the inability to repay the unilateral gift). It also shed new light on grace, as an unconditional gift, with the risk of transforming beautiful generosity into indebtedness of the beneficiary. All of this led to a new reading of Weber’s central thesis of The Protestant Ethic and to a new way of situating reciprocally the relations of gifts and the relations of money, which are not two opposing versions of a same level of exchange, but two profoundly different orders of social relations. The marketplace exchange is in response to the differentiation of labor, while the gift publicly attests to recognition between groups and individuals, and is the link that unites mankind. The question of ceremonial gift-giving was finally most especially about this link, this reciprocal recognition, this grace received from others or granted by the gods. And thereby we understand Socrates’s insistence—the gifts he receives honor what the god, through him, has granted: that invaluable wisdom that no discipline can master.

This is a brief account of my itinerary, the condensed narrative of its surprises and bifurcations, which gave me so many moments of joy, and, at the end of the journey, so many new questions, so many other unknown stars in the sky, so many archipelagos of knowledge still to explore...to renew that promise born of the journey itself: to discover that which I was not seeking.

University of California, San Diego
translated by Roxanne Lapidus

The Limits of the Literary

Vincent Kaufmann

(The tone is serious, full of self-confidence, as though the author were an author, as though he had a body of work, even a coherent body of work)

I have always attempted to grasp the literary—that absolutely specific thing that so many theories in the past attempted to define definitively—at its limits: in the Vers de circonstance of a Mallarmé, in the unpublished infinity of the Cahiers of a Valéry, in the worldly notes of a Proust, in the love letters of a Kafka, in the social games of the Surrealists, in the urban explorations of the situationists, or else in the interventions of a Debord in May ’68. At its limits—where boundaries are blurry, where the literary crosses over into
life, and becomes action (my point of view has always been absolutely pragmatic), there where inversely, life is transformed into text, where it is decreed by the poetic. To grasp it, not in order to defend or sacralize it (à la Blanchot), but simply to show that it exists, and in order to recognize it as such. This has the advantage of allowing one to not believe in it; the literary is not meant to be taken literally.

(The tone is still serious, but less confident; the author is in the throes of creation, and is sometimes overtaken by a lack of inspiration: what if the lode he has been mining for so many years gives out?)

This “method” continues to be at work in my current research, which consists, for example, of exploring points of intersection—the boundaries—between the literary, the medical and the religious (in a Zola, an Artaud or a Guibert). Or, more ambitiously, to examine the projects and means of communication developed by the Avant-Gardes, and by various utopias, which routinely become sects when they are put into action. Thus it’s a kind of analytical history of the desire for communication, and of the means for realizing it, which links the communal adventures of filibusters on Madagascar to the planetary utopia of the Internet, not forgetting the Saint-Simonians who built canals and railroads or the numerous Fourierists putting the finishing touches on their amorous utopias. There is a lot of literature in utopia, and a lot of utopia in the literary, especially among the Avant-Gardes.

(The tone is at first melancholy, then cool; the author attempts to be in sync with the times)

Today when one questions the limits of the literary, it is difficult not to hear the term limit also in its restrictive sense. It’s possible that in the new, primarily audiovisual and cybernetic media configuration characterizing our modern society and its networks, the role and function of literature—indisputable in the era of nations and national education—may hereafter be limited, secondary, or even precarious. By announcing the end of literature, this ends up happening, simultaneously putting out of work generations of specialists of the signifier and of close readings. What is the point of literary studies in an era that reads less and less anyway?

The lack of a satisfactory answer to this question could sink us into a definitive moroseness, recycled theoretically via Heidegger or Blanchot into
a quasi-political position. We could see ourselves as the Last of the Mohicans, as the ultimate defenders of poetry, as prestigious resisters to technoglobalization. But this lack (meaning also the change in the media’s horizon characterizing our era) also represents an opportunity to do the history of the beliefs and the legitimations that enabled something like the literary field or the literary institution to hold its own over the last three or four decades. To do this history in order not to repeat it, though in any case it’s not possible to repeat it, for history never comes around again in the same way. Today we must reinvent the uses and even the limits of literature. But for that, no doubt we must begin by evaluating the old usages, and eventually renouncing them. This would be the direction/meaning of a history of literary criticism and theory as developed over the last half-century: the pleasures of self-criticism, or of what some no doubt would call denial, if not betrayal. I prefer to speak of a taste for change. “Je est un autre”—I am another—and even several others.

University of St. Gallen, Switzerland
translated by Roxanne Lapidus

What is Conscious?

*Philip Kuberski*

Why should brain events bring about the experience of sight, hearing, smell, taste, sensation, emotion, and thought? How does the third person brain become the first person mind, how does an *it* become an *I*?

If one is unwilling to accept this transformation, one has to throw in one’s lot with the cognitivists who believe that subjective states are not essential but nominal. These cognitivists are as concerned with dismantling the “folk psychology” of subjectivity as they are devoted to an explanation of brain functions. We only think we’re conscious, they seem to be saying, and we should give up that illusion, just as our ancestors gave up the idea that the sun rises and sets.

If one thinks that an *it* can become an *I*, then different questions arise. If this transformation occurs, is it only an illusion? And if it is an illusion, does that mean that consciousness is illusory and thus unreal or illusory and no less real for that? Is consciousness a real illusion?