From Mind-Blind to Neurocosmopolite: Bridging the Gap Between Cognitive and Disability Studies

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In this paper, John Giunta charts the individual trajectories of cognitive and disability studies' approaches to comprehending the controversial Theory of Mind, also known as "mind-reading." Responding to the recent evolution in the work of prominent cognitive theorist Lisa Zunshine, Giunta maps out the recent strides in unifying the two formerly disparate fields into a working dialogue, yielding up a new vision of *mind-misreading* that opens up spaces for understanding a spectrum of Theory of Mind that does not rely on deficits, "mind-blindness", or exclusionary thinking. *Mind-misreading*, as a concept, allows for an area of ambiguity, or "mysteriousness," which then leads to productive investigation into the mechanics of previously unexplored facets of Theory of Mind, such as age, education, or reasoning skills. As a result, a Theory of Mind that encompasses and includes the Autism Spectrum and a broader survey of neurotypes is produced – creating the necessity for Ralph James Savarese' concept of Neurocosmopolitanism.

In her forthcoming article "The Critic as Neurocosmopolite; Or, What Cognitive Approaches to Literature Can Learn from Disability Studies: Lisa Zunshine in Coversation with Ralph James Savarese", prominent cognitive studies scholar Lisa Zunshine writes "Because mindreading is not telepathy but merely a far-from perfect adaptation (they might as well have called it mind misreading), more often than not it actually limits our perception and interpretation and lures us into insidious cognitive traps." (7) Although you might have blinked and missed it, the parenthetical correction Zunshine embeds in this sentence is extraordinarily significant, for it concisely unsettles an understanding of mind-reading, also referred to as Theory of Mind, that Zunshine emphatically argues for nearly a decade ago in her essay "Theory of Mind and Experimental Representations of Fictional Consciousness". In this earlier work, Zunshine explains

> Literary critics, in particular, know that the process of attributing thoughts, beliefs, and desires to other people may lead to *misinterpreting* those thoughts, beliefs, and desires. Thus, they would rightly resist any notion that we could effortlessly – that is, correctly and unambiguously, nearly telepathically – figure out what the person whose behavior we are trying to explain is thinking. It is important to underscore here that cognitive

> scientists and lay readers (here including literary critics) bring very different frames of reference to measuring the relative "success" of mind-reading. For the lay reader, the example of a glaring failure in mind-reading and communication might be a person's interpreting her friends tears of joy as tears of grief and reacting accordingly. For a cognitive psychologist, a glaring failure in mind-reading would a person's not even knowing that the water coursing down her friends face is supposed to be somehow indicative of his feelings at the moment. (274)

That is to say, here Zunshine establishes mind-reading, as she conceives it, as not being about accuracy but performativity; for cognitive studies, it doesn't matter *how* one interprets representations of mental states, but merely that one *can* ascribe these representations at all. Notice Zunshine first stresses "misinterpretation" as potentially negative, and yet, she deftly positions a similar word, "misreading", as being able to better represent the performance of attempted recognition of mental states in her more recent work. Whereas the "success" or "ease" of mind-reading was once a topic relegated to lay-readers or literary critics to ponder over, this potential to confuse minds has become of interest to cognitive scientists.

This shift in thought does not come about entirely on its own, but is instead tied closely into the burgeoningly large field of research on the relationship between neurodiversity and Theory of Mind developed in the time between essays. Zunshine clinches the above section from her 2003 article by bluntly stating "If you find the latter possibility absurd, recall that this is how (many) people with autism experience the world…" ("Theory of Mind…" 7), for indeed, Theory of Mind was largely defined by its deficit – understood as natural, inherent, or automatic by the very lack of performance in autistic people. Zunshine's shift, then, marks two very important benchmarks: first, it attempts to unify the otherwise disparate fields of Disability Studies and Cognitive Psychology, and second, in repealing earlier, problematic arguments of the autist as "mind-blind", this shift forces a radical rethinking of mind-(mis)reading that opens up new spaces for a more comprehensive understanding of Theory of Mind.

Much of Zunshine's earlier argument about the ToM deficit in autists, and her 2003 article as a whole, are indebted to the work of Simon Baron-Cohen. His 1985 study "Does the Autistic Child have a 'Theory of Mind'", with Alan M. Leslie and Uta Firth, utilizes a False-Belief, or "Sally-Anne", test which becomes the standard for detecting autism in young children. The experiment involves evaluating children on their ability to impute different beliefs onto dolls and then make predictions about how the dolls might respond in a particular situation. The test yields overwhelmingly negative results on the part of autistic children to ascribe mind-sets alternate to their own, and thus yields up Baron-Cohen's concept of "mind-blindness". As he will go on to explain in a 1997 article entitled "Mindblind", mind-blindness can be understood as the inability to mind-read; it denotes a complete unawareness of the existence of other emotions, thoughts, feelings, or memories, a state which Baron-Cohen mourns as "a terrible dilemma for a member of a social species such as ours." ("Mindblind").

Although Baron-Cohen intends his concept to act as explanation of an undeniable hardship experienced by autists, the term "mind-blindness" becomes complicated when viewed from a Disability Studies-oriented standpoint. Just as "blindness" implies a lack of a shared experience that generates a seemingly naturalized culture of seeing, mind-blindness cannot avoid automatically establishing mind-reading as the norm, as the majority. Baron-Cohen's writings imply a hierarchy of "normal" children and mentally retarded children as ToM capable and autistic children as mind-blind. What's more, there does not seem to be any intermediate gray area allowed in these early stages of construing ToM – and even if there are, these are fields of inquiry best not explored by cognitive psychologists. Theory of Mind is a trait that is either possessed or isn't. Ann E. McGuire and Rod Michalko expose mind-reading/mind-blindness as a binary of negatives; in their 2011 article "Minds Between Us: Autism, Mind-blindness, and the

Uncertainty of Communication", they write "This abnormal/normal dichotomy clears away any blurriness that may exist between the two and renders them as straight forwardly distinct from one another and there is nothing mysterious in this" (165.) This "blurriness" is exactly the space that needs further exploration, and, I argue, finally is being opened up. "Mysteriousness" is crucial to Zunshine's updated nomenclature of "misreading", as challenging the success of mind-reading also challenges the automatic quality ascribed to "normal" Theory of Mind.

Interestingly, Baron-Cohen's original study does suggest "a small subgroup of autistic children who succeeded on the task and who thus may be able to employ a theory of mind." ("Does the Autistic Child…" 43). However, this "subgroup", with the potential to transmigrate these binaries, is quickly relegated to a space which requires "further study", deferred until a later time or perhaps hoisted onto a different methodological approach, akin to Zunshine's breakdown of the literary criticism/cognitive science divide in relation to ToM comprehension. Maintained, in spite of this subgroup, is Baron-Cohen's conclusion that, generally, the autistic child does *not* have the capability to mind-read; the clear-cut nature of mind-reading/mind-blindness is upheld.

At this point in the dialogue, Baron-Cohen and Zunshine's original claims seem unfashionably primitive, especially when considering arguments of a ToM "module" come as early as Daniel Dennett in 1978. In a similar vein, a popular viewpoint, once shared by both Baron-Cohen and Zunshine, is of mind-reading as an important (if not the *most* important) human evolutionary trait. According to the binary established in Baron-Cohen, this would suggest the mind-blind as out of the adaptation-loop, with the autist as evolutionary throwback, or not-quite human. This kind of uncomfortable reading is, perhaps, not what is intended, but it too easily follows from Baron-Cohen and Zunshine's arguments. Although based in what

assumedly are only the best of intentions, this sort of reasoning reinforces social hierarchies and treats autism, as McGuire and Michalko put it, as "the other, the yet-to-know… the puzzle with missing pieces" ("Minds Between Us" 174). This is an infectious idea, one that can be seen expressed in scholarly works like Oliver Sack's collection of essays *An Anthropologist on Mars* - whose title is derived from professor and autist Temple Grandin's assertion about how she feels during social interaction - as well as in popular culture, in celebrated films like *Rain Man* and television series as recent as 2013's *Hannibal*. This idea of the autist as otherworldly or alien can be argued as the rationing of the distance and unreachability observed in actual autists, but just like the mysteriousness of Theory of Mind denied by cognitive psychologists, the mysteries of autism are not seen as places to open, explore, or accept, but permanent and unalterable, or, like the "missing pieces" metaphor, to be solved through cure, thusly re-integrating the autist into "normal society".

As demonstrated above, the myriad of uncomfortable suggestions that can be found inherent in autist-deficit Theory of Mind arguments may possibly explain Zunshine's first attempt to shift the mind-reading conversation away from autism. Her 2006 book *Theory of Mind: Why We Read Fiction* follows closely in the steps of her 2003 article, even borrowing some sections verbatim, but absent is Zunshine's argument about autist experience and how Theory of Mind is created by its very absence in the mind-blind. Instead, she writes "One reason that ToM has received the sustained attention of cognitive scientists over the last twenty years is that they have come across people whose ability to 'see bodies as animated by minds' is drastically impaired – people with autism" positing ToM and its unspoken opposite, mind-blindness, as potential solutions to the autism puzzle (*Theory of Mind* 7). As a disclaimer, she later writes

> First, though the studies of autism were crucial for initially alerting cognitive scientists to the possibility that we have an evolved cognitive adaptation for mind-reading, those studies do not define or delimit the rapidly expanding field of ToM research… I use research on autism merely to provide a vivid example of what it means not to be able to attribute minds; the bulk of my arguments do not rely on it (*Theory of Mind* 11).

Again, Zunshine skirts the idea of autism as producing, by comparison, a reading that allows for "normal" mind-reading. She works to distance herself from possibly problematic readings of "natural" evolution (and therefore "unnatural" mind-blindness) while still acknowledging the potential significance of Theory of Mind in explaining quite a bit about human development as a social being, particularly a being who partakes in the reading and writing of fiction. And while demonstrating the multifarious ways in which mind-reading can be applied to ambiguous moments in fiction is the aim of both her 2003 article and this expanded book, here, she is able to survey a wider selection of popular fiction, creating an array of different interpretations reached using ToM. However, these interpretations, as well as the dizzying number of levels of embedment achievable in prose fiction, still do not work to acknowledge the questionable success, ease, and performativity of mind-reading even though she points to a near-infinite amount of interpretations and *misinterpretations*; Zunshine intends this literary exhibition to show how, right or wrong, mind-reading takes place almost without human awareness.

Both Zunshine pieces use Stanley Fish's idea of interpretative communities as a way of explaining the sliding scale of correct and incorrect ways to "do" Theory of Mind. Zunshine concludes chapter 4, entitled "'Effortless' Mind-Reading" (note the air-quotes around "Effortless") by writing

> Mind-reading is thus effortless in the sense that we "intuitively" connect people's behaviours to their mental states – although our subsequent descriptions of mental states could run a broad gamut from perceptively accurate to profoundly mistaken. For any description is, as Fish tells us on

> a different occasion, "always already an interpretation", a "text," a story influenced to some extent by the personal history, biases, and desires of the reader." (*Theory of Mind* 16).

This makes sense – and yet it does not go far enough in that Zunshine never allows "getting it wrong" to be caused by mind-blindness; she maintains that this "broad gamut" of right and wrong imputing falls under the mind-reading half of the binary; wrong interpretations are not the production of a partially mind-blind observer or even the result of a moment of temporary mind-blindness. Instead, misinterpretations are unambiguously deferred to spaces of experience and context; the observer did not (and can never) have the full breadth of understanding of the observed, so at best, mind-reading can only be an educated guess.

Once again, Mcguire and Michalko's article attempts an unpacking of this issue. They counter arguments made in a similar vein when writing

> According to Dr. Simon Baron-Cohen, the capacity to mind-read, to 'see' the mental states of others, to perceive or read the faces and/or intentions of others is 'nothing mysterious' (Baron-Cohen, 1995, p. 2). In fact, he suggests, people mind-read 'all the time, effortlessly, automatically, and mostly unconsciously' (Baron-Cohen, 1995, p. 3)…If we have Theory of Mind, we presumably 'get it right' - we can read the minds of others. But, given that our action sometimes bears 'unintended consequences', this Theory of Mind sometimes results in misreading, whether we are autistic or not. People hurt one another, insult one another, and do such things unintentionally. ("Minds Between Us" 165-166)

Not only do they reinstate the ambiguity to human mind-reading, they point to the inherent difficulty of performing this task, successfully or not. If Zunshine is attempting to speak to the universal experience of the pragmatic spontaneity in catching a stranger's eye or reading intentions onto fictional characters, then McGuire and Michalko speak to another universal experience, the shared and much maligned difficulty and awkwardness of navigating complicated social relationships. Perhaps the so-called effortlessness of instantaneous mind-reading in actuality creates rushed assumptions, and therefore wrong conclusions? Misreadings

can be, to return to Zunshine's usage of Fish, very likely due to the infinitely varying personal histories and contexts involved in social interaction. What can be extrapolated from McGuire and Michalko's argument is a mind-reading that more accurately becomes mind-misreading, where instantaneous readings give way to hesitations, doubts, second-guessing, and missed connections that do not imply inherent, total mind-blindness, but instead denote vacillation between the not-so-irreconcilable binary poles of Theory of Mind and the mind-blind.

It is at this point in which I would like to transition to more recent work done in both the fields of cognitive studies and Theory of Mind, and Disability Studies and autism research. McGuire and Michalcko are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg, as far as modern attempts to open up new spaces in the Tom/mind-blind debate for discussion go. It is of no small significance that many of the studies and articles on Theory of Mind I located between the publication of Zunshine's book in 2006 and her forthcoming 2014 essay move, like Zunshine does, away from focusing primarily on autism deficit. But unlike Zunshine, they explore a greater spectrum of misreadings, and seek ways to explain or quantify the observable variations in ascribing mental states by looking at specific components of ToM.

This exact kind of survey is undertaken by Candida C. Peterson, Henry M. Wellman, and Virgina Slaughter, as seen in their 2012 study "The Mind Behind the Message: Advancing Theory-of-Mind Scales for Typically Developing Children, and Those With Deafness, Autism, or Asperger Syndrome". Although they do include autists in their research, this study is significant for two main reasons; the groups being tested are greatly expanded in age-range and in condition (typically developing, deaf, deaf-with-hearing-parents, autistic, and mentally retarded), and the utilization of a wider battery of tests, referred to as the multi-point Theory of

Mind scale. The first five points of the scale are described, in observed developmental order, thusly

> In brief, the specific tasks comprising the scale, are (a) diverse desires (DD; different people want different things), (b) diverse beliefs (DB; different people have contrasting, potentially true, beliefs about the same thing),(c) knowledge access (KA; not seeing leads to not knowing), (d) false belief (FB; standard misleading container task), and (e) hidden emotion (HE; people can feel a different emotion from the one they display). (Peterson 470)

This notion of a Theory of Mind scale, even if only used as a test, or a kind of yardstick to measure developing mind-reading skills as children age, denotes an advancing in the earlier all-or-none stance on ToM skills taken up by Baron-Cohen and other cognitive scientists, and also seems to line up with the progress made in understanding autism, first as a mystery ailment, and then as a differentiated spectrum. Peterson and co. introduce a sixth point to the scale, namely Sarcasm, Irony, and Nonliteral Language, placing this last point at the latest stages of development, early adolescence. Not only does an understanding of sarcasm depend on earlier mind-reading skills, it relies on specific cultural contexts and verbal, physical, or situational cues as well. These various components identify complex mind-reading skills that present challenges at different age groups and in different contexts, splitting ToM into different regions. What's more, it is indeed possible to excel in one test area and demonstrate weaker performances in others; results showed typically developed children performing the strongest in the most areas, but being far from perfect, with some age groups displaying no capacity for advanced ToM points like Hidden Emotions or Nonliteral Language at all (476). The potential difficulty of perceiving sarcasm or irony can be so advanced, it goes totally unnoticed, even by the typically developed, creating a categorical mind-blindness that is not total, but instead more precise, a sort of nonliteral-blindness. The report concludes that the autistic age groups still inhabit a different space of Theory of Mind development when contrasted with typical, deaf, and mentally retarded

children, but the differentiated results in varying points reveals a high quotient of experiential skill difference even within the autist sub-group. This testing of different skills across different ages and in different interpretive communities further explodes the binary of typical-Theory of mind/atypical-mind-blind.

In advancing this idea of Theory of Mind developing with age, Elena Cavallini put forth a study entitled "Beyond False Belief: Theory of Mind in Young, Young-Old, and Old-Old Adults" which maps the changing mind-reading abilities of typically developing people as they age. Although this article is similar to the last in that it starts its focus with children, it does not include autistic children, and it extends far beyond the early adolescents and teenagers tested under the adjusted Six-Point Theory of Mind scale. The work done with middle-aged and elderly adults displayed an important memory component to mind-reading, which is at risk of decreasing in advanced years. Cavallini and company also place additional importance on personal history – noting the importance of health, education, and up-bringing in effecting the speed and skill with which Theory of Mind explicit tests were completed (Cavallini 193-194). The huge amount of variation in performativity or non-performativity amongst older "normal" adults certainly would not imply an onset of autism in later years, and yet, Theory of Mind is neither automatic nor successful in all cases, which would evidence a degree of mind-blindness.

The age and education of high-functioning autists also factors into considerations of who can mind-read and who can't, as it becomes more and more clear that this skill is dependent on more personal details other than just whether or not one is autistic. Similarly to the test results in Cavallini's study, Anke M. Scheeren and company's conclusions in "Rethinking Theory of Mind in High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder" reveal that high-functioning ASD adolescents and teenagers, on average, performed equally well as typically developed teenagers in mind-

reading skills, with variations in age and education level (Scheeren 4-6). Reading and logic-reasoning abilities seem to be reoccurring skills that higher ToM-exhbiting subjects possess, across all studies, and I argue that education plays a greater role in Theory of Mind than originally allowed.

Lisa Zunshine's proposed focus in dealing with Theory of Mind is on fiction and stories and their relationship with social practices and mind-reading. She does not necessarily focus on how the reading of fiction is taught, or address biases in educational systems that work against autists, but she does view Theory of Mind as an answer to a related question of "why do we read fiction?", in that varying degrees of literature offer readers a chance to test out their ability to sort through sociocognitive complexities and glean mental and emotional meaning from characters, narrators, and authors' descriptions of events. As shown earlier, Zunshine agrees with Stanley Fish on description – in this case description of mental states – being an interpretation, or a story that is read onto the minds of other people. Zunshine concentrates on the phenomenon of autism apparently impairing appreciation for stories, when in 2011's "What to Expect When You Pick Up A Graphic Novel" she writes that autists generally "prefer narratives about objects to narratives about people" and "encyclopedia entries" ("Graphic Novel" 118). Zunshine offers sociocognitive complexity as possible explanation for this; with a lower threshold for mind-reading, autist readers find most fiction involving characters too confusing, and thus gravitate towards manuals, dictionaries, and informational texts. This, too, may be an observable trait in autists (Zunshine replicates emails exchanged with the father of an autist who prefers entries about films in compendium guides to actual films), but it does not speak to the varying education levels, mind-reading skill, and taste preferences that inform all readers' choices of reading material. Zunshine also takes a narrow-minded approach when handling her examples, neither

acknowledging potentially differing levels of engagement with fiction along the spectrum of autism nor allowing autists alternate forms of creative outlet that could demonstrate ToM.

Although Zunshine's article comes in 2011, Ann Jurecic's earlier 2007 essay "Neurodiversity" approaches the subject on a much more even keel, weighing Baron-Cohen's ideas on Theory of Mind deficits and communication issues of autism in relation to autist experience and observed differences along the autism spectrum. Juercic utilizes examples from students in her classes and, again, Temple Grandin, to demonstrate a writing style that, while different, is not entirely devoid of ToM; that is to say these writings do not suggest utter mind-blindness, merely a different quality of expression. She quotes Uta Firth and writes "people with Asperger's Syndrome often prefer to communicate in writing, rather than to participate in rapid exchanges of conversation. After all, when they write, they have time to think and perhaps 'to use an explicit theory of mind to compute effects on the recipient of the message' ("Confusions and Controversies"677)" (Jurecic 426). This period denoted by Jurecic's phrase "time to think" allows an overcoming of the spontaneity of mind-reading that can lead to perplexing misreadings, or, reflectively, potentially confusing statements that could be misread by an audience. Just like the categorical term which gives her paper its title "Neurodiversity", Jurecic is able to achieve a balanced argument by meeting cognitive studies, autistic phenomenology, and Disability studies half-way, using the strengths in each methodology to fill in gaps in logic on either side.

In the first chapter of the 3rd edition of *The Disabilities Studies Reader*, Lennard Davis opens his article "Constructing Normalcy" by stating "the 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the "problem" of the disabled person." (3). Going back to tentative Theory of Mind arguments that spoke in terms of

evolutionary traits and adaptation, as well as the ToM/mind-blind binary, it is easy to see how the autist becomes a marginalized minority. “Neurodiversity” as an identifier can be seen as a step away from the isolating categories created by “autism-sufferer” and “mind-blind”, specifically the negative connotations of disease, impairment, or deficiency that these earlier descriptors convey. It is also more accurate in being able to represent one of any number of possible positions on the autism spectrum, as autism cannot be defined by one single fixed set of symptoms.

Likewise, Joseph Strauss’ “Autism as Culture”, from the same collection, seeks to remove autism spectrum disorder from the overly medical models that have dominated the field and place it in a social context – similar to McGuire and Michalko, who argue that autism does not exist as inherent to an individual but instead in the social spaces in-between people. Strauss identifies autism as a cultural phenomenon, and quotes Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in saying

> the meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and it self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on other. (Strauss 541)

A dialogue is being established that allows for an alternative to the rapidly-antiquating views on of autism that rely solely on medical, scientific, or cognitive lenses. Jurecic points to autism as inhabiting an interesting space in the cultural consciousness; I would argue this popular over-awareness, like, for example, the abundance of autist-as-alien metaphors, take place in part because the autist does not outwardly exhibit signs of difference. Somehow, this makes autism seem more insidious, as appearing “normal” and then exhibiting a difference only in

communicating with others is more threateningly different than just being “openly” physically disabled. Autism Spectrum Disorder also denies easy categorization, as medical understanding of ASD continually shifts and updates, with no discovered “cause” or developed “cure”.

One interesting study done by Nicholas Dufour reveals that, during the reading of passages created to elicit Theory of Mind responses, no observable differences in brain activity is observed in a large sample of neurotypical adults and high-functioning autistic adults. Utilizing functional magnetic resonance imaging (fmri), Dufour concludes “social cognitive impairments typical of autism spectrum disorder can occur without measurable changes in the size, location, or response magnitude of activity during explicit Theory of Mind tasks.” (“Similar Brain Activation” 1). So while autists may demonstrate no outward physical flaws, a study of this kind shows that they demonstrate no inherent physical flaws either, with their brains performing similarly to neurotypical test subjects. The study only focused on high-functioning autistic adults, who seem to share a similar area of exemption as Baron-Cohen’s original “subgroup”, but still these examples suggest one of two possibilities. First, this study reinforces the already-established dissolving of the ToM/mind-blind as set binary, showing that high functioning autists do not exhibit some physical characteristic that generates mind-blindness. Second, and perhaps more interestingly, it makes clear that high-functioning ASD is always not observably different from a neurotypical subject, bringing the clear-cut status of both, separate categories into question.

Interestingly, Strauss mentions Theory of Mind only in passing, filing it under the larger heading of scientific models for viewing autism that he wishes to move away from, instead focusing on social, literary, and cultural models. He treats neuroscience and cognitive studies much in the way Zunshine originally handles literary criticism and lay readers. I believe that a

more complete reading can only come about when the two models, cognitive and cultural, come together, and this is most successfully apparent in Zunshine's forthcoming essay with Disabilities studies writer and autism spectrum disorder advocate, Ralph James Saverese.

If the decade's worth of research, advancements, and scholarly articles in the interim between Lisa Zunshine's essay "Theory of Mind and Experimental Representations of Fictional Consciousness" and her forthcoming dialogue with Ralph James Savarese hadn't done enough to unsettle the binary of Theory of Mind/mind-blindness, and open up the narrow constraints of cognitive studies, then Zunshine elects to make the move herself, allying herself with a stronger Disabilities Studies lens, finally taking into account the ambiguous spaces surrounding the act of mind-reading, and opening the dialogue to encompass considerations towards an autistic Theory of Mind. Mind-misreading goes from the Darwinian peaks of Baron-Cohen to a "far from perfect" adaptation, an endlessly convoluted process that explains less the human status as social animal and more the vexing complexities and misunderstandings that drive the everyday struggles of communications (and many a debunked hypothesis). Zunshine recognizes the usefulness of attaining an interdisciplinary standpoint, equipping cognitive studies with a concept of neurodiversity that allows for alternative readings of the relationship between mind, body, and other, and granting disability and literary scholars a neuroscience basis to help explain the cultural and phenomenological experiences of difference in bodies ("Conversation" 1).

Zunshine and Savarese being their dialogue by exploring the ever-increasingly active role autists are taking in autism research, becoming, Saverese notes, "speakers" and not "spoken-for" ("Conversation" 2). Aided along by re-workings of Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", this Postcolonial reading of the shift in cognitive and neuroscientific approaches to Theory of Mind research is reflective of the changes happening in a larger comprehension of Theory of Mind,

that is, the field is becoming more open and accessible to wider modes of discourse. Savarese quotes Dawn Prince in writing "the scientific community often has trouble with 'the superior part of speaking' ("The Silence Between") – namely, listening – it continues to damage", suggesting, interestingly, a certain degree of mind-blindness on the part of the cognitive/neuroscience fields when it comes to accepting alternate readings, especially from literary, socio-political, or Disability lenses ("Conversation" 3).

As a noted autism advocate and teacher, Savarese's aim is to open and improve avenues of communication with ASD students, writers, researchers, and thinkers. Similarly to Jurecic, he draws on much of his own experience working with neurodiverse writers to produce a new viewpoint on mind-reading, a perspective which allows for and understands different neurotypes as possessing different cognitive strengths and weakness, and for a divergent Theory of Mind that depends entirely on a constantly shifting personal context. This divergence, aided along by shifting cognitive skills that can, in fact, be in dialogue with each other, is encapsulated in Savarese's concept of "neurocosmopolitanism", a term meant to evoke the medical and cultural journey the collective Autist has taken. Savarese continues

> If cosmopolitanism is the idea of a trans-national community, the feeling of being respectfully at home everywhere in the world, then neurocosmopolitanism is the idea of a trans-neurocommunity, the feeling of being respectfully at home with all manner of neurologies. By "neurocosmopolitan" I mean not just an openness to neurological difference but, rather, a denaturalization, even a dethronement, of privileged neurotypicality. In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Paul Gilroy advocates "methodic[ally] cultivati[ng] . . . a degree of estrangement from one's own culture and history" (67) so as to forestall unfavorable judgments about the Other. Traveling to autism, we must do the same. By "neurocosmopolitan" I mean as well the effect on autistics of the journeying I mentioned—what might be termed neurohybridity or –mobility. ("Conversation" 5)

"Mobility", as a theme, seems incredibly pertinent to this discussion. There is a distinct movement, not only in the dialogue, the transference of ideas, that is taking place at last between

methodological approaches, but also, essentially, at the core of Theory of Mind. Spontaneous or protracted, successful or confused, "natural" or learned, mind-(mis)reading is all about conveying, imposing, or imputing emotional or mental meaning. Just like McGuire and Michalko's proposed model for autism, Theory of Mind takes place in these lanes of human communication and interaction. It is very well that Savarese's concept is drawn from the field of Postcolonial Studies, as the breaking down of physical, political, economic, and racial barriers must necessitate a breaking down of stigmas associated with disability as well.

The "autist as Other" cultural trope that was delineated earlier in this paper when considering early scholarship on mind-reading deficits and human evolution becomes here, for Zunshine, the "dark side of mind-reading", as she acknowledges that these flawed past ways of thinking about autism gives way to "essentialist" readings of what makes a human and furthers a stigmatized "dehumanization" of autists ("Conversation" 7). Instead, she pivots the accepted definition of "mind-blindness" to be widely applicable. Zunshine utilizes a hypothetical situation to pose a neurotypical subject as mind-blind when faced with neurodiversity - a "normal" observer who is unable to read an autist, not because the autist is unreachable, but because the neurotypical does not have the context or ability to successfully perform Theory of Mind (11). Whether this practice of flipping the usage of the term to be used reflexively is productive or not is up for debate; but what it does connote is the new understanding of mind-blindness not as inherent, as dehumanizing, or as permanent, but as flexible and fluid, just as mind-reading becomes differentiated.

Near the end of the dialogue, Zunshine poses a motivating question for moving forward and using this joint lens to address future issues. "How then," she queries "do we talk about autism now that we realize we cannot simply rely on mainstream scientific discourse and echo its

impersonal ‘outside-in’ view of the condition?” (“Conversation” 27) Zunshine is seeking to circumvent ways of thinking that lead to construing autism as a disease to be cured, or of an outsider force to be reintegrated into the mainstream. Their solution to this problem is, essentially, embracing neurocosmopolitanism as a methodological approach. Savarese notes that including autists in dialogues about autism is the first step to take in this neurocosmpolite direction. The aim of neurocosmopolitanism is generating social, scientific, and literary thinkers who are not mind-blind to any neurotype, but instead have experience with a gamut, or spectrum of neurodiversity. Savarese proposes a wider availability of reliable, phenomenological accounts of alternative cognitive traits, be they studies performed by neurodiverse researchers, philosophy written by autistic scholars, or literature and media produced by neurocosmopolite creators. Although a cultural shift like this is no small task, Savarese and Zunshine begin by calling for the readjustment of educational practices and values so that autists are not merely accommodated, but encouraged to learn and think and write in ways that are neither mimetic to or pass as neurotypical models, so that this dialogue between two disparate fields can be opened to become even more neurodiverse. Just as Zunshine’s original project of applying Theory of Mind concepts to the reading and writing of literature resulted in an understanding of fiction (and nonfiction) as testing ground for tentatively advancing mind-reading skills and sociocognititve processing, the shift away from past prejudices and towards a neurocosmopolite view that allows for a spectrum of ambiguous-but-accepted mind-misreadings is best suited to begin in the academic world.

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