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?
But if there is consciousness, who or what is conscious? Since consciousness seems unthinkable except as a form of representation, how is one to grasp the ultimate subject of that representation? Those subjects keep receding in an endless series of Chinese boxes.

The basic dilemma is clear. One can endorse the cognitive theory and discard consciousness or one can endorse the emergent theories and run up against an insuperable paradox. If one discards consciousness, it can be explained (away); if one accepts consciousness it cannot be explained.

But must consciousness be understood as an internal state that resists scientific explanation as well as non-paradoxical philosophical description? Can it rather be understood as a worldly, transactional event not confined either to subjective or objective locations?

Does understanding consciousness, then, mean giving up on the idea of the “I”? If it does, which absence of the “I” would I prefer? The cognitive absence of the self? Or the Buddhist absence of the self?

And who decides?

Department of English
Wake Forest University

“What Questions Fascinate Me?”
“What do I Want to Know?”

Gregg Lambert

The Question of Fascination: Oedipus asked too many questions for his own good. That much we already know. It follows, therefore, that the questions that fascinate me are not necessarily related to “what I want to know,” since fascination already betrays an essential passivity to “the question,” which fascinates me only to the degree that I want to know nothing about it.

“Bad Faith”: Likewise, there are questions that are posed only to avoid asking other questions; for example, in intimate relationships, we talk around the question we really want to ask. These parasitical questions are like the small fish that nibble at the carcass of a drowned man.

The Oyster and the Shell: It has often been observed that the question-answer form is itself already the symptom of the subject’s aggressive relation to an environment populated by objects and other subjects, a relation that in