely interested in the disposition of the relationship between individuals and communities as Fish casts it, and will address some of its aspects below, my focus on individual reading minds will preclude a rigorous investigation of it here. In light of my suggestions regarding individual community members, however, I believe an interesting and worthwhile study would attempt a comprehensive (I hesitate to say ‘complete’) analysis of the relationship between reader and community in the ‘bottom-up’ model I have just proposed.

28 Fish 329.
we have access to the public and conventional senses they make.”

Thus, it does not seem farfetched to conclude that theoretical attempts to investigate/describe/specify literary interpretation must be limited by that vastly complex, yet locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions which Fish attempts to describe via the interpretive community. Of the directives that pertain to the theorist’s attempts, Harvey Sacks (whom we have already encountered) agrees with Fish that “no one’s interpretive acts are exclusively [their] own but fall to [them] by virtue of [their] position in some socially organized environment and are therefore always shared and public.” Of the directives that pertain to the literary artist’s attempts, William H. Capitan (whom we have also previously encountered) notes that “what an artist gives us as his intention is subject to the artist’s limitations in putting his intention into words.” To reiterate then, if theories of literary interpretation and literary works are both produced according to the same locally simu-homogenised networked constellations of social functions, and each is ‘bound’ by language in Capitan’s sense, then it does not seem impossible that such ‘theoretical access’ as would provide useful insight into readers, reading processes, and response may be limited by severe tautology, if not completely forbidden.

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29 Fish 331.

30 I use the admittedly unwieldy term locally simu-homogeneous constellation of social functions (I have borrowed the prefix ‘simu-’ from ‘simulate’) to describe any perceived and unexamined homogeneity of social functions that may arise in a specifiable geographical location. I employ this term in hopes of temporarily side-stepping arguments that formally address ideas of societal homogeneity and/or ‘conventional thinking.’ In a broader sense, I intend this term as a replacement for ‘discourse,’ a term that’s efficacy is limited in the context of this project. I will explain my construction and usage of locally simu-homogenised networked constellations of social functions in greater detail below.


32 I use the term ‘useful’ in specific reference to goals I have set out for this project.
III

Wolfgang Iser argues that literary works are borne of collaborative interactions between the “artistic” efforts of authors and the “esthetic” efforts of readers:

The virtual position of the work is between text and reader, its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction between the two, and so exclusive concentration on either the author’s techniques or the reader’s psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself. This is not to deny the vital importance of each of the two poles—it is simply that if one loses sight of the relationship, one loses sight of the virtual work.33

Poised at the edge of the “gaps” or “blanks” that Iser claims facilitate the creation of literary works from the artistic or textual pole (and which serve as the operative locations of the interaction between artistic and esthetic poles), I would like to begin this section by emphasizing that a single physical page of text may ‘contain’ less information than might be supposed. Insofar as they are the matrices within which communicative exchanges between readers and texts take place, textual indeterminacies may well be the most prominent features on any page.34

Importantly, indeterminate moments in texts are not static or objective but, rather, they are reader-oriented and reader-specific—they may potentially be infused with abstracts of a reader’s personal history (personalities, experiences, attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs, etc.). Alternatively, they may be formed according to particular cues or combinations of cues (a word, a phrase, a subject, a particular style employed by an author, a font or paper type, a geographical location, a smell, a particular visual scene, etc.) which, according to random and transient biases,


34 The idea that a literary work’s interpretability is dependent on both a text and a reader signals Iser’s departure from objective textuality.
feature a particular ‘moment’ in her personal history. Indeterminacies may both incite and facilitate a reader’s ability to do things—interpret, admire, deconstruct, etc.—with texts according to her membership in an interpretive community which, according to Fish, is constantly acting to “enable and limit the operations of [her] consciousness.” Indeterminacies may be embodied by schools of thought—a reader’s conscious attention to her assumptions (about the interpretability of texts, for example) in conjunction with her inclination that unstable and/or plural meanings are at least plausible functions of reading could shape texts in ways that she might consider to be aligned with post-structuralism. To take up an earlier example, indeterminacies may be moulded by a reader’s implicit training in New Critical interpretive modes, her deconstruction (or mere scrutiny) of those modes, or by a hybrid mode which conflates the two. An indeterminate moment in a text may at once summon and be embodied by the peculiar synecdoche for a locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions—a hypothetical aggregate of the *sources* from which a specific individual’s understandings, attitudes, knowledge, points of view, values, beliefs, etc., *can* be derived—that any individual reader represents. A reader may shape textual indeterminacies without the knowledge that any of the preceding—artistic and esthetic poles, interpretive communities, post-structuralism, the New Criticism, deconstruction, or indeterminacies—exist. She might, on the other hand, shape them having carefully considered each of these things, as well as countless others.

I have purposely introduced Iser’s artistic or textual pole in somewhat ‘readerly’ terms in anticipation of my focus on consciousness. This introduction also provides a modicum of

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35 By invoking ‘moment’ instead of, for example, ‘memory,’ I am trying to differentiate between a temporally singular ‘harking back,’ and a particular ‘time’ in a reader’s personal history—a plural recollection of personalities, experiences, attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs, etc. *as they seemed to have been.*
continuity with Fish’s concept of the interpretive community, which I believe is worth bearing in mind while considering both Iser and Barthes’ work. Though, in doing this, I hope I have highlighted several plausible implicit potentialities of indeterminate texts, Iser himself conceives them (in the context of the relationship between artistic and esthetic poles) in somewhat sparer terms. Specifically, Iser holds that “textual structures and structured acts of comprehension are...the two poles in the act of communication, whose success will depend on the degree in which the text establishes itself as a correlative in the reader’s consciousness.”

Broadly speaking, I consider the means by which texts can be established as correlatives in readers’ minds to be my primary point of entry into Iser’s theory, as well as my basis for formulating a consciousness component capable of further specifying its esthetic pole. My interest here is analogous in purpose to my interest in the individual mental operations that support and enact interpretive communities—I will explore the qualitative aspects of mental operations that bring about Iser’s “act of communication.” Two interconnected topics of inquiry will explain how I intend to specify Iser’s esthetic pole—expectedly, both focus on Iser’s claim that for acts of communication to succeed, texts must establish themselves as “correlatives” in readers’ consciousnesses.

In stating that any successful communication between a text and a reader depends on “the extent to which this text can activate the individual reader’s faculties of perceiving and processing,” Iser implies that the two poles of communication between which the virtual literary work ultimately appears must, at least in some fashion, be synchronised. My first topic of inquiry is this synchronicity—for communication to succeed, in Iser’s thinking, both reader and

36 Iser 107.
37 Iser 107.
text must be roughly ‘aligned’ along unique axes of expectation which a reader tacitly engages as a peculiar synecdoche of a locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions. Together, the many axes of expectation that a reader creates may grant the text sufficient access (and vice versa) to establish and uphold communication. A pertinent analogy for this type of external synchronicity is an interpretive community. Recall Fish’s claim that the “mental operations we can perform are limited by the institutions in which we are already embedded. These institutions precede us, and it is only by inhabiting them, or being inhabited by them, that we have access to the public and conventional senses they make.” By describing this type of synchronicity as external, I acknowledge my phenomenologically based assumption that, as Fish claims, readers are always embedded in at least some form of pre-existing socially constructed institution. Whether such institutions finally inhabit or are inhabited by a reader, they predate her, and are initially external to her. Thus, in this analogy, the term ‘external synchronicity’ describes the extent to which both reader and text are embedded in the same social institutions.

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38 Interestingly, if readers and texts are sufficiently ‘misaligned’ (though the word seems to imply an error of some kind, I do not intend this connotation), alignment itself may become a topic for study. Rare books collections, (sometimes multiple and significantly diverse) translations of texts, and scholarly companions to literary works or authors each aim to ‘synchronise’ readers and texts temporally, linguistically, and socially.

39 One of my suspicions about Fish’s theory (a suspicion I will not be able to address in this paper), is that a finer-grained exploration of the ways in which individuals belong to interpretive communities would reveal nuanced differences among constituent members that escape/trouble/contradict Fish’s (very compelling) macroscopic approach. A general lack of academic impetus to theorise societies as functions of individuals is one of the subjects of E. E. Jones’ book Interpersonal Perception, and the reason for his remark that “it is curious how little attention is paid to discovering how humans come to construct the social world” (227).

40 Here, and following, I am using the terms ‘system’ and ‘institution’ as Fish uses them. As I have begun to explain, I prefer to subsume these types of amorphisms into the concept of locally simu-homogenised networked constellations of social functions.

41 The idea of the ‘external’ is also neatly encapsulated in Michel Foucault’s claim that the “fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemes of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy—establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and
Before I continue with the idea of synchronicity, I would like to interject a brief note regarding the roles of readers and texts in Iser’s collaborative theory of interpretation. My treatment of Iser’s claim that successful communication between readers and texts depends on the degree to which texts are able to stimulate readers’ perceptual and cognitive faculties may over-emphasize the text’s role in facilitating communicative processes. In Iser’s thinking, readers make sense of texts.\(^{42}\) The “game,” states Iser, “will not work if the text sets out to be anything more than a set of governing rules.”\(^{43}\) While he does suggest a seemingly balanced and equal relative position of reader and text by claiming that “the way in which [a text] is received depends as much on the reader as on the text,”\(^{44}\) it yet remains that a work of art, for Iser, is “a work of the mind.”\(^{45}\) Further, since the physical text is exclusively a “structured prefigurment”\(^{46}\) of the virtual literary work, it must be allowed that readers are solely responsible for all other processes that form these works.\(^{47}\) While communication between readers and texts creates virtual works, then, the success of this communication depends on readers’ consciousnesses to within which he will be at home” (xxii). Predictably, readers and texts that are informed by such fundamental codes in similar proportions will be most synchronous.

\(^{42}\) Note that the accounts of textual indeterminacies I propose at the beginning of this section each take some aspect of a hypothetical reader’s metal state as the operative element of interpretability, leaving aside, as it were, the text itself.

\(^{43}\) Iser 108.

\(^{44}\) Iser 107.

\(^{45}\) Iser 108.

\(^{46}\) Iser 107.

\(^{47}\) These processes might be referred to collectively as a ‘superstructure’ of interpretation upheld by a textual ‘infrastructure,’ which is the “prefigurment” to which Iser refers. This superstructure still relies on all of the functions of Iser’s esthetic pole. Also, I see no reason why the reader’s function in the relationship between reader and text might not include some aspects that might be considered ‘infrastructural.’ Reading strategies such as ‘skimming’ or skipping inapplicable material, for example, may influence the manner in which the text is able to ‘prefigure’ in Iser’s sense and, thus, influence the virtual work at an infrastructural level.
perform unpredictable, idiosyncratic, and ultimately more complex and varied tasks than it does
the textual schemata, which can serve exclusively to guide the process.

Suppose, then, a sufficient degree of external synchronicity between a reader and text as
would allow that text to establish itself (to some degree) as a correlate in a reader’s
consciousness. With such responsibility upon readers to make sense of texts, might there always
be a peculiar and limited range of potential interpretations proportionate, for example, to a
particular degree of external synchronisation? Iser’s response to this question is premised by the
fact that “the whole text can never be perceived at any one time.”

Apperception can only take place in phases, each of which contains aspects of the object
to be constituted, but none of which can claim to be representative of it. Thus the
aesthetic object cannot be identified with any of its manifestations during the time-flow
of reading. The incompleteness of each manifestation necessitates syntheses, which in
turn bring about the transfer of the text to the reader’s consciousness. The synthesizing
process, however, is not sporadic—it continues throughout every phase of the journey of
the wandering viewpoint.

Iser casts the wandering viewpoint as a specific posture of a reading consciousness.

Necessitated by the perpetual partiality of texts in readers’ minds, the wandering viewpoint

48 Iser 108.

49 Iser 109.

50 Notably, Iser relies heavily on New Critical modes in order to describe the wandering viewpoint. While he does
suggest that “every reading moment sends out stimuli into the memory, and what is recalled can activate the
perspectives in such a way that they continually modify and so individualize one another” (115) in describing how
the wandering viewpoint functions, he provides no more detail regarding mental processes. Instead, consciousness is
repeatedly invoked in its opaque form. A telling example of Iser’s apparent reversion to New Critical techniques
may be found in the way in which he exemplifies his claim that a “sequence of sentences may contain something
about a character, the plot, the author’s evaluation, or the reader’s perspective, without any specific signals to
allows a text to initiate and guide a reader’s progressively fractional and, therefore, layered and cascading perceptions of it. In Iser’s words, the wandering viewpoint facilitates production of the virtual literary work to the extent that “the sentences set in motion a process which will lead to the formation of the aesthetic object as a correlative in the mind of the reader.” 51 Since, for Iser, texts are engaged in the relationship between artistic and esthetic poles exclusively insofar as they set this “process” in motion, it would appear that another kind of synchronicity must exist between reader and text in order to give rise to the wandering viewpoint and to bring about successful acts communication (that is, to position the text “as a correlative in the reader’s consciousness”). 52 While it depends upon the extent to which readers and texts are embedded/encoded in a reader’s locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions (or, the extent to which reader and text are externally synchronised), this internal synchronicity aligns a reader and text according the reader’s methods of remembering, organising, and processing partial elements of texts. Since Iser claims that texts merely prefigure interpretive processes by serving as schemata for potential interpretations, I believe this alignment of text and reader must be oriented according to the reader (hence the term ‘internal’). In the context of the wandering viewpoint, Iser explains:

Every articulate reading moment entails a switch of perspective, and this constitutes an inseparable combination of differentiated perspectives, foreshortened memories, present

distinguish these very different points of orientation from one another” (113). Even though he suggests that “such signals are most frequently to be found where the depths of consciousness are to be plumbed” (113), Iser does not plumb them save for his suggestions regarding stimuli and memory. Instead, he offers a close reading of a section of William Thackeray’s Vanity Fair as his primary example.

51 Iser 110.

52 In saying this, it may seem as if I am departing from Iser’s claim that processes of interpretation rely equally on both the artistic and esthetic poles. Recall, however, Iser’s implication that ‘equality’ in this case signifies something more like ‘compulsory.’ The two poles are ‘equal’ insofar as both are necessary conditions for interpretive processes to occur. As I have argued, however, the ‘work’ done by readers in this relationship is very different from the ‘work’ done by texts.
modifications, and future expectations. Thus, in the time-flow of the reading process, past and future continually converge in the present moment, and the synthesizing operations of the wandering viewpoint enable the text to pass through the reader’s mind as an ever expanding network of connections.\footnote{Iser 116.}

From the point of view of internal synchronisation, then, Iser’s “aesthetic object,” even insofar as it is exclusively prefigured by a textual framework, cannot be anything but the result of a peculiar configuration of the reader’s consciousness.

To briefly summarise my first topic of inquiry, both types of synchronicity—external and internal—expose locations where Iser invokes the term consciousness without directly scrutinising it or, better, locations where Iser gathers any discussion of mental operations that pertain to reading indiscriminately in trust of the term. As a result, Iser’s wandering viewpoint, given its co-dependence on synchronous textual structures and structured acts of comprehension, may be viewed at best as a promising trope. While it stands in effectively as a prophetic placeholder for a potentially more functional and efficacious version of itself, the wandering viewpoint is exclusively a figure of speech. In admitting the mystery that still surrounds consciousness, Iser also admits that the preceding claim must be allowed—stating finally of “the reader’s ‘formulation’ of the text,” that it is “the essential component of a system about which we know all too little, for although it is clear that the norms and values of the textual repertoire become recoded, the basis of the recodification itself remains concealed.”\footnote{Iser 182.}

My second topic of inquiry deals with Iser’s concept of “blanks” or “gaps.” Iser claims that “the blank in the fictional text induces and guides the reader’s constitutive activity. As a
suspension of connectability between perspective segments, it marks the need for an equivalence, thus transforming the segments into reciprocal projections, which, in turn, organize the reader’s wandering viewpoint as a referential field.‖\(^{55}\) Somewhat paradoxically, these structures (I initially described them as the operative locations of the interaction between Iser’s artistic and esthetic poles) are floating textual valences which, collectively, serve as nodes for the peculiar built-in indeterminacies with which a reader endows a text. The paradox to which I refer is that, as my discussion of synchronicity implies, these textual structures are most accurately characterised by their readerly traits. To be clear, I am using the terms ‘textual’ and ‘readerly’ strictly under Iser’s conditions—each as an emblem for a pole of communication between which virtual literary works exist—and it is because the poles interact in order to facilitate this communication that the former term may be characterised according to the latter. Thus, I suggest that the ‘node’ analysis I propose is actually more specific than my more general ‘operative locations’ analysis. Though crucial, my point here may appear self-evident: all collaborative efforts that ‘fill in’ textual blanks and, thereby, induce communication between readers and texts must take place in the minds of readers. If the text is nothing less objective or static than “a governing set of rules,”\(^ {56}\) then readers’ minds, which complete the act of communication, are most pertinent when considering the interaction between reader and text. Put differently, if a reader’s consciousness is the only grounds upon which the process of communication takes place, then blanks are relevant to my purpose insofar as they are nodes, matrices, textual grounds upon which acts of communication take place—they are structures of texts, but they remain dictated by readers’ consciousnesses, they take place in readers’ consciousnesses. As is the case

\(^{55}\) Iser 202.

\(^{56}\) Iser 108.
with indeterminate moments in texts, then, consciousness both shapes, and is reflected within these blanks—as Iser states, consciousness is “the point at which author and reader converge.”

IV

Roland Barthes’ claim that the author is ‘dead’—a literary facade which “writing” sweeps (and has always swept) away—is, as Michel Foucault and others have implied, fraught with implications for reader-response criticism that are even more sonorous than the infinite proliferation of texts. Putting to one side for a moment that his claim also applies to such coterminous functions as “voice,” “subject,” and “point of origin,” Barthes invokes the vivid terms “death” and “destruction” in order to clear theoretical space for his own descriptors of “writing”—terms such as “neutral,” “oblique,” and “composite.” Importantly, as I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, Barthes uses these terms in an attempt to coerce the expository ‘current’ of literary theory into a mode that reader-response criticism alone cannot (as Fish and Iser also prove) support. So that I might preserve this point of view throughout this section, I will retain the concomitant point of view that some semblance of “the author”—along with “voice,” “subject,” and “point of origin”—may survive “writing” in Barthes’ sense. While I will investigate Barthes’ conception of the author/reader relationship further below, the point I

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57 Iser 154.


60 Here I am referring to my premise that Fish, Iser, and Barthes each hyperextend reader-response criticism in different ways in order to compensate for their lack of more defined concepts of reading minds.

61 In Barthes words, the “author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the ‘human person’” (142-43).
wish to begin by making is that, by means of his sometimes hyperbolic language (language that
seems to try to theorize something which is always beyond its grasp), Barthes attempts to debunk
a familiar claim: the claim that objective literary texts are completely self-contained subjects for
interpretive analysis. In his exuberance, and perhaps his frustration with literary theory’s
inability to fully carry out his intentions, however, Barthes positions readers at the focal point of
writing without offering a detailed examination of the qualitative aspects of mental activities
involved in reading. As I investigate Barthes’ reasons for, and means of centralising readers in
this section, I will explore several locations where a specified view of consciousness would make
Barthes’ work more incisive. Writing, after all, may indeed be “that neutral, composite, oblique
space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very
identity of the body of writing,” it may only be that Barthes does not investigate the manner in
which readers facilitate these phenomena, or the persistence with which they do so.62

As events are transcribed into narration—the moment when, according to Barthes,
“voices loose origin” and the “author enters into his own death”—the presence of what Barthes
refers to as a “narrative code” becomes apparent.63 Rather than the singular efforts of an author,
states Barthes, a “performer” or mediator’s mastery of such a code is to be noted. This premise,
aimed at decentralising the author, leads Barthes to consider the manner in which works are
‘attached’ to authors, as well as the positivistic and ideological association of the author (the
individual) and ‘the author’ (the function):

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centered on the
author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the

62 Barthes 142.

63 Barthes 142.
most part in saying that Baudelaire’s work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh’s his madness, Tchaikovsky’s his vice. The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, the voice of a single person, the author confiding in us.  

Here is a familiar contrast. On one hand, a distinct authorial voice exists in (and binds) a literary work, intimating thoughts and ideas which are exclusively its own. On the other, language itself ‘speaks’ in multiple and variously interconnected voices within a work. The premise, argues Barthes, is that a singular and isolated voice “confiding in us,” is untenable as a sole means of studying interpretability—indeed, a reader, for Barthes, is “that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.” The “multiplicity” of writing, then, which replaces the singular voice of an author, is “focused” on the reader. For the purpose of formulating a useful consciousness component, the disposition of this focus will be my primary point of entry into Barthes theory.

Language, for Barthes, having been stripped of any direct or objective connection with authors and readers, is a performance rather than an assertion or confession on the part of any individual. The very concept of writing as a performance of language suggests the potential efficacy of a consciousness component in Barthes’ theory. As regards the ascension of language and the deposition of the author, Barthes is clear:

64 Barthes 143.
65 Barthes 148.
66 Barthes 148.
Though the sway of the author remains powerful (the New Criticism has often done no more than consolidate it), it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it. In France, Mallarme was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach the point where only language, ‘performs,’ and not ‘me.’

For reasons that will become increasingly clear, Barthes is interested in the codes that language itself bears as opposed to ‘what it says’ or, certainly, ‘who is speaking’—topics which, though co-related, are necessarily subsequent to codification. In Barthes thinking, linguistic codes are not linked to specific authors, subjects, or identities, they only require a consciousness (much as was the case in the two preceding theories) oriented relative to the codes in such a way that makes it capable of decoding them (to some degree of ‘completeness’). This, incidentally, is perhaps the primary reason for Barthes’ famous claim that “the author is never more than the instance of writing.” The most important implication of this claim for my purpose is that, whatever processes of interpretation (or, reader/text interaction) take place subsequent to Barthes’ “instance of writing” must be functions of the methods by which the codes of a given linguistic performance are taken up (decoded, aligned, matched, partially understood, etc.) by a reader/listener/interlocutor’s consciousness. Language, states Barthes “knows a ‘subject,’ not a ‘person,’ and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to

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67 Barthes 143.

68 Barthes 145.
make language ‘hold together,’ suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.”⁶⁹ The “subject” that language “knows,” and which exhausts language is consciousness (imbued with particular communicative equipment designed to detect the codes carried by a given language).⁷⁰ In this substitution, the author that Barthes banishes is replaced by (or, more precisely, always has been) the reader’s consciousness (embedded in the social institutions in which she has grown up, and whose locally simu-homogenised networked constellations of social functions have become autonomic elements of her being).⁷¹

Barthes claims that “there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now.”⁷² Writing, then, in Barthes’ thinking, no longer designates

[...] an operation of recording, notation, representation, ‘depiction’ (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which it is uttered—something like the I declare of kings or the I sing of the ancient poets.⁷³

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⁶⁹ Barthes 145.

⁷⁰ If it seems as if the concept of the “narrative code” is ill defined at this point, I should point out that Barthes himself does not expound it directly. Instead, he positions the “narrative code” in contrast with the author (the “modern figure”), stating that, in “ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman, or relator whose performance—the mastery of the narrative code—may possibly be admired but never his ‘genius’” (142). As I will suggest, a specific code in Barthes’ sense is a function of the multiple sources of “writing” and the ways in which these sources appear to readers—I hope this concept recalls the locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions.

⁷¹ The substitution is only partial because Barthes’ readers (whom I will examine in detail below) perform functions that remain distinct from those performed by traditional authors.

⁷² Barthes 145.

⁷³ Barthes 145-46.
Such utterances bear the codes of locally simu-homogenised networked constellations of social functions (as internalised by individual readers in schools, work places, families, etc.) which make them and, thus, invest them with interpretability prior to interpretation. The scriptor’s hand, “cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a figure without origin—or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.”74 Importantly, language “calls into question all origins” insofar as the ways in which its gestures are observed by individual minds might always be partially unpredictable (even if we assume, for example, that Fish’s well organised, normalising interpretive communities describe the process of interpretation almost exactly). The origins to which Barthes refers are, in this sense, always defined (and re-definable) by the peculiar synecdoche for a locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions for which any reader stands. Simply put, there must always be a document and an individual reader; this combination, more than anything else, makes texts.

Barthes’ claim that a text is a “tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of cultures” foregrounds the influence of social institutions, cultural codes, and every more or less recognisable social force on reading minds.75 Within this array of diffuse, yet interconnected material lies the scriptor’s power and significance. Barthes claims that the writer “can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original.”76 Importantly, then, a writer’s “power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.”77 Barthes concludes that, should the writer “wish to express himself, he ought at least to

74 Barthes 146.
75 Barthes 146.
76 Barthes 146.
know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.”

This, for Barthes, is the way consciousness reads—it recognises, imitates, and interprets material with which it is already familiar, only subsequently conflating the scriptor and the author. In order to specify Barthes’ theory by means of a consciousness component, then, it will be essential to investigate how consciousness performs this function. As I will show in the next chapter, Richard Dawkins’ concept of the meme may begin to describe an answer.

Barthes’ removal of the author function (by which I mean the “modern figure,” which idolises the “prestige of the individual”) marginalises any effort to approximate “in language a work that [has] objective status,” and certainly destabilizes the idea that a work’s “intelligibility and worth [are] measured by that objectivity.” A text’s performance of language is the realm of readers’ consciousnesses and, therefore, is bound less by physical objectivity than by the subtle operations of locally simu-homogenised constellations of social functions. I have noted, however, that some semblance of “the author”—along with “voice,” “subject,” and “point of origin”—may survive “writing” in Barthes’ sense. I have done this for the reason that, while Barthes contends that attributing an author to a text ‘closes’ that work and gives it specific explanation, it is clear from current pedagogy in Canadian academic institutions that there is a certain efficacy (especially with respect to time constraints) in placing such restrictions on texts.

Suffice to say that, in addition to circumscribing the realm of the critic, Barthes’ author function also continues to circumscribe the role of the pedagogue and of the academic.

77 Barthes 146.
78 Barthes 146.
79 Barthes 143.
The ‘space’ of writing, for Barthes, is one over which an individual consciousness may "range," applying its social interconnectedness, its experience, its methods of perception, its very being in order to create meaning(s). Indeed, the world itself is a text in Barthes’ thinking, insofar as it amounts to a more or less peculiar (though, at least to some degree, interconnected) bricolage of cues, values, judgments, experiences, etc., which at once mould and amount to consciousness. Barthes states:

Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.81

According to this rationale, Barthes argues that “over and against the traditional notion of the work...there is now the requirement of a new object, obtained by the sliding or overturning of former categories. That object is the Text.”82 If, for example, the work is a “fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field.”83 This is undoubtedly what Barthes intends by his suggestion that writing is a field of coded material which requires decoding (interpretation) by a reader. The coding and decoding of information according to (whatever) processes of interpretation is always replete

80 Barthes 147.
81 Barthes 148.
83 Barthes 156-57.
with ambiguities. Once again, however, reading processes, which are not only engaged by
language, but constitute a part of any performance of language, are the realm of the reader’s
consciousness. As such, these processes are bound primarily by a reader’s peculiar locally simu-
homogenised networked constellation of social functions. In one way or another, this
constellation binds individual consciousnesses together. This, incidentally, is the sense in which
Barthes’ methodological field of the Text is a field; it is also the sense in which it might be
construed as methodological. The work, for Barthes, is a physical object, but the Text, which is
“held in language,” is subject to, and exists only in “the movement of a discourse”—my term
‘locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions’ is, again, a substitution
for ‘discourse’ in this context. Further, it is because Barthes’ Text is “held in language” that it
“continues”—its existence in a discursive continuum (to revert to Barthes’ parlance) is
dependent on, and indeed a subsidiary vision of the discourses, systems, cues, glances, gazes,
etc., which always exist in the very movement to which Barthes refers. These visions are
connected in innumerable and interchangeable ways, none of which are necessarily dependant in
any particular way, but each may be impacted by fluctuations or reformations in others. This,
then, is Barthes’ movement of readers’ consciousnesses. This, finally, is why “the Text is
experienced only as an activity of production,” and why “the text cannot stop.”

With respect to Barthes’ claim that texts must be experienced in reaction to “signs,” the
question arises: how is any sign, in Barthes usage, to be interpreted? Signs, for Barthes, are
“claimed to be evident” on one hand, categorizing a given work as one of “literal science or of
philology,” or as “something to be sought out”—something that, according to Barthes, must

84 Barthes 157.
85 Barthes 157.
86 Barthes 157.
discover its own location within readers’ minds (the realm, as Barthes suggests, of hermeneutics and interpretation). In order to allow for the creation of signs or referents of signs which, according to Barthes, must always both originate and formulate (‘signify’) in readers’ consciousnesses, Barthes proposes the infinite, or deferred, signifier. Barthes makes the distinction clear:

[...] the work itself functions as a general sign and it is normal that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign. The Text, on the contrary, practices the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as ‘the first stage of meaning,’ it’s material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its deferred action.

This formulation of the sign, expectedly, connects affably with the “field” of Barthes’ Text and with the movement of discourse within which, according to Barthes, Texts are created. The infinity of the signifier, which ‘plays’ within the field of the Text, allows the field itself to move and accepts deconstructive critical modes as adjuncts of reader-response criticism, henceforth essentially imbued with specified conceptions of consciousness. That is, consciousness will be the ‘way’ of the locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions—it will contour the new theoretical environment that it necessitates. As Barthes states (foreshadowing the implications of his own work), this arrangement allows the “generation of the perpetual signifier...in the field of the text (better, of which the text is the field)” which is “realized not

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87 Barthes 158.

88 Barthes 158.

89 According to Barthes, “‘Playing’ must be understood in all its polysemy: the text itself plays...and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which reproduces it, but, in order that the practice not be reduced to a passive, inner mimesis (the Text is precisely that which resists such a reduction), also playing the text in the musical sense of the term” (162).
according to an organic progress of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations.\footnote{Barthes 158.}

Barthes’ explicit distinction between work and Text further clarifies how Texts (which, again, as opposed to works, are held in language) ‘read’ “without the inscription of the Father.”\footnote{Barthes 161.}

Here again, the metaphor of the Text separates from that of the work: the latter refers to the image of an organism which grows by vital expansion, by 'development' (a word which is significantly ambiguous, at once biological and rhetorical); the metaphor of the Text is that of the network; if the Text extends itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic (an image, moreover, close to current biological conceptions of the living being).\footnote{Barthes 161.}

The Text, finally, is a “social space which leaves no language safe, outside nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder.”\footnote{Barthes 161.} Importantly, this social space, this locally simu-homogenised constellation of networked social functions draws to its finest point of focus in consciousness.

Given that Fish’s interpretive communities control (at least partially) or curtail the types of meanings that individual community members may ‘create’ during processes of reading, and that Iser allows for only slightly more individual freedom on the part of the reader to ‘create’

\footnote{Barthes 158.}
\footnote{Barthes 161.}
\footnote{Barthes 161.}
\footnote{Barthes 161.}
meaning (she is still guided by the schemata of the text), it would seem that, from the standpoint of meaning-making, Barthes allows the reader the most freedom:

The reader of the Text may be compared to someone at a loose end (someone slackened off from any imaginary); this passably empty subject strolls—it is what happened to the author of these lines, then it was that he had a vivid idea of the Text—on the side of a valley, a oued flowing down below (oued is there to bear witness to a certain feeling of unfamiliarity); what he perceives is multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives: lights, colours, vegetation, heat, air, slender explosions of noises, scant cries of birds, children’s voices from over on the other side, passages, gestures, clothes of inhabitants near or far away.94

This is the locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions as closely as Barthes (lacking a consciousness component which would specify it) can express it.95 The Text, for Barthes, is not plural in meaning, but simply plural. In light of this plurality, I would like to emphasize that Barthes’ reader’s actions (as described in the preceding passage) bear a striking congruency with my description of the indeterminate text at the beginning of the previous section—the “half-identifiable” “incidents” of which Barthes speaks “come from codes that are known, but their combination is unique.”96 Barthes recognizes, then, that the ‘way’ or the contour to which I made reference above exists and, in doing so, he prefigures a consciousness component (as do Fish and Iser) almost to the point of formulating it directly. Indeed, Barthes only lacks a clearer conception of consciousness in order to specify his reading process, which is

94 Barthes 159.

95 As I have implied, without the addition of a consciousness component to his theory Barthes is limited by the term ‘discourse.’

96 Barthes 159.
“semelfactive...and nevertheless woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages...antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony.” If the “intertextual in which every text is held...is not to be confused with some origin of the text,” then a consciousness component is, for Barthes, the very lack of such confusion, and the location of (or, perhaps, the reason for) non-origin. Put differently, a consciousness component in Barthes’ theory will begin to account for any semelfactive instant that strikes into thought (into a reader’s consciousness), finally causing any confusion about origins to progress into that eventual “sliding or overturning of former categories” to which Barthes refers.

97 Barthes 159-60.

98 Barthes 160.
Consciousness Components

‘His was a great sin who first invented consciousness. Let us lose it for a few hours.’

—John T. Unger

I

As I have maintained throughout, I intend this paper as a preliminary exploration of the ways in which consciousness (as the studies I am about to consider treat of it) is integral to reader-response theory (as exemplified by the work of Fish, Iser, and Barthes). Perhaps the most obvious limitation that this objective places upon me, which is especially ad rem in this chapter, is that it often impels me to gloss, relegate to the footnotes, or omit relevant information about the theories (of consciousness) I consider. This chapter in particular raises questions of compatibility, integration, and vicissitude that cannot be addressed with the level of detail they deserve. I hope the fact that this is merely a preliminary effort will partially explain, if not excuse this chapter’s breadth and brevity.

Accounting for the preceding, however, I have consistently maintained that consciousness components are as elemental to Fish, Iser, and Barthes’ reader-response theories as interpretive communities, blanks, the wandering viewpoint, and Text—in this chapter I will strive to give evidence to this claim. I will pair my foregoing analyses of Fish, Iser, and Barthes with analyses of the afore mentioned works by Daniel Dennett, John Searle, and Richard Dawkins respectively (though I would rather perform a much lengthier investigation of the sorts of consciousness components might result from, for example, some hybridisation of their ideas). My primary task in this chapter is to offer some suggestions as to the ways in which the
investigations of consciousness executed by Dennett, Searle, and Dawkins may ground consciousness components for Fish, Iser, and Barthes’ reader-response theories.

II

Daniel Dennett’s view of consciousness is underpinned by a unique variation of phenomenology that he dubs “heterophenomenology.”¹ In the briefest terms, heterophenomenology is “a method of phenomenal description that can (in principal) do justice to the most private and ineffable subjective experiences, while never abandoning the methodological scruples of science.”² Insofar as heterophenomenology ‘does justice’ to such experiences, claims Dennett, it is “a neutral method for investigating and describing phenomenology.”³ Using his heterophenomenological method as a foundation, Dennett aims in *Consciousness Explained* to construct a conceptual alternative to the Cartesian Theatre—his term for a biological (brain-based) threshold between sensory stimulus, and conscious experience.

With respect to this “Cartesian materialism,”⁴ Dennett remarks that “[m]any theorists would insist that they have explicitly rejected such an obviously bad idea. But...the persuasive imagery of the Cartesian Theater keeps coming back to haunt us—laypeople and scientists alike—even

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³ Dennett 98.

⁴ Dennett distils “Cartesian materialism” from Cartesian Dualism by discarding Dualism in the strictly Cartesian sense, yet retaining the idea of a centralised ‘observation post’ in the brain where all streams of neurological stimulus come together as consciousness.
after its ghostly dualism has been denounced and exorcized.” By contrast, Dennett explains that his own method

[…] involves extracting and purifying texts from (apparently) speaking subjects, and using those texts to generate a theorist’s fiction, the subject’s heterophenomenological world. This fictional world is populated with all the images, events, sounds, smells, hunches, presentiments, and feelings that the subject (apparently) sincerely believes to exist in his or her (or its) stream of consciousness. Maximally extended, it is a neutral portrayal of exactly what it is like to be that subject—in the subject’s own terms, given the best interpretation we can muster.

The point I wish to make here serves at once to clarify an important difference between phenomenology and heterophenomenology, and to orient the relationship I intend to build between Dennett and Fish. Dennett doubts the “idea that the activity of ‘introspection’ is ever a matter of just ‘looking and seeing.’” He points out that when it comes to ‘reliable’ introspection, or otherwise attaining “privileged access to our conscious experience,” we tend to believe we are “much more immune to error” than we are. This, significantly, is why Dennett specifies his unique intention to account for what it is like to be a subject in the subject’s own terms. Further, the difference between an account of what it is like to be a subject and an account of what it is like to be a subject in the subject’s own terms is a pertinent point of divergence between Cartesian materialism (and the type of phenomenology it implies), and Dennett’s

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5 Dennett:107.  
6 Dennett:98.  
7 Dennett:67.  
8 Dennett:68.
heterophenomenology. I will revisit this idea and its relevance to the relationship between
Dennett and Fish below, but first (while I am clarifying terms) I will call upon Dennett to
describe the Multiple Drafts Model of consciousness.

The Multiple Drafts Model of consciousness is Dennett’s theoretical pillar. He
summarises it as follows:

There is no single, definitive “stream of consciousness,” because there is no
central Headquarters, no Cartesian Theater where “it all comes together” for the perusal
of a Central Meaner. Instead of such a single stream (however wide), there are multiple
channels in which specialist circuits try, in parallel pandemoniums, to do their various
things, creating Multiple Drafts as they go. Most of these fragmentary drafts of
“narrative” play short lived roles in the modulation of current activity but some get
promoted to further functional roles, in swift succession, by the activity of a virtual
machine in the brain. The seriality of this machine (its “von Neumannesque” character) is
not a “hard-wired” design feature, but rather the upshot of a succession of coalitions of
these specialists.

The basic specialists are part of our animal heritage. They were not developed to
perform peculiarly human actions, such as reading and writing, but ducking, predator-
avoiding, face-recognizing, grasping, throwing, berry-picking, and other essential tasks.
They are often opportunistically enlisted in new roles, for which their native talents more
or less suit them. The result is not bedlam only because the trends that are imposed on all
this activity are themselves the product of design. Some of this design is innate, and is
shared with other animals. But it is augmented, and sometimes even overwhelmed in
importance, by microhabits of thought that are developed in the individual, partly
idiosyncratic results of self-exploration and partly the predesigned gifts of culture.
Thousands of memes, mostly borne by language, but also by wordless “images” and
other data structures, take up residence in an individual brain, shaping its tendencies and
thereby turning it into a mind.9

As regards Fish’s theory (placing, as I did in the previous chapter, specific emphasis on
Fish’s ideas about the ways in which individuals enact reading within interpretive communities)
I believe Dennett’s Multiple Drafts model addresses my criteria for a consciousness component
in several ways.10 Most importantly, The Multiple Drafts model begins to describe how an
individual consciousness may enact reading simply by offering a qualitative hypothesis about the
mental processes that account for consciousness—the notions that there exist “multiple channels
in which specialist circuits try, in parallel pandemoniums, to do their various things, creating
Multiple Drafts as they go,” and that “memes, mostly borne by language, but also by wordless
‘images’ and other data structures, take up residence in an individual brain, shaping its
tendencies and thereby turning it into a mind” rest at the core of this hypothesis. Tracing the
corollaries of the foregoing claim (which, in isolation, may not appear overly revealing) I believe
that, concurrently as Dennett’s theory attempts to clarify the quality of individual consciousness,
it begins to clarify the manner in which an individual consciousness may be “enabled and
limited,” in Fish’s terms, by communal influences. Dennett’s “predesigned gifts of culture” are
the primary means by which this may be said to occur. Further, since the Multiple Drafts model
offers an account of the relationship between individual consciousness and consciousness as at

9 Dennett 253-54.

10 The argument I present in this paragraph is briskly paced because, due to space restrictions, I have constructed it
in direct interface with Dennett’s summary of the Multiple Drafts model. For full derivations of the conclusions
Dennett sets forth in his summary, see chapter five of Consciousness Explained.
least a partial function of a community through the methodological lens of heterophenomenology, it begins to articulate Fish’s readerly (as opposed to textual) sphere of “influence and responsibility”—a definitional problem, you will recall, that Fish implies must be resolved before a more productive theoretical account of reader/text relationships within interpretive communities can be formulated.\textsuperscript{11} Recall from my discussion of heterophenomenology that Dennett’s intent to account for what it is like to be a subject “in the subject’s own terms” (in conjunction with any derivative descriptions of individual consciousness and consciousness as a function of a community) grounds this claim.

In the context of language production, Dennett’s Multiple Drafts model entails that

[...] a torrent of verbal products emerging from thousands of word-making demons in temporary coalitions could exhibit a unity, the unity of an evolving best-fit interpretation, that makes them appear as if they were the executed intentions of a Conceptualizer—and indeed they are, but not of an inner Conceptualizer that is a proper part of the language-producing system, but of the global Conceptualizer, the person, of which the language-producing system is itself a proper part.\textsuperscript{12}

Dennett’s global Conceptualizer lends greater specificity not only Fish’s ‘reader’ (by theorising language production as a specific aspect of a variously constituted individual), but also to interpretive communities. The global Conceptualizer is borne of a perspective that requires us to abandon the idea that a singular and cohesive ‘observer’ or Central Meaner, uniquely informed by all relevant neurological stimuli, is the seat of consciousness. As Dennett explains, “[t]here

\textsuperscript{11} Recall that Fish affirms “the assumption (shared by the formalists) that the text and the reader are independent and competing entities whose spheres of influence and responsibility must be defined and controlled.”

\textsuperscript{12} Dennett 251.
need be no time and place where ‘it all comes together’ for the benefit of a single, unified discriminator; the discriminations can be accomplished in a distributed, asynchronous, multilevel fashion.” If consciousness is as multifarious as Dennett’s model implies, then, it would seem that interpretive communities (which are, in Fish’s theory, populated by consciousness minds of a relatively unexamined and inert order) must gain in both complexity and specificity from his thinking.

Recall from the previous chapter Fish’s contention that interpretive communities dictate (to one degree or another) the collective consciousness of their constituents and, in so doing, influence the kinds of interpretive processes in which their constituents can engage. I in turn argued that whatever accuracy and efficacy may be ascribed to Fish’s hypothesis could be augmented by a supplementary theoretical component that would, by inferring community properties from the tendencies of individual minds (via secondary sources that attempt to explain consciousness), specify what it is that Fish believes is being dictated. In order to exemplify this argument, I would like to imagine Dennett’s global Conceptualizer as a member of one of Fish’s interpretive communities. The global Conceptualizer is essentially composed, as Dennett and Fish agree, by the community—endowed with the “gifts of culture” mentioned above, and “as much a product of [the] community (acting as an extension of it) as the meanings it enables him to produce.” Yet, the global Conceptualizer remains an individual, possessing “the language-producing system” as a “proper part” of her global self—embedded, engrained, and perpetually feeding her multifarious consciousness in ways that are individually tailored simultaneously by the “distributed, asynchronous, multilevel fashion” in which consciousness operates according to Dennett, the specific memes which “take up residence in an individual brain, shaping its

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13 Dennett 297.
tendencies and thereby turning it into a mind,” and the heterophenomenological method by which he suggests we may begin to comprehend consciousness. In light of what I have already said about the relationship between Fish and Dennett, then, it should be clear that the consciousness component I am working toward permits interpretive communities to “determine the kind of attention [a reader] pays and thus the kind of literature ‘he’ ‘makes,’” while simultaneously specifying individual consciousness by means of heterophenomenology.

Pertinent to a more detailed understanding of how individuals and interpretive communities intersect, however, is an understanding of how memes colour Dennett’s explanation of consciousness. Dennett states his hypothesis as follows:

“Human consciousness is itself a huge complex of memes (or more exactly, meme-effects in brains) that can best be understood as the operation of a ‘von Neumannesque’ virtual machine implemented in the parallel architecture of a brain that was not designed for any such activities. The powers of this virtual machine vastly enhance the underlying powers of the organic hardware on which it runs, but at the same time many of its most curious features, and especially its limitations, can be explained as the byproducts of the kludges that make possible this curious but effective reuse of an existing organ for novel purposes."

In conjunction with Dennett’s heterophenomenological method, memes grant us the possibility of thinking about interpretive communities in the seemingly paradoxical terms of a collection of

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14 In the previous chapter I stated that an examination of the ‘site of enactment’ of reading (or, the reader’s mind) not only should, but must accompany a more comprehensive version of Fish’s theory. By focusing on what Fish might refer to as the reader’s sphere of influence, I am proposing a ‘bottom-up’ theoretical model (scrutinising communities as functions of the individuals who create/inhabit/sustain them) to accompany his ‘top-down’ model, which foregrounds the influence of the community on the individual.

15 Dennett 210.
autonomous individuals who remain bounded by communal influences. I will discuss memes in greater detail below, but a cursory definition seems unavoidable here. Memes, according to Richard Dawkins, are cultural evolutionary replicators in the same sense that DNA is a genetic replicator. Memes can be “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the same pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.”¹⁶ According to Dennett, “[t]he best way to see the contribution of memes to the creation of our minds is to follow the standard steps of evolutionary thinking closely.”¹⁷ The reason this is so is because the type of meme evolution Dawkins proposes is “not just analogous to biological or genetic evolution, not just a process that can be metaphorically described in these evolutionary idioms, but a phenomenon that obeys the laws of natural selection exactly.”¹⁸ The point I wish to complete here is that there is certainly a basis in Dennett’s heterophenomenologically obtained (subjective) consciousness for Fish’s concept of communally ‘enabled and limited’ literary interpretability, and, by extension, that there may well be “only ‘ways of reading’ that are extensions of community perspectives.” If this is so, then the addition of Dennett’s theory of consciousness at once affirms and specifies Fish’s assumption that “interpretive strategies are not put into practice after reading; they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is usually assumed, arising from them.”

¹⁷ Dennett 203.
¹⁸ Dennett 202.
III

In *The Mystery of Consciousness*, John Searle prefaces his evaluation of several prominent perspectives on consciousness by reflecting upon the novelty of ‘respectable’ consciousness studies. Searle remarks that “[t]wenty years or so ago, when [he] first became interested seriously in [questions of consciousness], most people in the neurosciences did not regard consciousness as a genuine scientific question at all.”¹⁹ This sentiment is significant not only because it underscores the relative nascent of consciousness studies, but also because it calls attention to the many concomitant uncertainties (methodological, philosophical, biological, etc.) of that naissance with which scientists and philosophers continue to struggle. Further, Searle’s remark neatly represents the approximate time differential between the six major authors I consider in this paper—while Dennett, Dawkins (taking the second edition of *The Selfish Gene*), and Searle published in the early to mid 90’s, Fish, Iser, and Barthes published in the mid to late 70’s. Taking up the point from the previous chapter, Searle’s remark serves as a convenient reminder as to why the reader-response theories I am interested in were designed by their respective progenitors in theoretical environments that represented consciousness merely as a static ‘fact of life’ (environments that were not designed to scrutinise consciousness itself in significant detail)—simply put, there were very few ‘respectable’ studies of consciousness to which they could refer.

The connection I wish to establish between Iser and Searle has its foundation in Searle’s response to a question that he himself proposes during a Socratic style dialogue in the final chapter of his book. As he considers “the questions that keep coming up over and over in the

debates and correspondence” about consciousness, Searle asks: “[w]hy... is consciousness irreducible in a way that other observer-dependent properties such as liquidity and solidity are reducible? Why can’t we reduce consciousness to neuronal behaviour in the same way that we can reduce solidity to molecular behaviour, for example?” Searle’s response to this question may be taken as a concise summary of his philosophical approach to consciousness—he states that “consciousness has a first person or subjective ontology and so cannot be reduced to anything that has third person or objective ontology. If you try to reduce or eliminate one in favour of the other you leave something out.” In essence, Searle’s irreducible first person ontology is the reason I claimed in my introduction to Iser that a single physical page of text may ‘contain’ less (concrete, objective, publicly and universally accessible) information than might be supposed. Insofar as they are the matrices within which communicative exchanges between readers and texts take place, I suggested in accordance with Iser that textual indeterminacies may well be the most prominent features on any page for the very reason that they are exclusively reader oriented and reader specific. Further, though he could not have expressed it in such terms, the premise that consciousness entails an exclusively subjective first person ontology greatly specifies Iser’s claim that the “game [of producing a virtual literary work] will not work if the text sets out to be anything more than a set of governing rules.” Since Iser’s esthetic pole of communication (the ‘readerly’ element required for the creation of a virtual literary work) is essentially irreducible, individual, and inherently private according to Searle, whatever is universally or publicly available in a literary text can be no more than a basic schematic for a virtual work. The concept that consciousness has a strictly first person ontology which is
irreducible (and non-communicable except perhaps, to borrow an idea from Iser, in terms of broad schema) may be seen, finally, as the primary reason why a work of art, for Iser, is “a work of the mind.”

It would appear, then, that Searle and Iser describe a similar phenomenon in the preceding comparison (Searle in the parlance of philosophy of mind, Iser in that of literary theory). Tracing the congruity, I believe Searle’s concept of irreducible consciousness offers a useful working hypothesis as to why any internal alignment of a text and a reader must be oriented, as I have argued, according to the reader. Recall from the last chapter that, while internal alignment is dependent upon the extent to which readers and texts are embedded within a reader’s locally simu-homogenised, networked constellation of social functions (or, the extent to which reader and text are externally synchronised), it refers to the relative position of a text with respect to a specific reader’s peculiar methods of remembering, organising, and processing that text. I suggested that this alignment of reader and text must be oriented according to the reader since, as Iser claims, texts merely prefigure interpretive processes by serving as schemata for potential interpretations. If a reader’s consciousness amounts to a continuous series of irreducibly first person perceptions as Seale suggests, then we may specify internal alignment as a categorically individualised phenomenon. Note that as my concept of internal alignment is specified in this manner, so too is the distinction between Iser’s artistic and esthetic poles of communication—if we think of a literary text as subject to an individual reading consciousness which must experience it as irreducibly subjective, it becomes easier to envision the necessary divisions between schemata and blanks, between texts and virtual works.
Some additional consideration of Searle’s view of consciousness will specify the apparent parallel between his and Iser’s work in the context of the wandering viewpoint. Searle explains that

[...] biological brains have a remarkable biological capacity to produce experiences, and these experiences only exist when they are felt by some human or animal agent. You can’t reduce these first person subjective experiences to third-person phenomena for the same reason that you can’t reduce third person phenomena to subjective experiences. You can neither reduce the neuron firings to the feelings nor the feelings to the neuron firings, because in each case you would leave out the objectivity or subjectivity that is in question.23

With respect to the wandering viewpoint, Searle’s irreducible first person ontology view of consciousness may be taken as the reason why blanks in literary texts can guide “the reader’s constitutive activity.” To explain, by postulating conscious experience as a uniquely first person phenomenon, Searle specifies the manner in which the operative locations of the interaction between Iser’s artistic and esthetic poles (blanks) are textual valences which, collectively, serve as nodes for the peculiar built-in indeterminacies with which a reader subjectively endows a text. Interestingly, if we take reading to be a subjective conscious experience in Searle’s sense, then readers must be capable of keying on (and interacting with) any aspect of a textual schema without any necessity for the resulting virtual work to be identical with that produced by any other reader of the same text.24 Thus, insofar as blanks are ‘privatised’ according to subjective

23 Searle 212.

24 I would like to suggest that similarities among virtual works produced in this way are due largely to the action of locally simu-homogenised constellations of social functions. Recall my hypothesis that a locally simu-homogenised
experience, or, a reader’s exclusive first person ontology, they are the qualifying ‘units’ of the wandering viewpoint.

Recall that the reading consciousness (the wandering viewpoint), for Iser, is the engine of interpretation. While texts serve as guiding frameworks for communication between readers and themselves, they contain innumerable indeterminate moments which are, as I have previously suggested, reader-oriented and reader-specific. Iser’s “aesthetic object,” then, even insofar as it is exclusively prefigured by this framework, cannot be other than the result of the peculiar configuration of a reader’s consciousness, which, according to Searle, obtains from an irreducible and, thus, wholly subjective first person ontology. This is the most pertinent sense in which Iser’s wandering viewpoint may be described in the terms of a biologically based phenomenological process which leads to consciousness.\(^{25}\)

IV

Richard Dawkins’ brand of “orthodox neo-Darwinism” seems to offer an analogous shift in perspective on evolution as Roland Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” and “From Work Text” do for the relationship between authors and readers.\(^{26}\) In his essays, Barthes attempts to undermine the idea that works of literature are products of the singular and exclusive efforts of authors—“tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions”—proposing instead that a reader of literature is “that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.” In the analogous shift, Dawkins’ view of

\(^{25}\) Note that, according to Searle, consciousness is a product of “neuron firing,” which gives rise to experience (though neither the biological underpinnings, nor the qualitative experience of consciousness can be expressed in the terms of the other).

\(^{26}\) Dawkins viii.
Darwinism does not focus on “the individual organism” but, rather, adopts what he calls a “gene’s-eye view.”\textsuperscript{27} A pertinent anecdote regarding Dawkins’ appraisal of the link between these two perspectives is to be found in a subtle alteration which appears in the second edition of \textit{The Selfish Gene}. In the book’s first edition, Dawkins claims that both the gene’s-eye view and that of the individual practically amount to the same type of neo-Darwinism. In the second edition Dawkins revises this claim, suggesting that, while the two views do in some ways amount to differing perspectives on the same topic, “a change of vision can, at its best, achieve something loftier than a theory.”\textsuperscript{28} Not unlike Barthes, Dawkins is adamant that such a change of vision can “usher in a whole climate of thinking.”\textsuperscript{29} It is this kinship (a part of which I hope to share with my own work) that, in a broad sense, makes Dawkins’ work so applicable to that of Barthes. Since Dawkins is an ethologist, and deals with consciousness primarily from an evolutionary standpoint, I will rely on some of Daniel Dennett’s applications of his work in order to ‘individualise’ his ideas and draw them more directly into the arena of Barthes’ reader.

In accordance with his gene’s-eye view model, Dawkins suggests that we must “begin by throwing out the gene as the sole basis of our ideas on evolution.”\textsuperscript{30} Instead, adhering to the strictest definition of Darwinism, Dawkins offers that there may in fact be other types of replicators in the universe, and that limiting our theoretical vantage point to replicators of which we are already aware is limiting and unnecessary.\textsuperscript{31} Dawkins puts much stock in what he

\textsuperscript{27} Dawkins viii.

\textsuperscript{28} Dawkins ix.

\textsuperscript{29} Dawkins ix.

\textsuperscript{30} Dawkins 191.

\textsuperscript{31} As expected, Dawkins defines a replicator as a molecule (as in DNA) or other carrier of evolutionary information that has “the extraordinary property of being able to create copies of itself” (15).
believes to be a relatively universal law; specifically, “the law that all life evolves by the
differential survival of replicating entities. The gene, the DNA molecule, happens to be the
replicating entity that prevails on our own planet. There may be others. If there are, provided
certain other conditions are met, they will almost inevitably tend to become the basis for an
evolutionary process.”\(^{32}\) Dawkins’ concept of the meme, then, is borne in part from his wish not
to confine his Darwinian evolutionary model to the only replicator of which we are presently
aware. Importantly, Dawkins is convinced that new replicators may be found to be capable of
new “kinds of evolution.”\(^{33}\)

We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural
transmission, or a unit of imitation. ‘Mimeme’ comes from a single Greek root, but I
want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like ‘gene.’ I hope my classicist friends will forgive
me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme...Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases,
clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate
themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes
propagate themselves in the same pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process
which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.\(^{34}\)

Meme pools comprise what Dawkins refers to as “the soup of human culture”\(^{35}\) and, as such, I
suggest that they may be viewed as a conveniently specific form of the cultural collective that

\(^{32}\) Dawkins 192.

\(^{33}\) Dawkins 192.

\(^{34}\) Dawkins 192.

\(^{35}\) Dawkins 192.
Barthes claims inform both scriptors and readers. N. K. Humphrey summarises the rudimentary functioning of this pool:

[...] memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme’s propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell. And this isn’t just a way of talking—the meme for, say, ‘belief in life after death’ is actually realized physically, millions of times over, as a structure in the nervous systems of individual men all over the world.36

Memes, then, and the meme pools that amount to “human culture” at any given time and place present individual agents (my focus in this project is the site of enactment of reading—the reader herself) with a vast host of material from which to draw in order to produce both writings and interpretations. Indeed, from Daniel Dennett’s point of view, what Dawkins (and, implicitly, Barthes) describes is consciousness. Recall that, for Dennett, draft designs which lead to conscious experiences are

[...] augmented, and sometimes even overwhelmed in importance, by microhabits of thought that are developed in the individual, partly idiosyncratic results of self-exploration and partly the predesigned gifts of culture. Thousands of memes, mostly borne by language, but also by wordless “images” and other data structures, take up residence in an individual brain, shaping its tendencies and thereby turning it into a mind.37

36 Humphrey qtd. in Dawkins 192.

37 Dawkins 253-54.
Especially relevant to my locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions hypothesis is Dawkins’ suggestion that, in contrast to genes, a meme is propagated not by what he calls “survival value,” but by “what gives it its stability and penetrance in the cultural environment.”\textsuperscript{38} In addition, as it begins to clarify how a locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions is constituted (that is, by geographically proximate individuals, each drawing a more or less unique sample from a common ‘cultural library’ of material in order to formulate her own consciousness, or, in Dennett’s terms, to shape the tendencies of her brain, “thereby turning it into a mind”), Dawkins’ meme also specifies Barthes’ implied definition of consciousness. The author that Barthes banishes is replaced by (or, more precisely, always has been) the reader’s consciousness—a more or less unique collection of memes drawn from the social institutions in which she is embedded, and whose locally simu-homogenised networked constellation of social functions has become a foundational element of her being. The scriptor’s hand, “cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a figure without origin” for the reason that it is inextricably bound to draw upon (and subsequently be constituted in a reader’s mind by) a vast and eclectic “soup of culture” for its language, and for its potential meanings. For the same reason, Barthes claims that the writer “can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original.”\textsuperscript{39}

Importantly, then, Dawkins’ meme provides a new perspective on Barthes’ claim that a writer’s “power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.”\textsuperscript{40} Given the preceding meme-based construct of consciousness, I believe Barthes’ reasons for claiming that, should the writer “wish to express himself, he ought at

\textsuperscript{38} Dawkins 193.

\textsuperscript{39} Barthes 146.

\textsuperscript{40} Barthes 146.
least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is itself only a ready-formed
dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely” are obvious.
This, for Barthes, is the way consciousness reads—it recognises, imitates, and thusly interprets
material with which it is already familiar, only subsequently conflating the scriptor and the
author. Memes, in Dawkins’ description, are the fundamental means by which consciousness
performs this function. A scriptor’s meme-based consciousness is lost in the Text at the very
moment when it comes into contact with a reader for the reason that the reader is bound to apply
to it her own meme-based consciousness. This is why readers are, for Barthes, “the space on
which all quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost” and,
ultimately, why “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.”
Conclusion

‘More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness.’

—Walter J. Ong

I

In this paper I hope I have successfully begun to show how Fish, Iser, and Barthes each problematise the concept of objective textuality. More importantly, I hope I have begun to show that consciousness must figure prominently in any corollary theoretical attempt to reorganize what Tompkins refers to as the “distinctions” between readers and texts. While I have chosen to address this issue by focusing on consciousness, however, I believe another viable approach would focus on textuality. Moreover, I believe that there exists sufficient potential for communication between my consciousness based approach and a hypothetical textuality based approach to warrant a brief outline of what the latter might look like here.

Indeterminacy is the defining feature of the textual condition as Jerome McGann posits it. McGann describes his experience in the textual condition as follows: “I am currently in—deeply in—the textual condition. And I am in it whether I am writing on April 1 or speaking on April 27. Indeed, the textual condition is positively defined by some specific type of indeterminacy analogous to the one I experience at this (whichever) moment.” By means of an immediate example, I will attempt to clarify some of the ways in which McGann’s textual

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1 Recall from the first chapter my contention that the term ‘subjective textuality’ cannot usefully be applied in opposition to ‘objective textuality’ for the reason that, according to Fish, individual readers are not capable of creating their own independent literatures. The term ‘indeterminate’ is undoubtedly more appropriate both in the present context, and that of Fish’s argument.

2 McGann 89.
condition and, more generally, a textuality based approach to redefining the distinctions between readers and texts compliments my consciousness based approach.

My neighbours are, at this very moment in text, making noise. In response, I could simply try to ignore them; I could go someplace quiet and continue thinking/writing; I could bang on my wall in hopes of reminding them that the walls in our building are very thin. Insofar as it is inflected by their distraction, this text is the result of my decision to try to ignore my neighbours. It is likely that other decisions would have generated different texts—on my way to a quieter location, for example, I may have had a felicitous idea for this conclusion which, given my decision not to move, will not be included; on the other hand, I could have lost my concentration during the move and decided not to include the present example at all. The point is that no matter what I choose to do, there are bound to be indeterminate textual implications. These implications constitute a part of my current textual condition.

Since, according to McGann, I am perpetually in the textual condition, minor noise distractions, partially lost drafts, typographical errors, misquotations, misinterpretations, lapses in concentration, and countless other influential factors have undoubtedly shaped this text throughout its composition, and/or will continue to shape it in indeterminate ways. It is this perpetual condition of indeterminate affectation that serves as the primary link between my consciousness based argument for a reorganised view of the distinction between readers and texts and a hypothetical textuality based argument. As I have suggested, the two arguments are complimentary—McGann’s view of textuality, much like Fish, Iser, and Barthes’ views of reading, problematises objective textuality. D.F. McKenzie encapsulates the point succinctly when he states that “the different physical forms of any text, and the intentions they serve, are relative to a specific time, place and person. This creates a problem only if we want meaning to
be absolute and immutable.”

As I have argued throughout, there do not seem to be any conditions under which meaning (in McKenzie’s usage) could be absolute or immutable.

To approach the point differently, whatever is ‘in’ this text (momentarily putting to one side to how ‘it’ got here) could be quite profoundly indeterminate. For example, I have included a plethora of citations in this paper; ostensibly, my goal in doing so has been to support, enhance, specify, etc. my own claims—to show that they resonate in, or reflect existing ‘bona fide’ academic thought. Yet, it is entirely possible that, by incorporating others’ work into my own, I have caused ‘accidents’—I may have mistakenly (or, perhaps, on purpose) re-assigned intended meanings (however ‘intended meanings’ may be understood) by taking them out of context; I might also have misinterpreted a given passage and, as a result, cited it to the detriment of my own argument. In a number of ways, I might have mutated what others have written to suit (or injure) my own purposes.

In his assessment of the “deformationist” approach to interpretation, Jonathan Culler notes that “the greatest insights are produced in the process of necessary and determinate misreading.” For theorists such as Paul de Man, states Culler, “interpretation is always in fact covert literary history and inevitable error, since it takes for granted historical categorizations and obscures its own historical status.” While de Man’s perspective on misreading does address my point about citation, I would suggest that, in combination with a useful texuality based approach, a consciousness based reader-response approach to redefining the distinctions between readers and texts could neutralise or even abandon such terms as “misreading,” “covert,” and

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3 McKenzie 60-61.

4 Note that this form of indeterminacy contributes an additional dimension to my argument that a single physical page of text may ‘contain’ less information than might be supposed.

Perhaps the greatest potential strength of a consciousness/textuality based reader-response theory is that it would allow readings to proliferate through an ever changing literary history (as de Man might describe it), which would impinge upon a reader in different ways (whether she was aware, partially aware, or unaware of its influence) depending upon the peculiar synecdoche for a locally simu-homogenised, networked constellation of social functions that she embodied.7

In his essay “Disciplines of the Text/Sites of Performance,” W. B. Worthen calls attention to “three interlaced ways we think of a ‘text’: (1) as a canonical vehicle of authorial intention; (2) as an intertext, the field of textuality; (3) as a material object, the text in hand.”8 I believe my discussion thus far implies that Worthen’s second way of thinking of a text effectively subsumes the other two. That is, while I agree with Worthen that each way of thinking of a text is perfunctorily distinct (within the interlacement that connects them all), it seems that numbers (1) and (3) are always in some way mediated by number (2)—the interlacement is unbalanced. By examining the ‘content’ of this text, for example, I hope I have shown how the idea of a text as a “canonical vehicle of authorial intention” may be subsumed.9

Further, I believe that Worthen’s second way of viewing texts—the one that I have attempted to

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6 The most significant reason for this particular intersection of consciousness and textuality based perspectives is the idea, which is expectedly common to Fish, Iser, and Barthes, that readers are more or less responsible for creating meanings in texts. It is appropriate that such a fundamental tenet of reader-response criticism should come to bear upon such a fundamental issue of textuality as ‘error.’

7 I bring up de Man’s point in part because of the commentary it provides as regards obfuscated meanings in texts, but also to draw attention to the semantic shift that my project implies with respect to more colloquial conceptions of ‘wrong’ readings.


9 While I will not discuss Worthen’s third view of texts, I should note that both McGann and McKenzie treat the physicality of texts as an “expressive form.” McGann states that texts convey meaning through “bibliographic codes.” In contrast to its linguistic codes, a text’s bibliographic codes are prominent when the “physique of the ‘document’ has been forced to play an aesthetic function, has been made part of the ‘literary work’” (77). Similarly, the physical features of books, for McKenzie, are inseparable from their literary meaning and, thus, he argues that “books can be expressive forms of some subtlety” (60).
link to my foregoing discussion of indeterminate textuality—may ultimately be linked to my
discussion of reading minds. It seems to me, after all, that the idea of a text as a field of textuality
uniquely informs Fish’s claim that a reader’s interpretive strategies “are, in effect, community
property, and insofar as they at once enable and limit the operations of his consciousness, he is
too,” Barthes claim that “the metaphor of the Text is that of the network; if the Text extends
itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic (an image, moreover, close to current
biological conceptions of the living being),” and Iser’s claim that consciousness is “the point at
which author and reader converge.”

II

I would like to acknowledge some current scholarship in the relatively new
interdisciplinary field of cognitive cultural studies. Though each of the following authors takes
some aspect of literature as their theoretical focus (as opposed to literary theory itself), they are
each concerned in some capacity with combining cognitive and literary studies.

In 1999, Lisa Zunshine and several others received approval from the Modern Language
Association to create a discussion group which focused on cognitive approaches to literature. As
of 2009, this group’s membership was over 1200. In her edited volume Introduction to Cognitive
Cultural Studies, Zunshine states her threefold intention to provide readers with “grounding in
several major areas of cognitive science,” to present “new interpretations resulting from applying
insights from cognitive science to cultural representations,” and to consider “these new
interpretations in the context of the commitment of those who have adopted cognitive
approaches to seeking common ground with existing literary-theoretical paradigms.”

10 Barthes 161.
recent works in this field include Jonathan Gottschall’s *Literature, Science, and a New Humanities*, in which Gottschall outlines a comprehensive paradigm for literary studies based in cognitive science, Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky’s *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity*, and Blakey Vermeule’s *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters*

While Gottschall, Richardson, and Spolsky’s work is similar to Zunshine’s (in that it expounds the importance of cognitive science to literary studies), Vermeule’s work is a product of the closely related (and also relatively new) field of evolutionary literary criticism. In her book, Vermeule relies on literary and cognitive studies to examine the mental processes that inform human social interactions. She investigates “free indirect” narrative techniques, which conflate narrator and character voices, and hypothesises that such techniques evolved in response to our “intense interest in other people’s secret thoughts and motivations.”

Others currently contributing to the broadening fields of cognitive and evolutionary cultural studies include Elaine Scarry, who has hosted a seminar on cognitive theory and the arts at Harvard University since 2000, Michael Holquist, who leads a team of researchers with backgrounds in both the arts and sciences currently focused on understanding the mechanics of reading, and William Flesch, whose aim in *Comeuppance: Costly Signaling, Altruistic Punishment, and Other Biological Components of Fiction* is to “to try to analyse some of the biological conditions of possibility of narrative and in particular of fiction.”

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III

If the idiosyncrasy of linguistic expression to which I alluded at the beginning of this paper is indeed as vague and ineffable as I implied, I believe it is so because exact theories/models/definitions of consciousness are, at present, equally as elusive. This point is recognisable in the words of Evan Thompson, who summarises the renowned “explanatory gap” as follows:

In general terms, the problem is that there seems to be a gap between the bio-behavioural and abstract, functional characteristics of cognition and the subjective and experiential aspects of mental processes. This sense of a gap is evident in the fact that there is still no well-developed scientific account of consciousness and its relation to brain activity (or to bio-behavioural processes more generally), despite considerable scientific advances in understanding the ‘mind-brain’ and growing scientific respectability for the topic of consciousness.\(^1\)

It is evident in the words of Stuart Sutherland, who describes consciousness as a “fascinating but elusive phenomenon; it is impossible to specify what it is, what it does, or why it evolved. Nothing worth reading has ever been written on it.”\(^2\) It resonates in the words of Alexander Batthyany and Avshalom Elitzur, who conclude that consciousness is something of a paradoxical inevitability, “posing to science riddles just as evasive, annoying and challenging as ever: Why, given that laws of physics can in principle explain physiological behaviour just as they explain machinery, are there qualia?...And if qualia can affect observable behaviour, does

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this not entail a violation of physics’ most cherished conservation laws?” It is perhaps no more clearly evident than in the words of Daniel Dennett, who characterises consciousness as “the last surviving mystery;” and in the words of John Searle, who reminds us that, while much has been done to decipher consciousness in the last thirty years, “the whole subject is still plagued with mistakes and errors.” I believe that a greater understanding of the cosmic background of literary expression, of readers, reading processes, and response will evolve at a contemporaneous pace with consciousness research and the diligence with which this research is integrated into literary theory. I hope I have highlighted the need for such interdisciplinary thinking.


17 Dennett 21.

18 Searle xi.
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