Reframing the Adjustment: A Response to Adler and Gross

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We admire the seriousness of purpose evident throughout "Adjusting the Frame," the substantive response by Hans Adler and Sabine Gross to our coedited special issue of *Poetics Today* (23, no. 1), "Literature and the Cognitive Revolution." Responding in turn, we also wish to acknowledge the extensive scholarship that informs their response, not least their close acquaintance with primary and critical texts in German that clearly ought to play a greater role in the growing area of cognitive literary and cultural studies. Not least, we appreciate the spirit of hospitality that marks especially the first section of "Adjusting the Frame." Adler and Gross make a point of welcoming the new work in cognitive criticism that we sought at once to feature, challenge, and extend in the special issue. They find it "refreshing" and admire its "inclusionary" ethos and the resulting "heterogeneous" mix of essays, positions, and objects of critical interest (Adler and Gross 2002: 196–97). Given the suspicion, hostility, or (perhaps worst) indifference that a novel critical field may sometimes provoke, we relish the significant common ground that Adler and Gross establish with the critics and theorists represented in the special issue. In fact, we have still more in common with Adler and Gross than they seem to allow, as we hope to demonstrate in the course of this rejoinder. At the same time, we have found

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some legitimate areas of disagreement as well as certain consistent patterns of misunderstanding, the most important of which we will try to detail.

To begin with, we do not feel that the terms *cognitivist* and *cognitivism*, frequently invoked by Adler and Gross, although appearing nowhere in the special issue itself, usefully describe our joint efforts. As an "-ism," *cognitivism* seems to imply a shared worldview or ideology rather than an overlapping set of varied research interests and theoretical reference points. (Compare the difference between "social theory" and "socialist theory.") While the *cognitive* in "cognitive literary criticism" does meaningfully relate to the same term as it occurs in disciplinary compounds like "cognitive psychology," "cognitive anthropology," "cognitive linguistics," and "cognitive neuroscience," these rapidly developing fields manifest far too much diversity—in theory, method, and sheer range of subjects of inquiry—to yield anything like the common essence suggested by "cognitiv*ism*." Their extensive use of this term helps Adler and Gross (ibid.: 196) buttress the charge that we, as editors, have subsumed the heterogeneity of the special issue under the "homogenizing label *cognitivism*" (their italics). However, that "label" is theirs, not ours. Instead, we accept their characterization of what they call "cognitivism" as a "fuzzy 'orienting field' that sets up signposts for (among others) literary criticism and literary history" (ibid.: 198). The provisional, "fuzzy," and diverse character of our collective efforts should not be occluded by a label that implies a bounded significance to the rich and emerging conception of the cognitive.

As Adler and Gross (ibid.: 197) themselves note, in fact, a "more comprehensive notion of human cognition" has over the past decade or so largely displaced the narrower, more exclusively computational, and effectively disembodied notion that the term *cognitivism* now conveys for many cognitive theorists and researchers (Varela et al. 1991: 71). More recent theories of cognition instead seek to acknowledge the bodily instantiation (if not basis) of mind, the emotive aspects of cognitive activity, and the social embeddedness of cognitive development and functioning. Given this broad definition of the "cognitive" in cognitive criticism, we do not share Adler and Gross's qualms about viewing literary artifacts as a subset of cognitive artifacts. What could literary acts be *other* than acts of human minds, unless, say, one were to take poets' accounts of divine inspiration literally?

Viewing literary artifacts as products of mind, however, does not render the "category of the literary . . . superfluous" (Adler and Gross 2002: 198). Although no firm and stable bounding line can be drawn between literary and nonliterary productions, *prototypically* literary works exhibit a number of distinctive features. They manifest a greater than usual emphasis on and awareness of the material medium, and especially the sound qualities, of

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language (Jakobson's [1960] "poetic" function). They attempt to bring various levels of a text, from its particular phonetic features through its formal organization to its paraphrasable semantic import, into meaningful relation, whether harmonious, tense, or ironic. They relate to play in their "as if" or fictional character, what might be termed their "off-line" cognitive status. They seek to arouse affect as well as intellectual engagement. They aim to produce pleasure as well as to convey information (much of which may *appear* to be useless on account of its fictive status). The distinctive elements of literary works demand a distinctive disciplinary focus, even if that discipline ideally seeks coherence with such related disciplines as cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, cognitive anthropology, and neurobiology. At the same time, the cognitive study of literature cannot lose sight of the ecological, economic, institutional, and technological factors that help shape literary works. Cognitive theories (as Adler and Gross [2002: 198] rightly point out) "necessarily" view human subjects as "constantly changing and . . . in constant exchange" with a sociophysical environment, entailing a commitment to "historical" as well as evolutionary understanding. A cognitive approach to literature is by definition neither idealist nor ahistorical.

Especially given the length of their response to the special issue, Adler and Gross have surprisingly little to say about the essays themselves. When they do look at specific essays, their remarks are kept brief, and their criticisms are stated baldly rather than argued at any length. Francis Steen, for example, is tasked for failing to integrate his essay's historicist and cognitive dimensions (ibid.: 201). The point of Steen's essay, however, is that a given text's ideological effects cannot be fully understood without some model for how fictional texts engage with and seek to alter the minds of their readers. If the model Steen proposes is even remotely on target, then his essay's historicist and cognitive dimensions are tightly integrated indeed. Lisa Zunshine is said to have ignored the popularity of "physico-theology" in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European culture, which Adler and Gross (ibid.: 201–2) claim invalidates her argument that children being told that God "made" them will find the notion of artificial human creation salient. (Have the children been keeping up with teleological theology?) Yet one era and culture after another has found the notion of an artificial human disturbing, from Greek myths of living statues and metallic men to Jewish traditions concerning the golem. La Mettrie could count on the shock value delivered by the very title of his work, *L'Homme machine* (Machine man), in the eighteenth century, and the spectacle of an artificial human being has continued to trouble and provoke audiences from the stage adaptations of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in the early nineteenth century to the

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Steven Spielberg film *AI* released in 2001. Eighteenth-century English children, moreover, would be far more likely than their twenty-first-century counterparts to live in or near rural areas and to have regularly witnessed animal births. The notion that they themselves were "made" and not born should indeed have proved cognitively salient, whether or not their parents were conversant with theological notions of a divine craftsman. Adler and Gross's (ibid.: 202) point that the connection between Romantic-era and current neuroscience remains "somewhat oblique" in Alan Richardson's (2002: 157–58) essay is anticipated by the concluding section of that essay itself. The other essays in the special issue are mentioned only in passing.

After the first two sections, "Adjusting the Frame" largely ignores the special issue, instead attacking positions that we fail to see articulated in the issue itself and that, indeed, we would hasten to repudiate. Adler and Gross (2002: 203) complain, for example, of a "cheerful obliviousness" to earlier relevant work often marking what they call "literary cognitivism." But no specific literary critics are mentioned in this context, except for Mark Turner, who is exempted from the charge. In addition to Turner's essay, the special issue features an essay by Richardson (2002: 143–44, 149) that addresses precisely the subject of what Adler and Gross (2002: 205) call "cognitive studies *avant la lettre*," citing (as they also do) the work of Herder among other eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century thinkers. Richardson does not lack for company in taking an active scholarly interest in cognitive and neural theory avant la lettre, which might best translate into English as the "pre-history of cognitive science," a phrase Adler and Gross (2002: 202) object to despite its harmony with their own French-English hybrid. Owen Flanagan (1991), for example, devotes an entire book to antecedents of cognitive science in earlier philosophical and psychological traditions, while John Sutton's *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism* (1998) looks more exclusively at Cartesian models. Among cognitive literary critics, Mary Thomas Crane addresses early analogs to cognitive theory in early modern humoral psychology throughout *Shakespeare's Brain* (2001), while Richardson devotes much of his book, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (2001), to the pioneering "embodied psychologies" of the Romantic era. We value the suggestive contributions made in "Adjusting the Frame" to this growing area of research, but Adler and Gross (2002: 207) are hardly alone in wishing to "investigate the history of cognitivism."

We find some merit, nevertheless, in Adler and Gross's specific charge that George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have paid too little attention to their precursors. Johnson (1987: 31, 139), in fact, has ironically gone on record attacking "Romantic" notions of the imagination, despite the profoundly Romantic resonance of many of his and Lakoff's leading ideas, a reso-

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nance Adler and Gross help us hear through their apt citations of Herder and Jean Paul. It is worth noting, however, that the statement they quote from the latter—"Originally . . . metaphors were forcefully derived synonyms of body and mind . . . every language, as far as mental relations are concerned, is a dictionary of faded metaphors" (Adler and Gross 2002: 204)—also points up what is *novel* in Lakoff and Johnson's work. Unlike their (unacknowledged) Romantic predecessors, Lakoff and Johnson consistently emphasize the living, productive character of the metaphorical relations embedded in natural languages, which are not fossil records of an earlier, more vital, primitive tongue but manifestations of the figurative nature of much mental activity now at the present time. There is (gratefully) no room in Lakoff and Johnson's thinking for the nostalgic, primitivist attitudes that characterize most eighteenth-century and Romantic writings on the subject.

The final section of Adler and Gross's (2002: 209) essay addresses the "avowed 'scientificity'" of cognitive literary studies, closely aligned, "so its proponents assure us," with science and illicitly claiming "empirical authority" from that (perhaps wishful) proximity. We sense here an unraveling thread in the fabric of their unease: a uniquely privileged critical discourse pretending to scientific validity might be enlisted to erase the multiplicity of literary meanings. It is our firm conviction that science will not and cannot provide authoritative answers to the meaning and significance of literary works. Indeed, a central challenge to a cognitive description of culture is to account for the sharply different human purposes of science and literature, not to reduce one to the other. Taking a vital interest in the models, theories, and findings emerging from work in the cognitive sciences and neurosciences does not commit one to a scientific methodology, any more than taking an interest in psychoanalysis commits Freudian or Lacanian literary critics to a therapeutic discipline. Nevertheless, the task of bringing cognitive approaches to bear on literature opens up the possibility of new empirical investigations, a challenge being taken up by some within and many more outside of the orbit of cognitive literary and cultural criticism. Rather than configuring the relationship of literary studies to empirical investigations as deceitful and illicit, we suggest there is ample opportunity for a constructive and mutually illuminating engagement.

Literary critics, in our view, are presented with a striking opportunity to learn from and contribute to an emerging understanding of the human mind that is inherently sympathetic to our concerns. Cognitive and neuroscientific research and speculation do strike us as far more interesting than, say, psychoanalysis or pre-Chomskian linguistics, as they do the vast majority of our colleagues in departments of psychology, linguistics, and

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medical psychiatry. It might go without saying that at least some literary scholars should be looking, in their search for models for understanding mind and language, subjectivity and agency, to the work currently held in esteem by their colleagues in the relevant academic disciplines, rather than remaining entranced by theories dating from early in the twentieth century and widely seen as outmoded in their home fields. That the point needs to be made at all says more, perhaps, about the lamentable lack of conversation among the various academic disciplines than it does about what Adler and Gross (ibid.) call the "inexact" character of literary studies.

Many (though not all) literary scholars who actively follow developments in cognitive science and neuroscience have found work on cognitive, cultural, and linguistic universals useful in framing or qualifying the emphasis on human differences so widespread throughout literary and cultural studies. That *some* such universals obtain—for example, that all natural human languages are complex, or that all human groups show a remarkable and roughly equivalent capacity for acquiring knowledge and skills—only a racist would deny. (Such universals were, of course, routinely denied in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the service of empire and colonialism and of the racialist ideologies that supported these enterprises.) Most cognitive scientists and neuroscientists now include a fairly robust sense of human universals among their basic working assumptions. It is important to point out that the recent work of Richard Nisbett, cited by Adler and Gross (ibid.: 211) as casting doubt on "cognitive universality," would not in fact undermine this consensus even should it become widely accepted. (So far, it has been met largely with skepticism, as one of Adler and Gross's own sources, an article in the magazine *Lingua Franca*, makes clear [Shea 2001].) Nisbett has produced some findings suggesting that, within the artificial setting of the laboratory experiment, certain acquired differences in selected cognitive processes may manifest themselves among subjects from discrete cultural backgrounds. Nisbett's experimental data, however, preliminary and tentative as it is, concerns fairly local areas of cognitive life, such as the relative amount of attention expended on figure versus ground in perceptual memory tasks. If borne out, Nisbett's research on culturally acquired cognitive differences would apply to relatively little work on human universals. Not one among the fairly ambitious list of common human behaviors compiled by Donald Brown in his book *Human Universals* (1991), for example, would be affected, any more than would the large body of work on linguistic universals. Indeed, as the example of linguistic studies suggests, no simple choice need be made between human universals and cultural differences. The wealth of linguistic variation across cultures suggests instead that uni-

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versal cognitive capacities and principles help *generate* cultural differences, but within certain constraints and according to generalizable procedures.

We share the concern expressed by Adler and Gross (2002: 211) that any interdisciplinary exchange may result in the circulation of terms bled of the meanings they have acquired in their home disciplinary context; their examples, "chaos theory" and "fractal structure," are telling ones. We see less of this empty term mongering taking place at the interdisciplinary borders between literary studies and the sciences of mind and brain than one might initially fear. One reason may be that the exchange has long taken place in both directions, contrary to the humanist's anxiety of "usurpation" (ibid.: 212). *Script* and *story*, for example, early became crucial terms for the development of artificial intelligence theory, as did *metaphor* in cognitive linguistics and (more recently) *parable* in conceptual blending theory. One cognitive psychologist has published a book entitled *The Poetics of Mind* (Gibbs 1994) while a prominent neurophilosopher has adapted such terms as *stream of consciousness* and even *Joyce machine* to describe the "on-line" workings of the brain-mind (Dennett 1991: 111–13, 275–80). Although (as Adler and Gross have noted) cognitive theorists have not always studied the full history of the literary terms they rely upon, they often do pay serious attention to the current use of those terms in literary and rhetorical studies. The best cognitive literary criticism, on its side, has been marked by a genuine and largely successful effort to import terms and models with a robust sense of their nuances and (often) controversial status in their original disciplinary contexts. Some (and here Turner is exemplary) have made a point of collaborating with cognitive researchers, publishing in scientific journals, and attending and addressing scientific meetings. Such active cross-disciplinary collaboration and conversations will do much to obviate legitimate worries concerning meaningful and balanced exchange between humanistic and scientific disciplines.

Over the course of their essay, Adler and Gross seem to change their opinion concerning both the provisional character of work in the brain and mind sciences and our sense of the equally provisional nature of our work as cognitive literary and cultural critics. They admonish their readers, in the final section of their essay, that both literary interpretation and scientific research are "often unabashedly non-final, inviting supplementation and revision," apparently accusing us of holding the opposite view (Adler and Gross 2002: 213). And yet, in the opening pages of the same essay, they note (rather archly) that we stress the preliminary, exploratory nature of our work ("the cognitive revolution, after all, has only just begun"), an attitude we are (rightly) said to share with prominent neuroscientists (ibid.: 196).

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Adler and Gross were right the first time: we have never sought to occlude the "speculative, argumentative" character of work either in the cognitive sciences or in the emerging fields of cognitive literary and cultural studies (ibid.: 214). Why would we want to claim otherwise?

Indeed, the final pages of "Adjusting the Frame," an essay that claims to take our coedited special issue as its point of departure, attacks a number of positions that we have never articulated and from which we hasten to disassociate ourselves. We do not promote a scientific criticism that would seek to "determine" literary meanings and deny the "openness" of literary texts and readers' interpretations of them (ibid.: 215–16). We have no interest in ignoring the "visceral impact" of literary texts (ibid.: 216). (To the contrary, we expect that recent work in neurobiology and cognitive neuroscience may do much to help elucidate that impact.) We have no wish to "dissolve the aesthetic into cognitive clarity" (ibid.), whatever that would mean. Note that these charges come unencumbered by citations of our work, not surprisingly given that they address positions we have never taken ourselves and cannot imagine wanting to take in the future. If one must choose "allegiance," as Adler and Gross invite their readers to do, between the "scientific" approach to literary interpretation described by Siegfried Schmidt (who is not, we believe, a cognitive critic, and whose work we do not cite) or the open, "varied landscape" of literary "forms of feeling" described by Stanley Corngold, we find ourselves far more in sympathy with the latter (ibid.: 212). Once more, Adler and Gross seem to have conflated a respect for empirical results with a striving toward a determinate and scientific "fact" at the basis of literary meaning. We do not aspire to establish what Gross and Adler call a "literary 'science'" (ibid.: 209), nor have we advocated doing so.

As William Blake (1975 [1790]: 20) so memorably put it, "Opposition is true Friendship." But our best critical friends are those who read us carefully and argue in detail against claims we have in fact made or who find flaws in the arguments we ourselves and not others have advanced. Little is accomplished by attacking straw opponents or by criticizing writers for views and statements they have neither made nor endorsed. Reifying a varied body of work into a nebulous "cognitivism" may serve our critics' polemical purposes, but it does not constitute a real challenge to our collective efforts. We ask our friendly opponents only to become *more* challenging by attacking us on the ground we have actually staked out. In the meantime, we look forward to Adler and Gross's contributions to the study of cognitive theory "avant la lettre," which promise to be significant indeed.

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