Actor-Network Theory and the Action of Biblical Texts



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Short Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of the mechanisms of textual performativity: how do biblical texts bring about change, such that they can be thought of as enacting and configuring social reality? This methodology begins with Bruno Latour's work on actor-network theory, and proposed here is a model for the performativity of texts as nonhuman actors embedded within actor-networks.

Three theoretical components form the basis to the argument: 1) Texts are nonhuman actors that have agency and act within actor-networks. Within these actor-networks, the text mediates the agency and action of other actors, shifting, transforming, and betraying the meaning and action it carries from the writing event to the reading event. 2) A text functions both as an artifact and a being of fiction, with action that emerges in the relationship between text and other objects to which it is attached, such that notions about the text are assembled together with the text and other actors, together configuring its action. 3) The text's action as a Latourian mediator provides the text with autonomy, and it is, thus, the reader's notion of meaning, not the author's intent, that is performative in the reading event. Any notion, however, of the creative event held by the reader shapes this emergent meaning. Finally, because texts are performative, notions of what an author meant, of a text's production, and of how to read are caught up in politics. In this analysis priority is given to *what is* rather than *what ought to be*, in what is referred to as a *Realhermeneutik* approach.

In order to develop this theoretical framework with practical analysis, throughout this thesis, examples are drawn from the action of the Bible within American evangelicalism, concluding with a chapter that demonstrates this methodological approach by tracing the participation of the Bible in climate change.

Long Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of the mechanisms of textual performativity: how do biblical texts bring about change, such that they can be thought of as enacting and configuring social reality? My method begins with Bruno Latour's work on actor-network theory, and I propose a model for the performativity of texts as nonhuman actors embedded within actor-networks.

Latour's interest in texts has been evident since his doctoral studies and has continued throughout the body of his work: a focus on the role of textual inscriptions in mediating scientific knowledge was central to his early work in science and technology studies; his subsequent work incorporates a semiotics approach borrowing heavily from Greimas; and his characterization of the agency and action of artifacts is often framed in contrast to that of the action of texts. Despite this attention given to textual mediation throughout his work, Latour's approach to agency and action has been underutilized for analysis of the performativity of texts, and secondary literature on this topic remains sparse.

The specific contribution of my project is to turn Latour's theoretical approach back to texts in order to develop a model of how textual performativity emerges within an actor-network. This involves three theoretical components: 1) Texts are nonhuman actors that have agency and act within actor-networks, and within these actor-networks, the text mediates the agency and action of other actors, shifting, transforming, and betraying the meaning and action it carries from the writing event to the reading event. 2) A text functions both as an artifact and a being of fiction, with action that emerges in the relationship between text and other objects to which it is attached, such that notions about the text are assembled together with the text and other actors, together configuring its action. 3) The text's action as a Latourian mediator provides the text with autonomy, and it is, thus, the reader's notion of meaning, not the author's intent, that is performative in the reading event. Any notion, however, of the creative event held by the reader shapes this emergent meaning. Finally, because texts are performative, notions of what an author meant, of a text's production, and of how to read are caught up in politics. In this analysis priority is given to *what is* rather than *what ought to be*, in what I refer to as a *Realhermeneutik* approach.

Throughout this thesis, I draw upon examples of the action of the Bible within evangelical Christianity, particularly within an American cultural and political context, in order to demonstrate how my theoretical model can be used to trace the impact of biblical texts. In my final chapter I bring this theoretical model to analysis of the performativity of Genesis 1-11 and other biblical texts within current political discourse on climate change policy, and I argue that through its action in American evangelicalism the Bible is participating in climate change.

Chapter Descriptions

In the first chapter, I introduce core actor-network theory notions and argue that with this conceptual framework, it is possible to trace the action of texts in actor-networks. Within actor-network theory, action is interpreted using a semiotic approach derived from Greimasian semiotics. The action of humans and nonhumans are regarded symmetrically, where what matters is the effect an actor has within an actor-network, not its ontological status as human or nonhuman. Moreover, at the heart of actor-network theory is a notion that every actor is both acting and made to act, such that every actor is both an agent and a mediator of others' agency. Each actor shifts, translates, modifies, and transforms the action it mediates, such that action never moves through an actor-network without some reworking of the action performed and of the effects of that action. With the theoretical basis outlined in this chapter, it is possible to, in effect, slot in a theory of texts adopted from Ricoeur, and by bringing Ricoeur into dialogue with actor-network theory, I argue for a model of textual performativity that consists of two events, a writing event and a reading event, mediated by a text. Texts, in this model, are autonomous from their creators and participate in the distributed agency of an actor-network, acting and bringing about change together with other actors that compose an actor-network. Moreover, the text functions as a Latourian mediator—performing spatial, temporal, and actorial shifts in meaning and action—and in so doing transforms and betrays the action it mediates, introducing new meaning and action in the communities in which it is read and acts.

In the second and third chapters, I argue for recognizing *notions* of texts as actors that do things in actor-networks and for approaching texts as Latourian beings of fiction. Chapter 2 first lays out a theoretical basis for recognizing action in actor-networks as emerging in the specific configuration of actors that are assembled alongside text and reader. Neither the text nor reader acts alone, but instead both together form what could be thought of as a hybrid text-reader object. Action then emerges in the specific way in which the text and reader are assembled with other actors, including notions of the text. I argue, for instance, that notions of the Bible as providing a God-given design for gender roles configure sexuality and gender within conservative evangelical communities. Chapter 3 then turns to Latour's beings of fiction. Here I argue that texts must be reprised and instaured—adopting notions that Latour borrows from Charles Péguy and Étienne Souriau. It is only when texts are brought to life by a reading community that the text can have effect, and thus it is with the fabricated notions of a text, with the way the text grips readers and their imaginations, creating possibility for response and shaping and configuring action, that texts can be performative.

The fourth chapter shifts from developing a model of textual performativity to an argument that this actor-network approach introduces new ways of addressing hermeneutical questions. Here, I present what I term a *Realhermeneutik* approach to matters of meaning and interpretation. An actor-network approach, with a notion of texts as autonomous artifacts that mediate between the author-text and the text-reader hybrids, allows for reading and writing to be recognized to as cognitive events in which author and reader anticipate and reconstruct each other. This

chapter brings Stanley Fish and Ralph Rader into dialogue with Latour in order to argue, on one hand, that the meaning fabricated by a reader is free from the control of the author, but, on the other hand, reconstructed notions of intent—as distinct from the past intent itself—do have an authoritative role in readers' cognitive processes.

Moreover, the text as mediator serves as an index through which past agency and action can be inferred, and these abducted notions about the text's origin modify its interpretation in the present. Here I bring Alfred Gell's theory of art into dialogue with actor-network theory. The author-text creative event occurs within an actor-network, and the reader's notion of the configuration of that author-text in an actor-network modifies the current interpretive event. Following Gell, I argue that texts mediate the relationality between texts, readers, creators, and the worlds—fictional or real—to which the text refers. This mediated relationality shapes the reading community's notion of what the text is, says, and means—along with how seriously to take the text, how to read it, what to do with it, and how to relate to it. Notions held of an author's intent and action, of intended community, of past reception, and any other notions of the text are constituents of the text-reader hybrid, despite the very fact of autonomy that is a feature of this model of textual performativity. These notions of a text, including of its origins and of the relationality of the world depicted by the text with that of the world outside the text, together function to shape the meaning and performativity that emerge in the text-reader event.

In the case of the Bible, notions of authorship, historicity, genre, and intention, among other notions, as they are reconstructed in evangelical communities, are then performative. Description is prescriptive, and these constructed notions of a text are necessarily political. To say something about authorial intent, for example, is not only a descriptive analysis but also a prescriptive claim for how a text should be read. For this reason, what can be known or believed by a community about the origins of the Bible, or any other text, is entangled with that community's values, and cognition about texts is not disinterested but instead emerges within the context and social configuration of a specific community. The term *Realhermeneutik*, then, is one that recognizes that the meaning and action that emerge in a specific reading community are contingent on the way social and political concerns are configured within that actor-network.

The fifth, and final, chapter brings this theoretical model to analysis of the Bible's participation in climate change. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the theoretical issues developed in the previous four chapters work out in practice in contemporary culture and politics, showing how the Bible functions as a nonhuman agent with action contingent on the configuration of humans and nonhumans with which it forms a hybrid text-reader object. The Bible both acts and is made to act, being both an agent and patient of action, and it is mobilized on behalf of people who use it for their own political agendas even as it acts, in a sense, with its own agenda, exerting its own social power and, given the notions and readers together with which it is assembled, acting to prevent many evangelicals from supporting climate change prevention and mitigation policies.

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Introduction

In the five chapters that make up this thesis, I argue for an actor-network approach to textual performativity. Texts, I argue, bring about change in and through the communities that read them, and the way they do this is contingent on the community's way of relating to the text. This relationality is configured by the people and artifacts assembled together with the text and also by notions of the text that are assembled alongside text and readers. Included in these notions are any tacit, socially embodied, and explicit concepts or practices which constitute the way a community identifies what a text means and says, how it should be read, what kind of authority it has, who it speaks for, who or what speaks through it, where it came from, what should be done in response to the text, and any other notions that shape how texts are read and interpreted. What I am arguing for here is an approach that recognizes texts as both performative and contingent. The model of textual performativity developed in these chapters, then, is one in which it is recognized that texts bring about change, enacting and configuring social reality and that this action emerges within a specific community, a specific set of reading practices, and a specific way of relating to the world. Actor-network theory (ANT) and the work of Bruno Latour serve as both a basis for developing the theory of textual performativity outlined in these chapters and as a method for tracing that action.[1]

[1] I use a definition of performativity in which *performativity* is a characteristic of bringing about change and causing another to act. In other words, it is that which makes another perform. See Bal 2002*a*; 2013: 10–14. By community, here, I use a broad definition that could include any group with some shared identity, values, or practices. In the case of evangelical Christianity, this could be a small Bible study or large movement such as the churches and people that identify as part of the Gospel Coalition. Those that would identify as, or hold beliefs consistent with, young earth creationists could also be considered a community in this definition. Moreover, my definition of community is similar to Latour's *collective*, and I am using a Latourian notion of the social as constituted not only of people but also of any nonhuman objects that contribute to, stabilize, or compose that community. See Latour 1993: 4; 1994.

It has been recognized since J. L. Austin's work on speech act theory that to say something is to do something. In Austin's scheme, speech acts are composed of locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary acts—or what maps loosely to the content, force, and effect of a speech act.[2] The starting point for this thesis is that texts, too, have content, force, and effect. If to say something is to do something, to write something is, likewise, to do something. The matter in question that I am addressing here is one of this action of texts: What action do texts perform, and what effect do they bring about? What is the mechanism by which they exert this force and to what effect? It is with this question about the mechanisms of textual performativity that I turn to actor-network theory and the work of Bruno Latour.[3]

Texts in Actor-Networks

Actor-network theory, despite the word *theory* in its name, is sometimes described as less of a theory than a repository of practices and methods.[4] At the same time, however, ANT provides a framework for a theory of action in which action is distributed between the humans and nonhumans that compose an actor-network, such that any one actor is both acting and made to act. In this sense, every actor is a mediator and every mediator is an actor. What I do in this thesis, then, is both develop a theoretical model, following ANT, in which texts are identified as agents that are performative within the actor-networks in which they are embedded and also demonstrate how this approach serves as a method for tracing that action. To develop my model of textual performativity, my argument consists of three principal components:

First, texts are nonhuman agents that act within actor-networks, where the text mediates the agency and action of other actors, shifting, transforming, and betraying the meaning and action it carries from the writing event to the reading event.

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[2] Austin 1962.

[3] On speech act theory and textual performativity, see among others, Bal 2006; Bazerman 2003; 2004; Butler 1997; Cooren 2000; 2004; 2006; 2009; Culler 2000; Ohmann 1972; Skinner 1975; 2002. New materialist and posthumanist approaches also provide an approach to these questions, but are mostly outside the scope of this thesis. See, for instance, Barad 2003; 2007; 2008; Bennett 2010; Haraway 1991; 2004; Henare et al. 2007.

[4] See further discussion of this point in Chapter 1.

Second, a text has characteristics of both an artifact and a being of fiction, with action that emerges in the relationship between text and other objects to which it is attached. Notions about the text are assembled together with the text and other actors, together configuring its action.

Third, texts are autonomous from their creation event, even as they mediate the meaning and action of their human authors. It is, thus, the reader's notion of meaning, not the author's intent, that is performative in the reading event. Despite this autonomy, however, readers do reconstruct notions about authorial intent, as well as other notions about a text's creation and the action it mediates. These notions—whether poorly or well-constructed—do then act to configure the meaning of the text. Moreover, because texts are performative, notions of what an author meant, of a text's production, and of how to read are caught up in politics. Although this approach lends itself to critical analysis of the way that texts are read within communities, in the method of tracing action that I argue for here—what I call a *Realhermeneutik* approach—priority is given to analyzing the action of actor-networks *as they are* configured, not as one might argue *they ought to be*.

Biblical Texts in Actor-Networks

The question of what texts do within communities, and the mechanisms by which they perform that action, is one that is highly relevant to contemporary American evangelical Christianity, in which the performativity of the Bible is entangled with religion and politics.[5] This ANT approach to textual performativity, then, serves as a method for tracing the impact of the Bible in these communities.[6]

On one hand, it is my argument that all texts, of any form or genre, are performative; that every text will do something, even if its significance is not very notable. Indeed, boring someone to the point of unconsciousness is itself a form of performativity. American evangelicalism, however, and the ethics and politics of interpretation within evangelicalism, provides a unique

[5] On evangelicalism, conservative protestant Christianity more broadly, and the way the Bible functions within these communities, see Bramadat 2000; DeRogatis 2015; Luhrmann 2012; Malley 2004; Noll 2000; Percy 1996; Stone 2008; Watt 2002; Young 2015.

[6] When I refer throughout this thesis to *the Bible*, I am in effect masking (black boxing) matters of its history and composition, translation practices, the communities and their beliefs, rituals, and practices through which the Bible is held in place as a singular text, and other ways in which the Bible is *composed of* and *configured within* actor-networks. See discussion of texts as black boxes in Chapter 1.

context in which to trace textual performativity and with which to work out the theoretical approach I develop in this thesis. Indeed, the very fact that the Bible is viewed as something more than an important piece of literature is what enables it to have far-reaching effect. Its status as a trustworthy, inerrant text—at least among the more conservative churches that make up American evangelicalism—lends creation texts, for instance, their status as factual, historical accounts with which scientific methods are expected to cohere. It is, likewise, because the text has a status as inspired word of God that evangelicals believe they must not only listen but also do what the text instructs. What the community believes, or thinks it knows, about the text—the notions held about what it is, says, means, and does—modifies how the text acts, and the specific notions evangelicals bring to the text have consequences both inside and outside their own communities.

Throughout this thesis I return to biblical examples to illustrate how my theoretical method works in practice—and how this method makes evident the political and ethical implications of reading practices. In my final chapter I apply this theoretical model to analysis of the performativity of Genesis 1-11 and other biblical texts within current political discourse on climate change policy, and I argue that through its action in American evangelicalism, the Bible is participating in climate change.

Chapter Development

I introduce core actor-network notions in Chapter 1. In this chapter I argue for a model of textual performativity in which texts are considered Latourian mediators that mediate between writing and reading events. To begin developing this actor-network approach to the performativity of texts, I first draw on a biblical story from 2 Kings 22-23 about the reforms brought about in the reign of Josiah with the discovery of the lost book of the law. Both this example and also a case of a lecturer in a classroom illustrate and introduce core ANT notions which I develop throughout the chapter.

This theoretical analysis starts with a review of the influence of Greimasian semiotics on the development of ANT, tracing how notions of *actor* and *actant* make possible a symmetrical approach to the action of humans and nonhumans in actor-networks. I then turn to the notion that nonhumans have agency and do things. To make this argument, I further expound on the

ANT notion of symmetry and discuss the difference between a symmetrical account of action in the flattened plane of action recognized by ANT and that of moral or ethical accounts of human agency. For ANT, what matters is what things do, not why they do them, and for that reason notions of intentionality, sentience, or conscious choice do not matter to an actor-networks approach. Humans and nonhumans, both, are recognized as agents that have effect and bring about change. Moreover, within an ANT theory of action, action is said to be distributed, such that any one actor is both acting and made to act. Texts, then, in this model are nonhuman actors that participate in the distributed agency and action of an actor-network, participating in action and bringing about change.

Next I turn to the Latourian notion of mediation, in which it is recognized that action is never transported without modification, that to mediate is always to modify, to add to, subtract from, distort, and sometimes betray that which is carried from one point to another. Mediators translate action with temporal, spatial, and actorial shifts, carrying action from one place to another and one time to another, but also shifting the form of that action. Here I will turn to discussion of examples from Latour's work, including his analysis of how artifacts such as speed bumps mediate action and, in doing so, modify action in all directions, reconfiguring action before and after it is transported by the mediator.

With these notions of symmetry, nonhuman agency, distributed action, and mediation, I can propose my model of textual performativity. Here I turn to a theory of texts borrowed from Paul Ricoeur, slotting his notion of textual mediation between events of writing and reading into a Latourian framework for mediation in actor-networks. In this theoretical model, a text carries action from the actor-network in which it was created to the actor-network in which it is read, and as it mediates between these two events, the text adds to, subtracts from, distorts, and even betrays the meaning and action for which it serves as a vehicle. This chapter ends by returning to 2 Kings 22-23 and the story of a lost text and the reforms initiated with its rediscovery. Here I apply the theoretical model developed in this chapter to analysis of the text's performativity as an actor and mediator embedded in an actor-network.

Chapter 2 builds on the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter, extending this model to argue that textual performativity emerges with the specific configuration of human

and nonhuman actors with which the text is embedded in an actor-network. Here I revisit the notion that actors both act and are made to act—what Latour refers to as the middle voice of action. It is neither texts alone nor people alone that act but a hybrid actor composed of human, text, and other actors to which text and reader are attached. The action of the Bible, thus, is the action of the Bible in specific contexts and specific ways of being configured together with other humans and artifacts. A biblical text in the hand of a preacher, for example, is a different hybrid object than the Bible on the shelf of a professor of literature and different again from the Bible in the hands of an internet troll. This chapter introduces my argument that notions are themselves actors, and for this reason, the performativity of texts within actor-networks is contingent on both a) how the actors within the actor-network are assembled and b) the notions about the text—and any other notions—that are assembled alongside text and reader.

With Chapter 3, I continue my argument that a reader's notion of a text configures the text's action. Here I shift from approaching texts as artifacts to a conceptual framework in which they function as beings of fiction. To develop this component of my model of textual performativity, I trace the influence of Charles Péguy and Étienne Souriau on Latour, and particularly of their notions of *reprise* and *instauration*. The action of a text as being of fiction, I argue following Latour, is one that is contingent on the way it reprised and instaured. Consistent with Latour's approach to beings of fiction, it should be recognized, then, that the notions of a text are both fabricated and real and that beings of fiction, unlike artifacts, need not exist outside of one's imagination to have effect. For this reason, the action of texts is dependent on the action of a reader, and the text must assemble and grip a reading audience, through which—and together with which—it acts. In this way, the action of a text emerges with how it is instaured and reprised by a reading community.

Chapter 4 develops what I am referring to as a *Realhermeneutik* approach to textual performativity, in which it is recognized that the meaning that emerges in the reading event is contingent on the configuration of politics, values, and social knowledge of the reading community. To develop this model of hermeneutics, I return to the model of textual mediation first developed in Chapter 1 in which a text mediates between events of writing and reading. Here it is recognized that meaning and action emerge contingent on the configuration of the actor-network in

which the text is read. This Latourian approach to action is consistent with Stanley Fish's argument that meaning is the reader's meaning as it emerges in the act of reading. Nonetheless, as I argue following Ralph Rader, this reader experience includes notions of authorial intent reconstructed—mostly tacitly—by the reader. In this model then, one on hand, the text is autonomous from its creation, and what the author intended for the text is no longer authoritative. On the other hand, however, any notions—accurate or inaccurate—reconstructed from the text do shape and configure the meaning experienced by the reader. The notion of the actor-network mediated by the text—in other words, that of the creation of event—thus configures the actor-network in which the text is read.

To further develop this conceptual approach, I bring Alfred Gell's theory of art into dialogue with ANT. Following Gell I argue that the text serves as an index of the agency and action it mediates. Through the text a reader is able to abduct the relationships mediated between the text, its author, its reader, and the world depicted by the text—fictional or real. The text functions as a nexus of these relationships, mediating them and presenting them to the reader, such that the reader's abducted notion of the agencies mediated by the text modifies the reader's relationship to the text—as I illustrate with examples from biblical texts and their interpretation.

Because any hermeneutical notions of a text modify the emergent meaning and action of a text, these notions are themselves performative. The notions of a text assembled in a reading community, for this reason, cannot be disentangled from the values and interests of that community, and what is thought to be true of a text is not value-free or disinterested. This interdependence of facts and values, and notions of *what is* and *what ought to be*, has clear implications for texts such as the Bible, where notions of how it should be read and what it means have strong performative effects. In this way, notions brought to the text and notions inferred from a text both configure the reading event, and the meaning that emerges is contingent on the configuration of the politics, values, and social knowledge of the reading community. To understand the action of texts is, thus, also to understand the politics of how the text is configured within and together with the assemblage of an actor-network that we call the reading community.

This development of my theoretical approach to textual performativity in actor-networks comes to a close in Chapter 5 with analysis of the Bible's participation in climate change. Here, I

argue that the action of the Bible is entangled with melting ice sheets, CO_2 levels, scientists, politicians, tweets, Senate committees, religious leaders, and lobbyists. The Bible both acts and is made to act, and I trace the way that what the Bible does in American political discourse is contingent on notions of what the Bible says, and also on notions of climate science, economic policies, and political coalitions. In this way, the action of the biblical texts such as Genesis 1-11 is contingent on the way a text-reader hybrid is configured with many other actors in an actor-network. And, as I argue, in the case of American evangelicalism, where the interplay between religion and politics gives the Bible social and political power, the Bible itself acts to prevent climate change policy from being enacted.

Original Contribution

With the argument developed in these chapters, I make two contributions: first, this thesis extends the work of Latour and others to develop a model of textual performativity in actor-networks; second, this theoretical model contributes toward a new approach to hermeneutical questions such as the role of authorial intent and the location of meaning. As I demonstrate with examples from American evangelicalism, this theoretical framework then enables analysis of the mechanisms by which texts enact change, hold social power, and have far-reaching impact.

1

Texts in Actor-Networks

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In 2 Kings 22-23, the narrative account of King Josiah's reign includes a story of how a text changed a kingdom. This text had been lost, misplaced somewhere in a ruined temple. But one day it was found. And when it was found it started bringing about reforms in the nation in which that ruined temple and lost text were located.

In this simplified retelling, 2 Kings 22-23 presents a story in which a biblical text is, in effect, the main character. This is a reinterpretation of the reforms of Josiah that places the text in the role of a grammatical *subject* rather than *object*. It is also, I argue, a story of the action of a text embedded in an actor-network, in which humans and nonhumans act together to bring about change.

This story begins with a decision on the part of the king to renovate the temple. Following instructions sent via the king's secretary for funds to be released to workers and temple restorations

to begin, this text is found and initiates its action:

> The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD." When Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it. Then Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and ... informed the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king. When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.[1]

After the text reaches the king, a further series of actions begin to be performed. First, in order to interpret and clarify the implications of the book, the king sends a delegation composed of his servant, his secretary, the high priest, and two others to the prophet Huldah—coincidently the wife of the keeper of the wardrobe—for consultation:

> Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah, saying, "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."[2]

The prophet Huldah confirms impending disaster for the country, declaring, "thus says the LORD, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read."[3] As to the king himself, she states that given his actions in response to the text—deemed to be appropriately penitent and humble—he himself would not see the foretold disaster during his lifetime.

The narrative continues to describe the king gathering together all the people, and how, standing next to a pillar in the temple, he reads aloud the book to everyone, after which he has the people join him in a covenant "to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book."[4] Following this assembly of the people, the text's action continues to be felt through the far-reaching religious reforms implemented on its behalf by the king, including reforms of temple worship, eradication of cult sites, and celebration of passover for the first time since the monarchy had been established. In doing so, the 2 Kings narrative recounts, Josiah "established

[1] 2 Kings 22:8-11 (NRSV).
[2] 2 Kings 22:12-13 (NRSV).
[3] 2 Kings 22:16 (NRSV).
[4] 2 Kings 23:3 (NRSV).

the words of the law that were written in the book that the priest Hilkiah had found in the house of the LORD."[5]

This story of the discovery of the book of the law and the subsequent religious reforms raises a number of issues related to the performativity of texts in actor-networks. I have emphasized above the role of the newly discovered text as a *main character*, intending in my retelling to portray the text as a pivot point around which the action in the story occurs, and indeed a driver of that action.

To the extent the text itself is regarded as an actor which brings about change, there is still a question, however, of what, or who, should be identified as the source of that action. Is it the text's own agency or that of another that should be identified as the driver of what occurs in the story? And for whom does the text speak? In the 2 Kings narrative, the power of the text is related to the perception that the words of the book are the words of the LORD, and failure to obey the words of the text is experienced as a failure to obey the God whose words the text is thought to mediate. For this reason, the religious reforms initiated by Josiah are then thought to be reforms directed by a text but also, for the characters in the story, thought to be reforms directed by God.

Moreover, it is not any single actor alone—neither Josiah nor the text—but an assemblage of characters, including humans such as workers, priests, and royal staff that work together with nonhuman characters present in the form of money, building materials, storerooms and treasuries, wardrobes, clothes, pillars, cult artifacts, among others. What an actor-network method of tracing action does—as I will discuss—is approach these humans and nonhumans symmetrically, seeing action as distributed among all the objects present, regardless of whether they are human or nonhuman. In ANT there is no special consideration granted to sentient beings as a unique ontological category, at least so far as it comes to analysis of action performed; rather, humans and nonhumans are considered side-by-side in any actor-network analysis.

Actor-network theory provides a means of analysis by which texts can be thought of as agents that act to bring about change—which, I argue, is exactly the kind of nonhuman agency and action present in 2 Kings 22-23. Indeed, as I will argue following Latour, humans and nonhumans both can be thought to act; at the same time, however, no actor acts alone, and every actor

[5] 2 Kings 23:24 (NRSV).

speaks and acts on behalf of others, mediating the action of others even as it acts in its own right. It is with its emphasis on distributed action, symmetry of humans and nonhumans, and actors as mediators that actor-network theory serves as a means of tracing the action of texts within and through the communities assembled around them.

1.1 Action in Actor-Network Theory

To further introduce theoretical components of actor-network theory, consider another example.[6] Imagine, for instance, a lecturer standing next to a desk and discussing content projected on a large screen. The room is large, so she makes an effort to project her voice so the students present can hear her words. As she lectures, some students speak among themselves, whispering to one another. Even among those polite enough to keep their thoughts to themselves, many are distracted as they check social media, browse the web on their laptops, or respond to incoming texts. As the lecturer teaches, she notices this activity. Posture and body language, clouded eyes, confused or bored faces, or raised hands, too, inform the lecturer about what is happening in her students' minds and whether they are following what she says.

In this example, a lecturer is speaking, but many others also speak—both students and artifacts. Following ANT as a method, one might ask, then, who and what else is acting? Latour argues that what occurs in the lecture hall is modified and configured by humans and nonhumans alike. For instance, Latour argues, "the wooden desk was not part of the lecture ... and yet it does something; it is one of the ingredients that helps put it into shape, allowing interaction to be framed."[7] The physical structure of the building likewise enables and configures the teaching that occurs within the room. As Latour writes, "open the doors and the windows and see if you can still teach anything."[8] For this reason, the design of the lecture room itself—and the architectural firm that did the design—enables and configures the lecture that now takes place. The action of those far away or who once acted long ago, Latour argues, is also felt by those now present for the lecture:

[6] This example originates with Latour's discussion of distributed action in actor-networks in *Reassembling the Social*. See Latour 2005*b*: 193–204.
[7] Latour 2005*b*: 201.
[8] Latour 2005*b*: 195.

> What is acting at the same moment in any place is coming from many other places, many distant materials, and many faraway actors. If we wanted to project on a standard geographical map the connections established between a lecture hall and all the places that are acting in it at the same time, we would have to draw bushy arrows in order to include, for instance, the forest out of which the desk is coming, the management office in charge of classroom planning, the workshop that printed the schedule that has helped us find the room, the janitor that tends the place, and so on.[9]

In other words, as Latour argues, action is composed of humans and nonhumans distributed across space and time. These actors may go unnoticed, functioning as unrecognized participants in the ongoing lecture, yet all constitute, enable, frame, amplify, and contain what happens. Together they constitute an actor-network which is lecturing alongside the lecturer herself, forming an assemblage of humans and nonhumans that compose the lecture.

In an actor-network approach, then, what is recognized is that material objects and humans together compose action, and no actor, human or nonhuman, acts alone. In the same way, the action of the text discovered in the temple during Josiah's renovations is the action of an assemblage of actors, where the text acts, but so also do many other actors, seen and unseen, human and nonhuman. As I will argue throughout this thesis, it is this model of action that serves to trace the action of the Bible in American evangelicalism. The Bible functions to enable, shape, configure, modify, assemble, and act on and through the evangelical communities with which it is embedded in an actor-network. In other words, the Bible acts, but it does not act alone; it functions together with many humans and nonhumans, from near and far, with which it is assembled.

To develop this model of action in actor-networks, for the remainder of this chapter, I will address topics of Greimasian semiotics, human/nonhuman symmetry, nonhuman agency, distributed action, and textual mediation. Finally, I will turn to a Ricoeurian model of texts as mediating between events of writing and of reading, in effect slotting Ricoeur's approach into an actor-network model of action. Each theoretical component addressed here reveals something about the performativity of texts and, more specifically, as I will argue in later chapters, the action of biblical texts within American evangelicalism.

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[9] Latour 2005*b*: 200.

1.2 Actor-Network Theory as Repository, Method, and Theory

Before further introducing specific components of actor-network theory—as I incorporate it into my own model of textual performativity—I should make clear that ANT itself is a broadly defined collection of theories and practices. Despite the word "theory" in "actor-network theory," the approach is often described as more of a methodology or a repository of practices. Michel Callon states, for instance, "ANT is not a theory. It is this that gives it both its strength and its adaptability."[10] In his work on Bruno Latour, Gerard de Vries describes ANT as both *technique* and *theory*. For instance, he characterizes ANT as "a technique for detecting how connections between heterogeneous, human and nonhuman, entities make up a state of affairs that we used to call 'social.' "[11] In this sense, he writes, it is "a theory about *how to learn* what makes up collective life."[12] Annemarie Mol describes ANT as a *repository*, writing, "if ANT is a theory, then a theory is a repository of terms and modes of engaging with the world, a set of contrary methodological reflexes."[13] In the introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Actor-Network Theory*, the editors similarly describe ANT in terms of "a family of conceptual and methodological sensibilities."[14] Latour describes ANT as something of an "ontology" or "a metaphysics as a sociology."[15] And in his article, "On Recalling ANT," Latour critiques ANT for its use of the word "theory," and indeed also the words "actor," "network," and even the hyphenation of the two.[16]

Early work on ANT does not necessarily reflect the same language or concepts of later work. "ANT was not the stabilized model it became," writes Antoine Hennion, one of Latour's collaborators. "It was still in the process of making."[17] In many ways this is due to ANT's development by multiple people working in different theoretical areas with different aims—Hennion, for instance, working on mediation in art, while Latour and others developed epistemological approaches to the production of scientific knowledge.[18] Initial ANT work, then, addressed

[10] Callon 1999: 194.
[11] de Vries 2016: 88.
[12] de Vries 2016: 88.
[13] Mol 2010: 262.
[14] Fańias et al. 2019: xx.
[15] Latour 1996*b*: 369.
[16] Latour 1999*b*. See also other critiques of ANT published alongside Latour's in a collection edited by John Law. See *Actor Network Theory and After*: Law and Hassard 1999.
[17] Hennion 2017*b*: 405.
[18] See Hennion 2016.

matters ranging from science and technology to issues related to composition of the social and management of organizations, and since then has grown to encompass a large number of areas of investigation.[19] Indeed, along these lines, the editors of *The Routledge Companion to Actor-Network Theory* describe "the radically different intellectual, political and planetary ecologies in which ANT is practiced today."[20]

Partly because of this function as both a theory and as a set of methodologies—and a corresponding wide range of theoretical descriptions and practices—criticism of ANT is likewise wide-ranging. For instance, various critics have challenged ANT for being value-free, apolitical, and amoral, unquestioning of discriminatory practices and exercise of power, and being overly agonistic in its approach to action, while others critique ANT on epistemological or ontological grounds.[21] The problem with these critiques is they often apply to some specific work but not ANT as a whole, particularly since what is now recognized as ANT has evolved from the early publications by Latour, Callon, Law, and others. For example, criticism of ANT for being apolitical does not seem to apply to Latour's *Dingpolitik* and applies even less so to Latour's highly political work on climate change.[22] Other criticism of ANT as agonistic and normalizing power relations is again what I would argue to be true in some cases, but by the time of Latour's work in *Reassembling the Social*, these concerns seem to have been addressed, such that ANT as Latour describes it in this later work does not center on powerful human agonists in the same way that was the case in some early publications.

For my own work, I am adopting ANT as both a *theory of action* and a *method* of tracing that action. Toward developing a model of textual performativity in actor-networks, what I do in this thesis, then, is compile, summarize, and integrate a number of ANT and ANT-related concepts and approaches to develop a model of textual performativity. For this reason, I do not place much emphasis on ANT as an approach to epistemological questions about knowledge production, for instance, despite the importance of these concerns to early ANT work on science

[19] Including, for example, matters of home design and energy usage. See Wilhite 2008.
[20] Fańias et al. 2019: xxiv.
[21] See, among others, Alcadipani and Hassard 2010; Amsterdamska 1990; Ashmore 1993; Ausch 2000; Birk 2016; Button 1993; Collins and Yearley 1992; Corrigan and Mills 2012; E. Martin 1998; Radder 1992; Shapin 1988; Star 1991; Walsham 1997; Whittle and Spicer 2008; Winner 1993.
[22] See Latour 2005*a*; 2017; 2018. On the politics of hermeneutics in actor-networks, see Chapter 4 and 5.

and technology.[23] In all this, my goal remains to develop a theory of action related to texts as nonhuman actors with agency and to demonstrate how the mechanisms of that action can be traced, particularly in the context of the Bible in American evangelicalism.

1.3 What is an Actor? Greimasian Semiotics and Actor-Network Theory

In referring to the action, or performativity, of texts, I have been using the term *actor* to refer to anything, human and nonhuman, that contributes to action. In adopting this terminology, I am following a Latourian semiotic approach, in which terms of *actor*, and sometimes *actant*, are borrowed from the work of Algirdas Julien Greimas. As I will discuss below, the influence of Greimas on Latour's work is visible starting with *Laboratory Life* and continuing through the development of what later becomes actor-network theory.[24] Tracing the adoption of a Greimasian semiotic approach—and the ways that Latour and others appropriate Greimasian terms for new purposes—will help clarify how action is viewed within an actor-network framework, and make more intelligible the way in which actors are identified, named, and characterized. On this basis it will be possible to address ANT concepts and notions such as symmetry, distributed agency, and mediation to which I will return later in this chapter.

1.3.1 Actors and Actants in the Work of Algirdas Julien Greimas

Within Greimas' semiotics the terms actor and actant serve as ways of identifying characters and other components of a narrative that have some effect, whether they be human or nonhuman, material or conceptual.[25] Actants can be anything at all, real or imagined, and thus, for Greimas, an *actant* is a way of referencing that which plays a role in some action.[26] Notions of hero, villain, opponent, and helper serve as actantial categories, as do syntactic terms such as subject and object. Because an actant is an abstraction, a way of referencing an entity by its function or classification, the same entity can hold several actantial roles.[27] The *hero* of a narrative can

[23] In Chapters 4 and 5, I do, however, touch on epistemological matters as they relate to political and hermeneutical concerns about *notions* of texts.
[24] See Latour's autobiographical comments in Latour 2013*b*; 2016.
[25] Greimas and Courtés 1982: 5.
[26] Greimas and Courtés 1982: 5.
[27] In his work Greimas demonstrates how actantial categories from Vladimir Propp, Étienne Souriau, or even Freud can map to the same entities. See Greimas 1983.

also be the *subject* of a sentence, the *patient* of some agent's action, and the *receiver* of some message or object. At other times the same hero could be the *object* of a sentence, an *agent* who causes things to happen, or the *sender* rather than receiver.[28] In this sense, then, *hero*, *subject*, *object*, *agent*, *patient*, *sender*, and *receiver* are all actants.

The difference between an *actor* and *actant* in this scheme is that an actor is a character, something named, concrete and specific, whereas an actant is a way of referring to an entity through a functional, ontologically open abstraction.[29] Like actants, *actors* in Greimasian semiotics can be anything, real or imagined. In Greimas' definition, "an actor may be individual (for example, Peter), or collective (for example, a crowd), figurative (anthropomorphic or zoomorphic), or non-figurative (for example, fate)."[30] Fairies, orphan boys, evil wizards, enchanted swords, and mythical beings are *actors* when they are named, made concrete and given a thematic role in the text, even if that actor does not exist in material form. Actors, then, are things themselves, with no interpretive gloss. Actants are the interpretive categories assigned to actors (singular or plural) in the process of making sense of action and meaning. For this reason, a single actor may be categorized using multiple actant terms, just as a single actant may be constituted by multiple actors.

1.3.2 Semiotics in Latour's Early Work

Early in his career Latour saw the potential for applying hermeneutical methods to analysis of scientific endeavors. Prior to his work on the production of scientific knowledge, and what would later become actor-network theory, Latour had engaged with Derrida's work, an influence that Latour describes as constructive, and he had done work on biblical exegesis for his doctoral thesis.[31] In autobiographical comments, he tells of how he came to the realization that with Greimasian semiotics, "scientific texts could be analyzed in the same way as biblical scriptures," although he qualifies this is "with another key," setting the stage for his much later project on modes of existence.[32]

[28] Greimas 1983: 198–207.
[29] Greimas 1987.
[30] Greimas and Courtés 1982: 7.
[31] Tresch 2013: 305; Latour 2016: 466.
[32] Latour 2016: 468.

Latour tells the story of how, at the instigation of Paolo Fabbri, as a young anthropologist at the Salk Institute, he began using a semiotic approach to science:

> I still recall my admiration when Fabbri, with his high-pitched voice and his lovely Italian accent, picked up a text that had emerged from the lab machinery—a text full of diagrams and chemical formulas concerning the discovery of a neuropeptide, the soon to be well-known Thyrotropin-Releasing Factor (TRF)—and calmly set out to produce a Greimasian analysis of it, as if he were dealing with a fairy tale. In Paolo's capable hands, the varied figuration of the *actors* was no longer to be confused with the underlying detection of the *actants*. I suddenly understood that the nonhuman characters had their own adventures that we could track, so long as we abandoned the illusion that they were ontologically different from the human characters. The only thing that counted was their *agency*, their power to act, and the diverse figurations they were given.[33]

It was through this approach, Latour says he realized, "hermeneutics could move out of texts, to things, to knowledge, to technology, and, finally, to the world."[34] This possibility is noted in *Laboratory Life*, where Latour and Woolgar acknowledge the potential for methods from biblical exegesis and semiotics for analysis of written documents involved in the production of scientific knowledge.[35]

Latour's adoption of semiotic methods is worked out in more detail in work which followed *Laboratory Life*. Early work by Latour and his colleague, Michel Callon, specifically cites the term *actor* coming from Greimas' semiotic dictionary, and it is noted that, in this approach, nonhumans may be actors.[36] In the introduction to *The Pasteurization of France*, Latour raises the question of how to "compose" the world: "What will we talk about? Which actors will we begin with? What intentions and what interest will we attribute to them?"[37] To this end, Latour writes of "forces" responsible for winning battles—for instance, the forces involved in Napoleon's defeat in Russia or in the defeat of microbes in the laboratory.[38] He writes, "I start with the assumption that everything is involved in a relation of forces but that I have no idea at all of precisely what a force is."[39] What he is doing here, he later explains, is treating *force* as a

[33] Latour 2013*b*: 291. See also Latour and Fabbri 1977. I will return later in this chapter to discussion of notions of nonhuman action and agency in actor-network theory.
[34] Latour 2016: 468.
[35] Latour and Woolgar 1986: p. 168, note 7.
[36] Callon and Latour 1981: 279 note 8. Callon and Latour cite the original French edition of *Dictionnaire de śemiotique*. I refer to English terms and descriptions from the English translation of Greimas's work: Greimas and Courtés 1982. See also Callon 1986*a*,*b*.
[37] Latour 1988*b*: 9. Note that the French edition of *The Pasteurization of France*, originally published in 1984, preceded *Science in Action*.
[38] Latour 1988*b*: 3–7.
[39] Latour 1988*b*: 7.

type of *actant* in which the precise actors to which these actants map are left open.[40] Indeed, the Greimasian notion of *actants* is central to his analysis in *Irreductions*, the second, more theoretical part of *The Pasteurization of France*, where he asks, "what happens when nothing is reduced to anything else" and "what happens when we suspend our knowledge of what a force is?"[41] To this end Latour writes, "in place of 'force' we may talk of 'weaknesses,' 'entelechies,' 'monads,' or more simply 'actants.' "[42] In doing so, Latour is arguing that when forces are recognized as actants, the precise actors that make up these forces can be left undetermined, and, in this way, the notion of an actant makes possible a non-reductive reference to that which is acting without making ontological claims about its nature.[43]

In *Science in Action*, Latour uses the term *actant* to describe the things that act in laboratories but have not yet become accepted as facts or, in his terms, have not yet been assembled into black boxes.[44] Latour describes "something" that acts but that is undetermined, and thus an *actant* rather than an *actor*.[45] In other words, the term *actant* points to "whoever and whatever is represented," whether that is known or unknown.[46] This semiotic approach is made explicit when Latour describes the as-of-yet unnamed actants as "heroes" who can be killed or who can survive enemies, as occurs in the "trials" that are scientific experiments.[47] Latour also points out that many actors are named after what they do. In other words, the actant—the function and role the object plays—is, at least in the sciences, what determines the name of what would thereafter be an *actor* in semiotic terms. Pasteur's *anaerobic microbes*, for example, are named this precisely because they require conditions without air.[48]

Once an entity is recognized as an actor, however—or, in other words, once the actant becomes a named object—it becomes autonomous from the functions it once performed in the laboratory. For example, Latour writes, "all biologists now take 'protein' for an object; they do not

[40] See *Irreductions* in Latour 1988*b*.
[41] Latour 1988*b*: 157.
[42] Latour 1988*b*: 159.
[43] Some argue that Latour is more reductionistic than he acknowledges. See discussion in Harman 2014: 40–41.
[44] Latour 1987: 83–85. I will return to black boxes later in this chapter.
[45] Latour 1987: 89.
[46] Latour 1987: 84.
[47] Latour 1987: 89–90.
[48] Latour 1987: 90.

remember the time, in the 1920s, when protein was a whitish stuff that was separated by a new ultracentrifuge in Svedberg's laboratory."[49] Once named and released back into the wild, the actor begins to take on a life of its own, no longer tethered to its original actant roles, and named as its own object rather than for what it was once thought to do.[50]

1.3.3 Semiotics in ANT

The semiotics approach that Latour begins to develop in *Pasteurization of France* and *Science in Action* is core to the approach taken in ANT, which Latour describes as half ethnomethodology and half semiotics—and he names Harold Garfinkel along with A. J. Greimas as inspirations.[51] It should be noted that despite its structuralist origins, Greimasian semiotics is adopted by Latour without taking on a structuralist approach itself, which he sees as problematic. Latour notes, "of course the structural rendering of these choices—differences—and embranchments—dichotomies—are not kept by ANT, but essential traits of semiotics are kept."[52] "What remains," he writes, "is a toolbox to study meaning productions."[53] In ANT this adoption of semiotics serves two purposes: first to create symmetry between humans and nonhumans; and second to allow actors to go undefined, to describe them by function or action—as *actants*—so that this symmetry is possible without identifying all the actors, which begin to multiply rapidly once nonhumans are included in an actor-network.

Semiotics and Symmetry

Latour makes use of semiotic notions of actors and actants to develop a methodological framework, and the terms do not always hold the same meaning in ANT as they do in Greimas' own semiotic definitions. The origin of this semantic drift appears to be with the adoption of Greimas' terms for the purpose of avoiding controversy over ascribing agency to nonhumans. In typical style, Latour describes this controversy in polemical fashion, writing, "most sociologists are violently upset by this crossing of the sacred barrier that separate human from nonhumans,

[49] Latour 1987: 91.
[50] Latour 1987: 91–92. See also Latour 1991: 121–123.
[51] Latour 2005*b*: 54, note 54; 2016: 468.
[52] Latour 1996*b*: 374.
[53] Latour 1996*b*: 373. Here, Latour's initial focus on epistemological concerns is evident. In my adoption of Greimasian semiotics, what matters is how the toolbox enables tracing the action of texts.

because they confuse this divide with another one between *figurative* and *nonfigurative* actors."[54] Elsewhere he calls this, "the panicky fear of seeing humans reduced to things."[55] Within this context, the term *actant* serves to introduce notions of nonhuman agency and action, but also has led to some of the meaning of Greimas' semiotic terms being lost, with the terms instead used to show equivalence of humans and nonhumans.

This has become standard in ANT, where Latour and others typically—but not always—use the terms *actor* and *actant* interchangeably. In the glossary to *Pandora's Hope*, for example, Latour writes, "since in English 'actor' is often limited to humans, the word 'actant,' borrowed from semiotics, is sometimes used to include nonhumans in the definition."[56] This usage is not consistent, and at times Latour does use actant as a technical term consistent with Greimas' semiotic meaning, such as noted above in *The Pasteurization of France* and *Science in Action*. However, even in *The Pasteurization of France,* with its adoption of Greimasian semiotic approach, the distinction between actors and actants is blurred when Latour references the definition of actor in Greimas' semiotics dictionary but then groups actors, agents, and actants together under this definition.[57]

Consistent with this way of adopting Greimas' terms as a way of referring to symmetry rather than for semiotic analysis, Madeleine Akrich, in an article cited by Latour, calls upon the term *actant* as a way "to avoid terms that assume a distinction between the technical and the social" and a way to sidestep what she describes as the social constructionist view that "only people can have the status of actors."[58] In a note, she describes the term *actant* as a "convenient but imprecise shorthand,"[59] and she uses the term *actor* to refer to humans unless specified otherwise. Interestingly, in different versions of Latour's article citing Akrich, the latter published alongside hers as a chapter in an edited book, Latour swaps the terms "actor" and "actant."[60] In both versions he discusses figurative and non-figurative understandings of Hamlet as "the figuration

[54]Latour 2008: 163.
[55]Latour 2004*a*: 76. See further discussion of this point later in this chapter.
[56]Latour 1999*c*: 303.
[57]Latour 1988*b*: 9, note 11 and 10, note 13. See also examples of this equivalence in Latour 1996*b*: 369, 373; 1996*c*: 237.
[58]Akrich 1992: 206.
[59]Akrich 1992: p. 206, note 3.
[60]Latour 1988*a*: 303; 2008: 163.

of 'depression among the aristocratic class,' " or as someone that "stands for doom and gloom" or "represents western civilization." In the earlier version he writes, "they all are equally *actants*, that is to say entities that do things," but in the revised chapter he writes, "they all are equally *actors*, that is, entities that do things."[61]

This altered definition of Greimas' terms has been taken up by others. Michel Callon, for instance, early in the history of ANT explains in a note, "the term actor is used in the way that semioticians use the notion of the actant," citing *The Pasteurization of France* along with Greimas' dictionary of semiotics.[62] Harry Collins and Steven Yearley in a critical exchange with Callon and Latour over the issue of symmetry of humans and nonhumans, write of the terms actor and actant, "it makes no difference."[63] For Collins and Yearley, both terms are reflective of "French-style radical symmetry" which "draws no boundary between objects that have been created and those that occur naturally."[64] Graham Harman likewise makes no distinction between actors and actants, and he defines actants as anything that has effect. He writes: "whatever acts in some way is real: whether it be neutrons, trees, mountains, armies, politicians, unicorns, stick figures, or flying saucers. Unicorns cannot be excluded from the picture, since they obviously have an effect on the structure of fairy tales and the stuffed animal collections of children."[65] Gerard de Vries similarly equates the terms, explaining, "the generic term *actant* is introduced to cover any human actor or nonhuman entity that acts, that is, that performs an action."[66]

What has happened, then, is the use of semiotics to create symmetry between humans and nonhumans in ANT has introduced a new definition of actor and actant that is influenced by, but not the same as, the notions introduced by Greimas. While serving the purpose of avoiding controversy and introducing new concepts, this semantic drift is in some ways a misappropriation of Greimas' semiotics. For Greimas, both actors and actants can be humans and nonhumans, figurative or material, but there is still a difference in that *actant* refers to abstractions identified

[61] Latour 1988*a*: 303; 2008: 163. Emphasis mine. In my understanding of Greimasian semiotics, the latter is more correct.
[62] Callon 1986*a*: note 21.
[63] Collins and Yearley 1992: 317.
[64] Collins and Yearley 1992: 312.
[65] Harman 2014: viii. See further discussion of this point in Chapter 2.
[66] de Vries 2016: 40.

by function while *actor* is limited to that which has been named or made concrete—and when an entity is recognized as an actor, it always remains that same actor even when it plays a different actant role. Consequently this loss of the distinction in terms has had the effect of reducing the power of the term *actant* as a way of indirect referral to an actor based on an abstraction of its function or classification. Despite the common usage of this simplified meaning, Greimas' own definition of actant has continued to be important to Latour's work, as I will show next.

Semiotics and Creating Meaning

Notwithstanding the semantic drift in the meaning of actant and actor described above, there is an adoption of the principles of Greimas' semiotics in Latour's work on ANT, just as there was in his earlier work on the production of scientific knowledge. The important characteristic for Latour is the possibility of referencing things using these terms of actor, agent, or actant "without making any assumptions about who they may be and what properties they are endowed with."[67] Latour also notes that he uses notions of performance and competence to define these terms. He is interested, he explains, in "what characters do" and "what this action implies."[68] In other words, he writes, "actors, that is characters, emerge from actants, that is concepts."[69]

This way of thinking—more so than the use of the simplified meanings of *actor* and *actant*—is what underpins ANT. A semiotic approach is one which allows creation of meaning out of the vast number of entities that contribute to action by enabling a question of what things *do* rather than what they *are*. This more complex approach provides the theoretical basis for ANT and is what I make use of for my own theoretical moves regarding the action of notions of the text alongside the text itself.[70] Specifically, this semiotic method allows for actants to be nested, overlapping, uncertain, and, ontologically open and makes possible identification of mechanisms of action in actor-networks through: actors composed of multiple components; multiple and nested sources of action; a reversal of directionality in the term society is used; and an emphasis on effects of entities rather than their ontological status.

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[67] Latour 1988*b*: 9, note 11.
[68] Latour 1988*b*: 10, note 13.
[69] Latour 2016: 468.
[70] I will return to the concept of notions as actants in Chapter 2.

A single actor can be composed of many actants. Latour points to the example of malfunctioning projector, for instance. He writes, "in an instant, our 'projector' grew from being composed of zero parts to one to many. How many actants are really there?"[71] This is what lies behind Latour's argument that "B-52s do not fly, the U.S. Air Force flies."[72] A single B-52 might be the character, or actor, that gains our focus and follows a narrative arc in our story of action, but there are many actants that compose and empower this character: all the parts of the bomber as well as all the bureaucratic machinery that keeps the plane maintained, fueled, and piloted. It is for this reason that Latour writes about commercial airlines, similarly, "flying is a property of the whole association of entities that includes airports and planes, launch pads and ticker counters."[73] The notion of *actant* is what allows us to recognize these component parts and functions that work hidden behind the scenes. In this sense, an *actor*-network might be better called an *actant*-network.[74]

As I have noted, one actant can be represented by several actors and one actor can be made up of multiple actants.[75] By adopting a semiotics approach, Latour is able to argue, "the prime mover of an action becomes a new, distributed, and nested series of practices."[76] Together with the way in which actants allow for different categories of analysis to be applied to the same entities, this approach allows for multiple sources of action to be identified for the same actor or event. In a sense, this is equivalent to the sectioning and probing in biosciences, where cross-sections made from different angles and staining with different probes reveal different mechanisms of action in the same organism.[77] Explaining his adoption of this approach, Latour writes:

> The difference between actor and actant is exactly the same as in a fairy tale where the sudden performance of a hero may be attributed to a magic wand, or to a horse, or to a dwarf, or to birth, or to the gods, or to the hero's inner competence.[78]

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[71] Latour 1994: 36.
[72] Latour 1994: 35. See Chapter 2.
[73] Latour 1994: 35.
[74] Latour suggests as much with his acknowledgement than a name such as "actant-rhyzome ontology" might be more fitting for ANT. Latour 2005*b*: 9; 1999*b*: 19.
[75] Greimas 1987: 107.
[76] Latour 1994: 34.
[77] See, for example, Alcaraz et al. 2006.
[78] Latour 1994: 33. See also discussion in Latour 2005*b*: 54.

Applied to his analysis of gun control arguments, Latour argues this approach expands the way we describe the source action: a gunman could be replaced, for instance, by unemployed loiterers, unconscious motives, the gun lobby, or components including the trigger, cartridge, spring, or firing-pin.[79]

Latour describes ANT as combining "a semiotic definition of entity building" with "an ontological claim on the 'networky' character of actants themselves." These two components of ANT are built into a third "preoccupation" with developing "a methodological framework to record the heterogeneity of such a building."[80] "The key point," he writes, "is that every entity, including the self, society, nature, every relation, every action, can be understood as a 'choice' or a 'selection' of finer and finer embranchments going from abstract structure—actants—to concrete ones—actors."[81] This leaves the possibilities for analysis wide open, with no set way of thinking about actants. Humans and nonhumans can act and be a source of action, and by adopting a semiotic approach, stories of action can be told with actors that are figurative or non-figurative, singular or plural.

When we apply this approach to the notion of *society*, we can reverse the sense of directionality often associated with the term. Latour argues that society *is not the glue* that holds people together, but rather it is what *is held together* by humans and nonhumans. Likewise, society is not what makes people do things, not the *cause* of action; it is what is made to do things by the component actors and actants with which it is constituted.[82] For this reason, and in order to reintegrate the action of nonhumans into the social, Latour argues for replacing the term society with *collective*, which in his definition includes the action of both humans and nonhumans.[83] If we do keep the term, *society* would be a plural actor in Greimas' system, although one that is often mistaken for a singular actor or effectively thought to be an actant.[84]

To apply this to my own work in this thesis on the action of the Bible in evangelicalism, to say *evangelicals* is to speak of a plural actor but not to say anything about *specific evangelicals*. In

[79]Latour 1994: 33; 2005*b*: 54–55. See discussion of this example in Chapter 2.
[80]Latour 1996*b*: 373.
[81]Latour 1996*b*: 373.
[82]Latour 1986.
[83]Latour 1994.
[84]Latour makes this argument (without this level of semiotic analysis) in Latour 1986.

other words, we cannot equate individual evangelicals, whether actor or actant, with evangelicals plural. Evangelicals collectively are composed of singular evangelicals, but singular evangelicals are not made up of the collective, although we would recognize evangelicals singular and plural as being downstream of the action of many other actors, including other evangelicals. We can, nonetheless, still say that American evangelicals as a group made up of individuals have done something, such as oppose policies that would have reduced climate change.[85] To do so we would have to recognize that the actor, *evangelicals*, has acted in a way that has done something, but the actors and actants that constitute evangelicalism have individually done all sorts of things, some in favor, some opposed to what the plural actor has done.

To bring this description of Greimasian semiotics to a close, what matters in analyzing actants is their effect. Annemarie Mol explains, "the question ANT asks not where the activities of actors come from, but rather where they go: effects are crucial."[86] Latour argues, "there is no other way to define an actor but through its action, and there is no other way to define an action but by asking what other actors are modified, transformed, perturbed, or created by the character that is the focus of attention."[87] Consequently, as Latour argues, actors "can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action."[88] This is what Graham Harman refers to when he summarizes the view that "all natural and artificial things must count as actants as long as they have some sort of effect on other things," and indeed why Harman can count unicorns and square circles as actants.[89]

1.3.4 A Semiotic Approach to Objects

I should finally note that in my scheme, an *object* refers to anything that could be called an actor or actant. This is an area where I depart from both Greimas and Latour. Where the term object is a syntactic category for Greimas and for Latour a term that can raise the specter of an object-oriented ontology which he rejects, in my scheme it is a way of referring to things

[85] See analysis of climate change and evangelicalism in Chapter 5.
[86] Mol 2010: 255.
[87] Latour 1999*c*: 122.
[88] Latour 1996*b*.
[89] Harman 2009: 17, 90.

in an ontologically open way. When I use the term, then, it is not in reference to a subject-object dichotomy, nor to make a claim about human subjectivity, but in the sense of a computer science, object-oriented approach in which everything is an object, not unlike the way that Latour might apply the term *actant* to everything. Harman uses the notion of actant similarly when he describes objects as "actants defined by their effects and relations rather than by some essential nature held in reserve."[90] In my own use of the term *object*, every actor or actant is an object. Thus an object can be anything from conceptual notion to physical entity—effectively anything that can be identified by the human mind as having some coherence as an entity. In this sense, my use of *object* is as an index or pointer to something else which is left ontologically open as long as it has the characteristic of having some effect. In this definition objects, like actants, can be nested and hierarchical, inherit properties from other categories of objects, and be a specific instance of an object or a class of objects.[91]

1.4 Nonhumans in Actor-Networks

I have argued that actor-network approaches draw on Greimasian semiotics, using notions of actants and actors to trace the action of humans and nonhumans alike. I will now move to notions of symmetry, agency, and distributed action. ANT analysis approaches humans and nonhumans symmetrically, recognizing both as agents that do things within a distributed network of action. It is on this basis—that action is composed of people, artifacts, texts, natural objects, and other objects that are assembled together in actor-networks—that nonhumans are recognized as actors. With this theoretical basis I will then be able to turn to the notion of *mediators* in actor-networks and, finally, the role of texts as mediators of agency and action.

1.4.1 Symmetry in Actor-Networks

I have begun to address symmetry in my discussion of how a Greimasian semiotic approach makes no distinction between humans and nonhumans, characterizing all in terms of actors and actants. I will now turn to the development of the notion of *symmetry* within ANT and how

[90] Harman 2014: 178.

[91] On objects, see also Latour 2004*a*: 51,*b*; Plotz 2005. For further discussion on semiotics and ANT, see Mattozzi 2019.

with this notion there is no ontological distinction between humans and nonhumans. Rather, as I will argue, ANT flattens all action into a single plane, tracing the contribution of people, artifacts, and any other objects as a collection of heterogeneous actors that do things.[92]

In ANT, neither the social nor the technical should be given priority in any causal explanation; rather ANT recognizes that action weaves between social and technical concerns. In early work, particularly, this notion of symmetry was developed in contrast to approaches that took either the social or the technical as determinative. Latour, for instance, traced the way that production of scientific knowledge involves politics, organizational structures, financial concerns, and also machines, laboratory techniques, and inscriptions ranging from laboratory notes to scientific publications.[93] Colleagues of Latour made similar arguments. Michel Callon, for instance, used symmetry as an approach to trace the relationships between scientists, scallops, and people in the fishing industry.[94] John Law argued that European colonialist expansion should be traced to a combination of social and technical factors, including, specifically, the ship design that allowed projection of military force to far away locations.[95]

Within an actor-network approach, one can choose to focus on the function and contribution of any single actor—as I do with texts—but to do this is more of a narrative choice than a theoretical claim about what has causal priority. Early ANT analyses, for instance, placed priority on specific human agents who mobilized a range of human and nonhuman actors toward some goal.[96] This has left ANT open to criticism for adopting agonistic approaches to action which privilege stories of certain people while tending to overlook the contributions of others.[97] This criticism may be deserved considering how early ANT analyses were performed but, I would argue, does not reflect the potential of the underlying theoretical approach in which humans and nonhumans are approached symmetrically. Indeed, Latour's own work in *Reassembling the Social* emphasizes this need to trace all the actors that compose action.[98] Moreover, an ANT approach

[92] Latour compares ANT's flattening of action to the way cartography flattens mountains onto a two-dimensional map. See Latour 2005*b*: 165–246.
[93] Latour 1987; 1990; Latour and Woolgar 1986.
[94] Callon 1986*a*.
[95] Law 1986; 2012.
[96] See, for example, Law 1992.
[97] See Star 1991; E. Martin 1998.
[98] See Latour 2005*b*.

has the same potential to uncover the hidden, overlooked contributors to action—human or nonhuman—as it does to normalize existing power relations. What matters, in this sense, is the narrative approach one takes, not the theoretical underpinnings of ANT itself. One can, for various reasons, trace what a single actor does within an actor-network, but ANT itself makes no prior claim to human or nonhuman priority, instead starting from a position that recognizes the action of humans and nonhumans as equivalent.[99]

Ethics of Symmetry in Actor-Networks

To say humans and nonhumans are equivalent within the flattened plane of action recognized by ANT is not to make a moral, philosophical, or ethical claim about humans and nonhumans more generally. Likewise, to approach the action of humans and nonhumans, both, as objects is not to suggest that one should objectify or dehumanize humans when it comes to moral or ethical concerns.

In "Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network," John Law recognizes that an approach which collapses distinctions between humans and nonhumans could be problematic from other perspectives. Law writes:

> Actor-network theory is analytically radical in part because it treads on a set of ethical, epistemological, and ontological toes. In particular, it does not celebrate the idea that there is a difference in kind between people on the one hand, and objects on the other. It denies that people are necessarily special.[100]

In Law's view, ANT serves as a methodological approach to tracing the social as it is composed of humans and nonhumans, and for this reason, the concerns of a sociological approach to symmetry should not be confused with ethical concerns raised by the interactions of humans and nonhumans. However, he acknowledges, this approach "sets the alarm bells of ethical and epistemological humanism tinging."[101] He writes, "we need, I think, to distinguish between ethics and sociology. The one may—indeed should—inform the other, but they are not identical. To say that there is no fundamental difference between people and objects is an analytical stance,

[99] This is not to say that analysis will not give priority to one actor over another. See, for instance, Malcom Ashmore's argument that a human, cat, and catflap cannot all be equally said to be protagonists. See Ashmore 1993.
[100] Law 1992: 383.
[101] Law 1992: 383.

not an ethical position."[102] And in what I would argue is stating the obvious—but perhaps does need to be made explicit—Law makes clear that "to say this does not mean that we have to treat the people in our lives as machines. We don't have to deny them the rights, duties, or responsibilities that we usually accord to people."[103] In other words, the question of what it means to be human and the corresponding ethical questions around human life and human relationships are matters to which ANT may contribute, but are not themselves within the scope of action to which ANT is an appropriate method for tracing.

Clay Spinuzzi suggests an example from physics to illustrate the difference between symmetry as a methodological move in ANT and symmetry in areas such as philosophy, ethics, and law. Since Galileo, Spinuzzi notes, it has been known that objects of different masses have the same acceleration. To test for oneself the theory that a one pound brick and a ten pound brick both fall at the same speed, Spinuzzi suggests climbing an observation tower and dropping both bricks and watching to see which hits the ground first, at which point one will discover that Galileo, and not Aristotle, was right about mass acceleration. However, to better experience the principle of symmetry for oneself, he suggests modifying the procedure:

> Interesting, you think. And then you decide to try a second variation of the experiment. You ascend the tower again, this time with a one-pound weight, a ten-pound weight, and a 150-pound hipster.... When you reach the observation deck, you repeat the experiment, this time dropping all three objects at the same time. It turns out that no matter how ironically the hipster falls, in terms of gravity, he behaves exactly as the other weights do."[104]

It here that one then discovers the limits of symmetry as an approach to analysis of action:

> But when you descend the elevator to the bottom of the tower, you discover that what is treated as symmetrical in one network of meaning is not treated as symmetrical in other networks. Dropping the weights is a misdemeanor. Dropping the hipster is a felony. The law of gravity treats them as symmetrical, but state and federal law do not.[105]

Spinuzzi is clear that one should not, in fact, drop human beings from observation towers, and that this is only suggested as a thought experiment. In Spinuzzi's words, "symmetry is a

[102]Law 1992: 383.
[103]Law 1992: 383.
[104]Spinuzzi 2015: 28.
[105]Spinuzzi 2015: 28.

methodological stance meant to get at certain things and not others."[106] What he is pointing out with this example is that to the extent ANT is a method of analyzing action, there is symmetry *in the analysis* not in the objects being analyzed themselves, or indeed in other ways that humans relate to other objects. What this means, in effect, is that by making visible the contribution of nonhumans to action, ANT enables human ethical or moral reflection, even if ethical or moral concerns remain outside the scope of ANT itself.

1.4.2 Nonhuman Agency in Actor-Networks

Within an actor-network approach there is no special consideration given to human agency as something distinct from nonhuman agency. All act; all are made to act. And for this reason, there is no methodological or theoretical difference between whether an actor is identified as human or nonhuman. To be sure, every actor is unique, and humans will act differently than nonhumans, and indeed differently than other humans, but this is recognized to be a difference within the flattened plane of action to which ANT assigns all actors. Simply put, within ANT, every actor is an agent.

Writing on this topic, Michel Callon and John Law address the question of whether "non-human agency" is a "contradiction in terms." This question, they write, "asks us to assume that there are indeed two classes, human and non-human. Which we don't." Furthermore, they argue that the question assumes that "humans are special and particular," a notion also rejected within an actor-network approach.[107] Instead, they state, "we start with this assumption: that non-human agency is not a contradiction in terms."[108]

This concept of agency is then not one that requires the agent to exercise, or be able to exercise, its own will or have the ability to make choices. Rather, this is a view of agency that sees all objects as agents even if their action is passive or lacks intentionality. In this approach, for instance, a piece of furniture would be recognized to have agency for the way it configures a room and shapes the interactions that occur within a room. Following ANT, the stationary object is an agent just as much as the people chatting in the room are agents. Likewise, the earth could be

[106] Spinuzzi 2015: 27.
[107] Callon and Law 1997*b*: 95.
[108] Callon and Law 1997*b*: 96.

said to act as an agent on the basis that its gravity acts on all the people, animals, artifacts, and other objects on the planet, structuring their lives and preventing, as of yet, any living beings from escaping its reach. To act does not require that an object have the intent to perform an action; it does not need to know what it is doing, want to do it, or have any choice in the matter. Agency is thus not—as I am using the term following ANT—dependent upon a state of freedom or capacity to make choices, nor is it contingent on desire or any other cognitive state.

Humans, animals, artificial intelligence, robotic devices, and inanimate objects all can participate as causal agents in actor-networks. Making the case for ANT's notion of nonhuman agency, Latour lists a number of actions nonhumans can perform, writing:

> there is hardly any doubt that kettles 'boil' water, knifes 'cut' meat, baskets 'hold' provisions, hammers 'hit' nails on the head, rails 'keep' kids from falling, locks 'close' rooms against uninvited visitors, soap 'takes' the dirt away, schedules 'list' class sessions, price tags 'help' people calculating, and so on.[109]

He asks, rhetorically, "are those verbs not designating actions?" To address agency from an actor-network perspective, then, the issue regarding an object's agency is one of "does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not?"[110] If the object did not participate in action, what action would not be brought about? Latour asks one to imagine the difference between:

> hitting a nail with and without a hammer, boiling water with and without a kettle, fetching provisions with or without a basket, walking in the street with or without clothes, zapping a TV with or without a remote, slowing down a car with or without a speed-bump, keeping track of your inventory with or without a list, running a company with or without bookkeeping...[111]

Latour ridicules the notion that these "are exactly the same activities, that the introduction of these mundane implements change 'nothing important.' "[112] If they are doing something, then, in an actor-network approach, they are said to have agency.

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[109] Latour 2005*b*: 71.

[110] Latour 2005*b*: 71.

[111] Latour 2005*b*: 71. The fact that Latour's examples here are all human-centric could support an argument that ANT still prioritizes *human* agency. I would argue, however, that this simply reflects human analytical interests and the choice to focus on stories of action in which humans play a central role. ANT as a theory of action applies equally whether humans are involved or not. See related critique in Ashmore 1993.

[112] Latour 2005*b*: 71.

To argue that nonhumans participate in agency is not to make a claim about the action of those agents being determinative, however. By contributing to action within an actor-network—enabling something to happen that would not happen without them—nonhumans are participating in the distributed agency of an actor-network. Latour notes that this contribution "does not mean that these participants 'determine' the action," or for instance, "that baskets 'cause' the fetching of provisions or that hammers 'impose' the hitting of the nail."[113] It may be that nonhuman actors do cause things to happen, but Latour argues, "in addition to 'determining' and serving as a 'backdrop for human action', things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on."[114] Action in ANT weaves between the human and the nonhuman, the social and the technical, and, agency, likewise, is composed of humans and nonhumans interwoven in an actor-network such that the agency of any one actor is contingent on the other actors with which it is entangled.

This view of agency differs from the way the term has typically been used within philosophy of action or in reference to human behavior. While this approach is not itself inconsistent with philosophical notions of agency, the broad, distributed concept of agency that is central to ANT is meant to address different concerns than that of approaches that emphasize human or moral agency.[115] An actor-network approach, then, would not use the word *agency* to specifically emphasize matters of human freedom, choice, and self-determination, although I would argue it would contribute to an analysis of how configuration of material artifacts alongside human beings both enables and constrains human action. The difference is that ANT does not imply or suggest that agency is necessarily referring to human action, nor does it work on the assumption that only humans can act.

This difference could be said to be one of emphasis on *intentionality* or *causality*. In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour notes: "Psychologists have shown that even a two-month-old baby can clearly

[113] Latour 2005*b*: 71. Malcom Ashmore raises critique of symmetry along these lines, pointing out how narratives of action do not always work when one attempts to trace the action of an artifact as the primary actor. See Ashmore 1993.

[114] Latour 2005*b*: 72. In this Latour follows James Gibson on the affordance of material objects. See Gibson 1979.

[115] For a discussion of philosophical approaches to the agency of nonhumans and inanimate objects, see for instance, Alvarez and Hyman 1998; Coope 2007.

differentiate intentional and non-intentional movements. Humans and objects are clearly distinct." "But a difference is not a divide," Latour continues. "Toddlers are much more reasonable than humanists: although they recognize the many differences between billiard balls and people, this does not preclude them to follow how their actions are woven into the *same* stories."[116] And this is where ANT's notion of agency differs from that of other approaches. In ANT what matters is how objects, human and nonhuman, interact to cause things to happen. This, then, is not to make a claim about the validity or non-validity of other approaches to agency. Indeed, as I will return to in Chapter 4, human cognition about intentional causes is significant and does modify human action, including configuring how humans interact with written texts, but this intentional human agency is only a subset of the types of agency recognized within ANT.

Andrew Kipnis draws a helpful distinction between human and nonhuman agency, seeing human agency as a unique category while not rejecting the importance of recognizing the broader category of nonhuman agency. He argues, "while it is possible in the Latourian sense to ascribe agency to anything in the world, it is not necessary to say that all agencies are the same."[117] Each field of academic work, he notes, examines different types of agency. Physicists, chemists, biologists, art historians, and anthropologists, for example, each have different types of agents in which they are interested—particles, chemicals, creatures, art works, and societies, for instance.[118] It is useful, in this sense, to think of the agency of particles as different from the agency of animals, not for the sake of isolating action into hermetically sealed categories, but for the reason that recognizing differences in the way each functions allows for better analysis of these different agents.

Kipnis raises a critique of actor-network approaches for going too far in anthropomorphizing nonhumans and objectifying humans, and he suggests that Latour's use of anthropomorphic language sometimes blurs "the distinction between inanimate and animate beings." This is problematic for Kipnis when this conflation results in what he describes as "forms of anthropomorphic fallacy typical of posthumanists who wish to flatten the differences between human and

[116]Latour 2005*b*: 76 note 88. Note that Latour's use of *object* here to refer to nonhumans reflects a difference in terminology from that of my use of the term to refer to any actor or actant that can be said to act in some way within an actor-network.
[117]Kipnis 2015: 48.
[118]Kipnis 2015: 48.

nonhuman agency." It is not the notion of symmetry itself that he rejects, however, but a failure to recognize what is unique about human agency. He writes, "this fallacy is not one of ascribing agency to things but one of ascribing a human form of agency to things."[119] In other words, recognition of material agency within a flattened plane of action is not itself problematic—what is problematic is when analysis strips humans of their unique ways of acting, even if that action is approached symmetrically with nonhuman action.

Human agency, then, should be noted for its own distinctive characteristics, particularly as it relates to human ethical reflection. For this reason, Kipnis rejects approaches that "deny the importance of what is typically considered unique about human agency—language and self-consciousness."[120] Specifically, he raises the question of "what distinguishes beings who are self-conscious, who can think themselves as separate from the worlds that they inhabit and thus consciously make choices about their course of action."[121] It is this possibility of conscious choice that makes humans unique and raises ethical concerns for human action.[122] Indeed, an argument that I make in this thesis for adopting ANT as a hermeneutic approach is that it enables humans to make better ethical choices about their reading practices and community configuration—thus myself implicitly recognizing that there is a distinctness to human agency as an ethical category.[123] Within an actor-network approach, this does not place human agency in a different plane of action, however, and to characterize unique ways that humans think and act remains characterization of action *within* an actor-network.

1.4.3 Distributed Agency and Action in Actor-Networks

I have discussed above how ANT takes a semiotic approach to action in which action is characterized in terms of actants and actors. I have also introduced the way that the action of humans and nonhumans is interpreted following a principle of symmetry in which anything that acts is named an actor and said to have agency within an actor-network. I will now return to the notion

[119] Kipnis 2015: 49.
[120] Kipnis 2015: 49.
[121] Kipnis 2015: 48.
[122] Kipnis 2015: 50.
[123] Note that ANT itself does not provide an ethical framework, but it does allow one to bring an ethical framework to analysis of action. In other words, ANT itself may be value-free, but when applied as a method, it makes possible the types of choices necessary to enact one's own values.

of *distributed* action within actor-networks. As I will argue, it is on the basis of this notion that action is distributed among all the actors that make up the actor-network that corresponding notions of *symmetry* and *nonhuman agency* can function within an actor-network approach.

To trace the action of any actor is to also trace the action of others with which that actor is associated. To illustrate, Latour asks: "When we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present? How come I never do what I want? Why are we all held by forces that are not of our own making?"[124] These, likewise, are the questions I have begun to address with the story from 2 Kings 22-23 and the example of the lecturer. In both cases we were looking for the distributed nature of action, in effect asking—following Latour—when Josiah enacted reforms or the lecturer taught her class *who else was acting*, *how many agents were also present*? In both examples, the action of any single actor is that which emerges from being entangled with many other actors. Every human exists within a web of action, formed and shaped by the numerous actors, human and artifact, with which we interact, forming what Latour calls a "star-like shape" or "star-like embranchments" radiating out from an actor.[125]

For example, Latour suggests considering one's own action and why what one does is so often other than what one wants. "Action is not done under the full control of consciousness," he writes. "Action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled."[126] To attempt to untangle that which influences oneself is to identify the many sources of action that have shaped one's own way of acting in the world:

> If you began to probe the origin of each of your idiosyncrasies, would you not be able to deploy, here again, the same star-like shape that would force you to visit many places, people, times, events that you had largely forgotten? This tone of voice, this unusual expression, this gesture of the hand, this gait, this posture, aren't these traceable as well?[127]

In other words, humans may be agents who make their own choices about how to act in the world, but these choices and these actions are entangled with the many other actors, distributed

[124]Latour 2005*b*: 43.
[125]See Latour 2005*b*: 132, 177–178, 185, 209, 222.
[126]Latour 2005*b*: 44.
[127]Latour 2005*b*: 209.

throughout space and time, with which they have interacted—interactions in which they themselves, as agents, have been modified.

As I have noted, the social, for Latour and actor-network theorists, is made up of heterogeneous elements—humans, natural objects, artifacts, and anything else that could be said to act. In both my example from 2 Kings and in Latour's lecture example, there were a number of actors present that composed action. I presented the story of the lost book in a way that emphasized the rediscovered text as the main character of that action, identifying a nonhuman as the pivot around which action occurs, whereas Latour's example places the human lecturer in this role. But in both cases, the source of action is distributed among many actors, human and nonhuman, that contributed to the religious reforms and to the lecture. In this way both examples made use of notions of symmetry and nonhuman agency to trace the action that emerges with the assemblage of entities present. Indeed, a core concept within ANT is that tracing agency and action requires weaving between human and nonhuman, integrating both together. For this reason, ANT rejects approaches that focus on the human or the physical to the exclusion of the other.

On one hand, it would seem to make sense to approach physical interactions and social interactions separately. Fields of physics, engineering, chemistry, and to some extent, biology, for instance, are concerned with physical mechanisms and how physical objects interact. Fields concerned with human behavior, conversely, trace what humans do, how humans interact, what humans want, and how human minds work. On the other hand, what Latour and others point out is that these two sets of concerns are entangled, and it is not possible, nor useful, to view them as entirely distinct. In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour explains how these two types of action are intertwined:

> It's true that the force exerted by a brick unto another brick, the spin of a wheel onto an axis, the balance of a lever onto a mass, the gearing down of a force through a pulley, the effect of fire on phosphorus, all of those modes of action seem to pertain to categories so obviously different from the one exerted by a "stop" sign on a cyclist or that of a crowd over an individual mind that it seems perfectly reasonable to put material and social entities on two different shelves. Reasonable but absurd, once you realize that any human course of action might weave together in a matter of minutes, for instance, a shouted order to lay a brick, the chemical connection of cement with water, the force of a pulley unto a rope with

> a movement of the hand, the strike of a match to light a cigarette offered by a co-worker, etc.[128]

What Latour describes here is the way all objects, human and nonhuman, are entangled in webs or chains of action. And, for this reason, Latour argues, "we have to accept that the continuity of any course of action will rarely consist of human-to-human connections ... or of object-object connections, but will probably zigzag from one to the other."[129] Because action is distributed among human and nonhuman actors, there can be no social world/material world divide.

Human Agency and Distributed Action

To return, now, to Andrew Kipnis' argument that there is something unique about *human* agency within actor-networks, Kipnis' argument can be reconsidered from the perspective of distributed agency. He writes, "at least since Newton (or perhaps Aristotle), we have known that there are no unmoved movers. The agency of one particle must be understood in relation to the agencies of others."[130] Furthermore, he explains, "the position I take here is that many types of agency exist and that agencies emerge through entanglements and attachments—no agency exists as an isolate."[131] Here, Kipnis is taking a position consistent with work by Latour, Callon, Law, and others. To ascribe agency to nonhumans is not problematic in ANT precisely because all agency is distributed. Nothing acts alone, neither humans nor nonhumans.

For Kipnis, then, the interesting question is not whether nonhumans have agency, but, rather, what recognizing the distributed and entangled nature of agency means for *human* agency. He writes, for instance, "a Latourian analysis does not deny human agency but examines how other things mediate that agency."[132] Moreover, he states, "all human agency takes place through attachments. To become detached is to erase agency."[133] Kipnis' arguments about human self-reflection and choice are made from a Latourian starting point in which any human self-reflection or ethical choice is not only about oneself, but about how one is configured together with other

[128]Latour 2005*b*: 74.
[129]Latour 2005*b*: 75.
[130]Kipnis 2015: 48.
[131]Kipnis 2015: 50.
[132]Kipnis 2015: 47.
[133]Kipnis 2015: 47.

humans and nonhumans.[134] Like Latour, Kipnis recognizes that one cannot be detached from other actors and the forces they exert on oneself—to do so would be to render oneself powerless and immobile—but it is possible to use one's own capacity for intentional action to reconfigure one's way of being assembled within an actor-network.[135]

Actors are Composed of Actor-Networks

In actor-network theory, action is distributed within the web of actors in which any single actor is embedded, but actors themselves are also 1) *composed* of actor-networks and 2) *configured* by the actor-network in which they are embedded. On the first point, consider how except for the smallest, fundamental particles—if they exist—any single entity can be deconstructed into smaller entities. The human body, for example, is composed of tissues and organs, but also of cells, intracellular components, individual molecules, atoms, and particles. Texts might take the form of a book, but are also composed of chapters, sentences, phrases, words, and letters, and also paper, ink, letter strokes, or electronic files and bytes. ANT's semiotic approach is one which recognizes these multiple, overlapping, nested actors as together composing action—such that we can refer to the action of a *text* which contains other texts, or refer to a *body* of people also recognized to be made up of individual bodies.[136]

On the second point, every actor's existence is contingent on other actors which compose and configure it within an actor-network. It is here, again, that we return to the core ANT notion that no actor acts alone and that actor-networks are composed of heterogeneous entities. In the case of bodies and texts, these components do not exist in isolation; the body, for instance, requires external sources of nutrients and oxygen to keep its organs, cells, and other components alive and healthy. It also requires many other things—high carbon dioxide levels or even low levels of carbon monoxide, for instance, will quickly cause the human body as an actor-network to decompose into component parts. Texts require actor-networks to produce the materials and technology with which texts can be inscribed and maintained—a problem made more clear

[134] A similar argument is made in new materialist and posthumanist approaches. See, for instance, Barad 2008.

[135] I will return to this topic again in Chapter 2.

[136] To be clear, in an actor-network approach, a body of people would always be recognized to be a body composed of people and their artifacts—unless these were somehow naked bodies suspended in empty space.

when one considers the vast actor-network required to maintain the technological infrastructure which makes possible reading on a technological artifact, whether computer, mobile device, or e-reader. Moreover, just as humans beings cannot live and function alone, the words that make up a text, likewise, do not *mean* alone but only have meaning when associated with other words, including both those in the text and those external to the text.

Throughout their work, Latour, Callon, and Law describe actors as being composed of actor-networks and of having action that emerges within an actor-network. In "Unscrewing the Big Leviathan," Latour and Callon, for instance, argue that to understand action, one should "consider actors as networks."[137] Callon and Law, writing in "Agency and the Hybrid *Collectif*," develop this notion further, describing an actor as "a particular kind of emergent effect, an arrangement of bits and pieces." This arrangement of the components that form the actor-network is made up of that which is both internal and external to a person. For example, Callon and Law describe a human, named Andrew. On his functioning as an actor, they write: "no doubt, at least some of the time, this has something to do with his body, but it also has to do with a whole lot of things that lie beyond his skin."[138] As a *human*, Andrew is composed of that which exists within his body, but as an *actor* he is composed of both what is internal and what is external to himself.

Law explains this notion of an actor as an actor-network similarly in "Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network." He asks:

> Is an agent an agent primarily because he or she inhabits a body that carries knowledges, skills, values, and all the rest? Or is an agent an agent because he or she inhabits a set of elements (including, of course, a body) that stretches out into the network of materials, somatic and otherwise, that surrounds each body?[139]

Actor-network theory, Law argues, "insists that social agents are never located in bodies and bodies alone, but rather that an actor is a patterned network of heterogeneous relations, or an effect produced by such a network."[140] Using himself as an example, he writes, "if you took away my computer, my colleagues, my office, my books, my desk, my telephone I wouldn't be a

[137] Callon and Latour 1981: 280.
[138] Callon and Law 1997*b*: 98. I return to the notion of emergence in Chapter 2.
[139] Law 1992: 384.
[140] Law 1992: 384.

sociologist writing papers, delivering lectures, and producing 'knowledge.' "[141] In other words, he explains, "the argument is that thinking, acting, writing, loving, earning—all the attributes that we normally ascribe to human beings, are generated in networks that pass through and ramify both within and beyond the body."[142]

To apply this notion of an actor as a distributed network of action to the reforms of 2 Kings 22-23, it could be said that Josiah is only a reformer within a network of funds, priests, workers, construction materials, a lost text, and the other actors assembled around him to compose him as a reformer. In other words, Josiah as a reformer is Josiah as an actor-network which reforms. The lost text found in the story, too, is composed of an actor-network that brings about reforms, composed of the network of people, artifacts, and practices that form the religious practices, relationships, literacy and textual culture, and social structure through which the text enacts reforms.

Because of this distributed nature of action, no single actor can be said to have agency alone. Writing in "On Technical Mediation," Latour argues, "the prime mover of an action becomes a new, distributed, and nested series of practices whose sum might be made but only if we respect the mediating role of all the actants mobilized in the list."[143] Latour summarizes this notion in *Reassembling the Social* with the principle that "an actor is what is made to act by many others." Latour explains, "an 'actor' in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it." Within an actor-network action is "borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated." Thus, Latour writes, "if an actor is said to be an *actor*-network, it is first of all to underline that it represents the major source of uncertainty about the origin of action."[144] Indeed, Antoine Hennion reverses the order of the terms actor and network, suggesting "network-actor" might have been a better way to describe the notion of actors in ANT.[145] It is for this reason, also, with action distributed between the nested, hierarchical, distributed assemblage of actors

[141] Law 1992: 383–384.
[142] Law 1992: 384.
[143] Latour 1994: 34.
[144] Latour 2005*b*: 46.
[145] Hennion 2016: 302.

that compose actor-networks, that there is symmetry between how the action of humans and nonhumans is traced with ANT—with actors defined as actor-networks, in this way human and nonhuman both can be approached alike.

1.4.4 Actors as Black Boxes

Another way to refer to this composition of actors by actor-networks is with the notion of *black boxes*. The term is one Latour borrows from cybernetics, in which complex machinery is reduced to a "black box" which takes inputs and gives outputs, and the exact details of how the black box works do not need to be understood in order for it to be used.[146] In Latour's usage, a black box could be anything from an electrical circuit to an antidepressant drug for which there is no need for the user—nor even the creator—to understand the mechanisms by which it works so long as it performs in the way needed.

Just as a physical black box is assembled from component parts into an artifact that functions as a whole, the ANT notion of a black box is one in which the component parts are hidden from view. To assemble a black box, whether in the form of fact or artifact, requires assembling people and objects together such that the entity or notion appears as if it is holding itself together, as if it were natural, autonomous, and independent. What lies beneath, however, is humans and nonhumans acting together in an actor-network through which the fact or artifact emerges and is held together. In other words, the black box is an outcome of component actors gathered into a stable assemblage.[147] Latour writes, "if everything goes well it begins to look as if the black boxes were effortlessly gliding through space as a result of their own impetus, that they were becoming durable by their own inner strength."[148] Only when something breaks, a *network interruption*—to which I will return to below—does this composition of the black box as an actor-network become visible once again.

Humans and other objects are treated as black boxes in ANT, which means all that matters is how they integrate inputs and respond to them, not what they are made of or what their internal

[146] Latour 1987: 2–3. Note that this type of black box is distinct from the black boxes used as flight recorders to preserve data for recovery following catastrophic airplane loss.
[147] See Latour 1987: 131–132; 1994.
[148] Latour 1987: 132.

processes are. Human agents, then, are complex black boxes with capacity for self-reflection and at least some ability to make conscious choices about how to respond to inputs. But this does not change the fact that they *do* interact with other objects, human and nonhuman, and what matters, from an actor-network perspective, is what they do, not what they *think* while doing it. In this way, the ANT principle of symmetry functions, in part, by treating humans as black boxes, bracketing off matters of consciousness or sentience.

For the sake of tracing action, it is sometimes helpful to think of actors as a singular whole and sometimes it is necessary to disassemble the black box to trace how the component parts are configuring action. There is a tension here, between two goals within ANT of tracing all the actors and of making action accessible to view. The notion of a black box functions both to enable recognition of this way that actors are composed of actor-networks but to also collapse this vast range of actors into a single object which can be traced and analyzed. John Law writes, for instance, "an agent is a spokesperson, a figurehead, or a more or less opaque 'black box' which stands for, conceals, defines, holds in place, mobilizes and draws on, a set of juxtaposed bits and pieces."[149] To refer to a text, then, is to refer to a black box.[150] And by black boxing the various components of which it is assembled and upon which it is contingent, including its production history and the intertextuality upon which it relies, the agency and action of a text can then be analyzed.

1.4.5 Network Interruptions in Actor-Networks

Tracing the source of action in an actor-network approach is non-trivial, particularly given the way that action is both distributed and black boxed. One way to do so, however, is to look for the effect of disruptions in the actor-network. If tracing action in ANT is indeed a matter of disentangling a "node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies," as noted above, then looking for the points of failure—or potential points of failure—in an actor-network and the way these failures disrupt action serves to reveal hidden sources of action.[151] In this way,

[149] Law 1994: 101.
[150] As I noted in the introduction, when I refer to *the Bible* in this thesis, I am performing exactly this kind of black boxing of the actor-networks in which and by which the Bible is composed as an actor.
[151] Latour 2005*b*: 44.

the participation of actors, some hidden, some located far away or long ago, can be traced and made visible, revealing this agency and action of nonhumans and humans alike.

As I have alluded to above, with the notion of actor-networks being composed of heterogeneous actors, an actor-network is not a physical network. In some ways, concepts of computer networks, mobile phone networks, and social networks make the notion of an actor-network easier to grasp conceptually, but there is also a danger to comparing the *network* in actor-network to the physical infrastructure that transmits and receives digital signals or to the interpersonal connections that compose a social network.[152] The notion of an actor-network serves, rather, as a way to trace the interconnectedness of the heterogeneous collection of people, objects, and ideas that make an action possible. If one were interested in the mobile networks that provide signal coverage, for example, then what ANT provides is not a theory about the placement of towers that provide radio signals, but rather a method and theoretical framework with which one would seek to trace the entire network of actors that built, maintain, and constitute a mobile network. Latour describes this network as "the multitude of institutions, supervisory agencies, laboratories, mathematical models, antenna installers, standardization bureaus, protesters engaged in heated controversies over the harmfulness of the radio waves emitted."[153] To use the notion of network disruptions, then, is not to think in terms of the impact of breaks in physical links but to look for the effect of modification or absence of any of these heterogeneous actors.

Places of crisis, controversy, and breakdown are places to discover these sources of action that might otherwise be missed. To trace the connections that compose actor-networks, Latour looks to *surprises* and *trials* that appear in these actor-networks.[154] For instance, he describes the way in which "gas pipelines are not made 'of gas' but rather of steel tubing, pumping stations, international treatises, Russian mafiosi, pylons anchored in the permafrost, frostbitten technicians, Ukrainian politicians." The actor-network that makes possible a physical network of gas pipelines typically remains mostly invisible, like the pipelines themselves, but "everyone notices ...

[152] See Latour 2011*a*.
[153] Latour 2013*a*: 32.
[154] On notions of surprise and trial, see Latour 2013*a*: 28–46.

when some geopolitical crisis interrupts gas deliveries."[155] These "network interruptions," Latour explains, provide reveal the vast and often surprising network of actors that make action happen:

> Had you anticipated that link between the Ukraine and cooking your risotto? No. But you are discovering it now. If this happens to you, you will perhaps notice with some surprise that for gas to get to your stove it had to pass through the moods of the Ukrainian president... Behind the concept of network, there is always that movement, and that surprise.[156]

An interruption of a gas pipeline is, of course, a physical network interruption, but as Latour points out, it reveals the interruption in the actor-network that makes the physical network possible.

John Law notes that when an actor masks the underlying actor-network—in effect black boxing it—that network of actors becomes "neither visible, nor relevant" to those interacting with the actor. Law notes the ANT principle that "all phenomena are the effect or the product of heterogeneous networks." "But," he continues, "in practice we do not cope with endless network ramification. Indeed, much of the time we are not even in a position to detect network complexities." In this way, "something much simpler—a working television, a well-managed bank or a healthy body—comes, for a time, to mask the networks that produce it."[157] Law explains,

> for most of us most of the time a television is a single and coherent object with relatively few apparent parts. On the other hand when it breaks down, for that same user—and still more for the repair person—it rapidly turns into a network of electronic components and human interventions.[158]

In the same way, "for the healthy person, most of the workings of the body are concealed, even from them. By contrast, for someone who is ill and even more so for the physician, the body is converted into a complex network of processes, and a set of human, technical, and pharmaceutical interventions."[159] In these cases, only when the object breaks—a television or a human body in Law's examples—do the actor-networks that compose, sustain, configure, and conjointly operate alongside the actor become revealed.

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[155] Latour 2013*a*: 32.
[156] Latour 2013*a*: 32–33.
[157] Law 1992: 385.
[158] Law 1992: 384.
[159] Law 1992: 384.

In the case of the lecture described at the beginning of this chapter, when I asked, following Latour, who else was acting, I mentioned many of the more apparent actors one could see and trace if one were to attend the lecture. However, as Latour argues, many of these actors stay hidden and go unnoticed, at least as long as everything does what is expected. For instance, Latour asks, "when slides are projected on the screen, how many different successive ingredients are necessary when some writing on a keyboard becomes digitalized, then transformed again in an analogical signal before being retransformed in some sort of slower brain wave into the mind of half-asleep students?"[160] If the projector or computer were to break, the actor-network composed of university technicians nearby, parts assembled in a factory far away, international shipping infrastructure, and other non-digital means of communication all become noticeable.[161] And, as Latour points out, "at every point during the lecture, something could break, be it the microphone, the speaker, perhaps even the teacher."[162] The existence of these potential break points reveals those entities that constitute and enable action, even if black boxed or otherwise made invisible.[163]

1.5 Mediators in Actor-Networks

Previously in this chapter, I have reviewed core concepts of actor-network theory, in the process constructing a theoretical foundation for my own model of textual performativity in actor-networks. I have turned to methods and concepts, including Greimasian semiotics, symmetry, agency, and distributed action, to argue, following ANT, that this approach reveals the way in which heterogeneous actors are assembled together to compose action. On this basis, I will now turn to a Latourian notion of mediation. Here I argue, following Latour and others, that analysis of action should avoid broad explanations and cognitive leaps in which there is no specific mechanism of action. Rather, following an actor-network approach, it should be recognized that action must be mediated through *mediators* which integrate and modify action even as

[160] Latour 2005*b*: 201.
[161] Latour 2005*b*: 202; 1994: 36.
[162] Latour 2005*b*: 202.
[163] I will return to discussion of this method of looking for network interruptions when I turn to the role of *notions* as objects in actor-networks. See Chapter 2.

they transport and present that action to other actors. It is with this notion of mediation that I will develop my model of textual performativity in actor-networks.

1.5.1 Mediation of Social Forces in Actor-Networks

Action in an actor-network approach is grounded in the identification of concrete actors rather than explained away by reference to nebulous social forces. Along these lines, Latour writes, "power and domination have to be produced, made up, composed."[164] ANT as a method looks for the specific means by which social forces emerge, recognizing that the social is composed of the human and nonhuman. For this reason, Latour rejects references to abstract forces for sociological explanations:

> When sociologists of the social pronounce the words "society," "power," "structure," and "context," they often jump straight ahead to connect vast arrays of life and history, to mobilize gigantic forces, to detect dramatic patterns emerging out of confusing interactions, to see everywhere in the cases at hand yet more examples of well-known types, to reveal behind the scenes some dark powers pulling the strings.[165]

Latour does recognize conceptual ideas such as society, norms, values, culture, structure, and social context as helpful ways to make sense of the network of actors, many from distant times or places, that act upon the local, but he wants this to be done in a way that does not gloss over the surprising actors that compose and mediate these social forces.[166] If there is a hidden power pulling the strings, to be acknowledged within ANT it must be composed of specific actors with some mechanism that can be traced.

With a notion of *mediation*, actor-network theory provides an approach that seeks to "detect the type of connectors that make possible the transportation of agencies over great distance and to understand why they are so efficient at formatting the social."[167] It allows exploration of questions such as: "What lies in between these connections? What's the extent of our ignorance concerning the social? In other words, how vast is the *terra incognita* we will have to leave blank on our maps?"[168] ANT thus provides a conceptual approach that, in Latour's

[164] Latour 2005*b*: 64.
[165] Latour 2005*b*: 22.
[166] Latour 2005*b*: 11, 45–46. See also de Vries 2016: 82.
[167] Latour 2005*b*: 221.
[168] Latour 2005*b*: 221.

words, helps one "to decide what is acting and how," in a way that keeps open "the full range of uncertainties about agencies."[169] To understand what makes action happen, we need to look at all the connections, exploring all the actors that contribute to action, and follow the paths as far as they go. Latour suggests, "if we want to reach the top of the mountain, we need to take it one step at a time, right foot after left foot, with no jumping or running allowed, all the way to the bitter end."[170] In this approach, then, conceptual forces such as power and dominion should be "explained by the multiplicity of objects" that act and are "transported by vehicles which should be empirically visible."[171] Within ANT these "vehicles" or "connectors" are what compose, and indeed shape, action in an actor-network.

ANT as an approach traces the vast network of actors but is at the same time a method that takes interest in the narrow and specific. Responding to this tension between the study of micro and macro, or of local and global, Latour argues for what he describes as "the summing up of interactions through various kinds of devices, inscriptions, forms and formulae, into a very local, very practical, very tiny locus."[172] In this way ANT, with its concern for identifying these mediators of action, makes the abstract concrete. Broad categories of agency, including society, power, and so forth can be recognized as useful categories, but they should serve to make visible the networks of actors through which action is mediated.

In an actor-network approach, then, there should be no gaps that are explained away using cognitive or social explanations. Clay Spinuzzi explains: "Suppose that as you walk home, you spot your neighbor on the roof. Do you think to yourself, 'I am amazed that my neighbor can jump so high!'? Or do you look for a ladder? Analogically speaking, Latour always looks for the ladder."[173] Cognitive explanations are insufficient for Latour, functioning, in his mind, more as a way to gloss over missing actors rather than serving to provide accurate traces of action. This point was made in *Laboratory Life* when he proposed a ten-year moratorium on cognitive explanations,[174] a position later modified in response to Edwin Hutchins' work on

[169]Latour 2005*b*: 60.
[170]Latour 2005*b*: 221.
[171]Latour 2005*b*: 83.
[172]Latour 1999*b*: 17.
[173]Spinuzzi 2015: 30.
[174]Latour and Woolgar 1986: 280.

distributed cognition, in which human cognition was recognized to be distributed between technical artifacts and other humans.[175] In effect what Hutchins does is to provide a mechanism by which cognition can happen, removing the gaps in the social and identifying the actors, human or nonhuman, by which the social is mediated.[176] Spinuzzi writes, "Hutchins, like Latour, looks for the ladder."[177]

1.5.2 Mediators Translate Action Across Time and Space

In ANT action is local, and yet the local includes action transported from far away, from distant locations in space and time to the present. No actor acts alone; rather, every actor is also a mediator, functioning as a node which integrates and transmits the action of all the other actors to which it is attached. In effect, then, every mediator is an actor, and every actor is a mediator. Thus, with its description of action as distributed through an actor-network, ANT could also be thought to be conceptualizing action as that of a *mediator-network*. Mediators connect actors across time and space, translating action as it moves from one point to another, forming a web of action composed of actors that mediate the action of the other actors to which they are attached. In this way, the far away is made local. To investigate how the social is composed and configured, in an actor-network approach, is to identify the mediators through which and by which the social is constituted. To trace the cause of some local effect is to trace that which connects and transports agency and action from actors far away.[178]

The transmission of action from far away into the present local site of action is sometimes referred to in ANT as *translation*. The term is not meant to evoke a sense of linguistic translation from one language to another, but, rather, the way that the mediation of action is never pure, never innocuous, and, instead, always shifting, adding to, and subtracting from that which is translated. Latour explains:

> Translation does not mean a shift from one vocabulary to another, from one French word to one English word, for instance, as if the two languages existed independently. Like Michel Serres, I use translation to mean displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the

[175] Hutchins 1995.
[176] See Latour's review of Hutchins' work in Latour 1996*a*.
[177] Spinuzzi 2015: 30.
[178] Latour 1994: 36–37; 2005*b*: 193–196, 221.

> creation of a link that did not exist beforehand that to some degree modifies two elements or agents.[179]

This notion of *translation* is one that captures the way action is composed of concatenations of mediators, each connecting, passing along, and transporting agency and action, but also modifying it as it mediates that action. Each mediator, human or nonhuman, does something—functioning as an *agent*—even as it is upstream of additional mediators and downstream of others. In these chains of mediation, every entity thus transports and translates the action of others in an endless web of action.

1.5.3 Mediators are Actors

The conceptual view of action in ANT is one that "pictures a world made of concatenations of mediators where each point can be said to fully act."[180] Latour develops this notion in "The Powers of Association," an earlier work in which he outlined a theoretical basis for what would become ANT. Here he turns to the concept of *translation* to argue that power is contingent on the action of those assembled around the one traditionally said to hold power.[181] Latour suggests considering the example of a token—anything from an artifact of some sort to some instruction—that is carried along by those in some organization. He writes, "the spread in time and space of anything—claims, orders, artefacts, goods—is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it."[182] This transformation that occurs in the process of mediation is not an exceptional occurrence but a fact of how action is translated. Indeed, Latour writes, "the faithful transmission of, for instance, an order by a large number of people is a rarity in such a model and if it occurs it requires explanation."[183] This, for Latour, is what distinguishes the notion of *translation* from that of *diffusion*. In a diffusion model of action, there would be little-to-no modification of that which is transmitted. In a

[179] Latour 1994: 32. Latour cites Michel Callon on the notion of *translation* adopted from Serres. See Callon 1986*a*.
[180] Latour 2005*b*: 59.
[181] Latour 1986. I use *translation* interchangeably with *mediation* here. As Antoine Hennion notes, however, the two notions are not quite identical and one (translation) was developed in work that had more of an epistemological emphasis while the other (mediation) was developed in Hennion's work related to the performativity of art. See Hennion 2016: 293–295.
[182] Latour 1986: 267. I will return to the notion of *betrayal* below.
[183] Latour 1986: 267.

translation model, however, action is always transformed each step along the way. "In other words," Latour writes, "the chain is made of actors—not of patients—and since the token is in everyone's hands in turn, everyone shapes it according to their different projects."[184] The same is true for mediation by nonhumans; if we include all entities, human and nonhuman within the scope of *actor*, as ANT does, the notion of translation is one in which every mediator, human or nonhuman, modifies that which they mediate.

1.5.4 Mediators or Intermediaries

To make apparent the difference between an ANT view of action and that of other approaches, Latour draws a distinction between active and passive notions of mediation with terms of *mediator* and *intermediary*.[185] An *intermediary*, he suggests, is a notion that fails to recognize the active, transformative effect of transmission of action through a mediator. Latour explains, "an intermediary, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation." *Mediators*, in contrast, are recognized to "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry."[186] The notion of a mediator, then, is of something performative, modifying and translating that which it transports—as I have described—whereas an intermediary is a passive vehicle that functions only to carry and pass along action and meaning.[187] In other words, an intermediary simply transmits action, functioning as an inert conduit, not significantly transforming that action, not having any agency of its own.

In an actor-network model of action, however, there are no *intermediaries* to be found.[188] As I have argued, all objects are recognized in ANT as performative, each modifying the action they transmit. Intermediaries, in this sense, do not exist other than as mistaken notions about

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[184] Latour 1986: 268.

[185] Latour cites Hennion on the origin of this notion of mediation. Latour 1993: 78; Hennion 2017*b*: 405. However, his use of the terms varies from that of Hennion. In an English translation of Hennion's earlier work, for instance, Hennion uses *intermediary* more like the way Latour later uses *mediator*. See Hennion 1989: 402.

[186] Latour 2005*b*: 39.

[187] Latour 2005*b*: 59.

[188] Where I interpret Latour as using *intermediary* as a rhetorical notion in order to argue against a mistaken notion of action, Latour's own writing sometimes is ambiguous. Others, such as Gerard de Vries, interpret Latour in a way that implies intermediaries do exist. In both cases, I would argue the term *intermediary* points to the analyst rather than the actor—drawing attention to the reduction of action (e.g., black boxing) that masks the agency of those mediators. See Latour 2005*b*: 40; de Vries 2016: 90.

action. The notion of an intermediary, then, is valuable for the way serves to highlight the way that action is overlooked when analysis does not recognize the objects that compose an actor-network as mediators. What is recognized in an actor-network approach, instead, is that each step along the way—each entity that mediates action—acts in both directions, upstream and downstream, adding a new source of agency and action and reconstituting the web of action in which objects exist, act, and are acted upon.

1.5.5 Mediators Are Agents That Modify Action in Both Directions

Following an actor-network approach, mediators are themselves recognized as agents, bringing about change and acting on other actors. Recall, here, Latour's argument that kettles, knives, baskets, clothes, and so forth are all actors that participate in agency within an actor-network. It is clear that action performed with these artifacts is transformed by the tool used. Indeed, as Latour suggests, just try to imagine accomplishing tasks without these mediators of action.[189] This transformation acts in both directions, as mediators modify action upstream and downstream of themselves. Here, Latour's question is of whether an object does something more than simply *extend* human action. If one thinks it does not, if a hammer is only a passive tool, faithfully carrying the will of the one who wields it, not itself an actor, not an agent, then the term *intermediary* is appropriate. As Clay Spinuzzi comments: "Using the hammer remakes (perhaps I should say *makes*) the activity in a very fundamental way. Perhaps holding a hammer makes every problem look like a nail, but similarly, a nail poses a very different problem when one doesn't have a hammer."[190] For this reason, the hammer is a mediator, not an intermediary. Indeed, without the hammer, no nails could be hammered, but also buildings would not be designed to be built with nails. Action is shifted and transformed—in this case both in what a human can do and chooses to do—because the hammer mediates that action.

1.5.6 Speed Bumps and Actorial, Spatial, and Temporal Translations in Actor-Networks

An example of the action of a speed bump on a university campus is illustrative of Latour's notion of mediation.[191] The speed bump integrates action originating from both near and far,

[189] Latour 2005*b*: 71.
[190] Spinuzzi 2015: 33.
[191] This example is drawn from Latour 1994; 2008.

transforming that action as it mediates it. Here, unlike a tool held in one's hands, the artifact stands alone, functioning without the presence of the humans (and nonhumans) whose distant and past action it now mediates. Their action is mixed together, reconfigured, and presented to those downstream of the mediator, and these other actors need no longer be present for their action to be mediated. As Latour argues, the speed bump is made of "engineers and chancellors and lawmakers, commingling their wills and their story lines with those of gravel, concrete, paint, and standard calculations."[192] This distributed network of actors, human and nonhuman, is now presented to drivers and vehicles, acting on them and slowing them down as they drive through the campus.

In doing so, the speed bump mediates what Latour describes as *actorial*, *spatial*, and *temporal* translation:

> In the case of the speed bumps, the shift is 'actorial': the 'sleeping policeman,' as the bump is known, is not a policeman, does not resemble one in the least. The shift is also spatial: on the campus road there now resides a new actant that slows down cars (or damages them). Finally, the shift is temporal: the bump is there night and day.[193]

In this case, these three shifts—of action originating with different actors, at other locations, and at different times—are integrated together in a single object. Latour writes, for instance, "if I say to you, for instance, 'Let us imagine ourselves in the campus engineers' shoes when they decided to install the speed bumps,' I transport you not only into another space and time but translate you into another actor."[194] In the present, however, "what we now have are an absent engineer" and "a constantly present speed bump."[195] In this way, the decisions and actions from different locations, in different times, and by other actors are mediated to drivers and their vehicles, carrying this action and reconfiguring it into that of a now autonomous artifact that slows down vehicles day and night.

The notion of mediation is important here because it draws attention to the way that action need not be translated *this way*—and other actors would mediate action differently. In place of road signs, for instance, the intent to "make drivers slow down on campus," Latour writes, "is now

[192] Latour 1994: 41.
[193] Latour 1994: 39.
[194] Latour 1994: 39.
[195] Latour 1994: 40.

inscribed in concrete."[196] He explains, "for the engineers, the speed bump is one meaningful articulation within a gamut of possibilities among which they choose as freely as one chooses vocabulary in a language."[197] In this way, "the relative shapes of actants and their ontological status may be completely reshuffled—techniques act as shape-changers, making a cop out of a bump in the road, lending a policeman the permanence and obstinacy of stone."[198] And here this is another example of symmetry: there is no difference in the method of analysis for the action of a police officer observing and ticketing speedy drivers, a sign that warns drivers to slow down, and an artifact that coerces drivers to maintain the speed limit. Each has its own assemblage of actors, and each does something different, but all function to mediate the action of slowing down drivers.

There is another kind of a transformation that occurs with mediation. If different mediators perform different actions, each adding to, subtracting from, or otherwise modifying the action they mediate, there is also a modification of the action performed by the actors downstream of the mediator. Latour describes this as a displacement of goals, such that drivers choose to act differently because their own interests are modified by a mediator:

> The driver's goal is translated, by means of the speed bump, from "slow down so as not to endanger students" into "slow down and protect my car's suspension." The two goals are far apart... The driver's first version appeals to morality, enlightened disinterest, and reflection, whereas the second appeals to pure selfishness and reflex action. In my experience, there are many more people who would respond to the second than to the first: selfishness is a trait more widely distributed than respect for law and life—at least in France. The driver modifies his behavior through the mediation of the speed bump: he falls back from morality to force. But from an observer's point of view, it does not matter through which channel a given behavior is attained. From her window, the chancellor sees that cars are slowing down and, for her, that is enough.[199]

A speed bump and a concern for not harming pedestrians both mediate action that slows down drivers—as would signs and police officers or other humans or nonhumans, but this action is in a sense amplified in the case of stone speed bumps that shift concern from others to one's own property. In this way there is, as Latour writes, a "transition from reckless to disciplined

[196] Latour 1994: 38.
[197] Latour 1994: 39.
[198] Latour 1994: 40. Latour similarly develops this notion in "Where are the Missing Masses?" See Latour 2008: 165–166.
[199] Latour 1994: 38. See similar discussion in Latour 2005*b*: 77–78.

drivers."[200] The mediator brings action from other places and other times, modifies the nature of that action, and then likewise transforms the action that occurs as a consequence.[201]

1.5.7 Mediators Surprise, Betray

Surprise and betrayal are central to Latour's notion of the mediator. For Latour, input does not equal output. The way that mediators add to, subtract from, and otherwise transform action is one which introduces uncertainty into action.[202] Latour writes, "like Jesus on the cross, it is of the actor that one should always say: 'Forgive them Father, they know not what they do.' "[203] In part, here, Latour is simply referring to the nature of every actor as embedded in an actor-network and thus downstream of many other agencies. One is not in control of oneself as much as one might like—no one actor is the source of any action, but Latour's point goes further than this. Mediators, as vehicles of the agencies of others, surprise and betray. On these agencies, Latour writes,

> As long as they are treated as causes simply transported through intermediaries, nothing will be added by the vehicles chosen to carry their effect forward. Causes, in such a strange and very archaic theology, are supposed to create things *ex nihilo*. But if vehicles are treated as mediators triggering other mediators, then a lot of new and unpredictable situations will ensue (they make things do other things than what was expected).[204]

Elsewhere Latour likewise argues that with mediators "meaning is no longer simply transported by the medium but in part constituted, moved, recreated, modified, in short expressed and betrayed."[205] This emphasis on the surprise and betrayal of mediators is visible throughout Latour's work. It is, for instance, what happens when the puppet pulls the strings and guides the hand that controls it, surprising audience and performer alike.[206] A hydraulic door closer keeps the door shut but will also then "discriminate against very little and very old persons."[207] Action in ANT is distributed, but each point in that distribution has the potential to introduce surprise and betrayal.

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[200] Latour 1994: 38.
[201] For another similar description of the modification of action by mediators, see Latour's Berlin key example in Latour 2000.
[202] Latour 2005*b*: 58.
[203] Latour 2005*b*: 46–47.
[204] Latour 2005*b*: 59.
[205] Latour 2000: 19.
[206] Latour 2005*b*: 58–62, 213–218; 2013*a*: 158. See discussion of instauration in Chapter 3.
[207] Latour 2008: 159.

1.5.8 Missing Mediators and Reductive Analysis of Action

What happens, then, when the action of mediators is invisible, when "objects vanish from view," and when they are seen as having no noteworthy effect and no transformative role in transmitting the action in which they play a part—when they are treated, in effect, as intermediaries?[208] Glossing over mediators, turning them into intermediaries or ignoring them altogether, is reductive of complexity and distorts what is understood about the mechanisms of action. Actor-network theory recognizes that the actors that compose an actor-network function to "organize, shape, and limit our interactions," and, thus, Latour argues, "to forget their existence—their peculiar manner of being absent and present—would be a great error."[209] On one hand, an ANT approach is not deterministic. It is true that artifacts act, but in many ways the action of mediators is fragile, can be acted against and overcome, contingent as they are on the other actors in an actor-network. But, on the other hand, this action does matter, does contribute, and does shape the action that emerges in an actor-network.

In areas of power, textual performativity, and in exercise of one's own agency, for instance, this way that mediators shape and transform action matters for analysis and characterization of action. Without identifying the specific vehicles by which power is disseminated, power cannot be adequately understood nor its sources fully identified. As I have discussed in this chapter, an ANT approach looks for the mechanism of power, and in those mechanisms, seeing points of transformation, surprise, and betrayal. Likewise, if texts are mediators—as I will turn to next—what does textual mediation do to the meaning and action that is communicated within an actor-network? What happens when this mediating action of texts is unrecognized and glossed over?

In an ANT approach to the action of texts, as I am developing in this thesis, this model contributes to making visible these hidden mediators—texts and all other entities—that act on the humans and nonhumans with which texts and humans are assembled. Moreover, if one does not recognize the action of those assembled around oneself, one's own agency is reduced, as one's ability to act through and configure the actor-network in which one is embedded is then degraded.

[208] On objects vanishing from view, see Latour 2005*b*: 70.
[209] Latour 1994: 50.

In this sense, ANT as a theory and method is a theory of ethics—enabling one to make informed choices about how to configure the human and nonhuman relationships within communities.

Here, again, we can return to the notion of network interruptions, looking for areas of crisis or trial in which mediators are broken or missing, asking what this failure reveals about the concatenators that mediate action, and how each mediator adds to, subtracts from, transforms, and betrays action. A broken projector reveals the network of actors that makes a presentation in a lecture possible, a geopolitical crisis reveals the heterogeneous nature of the actor-network in which a gas line is assembled, and a lost text reveals the range of actors with which religious practices are performed. With the breakdown of the mediator, the action required to perform tasks of teaching, heating, or religious practice shows the impact of the shifts and translations, and indeed betrayals, introduced by the mediator. In each case, the mediator's failure makes visible the actor-network with which and of which the mediator is composed, and the transformation of action upstream and downstream of the mediator is made evident.

1.6 Texts as Ricoeurian Mediators in Actor-Networks

In this chapter, I have argued for a model of textual performativity in which nonhumans, including texts, are recognized as actors that participate in the distributed action of an actor-network. These nonhumans mediate the action of other humans and nonhumans, integrating and transporting, but also modifying, displacing, deforming, and betraying the action they mediate. With this theoretical basis, I will now turn to a model of how texts function as actors with agency in actor-networks. I will develop this model by bringing Ricoeur's theory of texts into dialogue with actor-network theory, arguing that Ricoeur's approach can be slotted into a Latourian notion of mediation.[210] In this Ricoeur-in-actor-networks model of performativity, a text functions as a Latourian mediator, transporting action from the author and the author's actor-network to the reader and the actor-network in which the reader is embedded. In doing so, the text carries meaning from the text's creator to the reader but also provides the text with autonomy such that the text introduces new meaning and action as it evokes change in the reading community.

[210] I am primarily following Ricoeur's work in *Interpretation Theory* here. See Ricoeur 1976.

1.6.1 The Mediation of Speech

To introduce this model of textual communication, it is helpful to start with what Ricoeur describes as "the fundamental solitude of each human being."[211] Describing this solitude, Ricoeur argues, "what is experienced by one person cannot be transferred whole as such and such experience to someone else."[212] Rather, it is necessary to exteriorize thoughts to language as a medium of communication, in order to carry meaning from one person to another, piercing the solitude of human thought and experience.[213] Ricoeur writes, "My experience cannot directly become your experience. An event belonging to one stream of consciousness cannot be transferred as such into another stream of consciousness. Yet, nevertheless, something passes from me to you. Something is transferred from one sphere of life to another."[214] This thing that is transferred, this use of language to carry meaning, is the basis for a model of textual mediation within actor-networks, a model I develop here following Ricoeur and reinterpreting his work within a Latourian framework. One's own experience cannot be transmitted in full, but it can be transmitted in part. In a sense, something is sent, from one to another, that allows partial sharing, partial escape from the fundamental solitude. What this thing is, what it does, what it is composed of, what surprises and changes it introduces, to both speaker and listener—this is what in many ways Ricoeur's theory of texts addresses with his notions of fixation and mediation, but also what ANT allows us to trace and analyze with Latourian notions of mediation.

Once spoken, speech takes on a life of its own, escaping the control and the intentions of the one who spoke. Ricoeur argues that exteriorization to language is "the process by which private experience is made public."[215] In other words, for Ricoeur, "the experience as experienced, as lived, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, becomes public. Communication in this way is the overcoming of the radical non-communicability of the lived experience as lived."[216] In this context, Ricoeur is describing how what was internal becomes external, shared with another. But it is this *public* aspect of speech to which Ricoeur refers that I am interested in, that in effect

[211] Ricoeur 1976: 15.
[212] Ricoeur 1976: 15–16.
[213] Ricoeur elsewhere does recognize the role of facial expressions and other forms of non-linguistic communication. See, for instance, Ricoeur 1976: 26–29, 35.
[214] Ricoeur 1976: 16.
[215] Ricoeur 1976: 19.
[216] Ricoeur 1976: 16.

belongs to a category of Latourian *actor* and *mediator*. Speech can never carry meaning faithfully, never transporting experience from one to another inertly, fully, or without some transformation or deformation of that which is communicated.[217] Rather, when speech is exteriorized—when this partial, narrow slice of one's interior mental life becomes public—it becomes an autonomous actor, carrying and mediating some meaning, but also having a life of its own and performing its own action. From the perspective of ANT, speech, once spoken, has its own agency.

Mediation Between Two Events

Ricoeur's theory of communication is based on the notion that speech is directed at someone—that speech involves both a speaker and a hearer. To exteriorize, and to share, is to share *with someone*.[218] Ricoeur draws on Austin's speech act theory, here, recognizing speech as composed of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts—or in simplified terms, what maps loosely to content, force, and effect. Within this system Ricoeur argues that there is also implied "what could be called the interlocutionary act or the allocutionary act."[219] Ricoeur explains: "One important aspect of discourse is that it is addressed to someone. There is another speaker who is the addressee of the discourse. The presence of the pair, speaker and hearer, constitutes language as communication."[220] In Ricoeur's theory of communication, then, if language is the exteriorization of some interior mental meaning, it is also directed toward uptake, or internalization, by another, to become part of their interior experience and meaning. Or, in other words, if speech is an act, it is an act whose force and effect involves another's action. And with this, again, Ricoeur is not far from Latour. The speaker, their speech, and the hearer in Ricoeur's system are all doing things, and from an ANT perspective, it would be recognized that each—speaker, speech, and hearer—is both acting and made to act, and each functions as, in effect, a link in a concatenation of mediators.

If speech is an act, it can also be characterized as an event. Ricoeur's theory of communication is one I have been describing in terms of thought or experience being encoded into language,

[217] *Deformation* is a term used by both Ricoeur and Latour. See Ricoeur 1976: 26; Latour 1999*b*: 15.
[218] In some cases, the other with which one shares may be oneself, but even here exteriorization is necessary, a point Ricoeur recognizes following Plato. See, Ricoeur 1976: 15.
[219] Ricoeur 1976: 14.
[220] Ricoeur 1976: 14.

exteriorized, and transmitted to another. This approach to the composition and mechanism of speech—which Ricoeur also characterizes in terms of discourse or dialogue—forms the basis for what he refers to as "the notion of speech as an event."[221] Moreover, it is, for Ricoeur, "an event which connects two events, that of speaking and that of hearing."[222] What couples the two events, then, is the exteriorized language itself, a kind of virtual object—or in ANT terms, an actant—that transmits meaning and mediates between the two events, fusing them together in the act of spoken dialogue. With this theoretical basis, we can return now to the model I am developing of texts as mediators in actor-networks.

1.6.2 From Speech to Text

A difference between speech and writing is that speech is fleeting while writing is permanent. In spoken discourse the two events of speaking and listening are commingled into one event, and the artifact that mediates between them—language inscribed in sound—is fleeting, as is the event itself. Ricoeur makes the argument that unlike the corresponding interior mental events of speaking and listening, exteriorized speech does have an object-like characteristic to it, making it available to external analysis. He writes, "the notion of speech as an event ... reminds us that discourse is realized temporally and in a present moment, whereas the language system is virtual and outside of time."[223] Moreover, even as the exteriorized (virtual) language object may be limited to the spatial and temporal location in which the speaking-listening event occurs, it does, nonetheless, exist and does do things.[224] What writing does, however, is transform this fleeting communicative artifact into something more permanent. Sound carried away with the wind is replaced by words inscribed in a physical artifact with permanence, and the exteriorized internal meaning of a speaker becomes fixed.

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[221] Ricoeur 1976: 11.
[222] Ricoeur 1976: 16.
[223] Ricoeur 1976: 11.
[224] This view of language as an object reflects a structuralist influence on Ricoeur's work. Although I am following Ricoeur in developing a model of that which is exteriorized as a (virtual) entity which does something and has linguistic content available for analysis, I am not otherwise adopting a structuralist approach. On structuralism and Ricoeur, see Thompson 1981: 47.

The difference between exteriorization through speech versus through writing raises a question of where meaning is to be found—in the event or in the artifact.[225] This distinction gives rise to what Ricoeur refers to as the "dialectic of event and meaning," and on this point Ricoeur argues, "to mean is both what the speaker means, i.e., what he intends to say, and what the sentence means."[226] With speech, the meaning of what is spoken and of the event are entangled, since both speaking and listening occur concurrently and in the same location. But, with writing, this is not the case.[227] What is exteriorized in writing, Ricoeur argues, following Husserl, is the intentional language arising from thought, or in other words "the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event."[228] He writes, "what writing actually does fix is not the event of speaking but the 'said' of speaking, i.e., the intentional exteriorization constitutive of the couple 'event-meaning.' "[229] This is, in effect, the fixation of the locutionary content of the speech act. In both speech and writing, the event disappears, but with writing, unlike speech, the linguistic content of the speech act remains embodied in the artifact. In contrast, the meaning of the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are difficult to encode in a text, contingent, as they are, on the specific speaking/hearing event.[230] For this reason, the only meaning that can be carried by a text is the linguistic content arising from the event—and not the meaning of the writing or reading events themselves; nothing else can be fixed in the textual inscription.[231]

With this permanence is a possibility for the two events, writing and reading, to be fully untethered from each other. When fixed in an artifact, meaning is dissociated from the event itself, such that even if the event is fleeting, the part of meaning exteriorized and encoded in

[225] I will return to this issue of the location of meaning, and whether it is located in the writing event, artifact, or reading event, with discussion of reader response theory and the work of Stanley Fish and Ralph Rader in Chapter 4. Note also that for the moment, I am skirting issues of fixation of other forms non-linguistic communication, such as the use of visual texts to communicate. (On the action of visual texts in actor-networks, see Gries 2015.) Moreover, it should be noted that no text exists in isolation, there are other texts and other forms of meta-information related to the text that are mediated through an actor-network. I will return to these matters, also, in Chapter 4.

[226] Ricoeur 1976: 8, 12.

[227] Ricoeur 1976: 35.

[228] Ricoeur 1976: 27. On following Husserl, see Ricoeur 1976: 8, 18.

[229] Ricoeur 1976: 27.

[230] See Ricoeur 1976: 17–19, 27–28.

[231] Referring only to *linguistic* content, here, is somewhat of a simplification—in fact font size, punctuation, italics or bold for emphasis, and arrangement on a page, for instance, are also means of conveying information and meaning.

language survives as something autonomous from that which occurs in the mind of the speaker or writer. Along these lines, Ricoeur argues, "what happens in writing is the full manifestation of something that is in a virtual state, something nascent and inchoate, in living speech, namely the detachment of meaning from the event."[232] The communicative event remains ephemeral and fleeting, but writing as a form of speech-artifact remains as a lasting trace of that event. Spoken words that had existed only in one moment in time and space instead become written words that can travel. And what writing makes possible, then, is for the two events to be detached, such that speaking and listening—or their equivalents reading and writing—are no longer required to take place in the same location or at the same time. In this way textual mediation performs Latour's spatial, temporal, and actorial shift, and the exteriorized speech in textual form is inscribed as an actor that moves about in the world, performing actions and bringing about change.

The untethering of the two events of writing and reading leads to what Ricoeur describes in terms of *distanciation*. With writing, he argues, "the human fact disappears," and this untethering provides the text with "semantic autonomy."[233] As Ricoeur describes in "What is a Text?", "the text has no outside but only an inside; it has no transcendent aim, unlike a speech that is addressed to someone about something."[234] The author's meaning is exteriorized to an artifact, but then, when the author disappears, the text, which stands alone between the meaning of the writing event and the text's meaning in the reading event, is free to betray the author's intent. "With written discourse," Ricoeur argues, "the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide."[235] Instead, "the text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author."[236] With this distanciation, texts are untethered from authorial intention, reception at time of writing, and cultural location.[237] Like any object created and released into the wild—or, perhaps, like the actions of a child as they transition into responsible adulthood—the text takes on a life of its own apart from the intentions of its creator.

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[232] Ricoeur 1976: 25.
[233] Ricoeur 1976: 26, 29–32.
[234] Ricoeur 1991: 109. See similar arguments, for instance, in Ricoeur 1991: 145–146.
[235] Ricoeur 1976: 29.
[236] Ricoeur 1976: 30. As I will argue in Chapter 4, notions of authorial intention may be recomposed in the reading event, but that which is encoded within the text itself remains autonomous of the meaning that occurs in writing or reading events.
[237] Ricoeur 1991: 17.

By starting with speech and moving to text, I have been following Ricoeur's argument, but it should be noted that this is not an unproblematic comparison. Indeed, Ricoeur acknowledges differences with Derrida on this point.[238] My intent in following Ricoeur, however, is not to argue that speech and writing are equivalent; rather it is to argue that in their difference they reveal something about the way texts function as *mediators* in actor-networks. Recall Latour's speed bump illustration and his argument about translation: "what we now have are an absent engineer" and "a constantly present speed bump."[239] Likewise, with textual mediation, *what we now have are an absent author and a constantly present text.* The comparison I am making between speech and writing, following Ricoeur, is not that of engineers and speed bumps, however. It is more of the difference between, say, police officers and speed bumps, or, indeed, any other means of slowing down drivers. Both, in this sense, are mediators, and for this reason they can be approached symmetrically, but their composition and action are different. Recall, again, Latour's argument that for engineers, "the speed bump is one meaningful articulation within a gamut of possibilities."[240] For someone who wishes to communicate, this gamut of possibilities includes spoken words, texts, music, or any other means chosen to mediate the thoughts and experience of one person to another. To compare humans and concrete artifacts—or spoken words and textual artifacts—is not to say they are alike but to say that in the comparison itself there is something revealed about the action mediated.

1.6.3 Effects of Textual Mediation

Ricoeur's theory of texts, in which a text mediates between events of writing and reading, is one that I argue is consistent with ANT and slots well into a Latourian approach to mediation in actor-networks. Like all mediators, textual artifacts do more than passively carry meaning, but instead add to, subtract from, transform, and betray the action mediated. Indeed, this notion is evident in Ricoeur's characterization of the impact of distanciation and textual autonomy. For instance, with written texts there is what Ricoeur describes as "the absence of a common situation generated by the spatial and temporal distance between writer and reader." Likewise, there is replacement of "the voice, face, and body of the speaker" with "material external marks."

[238] See Ricoeur 1976: 26.
[239] Latour 1994: 40. See prior discussion.
[240] Latour 1994: 39.

This fixation thus results in "the semantic autonomy of the text, which severs it from the present of the writer and opens it to an indefinite range of potential readers in an indeterminate time."[241] In this way Ricoeur, in effect, describes the kind of actorial, temporal, and spatial translation that is expected in a Latourian framework.

Texts modify and displace action, bringing about a shift in what occurs in the writing and reading events. For instance, Ricoeur speaks of "alterations, transformations, or deformations" that occur "when discourse is inscribed in writing."[242] Indeed, he argues, replacement of speech with inscription results in change that "irradiates in every direction" with "various peripheral effects."[243] With exteriorization to texts come new possibilities for genre and new ways of speaking.[244] Indeed, with textual mediation, there is also, Ricoeur argues, the possibility for better self-understanding.[245] As Latour does with his illustrations from technical artifacts, Ricoeur is, by implication, arguing that texts displace both the goals and the effects of communication.

What written texts do as mediators in Ricoeur's description is akin to what all mediators do for Latour. Consider, for example, Ricoeur's list of transformations brought about with writing:

> When we consider the range of social and political changes which can be related to the invention of writing, we may surmise that writing is much more than mere material fixation. We need only remind ourselves of some of these tremendous achievements. To the possibility of transferring orders over long distances without serious distortions may be connected the birth of political rule exercised by a distant state. This political implication of writing is just one of its consequences. To the fixation of rules for reckoning may be referred the birth of market relationships, therefore the birth of economics. To the constitution of archives, history. To the fixation of law as a standard of decisions, independent from the opinion of the concrete judge, the birth of the justice and juridical codes, etc. Such an immense range of effects suggests that human discourse is not merely preserved from destruction by being fixed in writing, but that it is deeply affected in its communicative function.[246]

[241] Ricoeur 1976: 35.
[242] Ricoeur 1976: 26.
[243] Ricoeur 1976: 26.
[244] Ricoeur 1976: 32–34. On the social impact of genre, see Miller 1984.
[245] See, for instance, Ricoeur 1991: 15–17, 84.
[246] Ricoeur 1976: 28. See similar descriptions of the cultural effects of written discourse in Habermas 1989; Warner 1990.

And, Ricoeur notes, texts can also be said to contribute to forgetfulness, oppression, and alienation.[247] In this way, Ricoeur's theory of text predicts what is expected also in an actor-network approach, where textual inscriptions modify what is possible and displace action, changing both what is first written and also what that writing then does, reconfiguring action—sometimes with surprising effects—on both sides of the text, for both authors and readers, and for all those humans and nonhumans to which they are attached.

1.6.4 Ricoeur, Textual Mediation, and Actor-Network Theory

To summarize, the model I am developing is one in which a text mediates between two events, writing and reading, each of which occurs within an actor-network. For this reason the exteriorized text-artifact mediates not only between two these *events* but could also be said to be mediating between two *actor-networks*. In doing so, the text transports the action of the distant, past actor-network in which the text was written into the current actor-network of the reader. It presents this past action, carrying it, transforming it, and making it visible to the reader and other humans and nonhumans which together compose the actor-network in which the reader is embedded.[248] Indeed, along these lines, Ricoeur argues that the text connects us with the past as it transports content into the present, writing, for instance, of "written documents, works, institutions, and monuments which render present the historical past."[249] But mediation also disconnects readers from the past, such that the distanciation of which Ricoeur speaks means that discourse mediated through texts is "no longer the 'voice' of its utterer."[250] In this way, textual mediation serves both as a means by which the fundamental solitude of human experience can be shared but also then betrays that trust as it transports the text into far locations and distant meanings in which it exercises its own agency and action.

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[247] Ricoeur 1976: 38–40. On the way exteriorization, of any sort, has the potential to alienate, see Berger 1967.
[248] See discussion of Alfred Gell's approach to art in Chapter 4.
[249] Ricoeur 1991: 38.
[250] Ricoeur 1991: 91.

1.7 Biblical Texts in Actor-Networks

To return now to the example with which I began this chapter, the story of the lost text in 2 Kings 22-23 is a story of a biblical text which mediates between two events, the event of its creation and the event in which it participates in the reforms of Josiah's reign. In this way, the book of the law found in the temple carries meaning and action from a past event in which it was created—although the narrative is sparse on this text's origins, leaving it to the reader to fill in the details—and brings that action into the actor-network in which Josiah and others respond to its content and implement reforms.

As a *mediator*, however, the text does more than passively transmit the action of past authors. The text performs actorial, spatial, and temporal translation, modifying the meaning carried into Josiah's own time and location, modifying and reconfiguring the force and effect of meaning as this mediated action is commingled with that of others. With this performative role, the text contributes its own action, now autonomous from the intentions that guided its creation. To once again paraphrase Latour, in mediating a past actor-network into the present, what we have now are an absent author and a constantly present text.[251]

And it is not the text alone that mediates action from far away and long ago: a temple in disrepair, religious rituals and practices at odds with that which is presented by the text, a prophetic tradition, and a monarchy with its own history all shape and configure the action of this text. Thus, on one hand, the text clearly mediates the action of its authorial community. On the other hand, the text also mediates the action of those who carry it, place it in storage, bring it out of storage, read it, interpret it, and enact reforms at its direction.

The text-artifact clearly plays a central role in the reforms: it is *found* by the high priest, *read* by the secretary, *read aloud* to the king, *interpreted* by the prophet, *read aloud* again to all the people—and in each case it is recognized that it is a text that must be *obeyed*. It is also performative in the sense that it causes others to act. In response to what the text says, for instance, the king tears his clothes, sends messengers to the prophet, calls the people together,

[251] See Latour 1994: 40.

and implements far-reaching reforms. From the moment the book is found, the role of the text is apparent at every point in the narrative and the text is the object upon which the story hinges.

Moreover, bringing a Latourian notion of mediation to this narrative raises for consideration the point, also, that action need not be mediated *this way*. Different forms of written communication would act differently—different languages and different artifacts would participate with other effect. Certainly a prophet, rather than a text, who speaks on behalf of the LORD mediates that communication with different force and effect than a nonhuman artifact. And, a prophet other than Huldah interpreting the significance of the text for Josiah could have led to different actions taken in response to its content.

Likewise, a Latourian approach makes note of the way the action of an artifact displaces the goals of the those receiving a message, shifting and transforming the recipient's own way of responding to that meaning and action transmitted. Where a human mediator might be imprisoned or silenced, a text might be more difficult to control. One could imagine, for instance, Josiah's own action being motivated by rumors of the text whispered around the temple and palace community such that Josiah's interest shifts from moral concerns to that of self-interest, at a minimum protecting himself from unrest evoked by the text, if not making use of the opportunity presented by the text to extend his own power.

Moreover, this function of the text as a mediator of action raises a question about whose action the text is mediating and on whose behalf it is speaking. Consider, for example, the fact that when the narrative depicts the text being handed over to the king's aide—following the specific instructions for release of funding for temple repairs—there is some ambiguity in how truthful the high priest is with his statement. When the narrative recounts, "the high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, 'I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD,' "[252] it is not entirely clear whether the lost text was found *after* works had been started or was only *said* to be found at that point. In either case, Hilkiah announces its discovery only after Shaphan the secretary informed Hilkiah of the king's new policy of using temple funds for a renovation project. In contrast to 2 Chronicles 34-35, where the narrative makes clear that Hilkiah does

[252] 2 Kings 23:8 (NRSV).

find the text upon start of renovations, what exactly happens prior to Hilkiah's statement is left unsaid in 2 Kings 22-23. Thus, this notion of mediation raises a question: did Hilkiah the priest find *a lost text* or *a willing king*? And when the text brings about reforms via the king, does it do so on behalf of its past author or on behalf of the current high priest?

This story of Josiah's reforms illustrates the notion that textual mediators do not act alone; they compose and configure an actor-network in which many other humans and nonhumans are also acting. To interpret the action of the book found in the temple following an ANT methodology is to take an approach that recognizes this action as distributed—thus tracing all the actors and not making explanatory leaps. For instance, consistent with ANT's weaving together of social and technical concerns, this narrative begins with attention to technical concerns about how workers are paid—indeed, it is the king's insistence on emptying the temple treasury and putting resources directly in the hands of the teams responsible for the construction work that sets the stage for the lost book of the law to be found. In this way, the reforms of Josiah are driven by a text, but also by technical matters of payment and mundane matters such as the number of artifacts stored alongside the book of the law in the temple treasury.

Consider other examples of actors present in the narrative, whether explicit or present only by implication, that could be said to have contributed. In 2 Kings 23:3, the narrative mentions that Josiah stood beside the temple pillar while "he made a covenant before the LORD" (NRSV). One could ask, what does this architectural artifact contribute to action? What upstream human and nonhuman action does it mediate? What would happen if it were not there, or if it broke—and is that action relevant to our specific interest in the performativity of the lost text?

One could investigate the relationship between Josiah's openness to reform and the assassination of his father—that is, if there is a relationship other than the fact that it happened?[253] If Josiah mediates the reform brought about by the lost text, does he also mediate the action of these assassins? In this case, would my own characterization of action be better stated as that of a lost text *and* an assassination bringing about religious reforms in Judah?

[253] See 2 Kings 21:23-24.

Other topics of inquiry include matters such as what is the relationship between the keeper of the king's wardrobe and his wife, Huldah the prophet? Does it matter that they are related by marriage? Does this configuration of social relationships modify the assemblage of text, king, and prophet, and the corresponding meaning and action of the text?[254] Or, one might ask a different sort of question: what is the mechanism by which the crowds which assemble are fed? One cannot implement religious reforms without food—or, indeed, perhaps it is the opposite, one cannot implement religious reforms without hunger. And what is the contribution of the religious artifacts—those that are destroyed and those that are not—to enabling, stabilizing, and precipitating religious rituals and practice, and what is their contribution to the religious reform brought about by the text?[255]

With this depiction of the effects of mediation, I recognize that my analysis here is speculative, and indeed, perhaps, cynical. But what this imaginative rethinking of this narrative does, even if not entirely fair to this particular text, is illustrative of the way that texts are agents that bring about change. To follow ANT as a method is to follow all of the actors, recognizing that no actor acts alone. To trace the action of the text is to trace this distributed, mediated action of a text in a community. To name these other actors is not to say that they *are* significant to the action of this story, but to say that they *might* be, and to ignore the way they are assembled alongside the text in an actor-network is to miss the way textual performativity emerges contingent on this distributed action.

In conclusion, then, this analysis of what happened in Josiah's reign is meant to be illustrative of an ANT approach, since in this case I am drawing on the biblical narrative to show how this approach to action *could* be performed, and in doing so not actually investigating how the Bible itself does act in contemporary reading communities. In the following chapters, as I continue to develop this model of textual performativity in actor-networks, I will turn to the action of the Bible in contemporary American evangelicalism to illustrate how this approach to action works in practice.

[254] See Chapter 2 for further discussion on this contingent action of texts.
[255] 2 Kings 23:4-20.

2

Emergence in Actor-Networks

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Chapter Overview

In the previous chapter I outlined the way that texts are performative objects embedded in actor-networks and that texts function as mediators within an actor-network. In this chapter, I will argue that textual performativity is an emergent characteristic, where the text's action is inherent neither to the text itself nor to the reading community but instead emerges in the relationship between text and community. Here I will argue that it is both the physical configuration of the actor-network *and* the assembled notions of the text through which the performativity of the text emerges.

2.1 Action Emerges from Attachments

To introduce the notion of performativity as emergent in the relationship between texts and other objects, I will first argue, following Latour, that performativity belongs neither to human subjects nor material objects but action instead emerges in the *attachments* formed between objects, human and nonhuman.

In his article, "Factures/Fractures," and again in a reworked chapter in *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Latour references a French comic strip in order to illustrate the notion that action emerges in the way objects are attached.[1] In this comic strip, "Le Club de Mafalda," a man destroys his cigarettes after being questioned by his daughter, Mafalda, about whether he or the cigarette is in control.[2] Latour describes the discussion between Mafalda and her father:

> "What are you doing?" she asks in the first scene. "As you can see, I'm smoking," responds her father unwarily. "Oh," Mafalda remarks in passing, "I thought the cigarette was smoking you."[3]

The father responds by destroying all his cigarettes.

This comic strip, and Latour's analysis of it, address the issue of where action originates—who has control, the human or the object? Latour comments:

> Whereas he thought of himself as an untroubled father, comfortably seated in his armchair after a hard day at the office, his daughter saw him as an unbearable monster: a cigarette grabbing a man to have itself smoked in a big cloud of tar and nicotine; the father as an appendage, an instrument, an extension of the cigarette, the father become cigarette to the cigarette.[4]

Within the comic, there is a move from an initial depiction of human control—a man at rest, thinking he is choosing to smoke (akin to the addict's "I can quit whenever I want")—to material agency in which the cigarette is seen to be exerting its own power, effectively smoking the man. Latour writes, "we basically pass from one extreme to another: at the start, the father believes himself given to an innocent vice that he has almost completely under control; at the end, he can extricate himself from his shackles only by pulverizing the cigarette."[5]

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[1] Latour 1999*a*; 2010*c*. On emergence and attachment in actor-networks, see Callon and Law 1997*b*; Hennion 2017*a*; Kipnis 2015; Law 2012.
[2] Quino 1986: 22.
[3] Latour 2010*c*: 54–55.
[4] Latour 2010*c*: 55.
[5] Latour 2010*c*: 55.

Latour rejects both positions depicted in the comic, that of the human subject in control as well as the reactionary response in which agency is attributed solely to nonhuman objects. A recurring theme in Latour's work is the artifacts and notions we create can act back on us and the instruments of our own making hold power over us. However, even as Latour recognizes the action of nonhuman objects, he claims he does not hold to a materialist position.[6] He suggests instead the use of a "middle voice" somewhere between causing something to happen and being made to do something, a voice that is neither active nor passive.[7]

To explain this middle voice of action, Latour argues that, in fact, neither the human nor the nonhuman artifact are in control; they are attached.[8] As I discussed in the previous chapter, in ANT causality is distributed, with action thought to be transported and mediated from distant locations and times to the present.[9] At the same time, a core component of ANT is the idea that all action is mediated locally. The notion of attachment serves as a means to focus on specific nodes of action, on sites of interest where objects interact together. And thus, where Latour finds the *network* part of ANT too broad and unspecific, attachments are a way to focus on the local, specific means by which action emerges.[10]

To describe the action of objects that act upon humans—and indeed nonhumans since there is no difference in ANT—Latour coins the term *factish,* combining *fact* and *fetish* and the notions of control these terms represent, that of objects that are subject to human action (fact) and of objects that act upon humans (fetish). These factishes that we create, Latour explains, are "capable of making one do things that no one, neither you nor they, can control."[11] To explain, Latour draws on the French expression *faire faire*, with a meaning of *making something happen* and having *something made to happen*.[12] No actor acts alone but instead mediates the action of many others, and thus Latour writes, "action never has the power of causation—whether it be a master subject or a master object."[13] It is to this attachment to objects that act upon us,

[6] I will argue below that Latour is more of a materialist than he acknowledges.
[7] Latour 1999*a*: 21. On the relation between human subjectivity and this sense of doing and undergoing, affecting and being affected, see Birk 2016.
[8] Latour 1999*a*: 25.
[9] See Chapter 1.
[10] Latour 1999*a*: 30–31.
[11] Latour 1999*a*: 22.
[12] Latour 1999*a*; 2013*a*: 157–161.
[13] Latour 1999*a*: 22. See also Latour 2005*b*: 213–218.

and in the way that we are not in control and that every object—human and nonhuman—is downstream of many others, that Latour refers with his suggestion of a middle voice that is neither active nor passive, both fact and fetish.

To bring this back to the Bible, its action is not unlike the cigarette in the Mafalda comic. The Bible could be viewed in extremes: as something to be read, perhaps in a daily quiet time, having an effect but not in control, or as a monstrous object, manipulating and seducing its readers, instigating fundamentalist intolerance and violence. Following Latour, however, we can reject both the Bible as innocent object or as powerful agent and instead recognize the Bible and the reader as attached, and action as emerging through that attachment. Neither alone are causal, and both are mediating the action of many others. It is as Latour explains, "if you make your children do their vacation homework assignments, you do not do them yourselves, and the children won't do them without you."[14] In the same way, when evangelical readers are attached to the Bible, things are made to happen. The Bible and reader act as a local site of action in an actor-network, where the action of actors from far away and long ago are mediated in a specific, local attachment. The Bible speaks and enacts some reality as it is read, but it is the human reader who acts and does the work, of whatever quality and character that action may be.[15]

Because we are always attached to other objects and we cannot escape from the attachments that control us, there is no liberation, no possibility of emancipation from attachment.[16] As Antoine Hennion explains, the notion of *attachment* "expresses our ways of both making and being made by the relationships and the objects that hold us together."[17] Latour writes, "we can substitute one attachment with another, but we cannot move from a state of attachment to that of detachment."[18] As I noted in Chapter 1, Andrew Kipnis similarly argues that human beings have agency *only* through this connectedness. Only through attachment to others, by submitting to the agency of others, can we act ourselves and create change and act in the world. Furthermore,

[14] Latour 2013*a*: 158.

[15] The way charismatic evangelicals experience God speaking and acting—including speaking through biblical texts—could be said to similarly function with this kind of middle voice. See Luhrmann 2012. On Luhrmann and Latour, see Bialecki 2014.

[16] In this Latour holds a view similar to that of Foucault. See, for example, Foucault 1984: 343–344; 1997: 167, 282–283. On Foucault and Latour, see Hekman 2009; Felski 2015*b*: 82–83.

[17] Hennion 2017*a*.

[18] Latour 2010*c*: 58.

as he argues, when we become aware of these attachments, we increase our capacity for ethical action.[19] What matters, then, from this perspective is the quality of that attachment—how well we are attached and how well-fabricated are the objects to which we are connected. Latour argues, "if it is no longer a question of opposing attachment and detachment, but instead of good and poor attachments, then there is only one way of deciding the quality of these ties: to inquire of what they consist, what they do, how one is affected by them."[20] This constructive approach—one that involves identifying and acknowledging the performativity of attachments rather than trying to remove attachments to the many actors to which text and community are attached—creates the possibility of new ways of understanding the relationship between text and community.[21]

2.2 Action Emerges in the Configuration of Hybrid Objects

I am arguing that textual performativity emerges in the attachments formed between texts and other objects, and it is in the specific attachments and configuration of these attachments that this performativity emerges. I will now argue for the notion of a *hybrid* as a heuristic device for understanding the emergent action of texts in configuration with other objects.

The Bible and readers are attached, downstream of many actors and upstream of many others. Text and reading community act in the middle, so to speak, of an actor-network, and neither acts alone—both are caught in this web of action, functioning as a source of action even as they are being made to act. It is for this reason Latour's work is helpful: it provides a means to ask questions about who and what is attached together, how these objects are configured, and what objects and their attachments do. If the emergent action of a text is contingent on these attachments and this embeddedness within an actor-network, elucidating these local mechanisms by which texts are performative makes possible an inquiry into, and judgements about, the nature and quality of the attachments through which text and community act.[22]

In an article published in 1994, but which still sounds strikingly relevant in the context of current American political discourse about gun violence, Latour addresses the question of whether "guns

[19] Kipnis 2015.
[20] Latour 1999*a*: 22.
[21] See, for example, Felski 2016.
[22] This will then allow for a critique of the politics of hermeneutics and performativity, which I return to in Chapter 4.

kill people" or "people kill people."[23] Here, I turn to Latour's analysis of this example, first, to introduce his notion of *hybrid* actors and, second, to show how it provides an approach to the emergence of textual performativity.[24]

The two ideological positions represented in gun control arguments, as Latour describes them, are what he calls the sociological and the materialist views.[25] On the "sociological" side it is argued that guns do not cause violence; people cause violence.[26] The gun is an instrument by which good or evil people carry out actions that are good or evil. The weapon may extend or amplify a human's power, but it is not ultimately responsible for violent actions.[27] If people are violent, they are violent with or without guns. The weapon is only a vehicle by which the human agent's pre-existing goals can be carried out; it does not modify the violent (or non-violent) intent of the gun-wielder. Some other weapon would ultimately serve the same goal, even if the means of carrying out violence were different. In this sense, a gun is thought to functions as what Latour terms an *intermediary*.[28]

The other side of the argument is one in which guns do, in fact, cause violence. They transform peaceful people into violent people, acting as material agents that cause bodily harm and death. Latour notes vividly, "who, with a knife in her hand, has not wanted at some time to stab someone or something?"[29] In this sense, guns are like knives and other objects of violence which seduce people into performing violent acts. Latour explains:

> What the materialist claims is that the good citizen is transformed by carrying the gun. A good citizen who, without a gun, might simply be angry may become a criminal if he is holding a gun—as if the gun had the power to change Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde. Materialists

[23] Latour 1994.

[24] Note that the notion of a hybrid discussed here is distinct from the notion of a hybrid in Latour 1993. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, the term hybrid has a broader reference to a mixing of sociology, science, and politics, and Latour uses the term to critique the non-acknowledgement of conjoining of nature and culture in modernity.

[25] Latour 1994: 30–34.

[26] Latour notes that it is amusing to describe the NRA position as sociological given that one might not typically associate a conservative political movement with a sociological approach. However, Latour often writes polemically against sociological explanations, and this argument is consistent with a sometimes caustic way of writing found throughout his work. See Latour 1994: 31.

[27] Philip Brey's analysis of delegation of social power to technological artifacts refers to this as an exercise of distal power using technology. See Brey 2008.

[28] Latour 1994: 32. See Chapter 1.

[29] Latour 1994: 31.

> thus make the intriguing suggestion that our quality as subjects, our competences, our personalities, depend on what we hold in our hands.[30]

The weapon functions, in this view, as a *mediator* that transforms and betrays the action mediated, not as an *intermediary* that merely extends action.[31] When one holds a weapon, a non-lethal confrontation is transformed into a lethal one, where an interpersonal conflict becomes a fatality and a fight becomes a murder.

Latour rejects both sociological and materialist positions.[32] What he argues instead is that neither the gun nor the person alone is responsible for gun violence. Objects are modified by their attachments, and it is a new *hybrid* object formed of the gun attached to the person, what he describes as a *gun-citizen* or *citizen-gun*, that acts:

> You are different with a gun in hand; the gun is different with you holding it. You are another subject because you hold the gun; the gun is another object because it has entered into a relationship with you. The gun is no longer the gun-in-the-armory or the gun-in-the-drawer or the gun-in-the-pocket, but the gun-in-your-hand, aimed at someone who is screaming.[33]

Rather than functioning as inert vehicle, transporting the will and action of the wielder, the gun-as-mediator acts both upstream and downstream of itself. The weapon changes what the wielder does and what happens to, and is done by, the one threatened by the weapon. This mediator and upstream actor form a hybrid object with its own "program of action."[34] Latour writes, "a third agent emerges from a fusion of the other two."[35] The new *gun-citizen* is a new actor, different from the gun or the citizen alone, and, thus, to understand its performativity we must consider its action as that of a new emergent object.

The notion of a hybrid object replaces a subject-object distinction, and this allows rethinking the way action is constructed grammatically. The citizen-subject and gun-object are attached, acting as a hybrid with its own agency and action. In this way, action can be spoken about using the

[30] Latour 1994: 31.
[31] Latour 1994: 30–31.
[32] Latour does acknowledge that that his portrayal of the positions is not entirely fair, writing, "I have caricatured the two positions, of course, in an absurdly diametrical opposition." Furthermore, as I discuss, Latour is more of a materialist than he admits here. See Latour 1999*c*: 177.
[33] Latour 1994: 33.
[34] Latour 1994: 32.
[35] Latour 1994: 32.

middle voice in which the hybrid is both *being made* to do something and *causing* something to happen. Rather than describing action following the typical construction of *subject–verb–object*, we effectively move to the hybrid action as that of *object-object–verb*, where it is the hybrid composed of human and nonhuman that is acting.[36]

This way of constructing a notion of action is not very different from the materialist approach that Latour claims to reject. It is clear that material agents act on human agents and change their action, and Latour's position may be seen as a better articulated and more nuanced version of the "guns kill people" argument rather than as a position opposed to the materialist view. Elsewhere, for instance, Latour argues materialism is made possible with *the beings of fiction*, a concept to which I will return in Chapter 3.[37] The issue for Latour is not so much a rejection of the agency of material entities but that he rejects a reductionistic approach in which objects are seen something less than complex assemblages composed of the vast range of entities, forces, institutions, and practices of which the material object is assembled.[38] What the notion of the hybrid does, then, is incorporate material agency into a non-deterministic view of action, and the difference between Latour's rejected materialist approach and his hybrid approach is one of whether objects are thought to be determinative or instead as having agency and action emerging only through attachment with others.[39]

With Latour's notion of hybrids is raised a matter of how many objects to include within a hybrid. A hybrid object acts, but, importantly, it also acts on something else. Latour writes, for instance, "the chimp plus the sharp stick reach (and not reaches) the banana."[40] Similarly the gun-citizen may be a hybrid composed of person and weapon, but the gun-citizen is still pointing at something else. At this point, we are describing something that looks more like *hybrid – verb – object*. While recognizing that the *chimp-stick* or *gun-citizen* have properties other than those which a chimp, stick, weapon, or person would have alone, this still leaves us with the problem of falling back into thinking in terms of *subject – verb – object*. Should the banana in the case of the

[36] Here I am referring to an *object* of action as a grammatical construction, not to be confused with the broader theoretical framework I am using in which *things* (of any sort) are recognized as objects.
[37] Latour 2013*a*: 252.
[38] On the notion of assemblages, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987.
[39] Latour explains his rejection of materialism in Latour 2007. See, also, Bennett 2010; Kipnis 2015.
[40] Latour 1994: 35.

chimp-stick, or someone screaming in the case of the gun-in-the-hand, also be recognized as part of the hybrid action?[41] If we include additional objects, as Latour argues we should, a hybrid composed of dual objects becomes one made of three or more objects, continuing to expand the further out we go. How far, then, do we extend the hybrid? What about other chimps or humans nearby, the ground upon which the hybrid stands, or any other actors present? Indeed, it may be more accurate to extend our scope of action out further to the entire collective or actor-network, a point Latour makes when he argues, "B-52s do not fly, the U.S. Air Force flies."[42]

However, the more the hybrid is extended, the exponentially more complicated and harder to grasp the source of action becomes, particularly once the notion of the hybrid transmutes into the notion of an actor-network, with its non-existent boundaries. If we trace the actor-network to its end, at some point we would need to talk about all the particles in the universe.[43] Our analysis becomes lost in the problem expressed by Dash in *The Incredibles*:

> "Our powers made us special," says Dash.
> "Everyone's special, Dash," replies his mother with a sigh.
> "Which is another way of saying no one is," he responds, turning away.[44]

Wrapping one's mind around a hybrid object composed of two or three actors is one thing; trying to conceptualize all the nested and irreducible actors in the universe is another. The more actors we include in our hybrid, the further we get from our interest in what individual texts do and the mechanisms by which they act. ANT recognizes no limit to the number of actors and allows for no single source of action to ever be identified since every actor acts downstream of many others. Thus it becomes necessary to make a choice about which objects to include in our analysis, and without a framework for doing so, it is ultimately an arbitrary choice based on human interests and intuition about what really matters.

Here I diverge from Latour's irreductionist approach. His starting point, described in the *Irreductions* part of *The Pasteurization of France*, is "nothing can be reduced to anything else, nothing can be deduced from anything else, everything may be allied to everything else."[45]

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[41] Latour 1994: 33.
[42] Latour 1994: 35, 46.
[43] See, for instance, Latour's comments on Damian Ortega's *Cosmic Thing* in Latour 2007.
[44] Bird 2004.
[45] Latour 1988*b*: 163.

Where Latour argues against reductionistic sociological explanations and, instead, is making a theoretical and a methodological move emphasizing the need to trace the actors out as far as they will go, I am trying to bring focus back to a single type of actor and show the mechanisms by which it acts.[46] To do so, I am applying Latour's approach to analysis of a specific actor—the Bible in American evangelicalism—and adopting some, but not all, of Latour's methodological and theoretical moves. ANT serves as a means to become sensitive to the hidden actors, tracing the humans and nonhumans, near and far, to which the text is attached and with which it acts. However, I am also looking for a story to tell, to form a narrative of action which can be understood, a story which can be grasped and which can contribute to a sense of the mechanisms by which texts are performative. In this sense, perhaps Latour would see this approach as falling within his stated intent to make it "possible to resume the traditional goal of the social sciences but with tools better adjusted to the task."[47]

2.3 The Bible and Hybrid Objects

I have argued above that performativity emerges in the attachments formed between objects, and that the notion of a *hybrid* provides an approach to this emergent performativity. I will now argue that different configurations of text-reader hybrids, with addition of objects or different configuration or permutations of the same objects, modifies the performativity of those texts.

The sociological and the materialist positions discussed above can also be mapped to views of biblical performativity. From one point of view, the Bible might simply be a straightforward means of action or communication, an intermediary of the speech of God or of humans, in which the text itself has little power or control. Alternatively, the biblical text could be considered a mediator, with all that then implies. It is an object which does act with its own agency, creating change and exerting itself on the reader. In this view, Mafalda might ask her father: are you reading the Bible or is it reading you? Or to misquote Latour, we could again ask, "who, with a [Bible] in her hand, has not wanted at some time to stab someone or something?"[48] In Chapter 1,

[46] On Latour's view of ANT as a methodology rather than a theory see Latour 2005*b*: 141–156. See also discussion in Chapter 1.
[47] Latour 2005*b*: 1.
[48] Latour 1994: 31.

I took a primarily materialist approach, describing the Bible as an actor with its own agency and its own surprising effects. Here, I move to an approach which recognizes the performativity of the Bible as that of a hybrid object in which the Bible is attached to other human and nonhuman objects. What this hybrid object does is altered by its reconfiguration: addition or replacement of objects, rearranging these objects, placing the hybrid within a different background or context, and reconfiguring its attachment within an actor-network more broadly.

2.3.1 Reconfiguration of the Hybrid

The agency of the Bible in one hybrid is not the same as that of the same Bible in a differently composed hybrid. As Latour points out, the gun-in-the-drawer is a different from the gun-in-the-hand.[49] Likewise a weapon held by an active duty member of a well-trained military is not the same object as a handgun in the hands of a teenager, or the same weapon in the hands of a child. What is true of weapons is also true of the Bible. The Bible-in-the-drawer is not the same hybrid actor as the Bible-in-the-hand. A different composition of the gun-person or Bible-person creates a new hybrid object with distinct agency and action. Neither the person nor the weapon or Bible can be said to be in control; there is a new action that emerges in the relationship between them. Which Bible is held matters as well. A youth reader's Bible, such as the *NIrV Adventure Bible for Early Readers*, available in hot pink, and a family Bible almost too large to lift that has been passed down through several generations constitute different hybrids. It is admittedly hard to imagine a preacher reading to a congregation from his or her daughter's small hot pink Bible, with its small words and simple language, and, indeed, the strangeness of this unlikely scene illustrates the extent to which performativity emerges in the relationship between specific objects.

2.3.2 Configuration with Added Objects

Addition of new objects further transforms the action of the hybrid. Consider a person who keeps a handgun home alone at night. The action of the person and gun is of a different category with and without an intruder present. If the intruder holds a knife or if children are present, the hybrid destabilizes, with an agency and action that is unpredictable and dangerous. If no children are present and the visitor holds a cup of coffee, the emergent action when confronted

[49] Latour 1994: 33.

by the *gun-person* is again unlike the other scenarios.[50] In the same way, a person-Bible hybrid is reconfigured with different attachments. A person reading the Bible at home while calmly drinking tea is constituted differently than that of one doing the same with children present. And the state of these children—energetic, unhappy, or quietly listening—also modifies action. Likewise, a human with the Bible in hand together with close friends, a Bible study group, or an intruder in the home all have different performativity.[51]

2.3.3 Reconfiguration of the Same Objects

The action of a hybrid emerges differently not only from different collections of objects but also from the specific way in which these objects are configured. For instance, is a left-handed person holding a weapon in their right hand or left hand? Is the safety catch engaged? The hybrid's action is reconfigured by how the objects within it are held, and, in this case, a small change, alone fairly insignificant, may determine whether this hybrid kills someone. Likewise, a new religious movement displays different characteristics when driven into the shadows than when it is allowed into the open.[52] A biblical text at an Evensong service—a text that warns against fornication for instance—read aloud by a senior member of staff in a tone that sounds like a liturgical performance of an ancient text does something different than the same text read by the same person with a normal speaking voice which sounds as if the words were directed at the students present.[53] The first might put students to sleep; the other unsettles them. The position and social power of actor modifies the directionality and force of its action, a point argued by Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove: "Positioned as dependent, one's cry of pain is hearable as a plea for help. But positioned as dominant, a similar cry can be heard as a protest or even as a reprimand."[54] The position of the text and its configuration likewise modify the performativity of its content.

[50] On the effects of holding a cup of coffee, see Williams and Bargh 2008.
[51] Consider the case, for example, of Lindsay Wood who read the Bible to her attacker, who then apologized and left. See Newcomb 2012.
[52] See Lu 2006.
[53] A reading of Ephesians 5:3, for instance.
[54] Harré and Langenhove 1991: 396. See also Harré 1991.

2.3.4 Configuration with a Different Context

The background, or context, in which the hybrid is located further changes the action of that hybrid.[55] Consider an example: A teenager reads from the Bible to his elderly grandmother as she rests at home. Then he walks her to church, holding her hand in one hand and her Bible in the other. After the service, he takes her to the local market. As she steps inside one of the shops, he takes a seat and waits patiently. "*Is he a fanatic?*" wonders the passing observer, seeing the adolescent boy with the Bible in a public space. The same Bible-teenager hybrid that might inspire hope if he had been seen earlier that morning now provokes a dismissive thought. The same person with the same object in hand has altered performativity contingent on the background or scene in which this person-object operates.

A question, here, is whether context itself a useful notion—or should the hybrid instead be said simply to include all actors to which it is attached? Latour argues, for instance, that context is "simply a way of stopping the description when you are tired or too lazy to go on."[56] Thomas Rickert disagrees with Latour on this point.[57] Rickert argues, drawing on wine tasting as an example, where taste has been found to be dependent on contextual factors, that *context* does play a central role in emergence. He takes what he describes as a holistic approach, and he argues that context should be acknowledged as a hybrid actor in its own right. While there is a danger of falling into the reductionism that Latour wants to avoid, Rickert's holistic notion of context does serve as a useful heuristic, particularly if we take the term "context" as shorthand for the vast number of actors to which any object is attached. When the term is used this way, it can alert one to the fact there are unexplored actors which are acting together with an object of interest. The notion of context is, in effect, a way of describing the specific way a text or text-reader hybrid is embedded into the actor-network. In this sense, context does matter and clearly has an effect. Identifying context as a plural actor enables one to identify and trace the way changes in the configuration of actors that constitute *context* alter the performativity of the text-reader hybrid.

[55] I could also use the term *situation*, following Bitzer 1968.
[56] Latour 2005*b*: 148. See also 219-221.
[57] Rickert 2015.

2.3.5 Configuration of the Actor-Network

It is clear that when one reads, one is not alone.[58] Present also with the Bible, for instance, are science textbooks, creationist organizations, natural history museums, pastors and denominational leaders, atheist friends, religious experiences, stories of miracles, the comic book Bible one read as a child, gay loved ones, queer activists, books of all sorts, and sermons advocating traditional gender roles—a list that would continue to be extended as other actors near and far, present or historical, are added to the inventory of actors to be traced.[59] As Rita Felski writes, "the reader-text relationship forms only a small part of a vast and sprawling network."[60] To recognize the emergent meaning of action of texts in actor-networks is, in effect, to do what Vásquez calls for when he writes, "texts should not be treated as 'fetishes,' acting independently of the practices by which we produce, circulate, consume, and authorize them."[61] Ultimately, it is the way in which the hybrid object is embedded in this actor-network from which performativity emerges.[62]

To speak of the Bible in the hands of a person, as I have done in this chapter, is only shorthand for the entire actor-network that surrounds and is mediated through the text and reader.[63] Human and nonhuman actors near and far have far-reaching effects. When Latour writes, "you are modified by the gun," it is, he argues, "more so or less so, depending on the weight of the other associations that you carry."[64] This is true, too, of how evangelicals and the Bible form a text-reader hybrid. The Bible is in the hands of a human, and the human is attached to others. The Bible acts on the actor-network and the actor-network acts on those entangled within its web, including the text and its readers.

Texts assemble other actors, and configure the actor-network around them. Indeed, texts are performative, at least in part, by creating an assemblage through which they exert force.[65]

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[58] On text and reader as "cocreators of meaning" in actor-networks, see Felski 2015*b*: 84, 173–174.
[59] See Chapter 5 for example of how this works out in the case of the Bible in climate change discourse.
[60] Felski 2015*b*: 184.
[61] Vásquez 2011: 232.
[62] On contingence and ANT, see Malafouris (2013) 123-130.
[63] Indeed, as I have noted, to speak of the Bible in the hands of a person is also to speak of a vast network of actors in which and by which the Bible as a black box is composed, translated, identified as a singular object, held together, and given meaning and function.
[64] Latour 1994: 33.
[65] See Gries 2015.

Furthermore, people do not read one text at a time; texts are read together, within an actor-network for some purpose or to solve some problem.[66] It is this assemblage, this actor-network, in which the Bible—itself composed of an actor-network—speaks and acts and within which it is performative.[67] Each of these configurations, or reconfigurations, have impact in the way they modify the meaning and action of the emergent text-reader, and thus there are political and ethical implications to the hybrid's assembly, including the politics of who or what is assembled together, how they are assembled, and the decisions made about how to configure this assemblage of community and reading practices.[68]

2.4 Notions Are Performative Objects

I have argued above that textual performativity emerges in the specific configuration of a hybrid, in which a text is attached to other objects. I will now argue that *notions* are performative objects whose performativity emerges alongside texts. As such, the way in which notions are configured together with other objects alters the emergent performativity of the hybrid which they constitute.

Consider another illustration (this one my own):

> Imagine yourself in a (post)modern art museum. In one of the galleries there is a collection of abstract works of art. Located around the room are a number of odd exhibits and paintings. One reminds you of Duchamp's Fountain, but you are not sure what it is meant to represent. In the center of the room is a pristine white chair. It is oddly shaped, definitely postmodern (or is it modern?) but still clearly recognizable as a chair. On the floor next to the exhibit is a panel with a description, which you start to read, wondering what it tells you about this particular work.
>
> At that moment, one of the museum attendants walks over and apologizes, saying that that particular exhibit was out for repair, but to please have a seat in the chair that has been brought in temporarily and enjoy the remaining works of art. At that moment you realize the chair was not an exhibit in this gallery at all. You sit down and ponder the meaning of art.[69]

[66] See Spinuzzi 2015: 35–37.

[67] Lloyd Bitzer's work on rhetorical situation precedes ANT but effectively makes the same argument that action produced by texts is contingent on, and mediated trough, the people and objects to which it speaks. See Bitzer 1968. I return to Bitzer and Gries in discussion of beings of fiction in Chapter 3. See also Felski 2015*b*: 162–172; Cooper 2011.

[68] I will return to the hermeneutics and politics of texts in actor-networks in Chapter 4.

[69] Consider an actual event that happened around the time of writing: two students visiting a local exhibition left a store-bought pineapple on an empty stand and came back later to find that it had been placed under a glass display case. See Bilefsky 2017.

Clearly the notions held by the visitor change the performativity of the art object (or non-art object) on display. At the start, the chair is performative as a perceived art exhibit. After interaction with the museum attendant, the chair performs the role of an object to sit in. That is, unless one entertains a new notion that the chair might actually be part of the performative experience (it did look like it was meant to be an exhibit!). Whatever the case may be, the change in perception, or notion, of the object alters the object's action on the visitor.

The chair's performativity in my illustration is contingent on what notions of the chair are held together with other notions of a museum, of art, and of what constitutes proper behavior in this context.[70] The visitor must make an interpretive choice, even if tacit, of whether the chair is meant to function as an art object or an object on which to sit and rest, and that interpretive choice changes the action of the chair-person hybrid.[71] The chair and the constructed idea of the chair are both acting upon the visitor.[72] Decisions about how to relate to the chair—whether to admire it or sit on it—are, moreover, contingent upon additional objects to which the visitor and chair are attached.

In "Where are the Missing Masses?" Latour proposes a thought experiment to show the agency and action of nonhuman objects: "every time you want to know what a nonhuman does, simply imagine what other humans or other nonhumans would have to do were this character not present."[73] Imagine, Latour suggests, if we had no doors and had to break down and repair a wall every time we needed to enter or exit a closed space. What is true here for human-fabricated artifacts is also true for fabricated notions, and if we substitute *notion* in place of artifact, we can ask: What would happen if a specific notion were not present? What would humans or nonhumans do differently? Indeed, Latour suggests something along these lines in an earlier version of his article published under the name "Jim Johnson," making a point about notions of the author.[74] Even if they are otherwise the same, a text thought to be by Bruno Latour and

[70] Andrew Pickering describes this entanglement of material agency with human thought and practice as "the mangle of practice." See Pickering 1995. John Searle describes these types of notions as part of the "Background." Like the term *context*, I find Searle's *Background* useful as shorthand for the vast number of actors, often invisible, to which any object is attached. See Searle 1983; 1995.

[71] On perceiving objects in terms of function, see Searle 1995.

[72] On the distinction between things themselves and constructed of ideas of things, see Hacking 1999. See also Latour 2003.

[73] Latour 2008: 155. See discussion of network interruptions in Chapter 1.

[74] Latour 1988*a*.

one by an unknown author are recognized to have a different impact on readers.[75]

What notions would leave a noticeable gap if they were not present alongside our chair and visitor? What ideas about museums, exhibitions, exhibits, art objects, best practices, behavior, and so forth are present and acting? One could include notions about the curator who designed the exhibit, notions picked up from informational signs, museum staff, or others viewing the exhibit. What would happen if the visitor did not have access to these notions?[76] What happens when these notions are mistaken? How would the performativity of the objects in the exhibit shift?

Consider, for example, what happens if that which the visitor was led to believe was a *chair*, and not an art object, were in fact officially an *art object*. It may be that the artist, the curator, and even the staff member who kindly pointed out that the visitor could sit in the chair were enacting some form of performance art. And if there is a panel to be found on display in the next room explaining how this chair was in fact part of this art exhibit, access to this distributed social knowledge will reconfigure the action of the chair, with the work of art then enacting something of confusion, frustration, and wonder in the mind of the visitor.[77]

Some objects are performative regardless of what notions are held of them. The Earth, for instance, will continue to exert gravitational force irrespective of our knowledge or beliefs about gravity. Exposure to the common cold will likely cause infection regardless of how much one believes in folk remedies. However, other objects—and texts particularly so—have action that is contingent. Action emerges with the physical configuration of the objects—chair, visitor, signs, attendant, lighting, other visitors, and so forth—and also with the notions held and communicated by these physical actors. For art objects and texts, what they are thought to be, to say, to mean, to do, and notions of what is meant to be done with them are all performative notions.

Objects afford certain ways of thinking of them, thinking that emerges from an object's embeddedness within an actor-network, and notions about that affordance and about those notions

[75] On notions of authorship and authorial intention, see Chapter 4.
[76] On the hermeneutical effects of missing notions, see Fricker 2007.
[77] For general discussion of social knowledge and social epistemology, see Goldman 1999.

all constitute the hybrid.[78] Art objects, for instance, are performative, in part, through self-referentiality, as they implicitly refer to the history of art and to other notions of art, critiquing both. This self-referentiality functions along the lines of what of Manuel Vásquez writes when explaining Spinoza's contribution to non-reductive materialism: "the mind is capable of self-reflection and, in the process, of producing second-order ideas, ideas about ideas, that can then make sense of and orient the actions of the body."[79] Mieke Bal likewise argues, "concepts can become a third partner in the otherwise totally unverifiable and symbiotic interaction between critic and object."[80] These second-order ideas are not limited to effect on a single mind, moreover. Berger and Luckmann argue, for instance, "a body of knowledge, once it is raised to the level of a relatively autonomous sub-universe of meaning, has the capacity to act back upon the collectivity that has produced it."[81] Following ANT, it is recognized that these notions function within an actor-network composed of many other notions, people, texts, texts about texts, notions about notions, and many other objects.

These notions can include anything from nonsensical ideas to categories and genres that organize human life. Graham Harman, for instance, counts unicorns, Popeye, square circles, and "present-day bald kings of France" as actors that do things.[82] What matters is that whether fictional characters or absurd philosophical notions, these actors are performative upon the imagination and beyond. Notions of genre likewise have effect, as Latour argues:

> If you find yourself in a bookstore and you browse through books identified in the front matter as "novels," "documents," "inquiries," "docufiction," "memoirs," or "essays," these notices play the role of prepositions. They don't amount to much, just one or two words compared to the thousands of words in the book that you may be about to buy, and yet they engage the rest of your reading in a decisive way since, on every page, you are going to take the words that the author puts before your eyes in a completely different tonality depending on whether you think that the book is a "made-up story," a "genuine document," an "essay," or a "report on an inquiry." Everyone can see that it would be a category mistake

[78] The notion of *affordance* traces to James Gibson. See Gibson 1979. For a more recent approach to the relation between things and cognition, see Knappett 2004.
[79] Vásquez 2011: 47.
[80] Bal 2009: 19; 2002*b*.
[81] Berger and Luckmann 1966: 104. Latour's work similarly refers to the way that the objects produced by humans in turn produce humans. See, for instance, Latour 2010*c*.
[82] See Harman 2014: viii–ix, 90.

> to read a "document" while believing all the way through that the book was a "novel," or vice versa.[83]

These notions of genre function as "interpretive keys," which "determine how you ... understand, translate, and transcribe what is to follow."[84] John Searle argues that when symbolization occurs, these categories and entities become real and have effect.[85] And, as Mieke Bal argues, concepts travel and have a history.[86] Scientific propositions, or facts, likewise, can be said to be actors with an existence and history.[87]

2.4.1 Semiotics, Notions, and ANT

With this analysis of how notions modify the action of a text, I am in effect considering *notions* as *actants*, following Latour's adoption of a Greimasian semiotics (see Chapter 1). It is not necessary to know exactly what these notions are made of or even to what other actors they are attached; instead, with a Greimasian semiotic approach, notions can be identified as actants that have effect. The question to ask of any notion is: Can the notion be said to do something? Is there, for instance, some verb that could describe the action of the notion?[88] It does not matter whether these notions represent anything real or substantive. What matters is whether the notions themselves have any effect. If they have force, or are forces, it is possible to recognize them and speak of them, even if we do not know what they are, of what they are made, or how to name them as individual characters in action.[89] In this sense, the notion-actant remains ontologically indeterminate, not needing a precise characterization or definition to be counted among that which acts. A notion can be held by multiple or single actors and can be thought of in terms of beings of fiction, distributed cognition, webs of belief, social fact, externalized and objectivated social reality, or any other actantial way of referring to that which acts.[90] What matters is that notions are performative, do things, and have effect.

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[83] Latour 2013*a*: 57. The reference to "prepositions" is in the context of Latour's modes of existence, which falls mostly outside the scope of this thesis, with the exception of the *beings of fiction* which I will turn to in Chapter 3.
[84] Latour 2013*a*: 58. On the performativity of genres, see also Miller 1984.
[85] See Searle 1995: 75–76.
[86] See Bal 2009.
[87] Latour 1999*c*: 156.
[88] See Searle's use of verbs to assist with classification of speech acts. See Searle 1976.
[89] In speaking of "forces," I am following Latour's *Irreductions* in Latour 1988*b*.
[90] Berger 1967; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Hutchins 1995; Latour 2013*a*; Quine 1951; Searle 1995.

2.4.2 Notions of the Bible

In the same way, notions held about the Bible—what it is, what it is meant to do, how it should be read, its authority, what it says, what it means—are performative. Notions of agency and intentionality, of authors or authorial community, of a God whose communication is mediated by the text, and even the notion of *mediatator* or *intermediary* modify and configure the hybrid to which the biblical text is attached. The action of the text is contingent on how these notions are held by the community, the weight they accrue within the community, and how securely they are interwoven into the community's social web of belief.[91]

This performativity of notions about the Bible is evident in *God's Good Design*, a book written by Claire Smith to argue that the Bible requires enactment of specific, traditionally-understood gender roles. For instance, describing her view that feminism is incompatible with what she sees as a right reading of the Bible, she writes: "The dust of feminism has settled on the pages of our Bibles and obscured God's word. What the Bible once said clearly about men and women is no longer clear to us. The plain meaning of texts no longer seems plain."[92] She depicts the notions of feminism as being literal "dust," representing as material the non-material notions that I have argued are components of a hybrid. In her depiction the text-in-the-hands-of-a-feminist is not the same as the text-in-the-hands-of-a-conservative-evangelical.

Smith believes there is a "plain" meaning and that this meaning is the one that coincides with the Bible in the hands of a complementarian. For example, she writes:

> As in all things, our views on this matter must be based first and foremost on the *actual text* of Scripture. If God has chosen to speak to us in his word about his design for men and women, and he has given us his Spirit so that we might understand his word, then his word is where we must start.[93]

Closely linked to her notion of an "actual text" are corresponding notions of God's word, of men, of women, of design, of plain text, and of Scripture. Each of these notions are themselves components of the Bible-reader hybrid object, and as such each notion is performative. About those who do not believe in conservative gender roles, Smith writes, "they tell us that these words of Scripture cannot be taken literally."[94] Smith's book is then an attempt to deploy the text

[91] These notions are caught up in politics, as I discuss in Chapter 4.
[92] Smith 2012: 12.
[93] Smith 2012: 13, emphasis mine.
[94] Smith 2012: 17.

literally to construct an argument for what she sees as a biblical role for women. She does not, and cannot, recognize that the notion of a literal text is intricately linked to the other notions assembled together in her tradition's text-community hybrid.

Interestingly, the "Spirit" is also identified by Smith as what is, by implication, a component of the text-reader hybrid. Following a Greimasian semiotic approach, ontological questions about the nature or identity of the Spirit can remain unaddressed, other than to recognize *the Spirit* as an actant with effect.[95] In this way, this semiotic approach makes it possible to defer questions about the precise kind of actor Smith is referring to—it does not matter, for this analysis, whether the Spirit is ultimately reduced to a notion that acts only in the minds of evangelical Christians, is recognized as some sort of autonomous being with action in the world, or is some other type of actant.

Where Smith's notion of the text ultimately fails is in her attempt at an unalloyed reading, to think that the text would speak on its own behalf if, somehow, one were to remove what she sees as the interpretive taint of feminism. This form of fundamentalism—this notion of unmediated access to texts or other objects—is exactly what Latour's body of work shows to be untenable.[96] There is no "actual text," as Smith claims, no possibility of reading without attachments and mediation. Following Latour, it would be better instead to be more and better connected, to increase attachments. I would argue, then, a quest for a right reading of the Bible would be better served by finding more and better notions to bring into this text-reader assemblage. The aim of detaching the Bible from feminism may be one that derives from deeply held principles on the part of Smith and others, but in doing so they only leave themselves at risk of other ideological attachments. Following Latour, it would be by increasing the number and quality of these attachments that the risk of that which is thought to be perilous ideology—whether in fact so or not—can be neutralized.

[95] As discussed in Chapter 1, the terms actant and actor are often used interchangeably in ANT. Here I use *actant* intentionally to emphasize ontological uncertainty.
[96] See Latour 2005*a*; 2013*a*.

2.5 From Emergence to Politics

In this chapter I have developed a methodological approach to tracing the way in which action emerges with the attachments formed between text and community. I argue for an approach to textual performativity that takes neither an active nor passive view of nonhuman agency; instead, I argue, texts act with Latour's "middle voice." Text and reader hold each other; they are attached and they act together. The biblical text in the hands of a conservative evangelical is a different object than the text in the hands of an academic in a biblical studies seminar, for instance, and both are different from the text-in-a-drawer or text-on-a-museum-shelf. The text changes those who hold it, and those who hold it change the action of the text. A third object emerges with its own new action and agency. In this way, the source of action is neither text nor community alone; rather, it is what can be thought of as a text-community hybrid. As I have argued, action is, then, contingent on both the *physical* configuration of the community and the constructed *notions* that are assembled alongside text and community.

It is to the construction and function of these notions that I will turn in the next two chapters. Latour's concept of *beings of fiction* (Chapter 3) provides one approach to these notions of the text, where the action of texts is contingent on the way they grip their readers' imaginations. In the following chapter (Chapter 4), I will turn to hermeneutics in actor-networks, tracing the way that notions of authorial intent and other notions about a text's origin and function modify its meaning and action. As I will argue, because texts are performative, hermeneutical choices are also performative, entangling hermeneutics in political and ethical concerns.

3

Beings of Fiction in Actor-Networks

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Chapter Overview

In the previous two chapters, I have argued that the performativity of texts emerges with the specific configuration of their assemblage with other objects, including humans and nonhumans. Moreover, I have argued that the notions of a text are themselves objects that act, and as Latourian actors they compose a hybrid object together with text, reader, and other actors. The action of text-reader hybrids, then, is contingent on how these notions are held and configured together with other humans and nonhumans.

In this chapter I argue for approaching the action of texts as *beings of fiction*. Specifically, following Latour, my argument is that it is in the way a text is reprised and instaured that the text grips the reader, evokes imagination, and creates a community around itself. The Latourian concept of

beings of fiction serves as a way to shift from approaching texts as artifacts to approach texts as mediators of content, and rather than conceptualizing texts as autonomous physical objects with permanence—as I did in the previous chapters—here, in this approach, texts are conceptualized as beings that exist only in the minds of their community. In other words, to approach texts as beings of fiction is to emphasize what texts do *within the reading event* rather than what they do as *autonomous object*. In this sense, then, it is the emergent notion of the text, rather than the text itself, that is performative and brings about change.

3.1 Reprise and Instauration

To understand Latour's notion of beings of fiction, it is helpful to start with the influence of Charles Péguy and Étienne Souriau. Péguy's work, particularly, was an early influence on Latour, and Péguy's notion of *reprise* is threaded through Latour's entire corpus of work.[1] Souriau was found by Latour later in his career, and Latour's more recent work is strongly influenced by Souriau's notion of *instauration* and his modes of existence.[2] Here I turn to these two notions—*reprise* and *instauration*—to introduce Latour's beings of fiction. The notion of *reprise* is one that reflects a recognition that there is no unmediated access to truth, texts, or scientific facts. Rather, there must always be a revisiting, a reconsidering, and a renewing of that which is mediated into the present.[3] *Instauration* reflects the way that creators are overtaken by their creations—neither creator nor created are solely in control—and creation is an act that involves possibility and risk.[4] Both concepts contribute to Latour's thought, and, by extension, serve here toward my own model in which texts function as beings of fiction that enact change in their readers.

3.1.1 Charles Péguy and Reprise

Charles Péguy has had remarkable influence on Latour's work, beginning with Latour's doctoral thesis, which he describes as "a close reading of Charles Péguy's amazing book *Clio*."[5] Latour cites a number of philosophical and theoretical influences throughout his body of work, but he

[1] Howles 2015; Schmidgen 2012.
[2] Latour 2011*b*.
[3] Latour 2015.
[4] Latour 2013*a*: 161.
[5] Latour 2010*b*: 600.

describes Péguy as "the only writer that would be recognizable as a clearly 'literary influence' on my work."[6] Indeed, due to Péguy's philosophical and literary influence on Latour, it is difficult to understand many of Latour's concepts without having an appreciation for his adoption of Péguy's thought.

The background to Latour's doctoral work on Péguy involved the mentorship of André Malet, a former Catholic priest who had become Protestant. Malet introduced Latour to Rudolf Bultmann's work on demythologization and was to have profound impact on Latour's work. It was through Malet's mentorship, Latour writes, that:

> the Biblical text finally became comprehensible, revealed as a lengthy process of transformations, inventions, glosses, and diverse rationalizations, which, taken together, sketched out a layer of interpretations that played out—this is the essential point—each in its own way, the question of fidelity or treason: faithful or falsified invention, impious reworking, or astounding rediscovery?[7]

From this exposure to Bultmann, Latour, who is himself Catholic, was inspired to pursue his own approach in which there could be an appreciation for the way in which the text is continually revisited and reprised within a religious tradition.[8] Building on prior influence of Nietzsche and Derrida, and through engagement with Péguy, Latour "realized that religious beliefs can never be detached from the complex trajectory of interpretation, rewriting, invention, reprise, fabrication, canon formation, and institutional incorporations that allow statements to gain a meaning."[9]

Péguy's work drew a contrast between intuitive and institutional ways of reading, with Péguy advocating for the former and against the latter.[10] What Péguy wanted, Latour explains, is for readers to experience the text without the interpretive gloss of commentaries, scholarship, or footnotes. He writes, "Péguy's philosophy circulates around the idea that a text should be grasped naked, exposed to full view, with all its power to renew."[11] This is how the reader brings the text to life. In *Clio*, for example, Péguy writes:

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[6]Latour 2016: 467.
[7]Latour 2013*b*: 288.
[8]Latour 2010*b*: 600.
[9]Latour 2016: 466.
[10]Latour 2015: 46.
[11]Latour 2015: 45.

> What a marvelous, what an astonishing, fate: it is through us, my dear friend, and through our way of reading, that so many of the great works, works of great men and of very great men, find their fulfillment, their completion, their crowning glory. What an astonishing responsibility lies upon us.[12]

Without this act of reprise, the text cannot be brought alive in the present. At the same time, Latour notes, Péguy was aware institutions were needed for the very act in which one was rejecting institutionalization. This question—or inherent conflict—of how Péguy could, "at the same time, in the same moment, require that the assistance offered by those who might be best equipped to bring this about must be spurned, even if that assistance is rather limited and provisional" is something that Latour describes as one that Péguy worked to keep exposed and unreconciled.[13]

Latour completed his doctoral studies with the conviction that, with certain qualifications, "the more a layer of texts is interpreted, transformed, taken up anew, stitched back together, replayed, and rewoven, each time in a different way, the more likely it is to manifest the truth it contains."[14] Elsewhere he talks of gaining an appreciation for the "streams of transformation, and reinvention, that are so beautifully studied in biblical exegesis."[15] It was this Péguy-inspired approach to the mediation of texts that Latour took to the production of scientific knowledge in the laboratory, launching his career as a sociologist of scientific knowledge.[16] Along these lines, Latour describes how his approach to science was informed by the principles he first worked out through his study of biblical exegesis: "the more mediations, the more inscriptions, the more rewriting, the more interpretations, the better."[17]

To *reprise* could be thought of as to creatively revisit. With all that is mediated—whether in religion, science, or fiction—we must reprise that with which we engage. Reading, in this sense, is what Tim Howles describes as "a collaboration between reader and text ... in which each must act reciprocally upon the other in order to synthesize a new reality out of what was present before."[18] This is the opposite of "passively rehashing ready-made concepts and ideas";

[12] Péguy, *Clio* quoted in Latour 2015: 46.
[13] Latour 2015: 46.
[14] Latour 2013*b*: 289.
[15] Tresch 2013: 305.
[16] See Schmidgen 2012.
[17] Tresch 2013: 305.
[18] Howles 2015: 42.

instead "a true reading experience, then, is one that is constantly renewed by each successive generation."[19] To reprise is thus to mediate the past and present. In the case of religion, for instance, we must continually go back to the founding documents and attempt to return to the origin in order to reinterpret and re-identify how the text and our history of our engagement with the text can be faithfully brought into the present.[20] In this sense, reprise is perhaps similar to the mechanics of a human relationship. One can never remain in the past, reacting only to past experience, but instead must continually adapt and renew relationships in the present. Something similar must be done for all texts, science, and facts, just as, for example, Newtonian physics is reprised in light of quantum physics and quantum physics is continually reprised in light of theoretical advances and new observational data.

The opposite of reprise, for Latour, is a fundamentalism in which it is thought that one can have direct access to truth, literal meaning, or nature.[21] The notion of reprise is core to Latour's engagement with the processes of construction, mediation, and translation, and, in a sense, his life's work of uncovering processes of engaging with the world. When this is done, as Latour has sought to do, these processes can be seen for what they are—and consequently can be performed well instead of poorly. In contrast, when the notion of construction is wielded as a means to deconstruct or to show falsehood or non-reality, it is no surprise that people want non-constructed facts and religion. When reprise is held to be synonymous with making things false, then, of course, it is unmediated access to the original text and unfabricated facts of nature that are sought. "With constructivism used this way," Latour writes, "we can understand why the fundamentalists have become crazed with desire for a reality that nothing and no one has constructed."[22] This is where we can turn to Souriau.[23]

3.1.2 Étienne Souriau and Instauration

The term *being of fiction* originates with Étienne Souriau in work described as "the forgotten book of a forgotten philosopher."[24] Although Souriau was not unknown in his time—rather, he seems

[19] Howles 2015: 42.
[20] See discussion of religion as a mode of existence in Latour 2013*a*.
[21] See discussions of "double click" and fundamentalism in Latour 2013*a*.
[22] Latour 2013*a*: 159.
[23] Latour 2013*a*: 160.
[24] Souriau 2015: 150; Stengers and Latour 2015: 11.

to have been well-regarded and had a successful career—Latour, writing with Isabelle Stengers, notes, "today, however, his name and his work have disappeared from memory, like a liner going down at sea, to be covered over by the enclosing waters."[25] Latour describes his own fascination with Souriau particularly for what he saw as a relation to work that he himself had long been pursuing on modes of existence.[26] Indeed, perhaps Latour saw too much of his own thought in Souriau, and he describes the first version of what he later rewrote with Stengers as "a little too self-interested to be faithful."[27] Certainly with *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* there is a clear influence of Souriau's *The Different Modes of Existence*. There is also similarity between Souriau's notion of *instauration* and Latour's body of thought dating back to his first publications on the production of scientific knowledge and even, as noted above, to his doctoral thesis on Péguy.

Instauration can be understood in terms of how an artist creates a work of art. Latour explains, "an artist, Souriau says, is never the creator, but always the instaurator of a work that comes to him."[28] The author, the sculptor, the artist all experience the sense of the work that wants to be born, of an outside being that almost creates itself. It is similar to Latour's example of the puppeteer whose hands are felt to be moved by the puppets.[29] Like Latour's factishes and mediators, instauration has something of the notion of an in-between middle voice, where the art object is both created and creator. The direction of creation flows from artist to work but also from work to artist. Souriau writes, "up to a certain point, the resultant work is always a novelty, a discovery, a surprise. *So this is what I was looking for*, *what I was destined to do!*"[30] With this there is also risk and judgement to creation. Souriau writes, for instance:

> To create a work of thought is to give birth to a thousand ideas and to submit them to relations, to proportions; it is to invent great, dominant themes and to impose their control over the ideas, those monstrous rebels that need to be subdued time and again. It is also to choose, to select, to discard.[31]

[25] Stengers and Latour 2015: 11. On Souriau's impact: Greimas engages with his work; Souriau is likewise cited by Ricoeur when he discusses Greimas' semiotics; and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari were also influenced by his work. See Greimas 1983; Ricoeur 1981: 283; Lawlor 2011.
[26] Stengers and Latour 2015: 11 note 2.
[27] Stengers and Latour 2015: 11 note 2. See also Latour 2011*b*.
[28] Latour 2013*a*: 160.
[29] Latour 2005*b*: 58–62, 213–218; 2013*a*: 158.
[30] Souriau 2015: 129.
[31] Souriau 2015: 129.

Interpreting Souriau and the process of creation, Latour writes: "You're not in control, and yet there's no one else to take charge. It's enough to make anyone wake up at night in a cold sweat. Anyone who hasn't felt this terror hasn't measured the abyss of ignorance at whose edge creation totters."[32] Along these lines, Stengers and Latour write, "to say of a work of art that it is 'instaured' is to prepare oneself to see the potter as one who welcomes, gathers, prepares, explores and invents."[33]

Likewise, one of the themes in Latour's work is the way writing creates the writer.[34] He writes, for instance, of the "countless surprises generated by the very material act of writing."[35] He began writing as an adolescent and he recounts how much his own thoughts have been developed through continuing the practice of writing in notebooks.[36] For Latour, the importance of this practice is more than just that one's thoughts become organized in the process of putting them into words on a page; it is the surprise that what we create creates us in return—the experience of instauration—that informs his notion of the beings of fiction.

Latour brings this notion of instauration to issues of construction and reprise. Despite his use of the term *construction* in *Laboratory Life*, or perhaps because of it, Latour has backed away from notions of social construction, or at least the way *construction* is associated with *constructivism.*[37] Stengers and Latour write, "instauration has the distinct advantage of not being weighed down by all the metaphorical baggage of constructivism."[38] Instauration provides, instead, an alternative in which construction is not thought to be entirely the fabrication of a human subject.[39] To instaure constructed beings, including scientific facts, is similar to what it is to create.[40] Just as Péguy's reprise involves collaboration to create something new out of what was already there, instauration involves a fabrication of something which belongs to the one fabricating but also to the fabricated. Constructed facts and artifacts surpass their creators. The meanings of texts, too, surpass both authors and readers.

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[32]Latour 2013*a*: 161.
[33]Stengers and Latour 2015: 21.
[34]See Latour 2010*c*; 2016
[35]Latour 2016: 464.
[36]Latour 2016: 464.
[37]Latour 2003; 2004*a*: 36; 2013*a*: 151–178.
[38]Stengers and Latour 2015: 21.
[39]Stengers and Latour 2015: 21.
[40]Stengers and Latour 2015: 23–29.

3.2 Beings of Fiction Are Fabricated and Real

With a turn to the beings of fiction, I am shifting emphasis to ideas—or notions—as they arise when texts are reprised and instaured. In this sense, texts are beings whose action is contingent on how they are instaured and reprised by a reader. In effect then, with this approach, this model of textual performativity recognizes the reader's experience of texts—what I am referring to as the *being of fiction*—as both fabricated and real.[41] Souriau describes beings of fiction as "those phantoms, chimeras, and fairies that are the representations of the imagination."[42] Despite being imaginary, these beings do exist, he argues: "Even the monsters, even the chimeras, even the beings of dreams."[43] Imaginary beings act on the non-imaginary, and Souriau writes, "we have been able to study some of them with the same objective spirit as that of natural history, history, or political economy."[44] Similarly, Latour argues, "this term does not direct our attention toward illusion, toward falsity, but toward what is fabricated, consistent, real."[45] Furthermore, he writes,

> Without any doubt, there is some *exteriority* among the beings of fiction: they impose themselves on us after imposing themselves on those responsible for their instauration, for the latter are more like constituents than "creators." They come to our imagination—no, they *offer* us an imagination that we would not have had without them.[46]

The beings of fiction are entirely fabricated, unconstrained by physics, unlike nature, constructed machines, artifacts, or anything that one might consider "out there" in the world. And yet, like all that is fabricated, these objects surpass their creators, and are performative and have effect upstream and downstream of their creation.

3.2.1 Fabricated Does Not Mean Untrue

Latour rejects the notion that to show something to be *fabricated* is equivalent to showing it to be not real or not trustworthy. He notes that notions of construction and fabrication are

[41] Notice the ambiguity in terminology here on whether it is the text itself or fabricated notions of the text that are beings of fiction. Latour's work is somewhat ambiguous on this, and in my own use, I am refer to both as beings of fiction. The text itself can be said to be a being of fiction for the way it can only have meaning when reprised and instaured; the ideas or notions of the text are beings of fiction in the sense they are what is reprised or instaured from a text.
[42] Souriau 2015: 150.
[43] Souriau 2015: 152.
[44] Souriau 2015: 152.
[45] Latour 2013*a*: 238.
[46] Latour 2013*a*: 240.

used as "weapons in a polarized battle against truth and reality," and he writes, "all too often the implication is that if something is fabricated it is false; likewise, if it is constructed it must also be deconstructible."[47] Along these lines, he writes, "if you assert the indisputable presence of a fact and someone explains to you rather arrogantly that you have created this fact out of your own prejudices and that you are dealing with a 'mere social construction,' you will resist this reduction violently..."[48] What Latour argues, instead, is all facts are fabricated: what is true of vaccines, bread, and machines is true for facts.[49] In Latour's description they are constructed through a process which involves trials and reprise and eventual black-boxing into a package that looks as if it were never constructed at all. Then once constructed, facts become autonomous from their creation.[50] What we read in reference books, for instance, is thus typically detached from the processes by which those facts were constructed and assembled into those references.[51]

Likewise, beings of fiction are not "mere products of the imagination."[52] Latour argues, "everyone will agree that the beings of fiction—in whatever medium—possess a particular type of reality that it is appropriate to cherish and respect."[53] Just as fabrication of facts does not mean the fact is untrue, the fabricated nature of beings of fiction does not imply the negative connotations of untruth applied to terms such as "fiction" or "fantasy."[54] To say beings of fiction are fabricated does not mean that one can or should "treat them as 'indifferent to truth or falsity,' equally distant from reality and unreality, as a form of 'truthful lying,' or as beings authorized to live thanks to the 'suspension of disbelief.' "[55] To approach the Bible as a being of fiction is thus, following Latour, not in any way to call it false or untrue or fantasy, but rather it is a way of recognizing the text as a constructed object that acts on readers in a way distinct from other categories of artifacts.[56]

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[47] Latour 1999*c*: 114, 115. See similar argument in Hacking 1999.
[48] Latour 2004*a*: 74.
[49] Latour 1987: 128–132.
[50] Latour 1999*c*: 127.
[51] For Hacking, facts are timeless. The disagreement then, for Hacking, is not with Latour's process of producing knowledge but one of nominalism and to what the word *fact* refers. Hacking argues that what Latour is doing is not addressing the construction of facts themselves but rather how people come to believe in facts. See Hacking 1999: 80–82.
[52] Latour 2013*a*: 240.
[53] Latour 2013*a*: 239.
[54] On the interaction between fact and fiction, see Latour 2013*a*: 251.
[55] Latour 2013*a*: 240.
[56] The extent to which fabrication of the Bible originates with human action or an act of God is a theological matter outside the scope of this thesis. Certainly, as I will argue in Chapter 4, the notions the community

3.2.2 Fabricated Objects Have Effect

What matters for beings of fiction is the same thing that matters elsewhere for Latour: what effect do they have? That the beings of fiction have effect is clear, Latour argues, if nothing else than by "a hundred treatises on the 'worlds of fiction.' "[57] Moreover, Latour argues, "imagination is never the source but rather the receptacle of beings of fiction.... one becomes imaginative when one is gathered in by works of fiction."[58] Franklin Ginn, for instance, argues that the practice of contemporary gardening in Britain is one in which gardening and gardeners are beings of fiction, where what is imagined about gardening shapes the experience of gardening.[59]

For Latour, beings of fiction, like all other objects—including facts and artifacts—are mediators and thus do the unexpected.[60] For example, Latour describes Jean-Baptiste Oudry's engraving, "The Sculpture and the Statue of Jupiter," in which both the artist and the god sculpted in stone are depicted as being surprised by the other.[61] "In [Oudry's] engraving," Latour writes, "it is Jupiter who opens his arms, in astonishment and terror at the view of his maker."[62] The work of art, so real and so surprised, then acts on the artist who likewise opens his arms in shock at the created. With instauration, Latour says, the creator is often surprised and carried away by their own work.[63] This kind of surprising instauration is found in biblical texts as well. Aaron's golden calf surprised Moses, but apparently it surprised Aaron too.[64] Like all mediators, fabricated beings do more than their creators ever intended: "facts and fetishes allowed us to access reality that no one has ever made."[65] In the same way, a text creates an imaginative reality for a reader, that can be traced to neither author nor reader.

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hold about this construction are performative. Here, however, I am making a more narrow argument that whatever its origins, the Bible, as it is black boxed within evangelicalism, functions as a being of fiction, and thus Latour's work is helpful for understanding its action.

[57] Latour 2013*a*: 239. One such treatise cited by Latour in his work on ANT is Thomas Pavel's *Fictional Worlds*, which I refer to again below. See Latour 2005*b*: 55; Pavel 1986.

[58] Latour 2013*a*: 246.

[59] Ginn 2016.

[60] On mediators, see Chapter 1.

[61] Latour 2010*c*: vi–x.

[62] Latour 2010*c*: ix.

[63] See Latour 2013*a*: 158–160.

[64] Exodus 32:24.

[65] Latour 2010*c*: 28.

Beings of fiction have real effect, doing things to their creators and to the communities in which they are held, attached, reprised, and instaured. For Latour, society is made up of humans and nonhumans and is held together and stabilized by fabricated objects, fact and artifact.[66] Beings of fiction hold society together just as technical artifacts and other nonhuman objects do. Furthermore, the fabricated objects—beings of fiction, facts, or physical artifacts—allow humans to do things otherwise not possible, and they can outlast the whims and short-lived actions of humans. Latour writes, "nonhumans are at once pliable and durable; they can be shaped very quickly but, once shaped, last far longer than the interactions that fabricated them."[67]

Fabrications act on those who fabricate them, sometimes sequentially and sometimes simultaneously: we are fabricators and fabricated. In organizations, for instance, at one moment we create a meeting schedule and at the next we are bound by that schedule. In politics we fabricate a leader and lend them our power even as we are made to do what that fabricated authority then demands.[68] Likewise, Latour argues we are subject to works of art. They engage us just as non-fictional beings and non-art objects do.[69] Similarly, I argue, biblical texts as beings of fiction provides notions of how to live, human relationality, meaning and purpose, and the human condition, among many other notions. The communities and traditions built around the biblical texts have been carried away by the texts.[70] Through the process of reprise and instauration, the biblical texts are both constructed and constructing, even as the notions about the Bible that configure its performativity are also concurrently constructed and constructing.

3.2.3 What Matters Is the Quality of Construction

Given that beings of fiction are fabricated beings with effect, what matters is the quality of their construction. There are clearly different kinds of fabrication. For Latour, a sentence "fabricated" by a young scientist who "fudged his data" is a very different type of fabrication than the many other sentences written by scientists who are also fabricating facts—the latter having the positive

[66] Latour 1996*b*: 370; Felski 2015*b*: 157–158. John Searle would add social and institutional facts—things like money or marriage—to that which stabilizes society. See Searle 1995.
[67] Latour 1994: 61. On this topic, see Berger 1967; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Berger and Pullberg 1965.
[68] Latour 2012: 170.
[69] Latour 2013*a*: 241. See, also, Felski 2011: 587.
[70] See Latour's work on religion as a mode of existence. Latour 2013*a*,*c*.

connotations associated with Latour's *well-fabricated* data.[71] As mentioned in discussion of the Mafalda comic (Chapter 2) in which Mafalda's father realizes he is being controlled by his cigarettes, Latour combines notions of fact and fetish into *factish*.[72] Just as a fact is said—wrongly in Latour's mind—to be accurate only if it is *not constructed*, likewise to say that religious object or belief is fabricated, or to call it a fetish, is to—also wrongly—say it is not real, only an object created by humans with no actual power.

When technical artifacts or religious objects—machines, tools, beliefs, or fetishes—are well-fabricated, they are what works and what make us act rightly. Latour writes, "*because* it is *well* constructed, it may *therefore* be *quite true*."[73] The fabrication of facts, when done rightly, when well-fabricated, is for Latour equivalent to what elsewhere would be called a "discovery."[74] Well-fabricated facts will act autonomously and, thus, would be re-discoverable, or at a minimum replicable, in an independent laboratory.[75] Conversely, Latour writes of the fear not that data was fabricated but that it was mistakenly or wrongly fabricated: "every scientist wakes up at night tormented by this question: 'But what if it were merely an artifact?' "[76] With the biblical texts, this remains an ongoing concern for theological interpretation: is a text of concern well-constructed or merely an artifact of history and culture? I will return in Chapter 4 to this question of how fabricated notions of texts, including notions of a text's origin and its author's meaning, modify the meaning and action of texts.

3.3 Characteristics of the Beings of Fiction

In adopting an approach following Latour's beings of fiction, I am developing a model of action in which *notions of a text* are actors that do things alongside the text. As I have argued, these beings—ideas or notions, in other words—are fabricated but also real. Furthermore, as beings of fiction, these ideas surpass both text and reader. I will now argue that their function in shaping performativity has four notable characteristics as objects that: 1) must be reprised to act, 2) grip others, 3) create possibility, and 4) are not determinative.

[71] Latour 1987: 49.
[72] Latour 1999*a*; 1999*c*: 266–292, 306.
[73] Latour 2013*a*: 157.
[74] Latour 1999*c*: 168.
[75] On autonomy see, Latour 1999*c*; 2013*a*: 151–178.
[76] Latour 2013*a*: 159. See also Latour 1999*c*: 272–276; 2010*c*: 63–64.

3.3.1 Beings of Fiction Must Be Reprised

A characteristic of beings of fiction is they can only exist when reprised. In an interview with John Tresch, Latour describes the significance of *reprise*: "In Péguy's beautiful argument, the text is 'on your shoulder': you are responsible for it, and if you don't really bring it out, remake it, it's gone."[77] Unlike other objects, texts have no moving parts, no active agency, no way to bring something about without another's enacting of that performativity. It is only in the reprise, or instauration, of the text that it begins to act. In other words, they are "in need of our solicitude."[78] Latour similarly states, "no other type of being imposes such fragility, such responsibility."[79] To illustrate this contingent existence of beings of fiction, Latour writes:

> The guardrail above a precipice that keeps you from jumping into the void keeps on protecting you with its steel uprights, whether you want it to or not. It is not like the story that has made your heart race when the hero threatened to throw himself into the precipice and was held back, at the last minute, by a guardrail of words. The latter is a story you have to read, you have to hold it together, charging it with your own knowledge and your own emotions.[80]

Latour continues:

> No one takes that path through the mountains any longer, yet the steel guardrail still stands, even if the blacksmith who made it, the person who ordered it, and the walkers it used to protect are long gone. A terrible obligation, Péguy called it, the one that makes every reader responsible for Homer: the absence of Homer's reader swallows up the word; the negligence of Homer's reader reduces it to rubble.[81]

As Latour argues with this illustration, beings of fiction require other objects to hold them—to enact, reprise, instaure. Together with Stengers, he writes, "it's as if works of fiction lean on us; as if, without us, they would fall down."[82] In other words, the text, and every being of fiction, must be taken up to live.

Note, however, that even as beings of fiction must be reprised to act, they exhibit a kind of permanence impossible for physical objects. Thomas Pavel argues, for instance, "Hamlet, Anna Karenina, Sherlock Holmes, Macbeth's dagger, Des Esseintes' mansion, Proust's madeleine, are

[77] Tresch 2013: 305.
[78] Stengers and Latour 2015: 57–61.
[79] Latour 2013*a*: 249.
[80] Latour 2013*a*: 248.
[81] Latour 2013*a*: 249.
[82] Stengers and Latour 2015: 60.

constantly talked about both by literary critics and by ordinary readers as if these characters and objects were fully individuated and, in some unspecified way, as if they empirically existed."[83] Because of their non-physicality, they are always available. Moreover, their very characteristic of only existing when reprised means that they can never wear out, and in this sense they outlast physical artifacts.[84] Pavel's work raises other questions about how this imaginary, fictional world is composed: what is its shape, its limits, its extent, its gaps?[85] It is in the constraints of the imagination that they come alive, for the worlds of fiction, as vast as they are, are worlds that come into being and continue to exist only as they are reprised and instaured.

3.3.2 Beings of Fiction Must Grip to Reprise

There can be no reprise without someone to hold, or be held by, the being of fiction. If, for example, a magazine article is too boring for people to bring themselves to read it, the article cannot have any effect. Likewise it would have no effect if it were not read simply because it was incoherent or badly written. Once the reader looks away, once their attention is lost, any possibility of performativity is also lost—assuming, of course, that they do not remember and think about the fragments they did manage to read. In contrast are good books that linger in the imagination, a film one keeps thinking about, or a piece of music that one replays in the mind. Even an unsatisfactory or unknown ending may be performative if it keeps one in suspense or curiosity.

Only by evoking a response can a work be performative. Latour writes, "someone who does not feel held and engendered by the requirements of the work will never be inhabited by it."[86] If no work is read, one cannot do criticism, but, conversely, Latour argues, if a work does grip you, you must do criticism. In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour writes, "if you are listening to what people are saying, they will explain at length how and why they are deeply *attached*, *moved*, *affected* by the works of art which 'make them' feel things."[87] In *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, he characterizes the way works of art grip their audience, writing, "it is an incontestably and terribly

[83] Pavel 1986: 31.
[84] Stengers and Latour 2015: 59. This is a point Searle makes about institutional facts as well. Unlike physical artifacts, they only get stronger with use. See Searle 1995: 57.
[85] Pavel 1986: 73–113.
[86] Latour 2013*a*: 241.
[87] Latour 2005*b*: 236.

demanding mode," one that inevitably evokes responses: " 'It fell flat.' 'It leaves me cold.' Or, conversely, 'It's come together.' 'It works.' 'That's it!' "[88] Furthermore, "if listeners are gripped by a piece, it is not at all because they are projecting their own pathetic subjectivity on it; it is because the work demands that they, insignificant amateurs, brilliant interpreters, or passionate critics, become part of its journey of instauration."[89] It is, likewise, in the way the Bible grips its readers that it acts in and through those communities.

Beings of fiction bring about change, in part, by assembling their own audience. Although preceding Latour's work on ANT and beings of fiction, Lloyd Bitzer's work on rhetorical situation is consistent with and, indeed, helpful toward, understanding the function of texts within actor-networks. Bitzer writes, "the rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change."[90] Bitzer presupposes an audience and rhetorical situation in which communication can evoke discourse and enact change. Laurie Gries argues that works catalyze change, in part, by first creating these assemblages.[91] For Gries what is important is seeing visual objects as *things* rather than texts that only represent or embody meaning. The difference, in her description, is that things assemble and gather others whereas texts are typically thought to be more passive. While I would not make this distinction between texts and things—I argue both are objects—where Gries' work, and Bitzer's likewise, is helpful is toward this notion that the text itself is bringing an actor-network together around it. Rita Felski similarly argues, "poems and paintings possess as much ontological reality as nitrogen or Napoleon: they are actors knotted into forms of association that enlist our interest and help make things happen."[92] The text forms a locus of action as it grips a community and brings about change through the humans and nonhumans it assembles around itself.[93]

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[88] Latour 2013*a*: 245.
[89] Latour 2013*a*: 241.
[90] Bitzer 1968: 4.
[91] Gries 2015.
[92] Felski 2015*a*: 739.
[93] This is what I argue was brought about by the discovery of the lost text during Josiah's temple repairs (see Chapter 1). The biblical text, when found, assembles an entire nation around itself and enacts change.

3.3.3 Beings of Fiction Create Possibility for Response

Another characteristic of the beings of fiction is the way they create possibility for response. Whether one's own work or another's, the beings of fiction, once created, transcend their creation. Latour writes:

> If the interpretations of a work diverge so much, it is not at all because the constraints of reality and truth have been "suspended" but because the work must possess many folds, engender many partial subjectivities, and because the more we interpret it the more we unfold the multiplicity of those who love it as well as the multiplicity of what they love in it.[94]

Beings of fiction allow, even invite, the recipient—reader, viewer, listener—to respond. In other words, the beings of fiction create their own possibility of reprise. In Latour's words, the one who loves Bach "receives from Bach, we might almost say that he 'downloads' from Bach, the wherewithal to appreciate him."[95] In Ricoeur's description the text projects a world for the reader to inhabit.[96] Music and other beings of fiction create their own enjoyment and possibility of response simply because they are there, without requiring effort on the part of the one listening, viewing, or reading. The art evokes its own response.

Latour's comment about the exteriority of the beings of fiction, that "they offer us an imagination that we would not have had without them," is a topic on which many others have written.[97] These beings, for instance, are a means of making possible an alternative vision of reality. This possibility of a different future is what Donald Hall speaks of in *Reading Sexualities* when he describes being exposed to different possible worlds as a young gay man in the American south.[98] It is likewise the impact of texts that is developed in work such as Walter Brueggemann's *The Prophetic Imagination*.[99] It is also what Miranda Fricker describes in her book, *Epistemic Injustice*, where she argues that without access to concepts and ideas we are hermeneutically constrained and have limited ability to interpret the world or take action.[100]

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[94] Latour 2013*a*: 241.
[95] Latour 2013*a*: 241.
[96] Ricoeur 1991.
[97] Latour 2013*a*: 240.
[98] Hall 2009.
[99] Brueggemann 2001.
[100] Fricker 2007.

Beings of fiction give us new ways of interacting with the world, new possibilities of imagination and of seeing and acting. This is evident, too, with children, who are exceptionally good at creating their own beings of fiction. These imaginary objects—entirely fabricated yet real enough—are said to be means through which they work out their possibilities of meaning and action. For those who are adults, with our more limited imaginations and somewhat lost ability to create lasting imaginary objects out of nothing, the exteriorized beings of fiction do something similar, providing a means to allow us to work through reality in some fictional way.

3.3.4 Beings of Fiction Are Not Determinative

For the text to act, it must grip a reader, but that does not mean it is determinative in what it does once it has hold of a person or, indeed, an entire community. As Latour writes, "being 'carried away' by a subway train and 'carried away' by the beauty of a narrative are two different things."[101] In the case of the beings of fiction, the nature of that *being carried away* is entirely contingent on how the text or being is reprised and with what other notions and actors it forms a hybrid. The work grips people, but does not determine how they are gripped, how they interpret it—only that they must do so.[102] What the being of fiction does depends on the person who it grips and how that person is connected to others. In other words, what the text does is contingent on the configuration of hybrid in which it is read.

The notions held together with the text are performative, and the action of the text emerges contingent on how the hybrid object is composed. In the case of evangelicalism, for instance, notions like *authoritative*, *inerrant*, *word of God*, *inspired*, *trustworthy*, *important*, *a text through which God speaks*, and *something I should read during my daily devotional*, when part of the Bible-reader hybrid, all change how it acts. In other words, the text is nondeterminative because of its need to be reprised. It comes alive in the imagination, projecting a world to inhabit. It contributes to action, and it does things as it is reprised, but it should not be said that it is determinative. This is not to say it is not *felt* to be determinative; certainly one's engagement with a text may leave one thinking that there is no choice but to do what it says.[103]

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[101] Latour 2013*a*: 248.
[102] Latour 2013*a*: 241.
[103] John Bunyan's experience of the Bible would be an example of a text experienced as determinative. See Ward 1990.

Consider the biblical story of Balaam and his talking donkey. Balaam is recruited to curse the people of Israel on behalf of the people of Moab, but he is warned by God, an angel, and even his donkey that he must not do so. Following this mandate, he utters oracles of blessing instead of curses.[104] Yet even as those who spoke—God, angel, or donkey—acted to prevent one action, their words are not determinative, and Balaam still provides advice on how to seduce the people of Israel into offending God to such an extent that a death plague is sent to start killing them off, with catastrophic consequences for everyone—for Balaam, his people, and his enemies.[105]

The linguistic content of a text is likewise not determinative. As discussed in Chapter 2, what the text does emerges with its attachment to other objects within a hybrid. Specifically, the notions of the text brought to this hybrid, or emerging within this hybrid, modify the action of the text. The characteristics of beings of fiction described Souriau and Latour, for this reason, are not the same as that found in reader reception theory.[106] Texts are not passive; they are not at the whims of those who receive them—the text must be instaured and reprised, acting both *on* and *with* the reader to enact its own reception. Like any other type of object, what the text does is relational; its meaning and action emerge in the configuration of attachments between the text and others. In this sense, the non-determinacy of texts is closer to Ricoeur's approach to texts, where the text presents a world to inhabit, one that is given space within the reader's imagination to which there is no set way of inhabiting.[107] This theoretical approach to beings of fiction, where the text acts on its readers and readers act on the text, is thus one of a dialectical relationship between text and readers.

3.4 Characteristics in Actor-Networks

If we take these characteristics of beings of fiction as fabricated objects that require reprise, grip their audience, create possibility for response, and are non-determinant, to all these characteristics we could add a qualifier *within an actor network*. A characteristic of being *well-fabricated* does not mean well-fabricated for an individual reader, since no such things exists. The emphasis should

[104] Numbers 22-24.
[105] Numbers 25, 31; Revelation 2:14.
[106] Latour 2011*b*: 325; Stengers and Latour 2015: 60. See Chapter 4 on reader response theory and hermeneutics on actor-networks.
[107] Ricoeur 1976.

be instead on whether the object is well-crafted, well-put together, for these attachments in *this* hybrid and *this* actor-network. This is the difference between asking if fiction is *well-written* or well-written *for its intended readers*. It is to ask about the quality and characteristics of the being of fiction's reprise, not on its own, but as reprised *by an actor-network*—to ask how it grips *the actor-network* and creates possibility *for an actor-network*.

The being of fiction is a product of an actor-network; it mediates between the actor-network of the creative event and the actor-network of a recipient; and it is now interpreted within an actor-network. As discussed in Chapter 1, the text mediates between the authorial community and the reading community. On one side is a vast community of actors whose action is mediated through a single inscription, an object that carries—and transforms and betrays—that action. On the other side is a community of readers, made of many beings, human and nonhuman, attached and interconnected. To say a text has these characteristics *within an actor-network* is the same as to say simply that *it has these characteristics*—there is no difference.

3.5 Beings of Fiction and Hermeneutics

If texts are beings of fiction, and they must be reprised and instaured to have meaning and effect, what does this mean, then, for the performativity of texts? What does this way of tracing action reveal about how texts bring about change? And what then are the political and ethical implications for the reading community—how are texts in fact read and how then can the community more intentionally configure itself to read in ways that have an outcome consistent with their beliefs and values? The focus of the next chapter will be the way that notions of a text—the way it functions as a being of fiction—are assembled together with text and readers, the politics of this configuration, the ethical choices in which this performativity implicates the community, and the way this contributes to a pragmatic, or realpolitik, approach to hermeneutics.

4

Realhermeneutik in Actor-Networks

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Chapter Overview

In the previous chapters I have argued for a model of textual performativity constituted by two events: an author-text creative event and a text-reader interpretive event. Both events occur within actor-networks, between which the text mediates as an autonomous artifact. In this model, then, the text embodies the meaning and action exteriorized in the first actor-network event, transporting and adding to, subtracting from, transforming, and distorting that meaning and action as it is carried to the second actor-network event. In this chapter I will argue for an approach in which reading and writing are recognized to be cognitive events in which author and reader anticipate and reconstruct each other. Moreover, I will argue that the text serves as

an index through which past agency and action can be inferred, and these abducted notions modify the text's interpretation in the present.

This actor-networks approach to hermeneutics makes it possible to address a question of the role of authorial intent in the meaning and action that emerges in the relationship between text and reader. On one hand, I will argue, the text is autonomous and an author's past intentions have no direct bearing on the meaning fabricated by a reader, but on the other hand, reconstructed notions of intent—as distinct from the past intent itself—do have an authoritative role in readers' cognitive processes. It is with this focus on textual interpretation *as it is*, not *as it should be*, that this approach functions as what I am calling a *Realhermeneutik*.

To develop my theoretical framework, I will first turn to the work of Stanley Fish and Ralph Rader, arguing that in both their stated disagreements and their shared approach to meaning, their work contributes to an actor-networks approach to reader cognition. I will next turn to the work of Alfred Gell to extend this Fish-Rader model of cognition, tracing ways in which a text serves as an index of agency and action through which a reader constructs a sense of a text's origin and function and then uses that notion to interpret the text.

I will then apply this hermeneutic approach to notions of biblical texts, including notions of authorship, historicity, genre, and intention, among others, as they are reconstructed in evangelical communities. This approach, I will argue, identifies ways in which these notions of a text, including of its origins and of the world depicted by the text—and that relationality with the world outside the text—together function to shape the meaning and performativity that emerges in the text-reader event.

Finally, I will turn to Latour's work on facts, values, and politics to argue that description is prescriptive, and, for this reason, these constructed notions of a text are necessarily political. To say something about authorial intent, for example, is not only descriptive analysis but also a prescriptive claim for how a text should be read. What can be known or believed by a community about the origins of the Bible, or any other text, is entangled with that community's values, and, therefore, cognition about texts is not disinterested but instead emerges within the specific social context and configuration of a community.

4.1 Stanley Fish and the Meaning of Reader Experience

Fish brings a performative view of texts to reader response theory, describing the meaning of texts in terms of their illocutionary force.[1] This method emphasizes what a text *does* to a reader rather than what a text *means* to a reader.[2] Fish describes, for instance, a method of teaching focused on bringing students' attention to the performative implications of components of a text, such as a sentence or a particular linguistic construction. He describes his approach as a "language-sensitizing device," in which one asks, "what does that ——— do?"[3] In this way, he writes, his students discover, "how much the prose of other writers controls them and in how many ways."[4] Fish notes that when he asks this question, his students at first instead answer the question of what something *means*. "After a while," he writes, "they begin to see the value of considering effects and begin to think of language as an experience rather than a repository of extractable meaning."[5] This focus on experience, on what a text *does*, is central to Fish's work on reader response theory.

4.1.1 Performativity Is Temporal

With this emphasis on performativity, Fish's method focuses on the temporal experiences of the reader, locating meaning in these experiences as they occur in time. Consequently, meaning, for Fish, is not possessed by a text but rather acquired within "a structure of experience."[6] In "Literature in the Reader," Fish describes his method as "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader to the words as they succeed one another on the page."[7] In "What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?", Fish describes this as an approach "in which the focus of attention is shifted from the spatial context of a page and its observable regularities to the temporal context of a mind and its experiences."[8] In other words, Fish is

[1] Fish 1980: 88. See also 197-245.
[2] This is evident, for instance, in Fish's work on Milton where he interprets *Paradise Lost* by what it does to the reader and the reader's response to the poem is framed terms of "humiliation" and "education." See Fish 1967: ix.
[3] Fish 1980: 66.
[4] Fish 1980: 67.
[5] Fish 1980: 67.
[6] Fish 1980: 91.
[7] Fish 1980: 42, 46.
[8] Fish 1980: 69, 91. Ralph Rader responds to these two essays in Rader 1974*a*,*b*.

interested in the responses of the reader in the moment and with what the text is doing to the reader as the reader engages with it.[9]

To illustrate this temporal performativity, Fish quotes a sentence from Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*:

> That Judas perished by hanging himself, there is no certainty in Scripture: though in one place it seems to affirm it, and by a doubtful word hath given occasion to translate it; yet in another place, in a more punctual description, it maketh it improbable, and seems to overthrow it.[10]

Fish argues that there is meaning found in the uncertainty this sentence evokes in the reader. He describes it as a "progressive decertainizing," where the reader makes predictions about where the sentence is going but is made to doubt those expectations as preliminary meanings are found to be wrong.[11] He writes, "the prose is continually opening, but then closing, on the possibility of verification in one direction or another."[12] It is this temporal experience of uncertainty and being wrong that is, in effect, the meaning of the text.[13]

4.1.2 Meaning Is in the Event, Not in the Artifact

Meaning in Fish's theoretical approach is the meaning of a cognitive event, one that happens in the mind of the reader. He describes his view: "for me, reading (and comprehension in general) is an *event*, no part of which is to be discarded."[14] Even a "simple assertion" is an event: "it is an experience; it occurs; it does something; it makes us do something."[15] Included in the meaning of this event would be both affective responses and rational, abstract thoughts. For instance, Fish writes, "very often ... cognitive processes—calculating, comparing, deducting—form the largest

[9] Ralph Rader calls this "slow-motion analysis." See Rader 1974*a*: 263.
[10] Quoted in Fish 1980: 23.
[11] Fish 1980: 23. Fish later states his regret for the phrase "progressive decertainizing," calling it a "barbarism." See Fish 1980: 141.
[12] Fish 1980: 24.
[13] Browne's sentence may reflect more of an archaic style of writing than the example of the temporal uncertainty that Fish presents it as. I include this illustration here because Fish's analysis is a point of contention with Ralph Rader and that conflict itself is illustrative of the two theoretical approaches (see further discussion below).
[14] Emphasis added. Fish 1980: 48.
[15] Fish 1980: 32.

part of our response to a work, and any description of its effects must take this into account."[16] Moreover, Fish makes explicit his model of meaning as a *cognitive* event with his stated shift "from the spatial context of a page" to "the temporal context of a mind and its experiences."[17]

Fish describes his approach as "a method of analysis which focuses on the reader rather than on the artifact," or, in other words, on an "event rather than an entity."[18] With this method, Fish is explicitly rejecting Wimsatt and Beardsley's affective fallacy, in which there is "a confusion between a poem and its *results*," or as they also put it, "what it *is* and what it *does*."[19] Fish argues, by contrast, "a poem *is* what it does."[20] False starts, unsuccessful attempts to infer meaning, meaning made "on the basis of incomplete evidence," and any "mistakes" made by the reader are part of the cognitive event. "They have been experienced," Fish argues. "They have existed in the mental life of the reader; they mean."[21] He later summarizes his approach: "I wanted to say that everything a reader does, even if he later undoes it, is a part of the 'meaning experience' and should not be discarded."[22] With Fish's focus on reader experience, and specifically temporal experience, he is defining *meaning* as the meaning evoked in the mind of the reader in the reading event—in contrast to locating meaning in the writing event or in the artifact itself.

To explain this definition in terms of my own working model, one could identify three loci of significance: the author–text creative event, the text as autonomous artifact, and the text-reader interpretive event. To speak of an author's intentions is to refer to the meaning of the author–text event; to speak of the meaning of a text is to refer to the text itself. And defining meaning as

[16] Fish 1980: 55. Fish contrasts his approach to I. A. Richards on the basis that Richards wrongly rejects the role of rational cognition as meaningful. It is clear from Fish's work that Fish considers affective, emotional responses and logical thought to be part of reader experience. Note that *cognitive* in my use refers to anything occurring in the mind. This would be consistent with Fish's argument about reader experience, although Fish himself uses the word *cognitive* more narrowly to contrast his own approach with other's arguments about the role of rational thought processes. See Fish 1980: 52–57, 100, 105.

[17] Fish 1980: 69, 91.

[18] Fish 1980: 2, 42.

[19] Wimsatt and Beardsley 1949: 31. Fish refers to the affective fallacy as a fallacy itself. See Fish 1980: 22–23, 42, 344, 349.

[20] Fish 1980: 349. Although Wimsatt and Beardsley make their argument about poetry specifically, Fish rejects the affective fallacy for both poetry and prose, bringing his method of analysis to examples from multiple genres of writing.

[21] Fish 1980: 48. Fish returns to this point again in "Facts and Fictions: A Reply to Ralph Rader." See Fish 1980: 144.

[22] Fish 1980: 3–4.

what happens in the reader's experience, as Fish does, sets the locus of meaning in the text-reader event.[23] In this way Fish shifts the frame of reference away from the artifact entirely. He preempts debate over what a text means or whether authorial intent matters because those questions are predicated on meaning being that of the author's intended meaning or in the meaning of the artifact—both of which Fish rejects. With his theoretical move from entity to event, the artifact itself has no meaning because *meaning* has a different definition in Fish's system.

4.1.3 Despite the Physical Nature of (Printed) Texts, Meaning Is Not Static

Texts do not have static meaning despite their static content; rather their meaning is continually changing, similar to that of kinetic art.[24] Fish points out that this non-static meaning is counterintuitive given the nature of texts as physical artifacts:

> The objectivity of the text is an illusion and, moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The illusion is one of self-sufficiency and completeness. A line of print or a page is so obviously *there*—it can be handled, photographed, or put away—that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it.[25]

He continues:

> Literature is a kinetic art, but the physical form it assumes prevents us from seeing its essential nature, even though we so experience it. The availability of a book to the hand, its presence on a shelf, its listing in a library catalogue—all of these encourage us to think of it as a stationary object. Somehow when we put a book down, we forget that while we were reading, *it* was moving (pages turning, lines receding into the past) and forget too that *we* were moving with it.[26]

For Fish, since meaning is in the reading event, constituted by the temporal cognitive experiences of a reader as they engage with a text, the meaning of a text cannot be determined outside of that experience. Texts may take physical forms, but their meaning is in the mind, not in the artifact.

4.1.4 When Meaning Is in Reader Experience, Meaning Is Indeterminate

When meaning is defined as that experienced by the reader in the event of reading, including all the temporal experiences that compose that event, meaning is simply too fluid and contingent

[23] Fish 1980: 349.
[24] On texts and kinetic agency, see Miller 2007; Pflugfelder 2015. Note that I am not claiming that all texts necessarily have static content, only drawing attention to the fact that interpretation is not static.
[25] Fish 1980: 43.
[26] Fish 1980: 43.

to be able to make conclusive statements about. "What I am suggesting," Fish writes, "is that there is no direct relationship between the meaning of a sentence (paragraph, novel, poem) and what its words mean."[27] Fish's view is one, thus, of "regarding human beings as at every moment creating the experiential spaces into which a personal knowledge flows."[28] In other words, meaning is as variable as the human mind, and what happens in the mind, for Fish, is too complex, too unrepeatable for anything consistent to be said.

To illustrate this point, Fish turns to two seemingly equivalent phrases: "the book of the father" and "the father's book." Typically they would be thought to have the same meaning. Fish argues, however, that they are not equivalent. Their respective emphases evoke different experiences, and meaning, as Fish argues, is in the experience.[29] Indeed, consider what a current reader of this paragraph experiences. What images are evoked with *the book of the father* and *the father's book*? It is impossible to say, and for Fish, that would be the point.

Moreover, saying something about meaning changes that meaning. Fish argues that to say something about the experience of the text is to change the experience of the text: "The meaning of an utterance, I repeat, is its experience—all of it—and that experience is immediately compromised the moment you say something about it."[30] Thus, Fish writes, "you are left ... with the impossible enterprise of understanding understanding; impossible because it is endless, endless because to have reached an end is to have performed an operation that once again extends it beyond your reach."[31] With this argument he is pointing out the impossibility of analyzing experience, in the sense that the act of analysis introduces change and thus invalidates the account. To observe is to create an effect.[32]

To reframe this in actor-network concepts, Fish's approach can be understood as, by implication, an argument that because meaning is contingent on cognition within a fluid configuration of a text-reader hybrid, little, if anything, can be said about this meaning prior to the event.

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[27] Fish 1980: 32.
[28] Fish 1980: 94.
[29] Fish 1980: 32.
[30] Fish 1980: 65.
[31] Fish 1980: 96.
[32] In this sense Fish restates what has been known to physicists about observation and uncertainty since Heisenberg.

There is infinite possibility for what the reader can experience in the event of reading—just about any meaning could emerge, contingent on some assemblage of actors attached to text and reader to make this meaning possible.

The difference between Fish and myself on the impossibility of saying anything about meaning, is that I would place more constraints on what meaning and action are possible than Fish does. In this way I follow Umberto Eco, who writes, "to say that a text has potentially no end does not mean that every act of interpretation can have a happy end."[33] While there may be an *infinite* range of possible meaning that can emerge from a specific text, this is not equivalent to a single text encoding *all* meaning. The linguistic content of a text will necessarily constrain meaning and action in some way—if only by the bounds of logic necessary for coherence within linguistic systems. There will be some meanings that simply could never emerge from a specific text.[34]

4.1.5 Texts Do Participate

Fish acknowledges that he frames his position "provocatively," and, in fact, he does leave room for a text to contribute to reader experience.[35] For instance, he argues that "the information an utterance gives, its message, is a constituent of, but certainly not to be identified with, its meaning."[36] This is important because Fish is sometimes misinterpreted as rejecting the idea that any one specific text brings something unique to the reader.[37] If meaning is equated to experience that is only in the mind of the reader, one might ask, what does it matter what is encoded in the text? It is clear, however, that Fish does, both in his own practice and in his theoretical argument, recognize texts as bringing something to the reader. For instance, in "Literature in the Reader," he asks what parts of specific poems do to their readers, extending an approach he had developed in his work on *Paradise Lost*.[38] In the introduction to *Is There a Text in This Class?*, he argues that in his approach production of meaning is a "joint responsibility" of text and reader.[39] Fish

[33] Eco et al. 1992: 24. On construal of meaning, see also Ricoeur 1976: 79.
[34] See discussion of cognition in Ralph Rader's approach to texts (later in this chapter) for further constraints to meaning as reading occurs in practice.
[35] Fish 1980: 32.
[36] Fish 1980: 32.
[37] See for instance, Felski 2015*b*: 168.
[38] Fish 1980: 21.
[39] Fish 1980: 3.

may argue that there are *no limits* to what a reader could experience in reading any one text—it seems he thinks a text could mean anything—but he does not argue that this experience would be equivalent to what the same reader would experience with a *different* text.

4.1.6 Fish in Actor-Networks

To return this discussion of Fish's reader response theory to my model of textual performativity, recall that in the working model I have been developing, there are two events mediated by a text. The first is the event in which an author creates a text (an author–text event); the second is an event in which that text is read (a text-reader event). Between these two events, the text functions as a Latourian mediator, transmitting action from the first event to the second. (Recall also that this is not passive or inert; the mediator shifts, translates, modifies, and redirects this action.) As I have argued, Fish places meaning within the second event, which he characterizes as a temporal event consisting of the experiences of the reader as they read. Fish's model of meaning shows the importance of the other actors assembled together with text and reader. The reader is a participant in the event of reading, as is the text, and as are, in my model, the notions brought to the text in the cognitive event. What Fish does is bring our attention to the way assembled people, notions, and practices act on text and reader in the moment of reading. These notions and other assembled actors are not static, and the temporal experience of a reader is contingent on the fluid way text and reader are embedded together in an actor-network and, indeed, on the way the actor-network is reconfigured through the act of reading.

Contingency of Meaning and the Ethics of Reading

Fish's argument that cognitive processes change the meaning of the text suggests a broader point for texts in actor-networks: to add analysis is to change the meaning of the text. In this sense, it could be argued, as Fish does, that meaning is compromised by analysis. Fish writes:

> It follows then that we should not try to analyze language at all. The human mind, however, seems unable to resist the impulse to investigate its own processes; but the least (and probably the most) we can do is proceed in such a way as to permit as little distortion as possible.[40]

[40] Fish 1980: 65–66.

While I do not think Fish actually intends to take this position—it seems to me he is making a point about meaning being located in experience rather than actually arguing against commentary—his comment raises an important point about underlying values (or thought) present in fundamentalism.

For those who read the Bible with the notion that there is a plain, or straightforward, reading available to the reader, there is, in this sense, a legitimate concern that extraneous commentary hurts rather than helps one engage faithfully with the text. For this reason, one could have a sympathetic view of a fundamentalist argument that commentaries and scholarly work do more harm than good. In this view, the Bible is meant to be read in its unaltered, untainted form. On the basis of the theory of texts I am developing in this thesis, this view is untenable—there is no such thing as unmediated access to meaning—but fundamentalists are correct that any notions and practices brought to the text would reconfigure the action of the text within their communities. To say something about a biblical text is to change what that biblical text is doing.[41]

As I have discussed in previous chapters, there are ethical implications to this way that meaning and action are contingent on the assemblage of humans and nonhumans. To follow Fish, then, in recognizing that meaning shifts as meaning is analyzed is to draw attention to the ethical implications of reading practices. How a community reads, talks about, reflects on, and analyzes a text modifies meaning; and when this contribution is recognized, it can itself be analyzed and modified to better conform to a community's values. Indeed, following a Latourian approach, it could be argued that the fact that notions brought to the text alter meaning and performativity warrants more analysis and commentary, not less. Within the context of the values of a fundamentalist interpretive community, however, it may be that reading with less attachment to scholarly or critical analysis *is* the value to which the community wishes its practices to conform. What this approach does in either case, then, is enable reflection on these values and practices.

[41] See discussion of notions of biblical gender roles in Chapter 2.

Meaning is Contingent on Meaning

The conclusion of Fish's method is that meaning is always going to be whatever the reader thinks that meaning is. He writes: "theories always work and they will always produce exactly the results they predict, results that will be immediately compelling to those for whom the theory's assumptions and enabling principles are self-evident. Indeed, the trick would be to find a theory that *didn't* work."[42] Anything that works for creating meaning is thus thought to be valid in Fish's approach; there is no value system by which to judge a theory as long as it contributes to reader experience. It is with this open-ended approach which evaluates only reader response, not theories of text themselves, that Fish is able in the same move to both adopt and reject other theoretical approaches.

The implications of speech-act theory is one such case. Indeed, Fish points out that utterances are "produced in a situation by and for intentional beings" and he argues that speech-act theory thus "poses a direct challenge to the autonomy of the text."[43] For someone notorious for holding the view that the meaning of a text has *no relation* to what the author meant for it to mean, this seems to be a surprising position to take. What Fish characterizes as lack of autonomy from authorial intentions, however, has no bearing on the meaning of the text since *meaning* is still defined as the meaning experienced in the event of reading. By implication, then, what matters is not what the author intended, only what the reader *thinks* the author intended.[44]

Fish rejects authorial intent as authoritative not because he believes authorial intent does not matter but because he believes there is no limit to what meaning the author could be thought to have had. For example, Fish argues against "an unexamined and highly suspect assumption that one can read directly from the description of a text (however derived) to the shape or quality of its author's mind."[45] This might be taken as Fish rejecting the role of notions of authorial intent in the experience of the reader, but Fish, here, is not arguing that the reader does not or cannot attempt to reconstruct a notion of what the author was doing in the act of writing a text. Rather, he writes, "the counterargument to this assumption is not that it cannot be done ... but that it can

[42] Fish 1980: 68.
[43] Fish 1980: 69.
[44] I will return to this point again in discussion of Ralph Rader's work.
[45] Fish 1980: 72.

be done all too easily, and in any direction one likes."[46] The author's intent is not authoritative, for Fish, because the attempt to uncover authorial intent could evoke too many possible meanings—it is constrained only by the configuration of the reading community.[47] In this way Fish provides an alternative to hermeneutical approaches which find meaning either in the meaning of the creation event—what an author meant—or in the text-artifact itself. To give priority to authorial intent is to refer back to the meaning of the author–text event. Placing meaning in the reading event, as Fish does, renders the authority of the author irrelevant: the text as artifact has no meaning itself, and the author's intention for the text's meaning does not hold power over what happens in the reading event. Only the reader's notion of the meaning of the text and of the author's intention, and the value and weight the reader gives these notions, are authoritative.

A Third Event: Text Mediated into the World

What for Fish is primarily a cognitive event—one in the mind of the reader—is also an event that precipitates action. Reading is an event *in the reader*, to use Fish's term, but it is also a performative event that causes the reader to do something. There could, thus, be said to be a third event downstream of reading—which could also be characterized as the perlocutionary effect of a text—in which the reader performs some action, mediating the text into the actor-network in which reader and text are embedded.[48] Instead of locating meaning in the reading event, with emphasis on this third event, meaning is located in the action of the reader in the world. To bring this model to the experience of being confounded by a text, as Fish argues the sentence in *Religio Medici* does to the reader, questions could be asked, such as, how does this experience of being confounded affect the reader and reading community? What else does a text do? How do people live differently, how are their politics different, and what does the text do, if anything, to their theology and practice? In other words, this performative approach is one which looks for the *meaning* of the downstream effects of a text-reader.[49]

[46] Fish 1980: 72.

[47] Fish, here, seems less motivated by ideological concerns about the use of notions of *authority* to impose meaning on a text than Roland Barthes or Michel Foucault are in "The Death of the Author" and "What is an Author?" See Barthes 1967; Foucault 1979; Fry 2012: 12–24.

[48] See similar argument made in Felski 2015*b*: 171–172.

[49] Here, like elsewhere, for the sake of developing a model of performativity, I am using *text* and *reader* as simplifications—or black boxed notions—to represent the many texts and readers, and indeed actor-networks, which constitute text and reader.

It is these sorts of performative implications to which Fish's approach can be extended with ANT. Text and reader are embedded in an actor-network, and not only is the experience of the reader contingent on this configuration of the other actors to which the reader is attached, but this actor-network is acted upon and modified through the act of reading. Fish stops with the experience of the reader, whereas that reading act is the starting point of my analysis. Indeed, with this model we can ask what impact does a text have, by what means, on a community and through that community into other communities, broader culture, and the planet itself?

The question I am interested in then, with this Fish-in-actor-networks approach, is *what happens* as the reader mediates the text into the world? In this way I turn from Fish's focus on *meaning* to a Latourian emphasis on *action*. Following Latour, human and nonhumans are treated symmetrically, all located within the same plane of action, and what matters, from the perspective of ANT, is what actors *do*, not what they *think*—although thinking does matter to the extent human thought modifies human action. Fish's point is that the text participates, but we cannot say anything about meaning because meaning is an all-too-contingent experience of the reader. It is with this argument in mind that I will turn to the work of Ralph Rader, and an alternative approach in which there are said to be "facts" of reader experience and in which notions of the creative (author-text) event are authoritative in the experience of the reader.

4.2 Ralph Rader and the Meaning of Texts

I will now turn to the work of Ralph Rader, who was a literary theorist and English professor at the University of California, Berkeley, to further develop this model of meaning and action. Rader framed his own method against Fish in two articles published in 1974, to which Fish replied in 1975.[50] Rader's approach to the meaning of texts is one in which communication through writing involves two corresponding cognitive acts: writing and reading, each in a sense answering each other. With this model, Rader diverges from Fish in two key ways: 1) he believes it is possible to identify facts of reader experience; and 2) he believes that authorial intent does matter to readers. Rader argues there are shared aspects of human cognition and experience which make it possible to say why one text is different from another and to say something about

[50] See Rader 1974*b*,*a*; Fish 1980: 136–146.

the meaning of a text itself. Moreover, Rader's model of interpretation involves something akin to theory of mind, in which a reader recognizes the intentions embedded in a text by an author who anticipates the reader's own process of assigning meaning to a text.

4.2.1 The Meaning of Texts and the Facts of Reader Experience

Rader and Fish both take as a starting point the difficulty, if not impossibility, of stating anything with certainty about the meaning of a text's content. For Rader the problem with saying something about the meaning of texts themselves is there are too many possible meanings encoded in the text. "The facts of the literary text do not speak for themselves," he writes.[51] "The same facts," he notes, "seem strangely able to confirm for different critics very different interpretations." He describes this as seeming "more and more an embarrassment," and he writes, "to have many meanings is too much like having no meaning."[52]

Rader diverges from Fish, however, in the implications of this indeterminacy of the text. It may not be possible to come to conclusions based on the linguistic content of a text directly, but it is possible, Rader argues, to say something about shared reader experience, and to work backward from the facts of reader experience to say something about the text.[53] In other words, shared characteristics of the reader's cognitive event can serve as the basis for making claims about the meaning of a text, even if these claims cannot be made from the text itself. Describing these "facts of literary experience," Rader writes, "there are many such facts, large and small."[54] To illustrate Rader turns to examples in poetry, where he finds cases of "a directly specifiable local fact of literary response invariant for all readers," such as how readers experience a character speaking in Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" or Browning's "My Last Duchess."[55] Speaking more broadly, Rader argues, "we are able systematically to distinguish literature in general from nonliterature."[56] In Rader's argument, the fact that humans can recognize this difference means

[51] Rader 1974*a*: 272.
[52] Rader 1974*a*: 245. For Fish, this lack of meaning of texts is a feature, not an embarrassment. See Fish 1980: 338–355.
[53] Rader 1974*a*.
[54] Rader 1974*a*: 246.
[55] Rader 1974*a*: 246–247. I question if this experience would necessarily be "invariant for all readers" to the extent Rader claims. To say that it is not necessarily invariant, however, is not to reject Rader's broader point that shared reader experience does indicate something about the content of a text.
[56] Rader 1974*a*: 247.

there must indeed be a difference in the content of literary and nonliterary texts. This method makes it possible "to make further general discriminations within that large discrimination," such as the fact that some novels are similar to each other.[57] The human mind is able to recognize similarities and differences and assign categories and genres based on that cognitive experience, and what we can say about features of texts, such as genre, is derived indirectly from what we can say about the human experience of the reading, not from directly accessible features of the texts themselves. *Literature*, in this sense, is defined as those texts that share characteristics of evoking a literary experience in human readers.

In this way, Rader makes a case for a way in which it is possible to say *something* about the content of a text, even if that is not to say *everything* about that meaning. Where language may allow for an infinite number of possible meanings, it is still possible through this pragmatic approach to settle on consensus meanings based on shared reader experience, and one can still rule out *possible* meanings of a text in favor of those meanings readers actually experience in practice.

I should note here that I am not claiming an equivalency between the Bible and literature or that the Bible should be approached as literature. Reader experience of different genres and types of written texts—poems, literary prose, sacred religious texts, legal texts, historical works, and instruction manuals, to name a few—would certainly be different in each case. In my argument, the specific way that readers relate to each type of text will emerge with the configuration of text, readers, and notions of text. A reader of an instruction manual, for instance, would not likely think very deeply about the author's intent, but a notion of the fact it was intended to be an instruction manual and not a literary work does still, in some way, contribute to the reader's way of relating to the text and understanding its meaning. What matters, following Fish and Rader, is how the reader experiences the text, constructs a sense of authorial intention, and uses that notion of intent to configure their own sense of meaning. The difference between Fish and Rader, then, in the way I understand them, is that Fish would argue that one could not determine outside of a specific reading community whether a manual, for instance, is in itself literary, while

[57] Rader 1974*a*: 248.

Rader would argue that the fact that readers consistently *do* experience it as non-literary allows us to classify it, indirectly via reader experience, as a non-literary text.[58]

4.2.2 Rader and Tacit Construction of Meaning

In addition to his divergence from Fish over what can be said about facts of reader experience, Rader rejects Fish's way of identifying meaning in temporal experience, instead arguing for a comprehensive approach in which meaning is located in the reader's response to the entirety of a text. In this view readers interpret texts holistically, seeing each text as the embodiment of an intentional act. To argue this point, Rader turns to speech-act theory and the imperative, "Close the door!", which he argues could have "a potentially infinite number of meanings" depending on the situation in which it was used.[59] It could be, for instance, anything from an expression related to cold temperature outdoors, to a point that someone has rudely left the door open, or wanting to communicate that a visitor is unwanted.[60] Rader argues:

> The interpreter of a sentence in use does not gather its meaning from the words taken in themselves, and he does not entertain all the meanings which the words separately and together might have; rather he assigns a single coherent meaning by inferring intention, asking himself not, "What do these words mean?" but something like "What must the speaker mean to have used these words in this situation?"[61]

Just as the phrase, "Close the door!" alone is ambiguous and requires some reconstruction of intent, texts, likewise, are interpreted on the basis of "a comprehensive inferential grasp of an author's overall creative intention in a work."[62]

For Rader, this identification of meaning through reconstruction of intent involves tacit knowledge, where the reader is able to make interpretive leaps that they might not, and need not, be aware of on a rational, conscious level.[63] It may be a fact that language is ambiguous and texts cannot themselves hold unambiguous meaning, but the mind nonetheless works to make

[58] On literary methods, intentionality, and the Bible—and how different meanings emerge with different ways of reading, see Barton 1996.
[59] Rader 1974*b*: 85.
[60] Rader 1974*b*: 85.
[61] Rader 1974*b*: 85–86.
[62] Rader 1974*b*: 86. Fish similarly argues meaning is contingent on a sense of illocutionary force. See Fish 1980: 284–285.
[63] Rader defines tacit as "referring to all that we know and can do that we are not focally aware of and cannot give an explicit account of," citing Michael Polanyi. See Rader 1974*a*: 249; Polanyi 1966. On tacit knowledge, see also Ryle 2009.

meaning available to a reader. Rader writes, "the mind by its nature actively seeks to impose meaning and to eliminate ambiguity in its encounters with the world, and so it must certainly be also with language."[64] That is not to say that the human mind cannot also identify ambiguity—indeed Rader notes, ambiguity of language is a source of humor.[65] His point remains that the mind does scan and interpret and make sense of complex and ambiguous patterns, interpreting them in light of the whole work, set within the context of a genre and understood as an intentional act of an author, in order to create meaning that can be grasped and worked with by a human. For instance, in the type of cognitive event that occurs in a reader's mind when reading literature as *literature*, meaning is resolved, at least in part, through one's tacit ability to identify meaning created by another human and intended to be legible to the reader who will recognize it within the genre of literature.[66]

To illustrate how the human mind is able to resolve meaning, Rader refers to a duck-rabbit optical illusion in which a simple drawing can seem to be that of a rabbit or a duck, but not both, at any one time.[67] Rader argues it is this ability of the mind to process what is encountered in the world and make sense of it that provides a solution to the problem of infinite meanings present in texts. Rader frames this in terms of evolutionary psychology: "our minds have been developed by evolution to enable us to operate in a world external to us which we must scan and interpret accurately and decisively if we are to survive."[68] His point is that the mind works to create graspable meanings from otherwise vastly complex arrangements of words and sentences, and a sense of an author's intent is part of what the mind resolves from the jumble of words and phrases that compose a text.

Tacit interpretation matters for recognition of the intentionality embedded in a work. Rader argues against approaching texts as autonomous from the creative act, writing that otherwise it is "possible to validate any desired interpretation of a literary work, however arbitrary," and "because literary works can be held to mean nearly anything, they seem in effect to mean nothing

[64] Rader 1974*b*: 84.
[65] Rader 1974*b*: 86–87.
[66] Rader 1974*b*: 85–86, 89–90.
[67] Rader 1974*b*: 83–84.
[68] Rader 1974*b*: 84.

at all."[69] Rader argues that, in fact, readers do consider the origin of a text and do make use of their comprehensive, tacit awareness of a literary text as intentional utterance. On the question of the meaning of "Close the door!", Rader writes that the man to whom this is told "asks himself this question and ordinarily gets his answer so rapidly that he is scarcely aware of the process, scarcely aware, without reflection, that the words in fact contain other possibilities of meaning."[70] Reading, then, in Rader's view, is a cognitive event which involves tacit processing through which the reader forms a sense of what a text means via reconstruction of the intentional action carried in the text, often scarcely knowing this cognitive operation is being performed.[71]

4.2.3 Meaning and Theory of Mind

Rader describes his theory as one that "requires that every work registered as literature be conceived as literature."[72] It is here that he also describes literary works as "the embodiment of a cognitive act."[73] Moreover, this depiction of reading and writing events as cognitive acts is important to Rader's argument because he believes that there are shared elements of human cognition which allow for reader and writer to experience shared meaning. He argues that there are "natural cognitive powers through which we conceive the world in common with our fellows," a shared cognition he traces to the human mind's tacit capacity. On this basis he suggests there is an "objective cognitive basis" for this shared meaning of authors and readers.[74]

What are the implications, then, of Rader's approach for my own working model of textual performativity emerging from two cognitive events mediated by the text? Following Rader, it can be argued that the resolution of meaning involves the reader's notion of an event in which an author wrote with the reader's own response in mind. The reading event, for Rader, involves

[69] Rader 1974*b*: 81. Here Rader lays blame upon "the concomitant doctrines of the intentional, biographical, and affective fallacies." In seeing endless meaning possible in language, Rader and Fish appear to agree, although they disagree on the implications of this range of interpretive possibility. Moreover, this may be a case of Rader being prescriptive rather than descriptive, arguing for a method of how readers *should* read rather than simply characterizing what happens in practice. See Fish 1980: 137–138.

[70] Rader 1974*b*: 86. There is neuroimaging evidence for this kind of tacit cognition in the processing of language, where distinct brain structures have been found to be activated by different types of speech acts. See Egorova et al. 2016.

[71] Rader 1974*b*: 85. For similar arguments about expectation for intentionality in a work, see Malley 2004: 8; Sperber and Wilson 1995; Wilson and Sperber 2012.

[72] Rader 1974*a*: 254.

[73] Rader 1974*a*: 254.

[74] Rader 1974*a*: 249.

tacit and explicit processes in which the text is read as a comprehensive whole. The authorial intention embodied in a text, as detected by the reader, is then key to the reader's ability to resolve the ambiguity of language into something meaningful. The reader identifies the text as an outcome of a cognitive event and reads it on the basis of it being an intentional utterance meant to communicate and do something.

An author creates a text knowing that there will be a corresponding cognitive event in which the reader engages with the text. The reader, argues Rader, has a "tacit grasp" of what the writer is trying to do, of how the writer is creating something for readers.[75] The reader infers the author's "overall creative intention" embodied in the text; the author writes with this expectation.[76] In this way the reader's cognitive act involves a reconstruction of the author's cognitive act, of what an author was doing in creating a text, including the author's expectation for a work to be recognized within its genre, an approach to reading that Fish characterizes in his reply to Rader as that of "an answering 'act of cognition.' "[77] The author anticipates the reader's reaction to a text, and the reader, in a sense, anticipates the author's own intentions and actions. For this reason, Rader's model of interpretation could be characterized as application of theory of mind, where the cognitive events of both author and reader are thought to involve a tacit awareness and reconstruction of the other's cognitive event.[78]

4.2.4 The Meaning and Action of "My Last Duchess"

In Rader's approach there can be more than one layer of intent embedded in a work.[79] When fictional characters speak, for instance, a reader can concurrently—and tacitly—construct what that character is doing with their words and what an author was doing with those same words. To illustrate this approach, Rader analyzes interpretation of Robert Browning's poem, "My Last Duchess." To introduce the poem, Rader quotes the beginning lines: "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive. I call / That piece a wonder, now..."[80] The

[75] Rader 1974*a*: 250.
[76] Rader 1974*b*: 86.
[77] Rader 1974*b*: 89–90; Fish 1980: 136.
[78] On reading and cognitive *anticipation* and *theory of mind*, see Farrell 2017: 29, 47–64. For an overview of theory of mind, see Kloo et al. 2010.
[79] I will return the way readers identify and respond to multiple sources of action in a text when I turn to Alfred Gell's theory of art.
[80] Rader 1974*b*: 91.

way readers respond to this poem, Rader argues, is illustrative of the way in which the mind tacitly constructs meaning. The reader can see this work is intended to be interpreted as a poem, and Browning's authorial intent, as creator, matters to the reader in making sense of the work. At the same time, the created fictional characters are interpreted as having intent, and this also forms a tacit basis for the mind to resolve meaning from the words of the poem.

Rader notes that the answer to the question of who is speaking varies with how this question is framed. He writes, "so vital has Browning made the Duke's presence, indeed, that critics often think of him as in effect the sole intelligence understood behind the words of the poem, almost as if he were in fact the real natural person he seems to our overt imagination."[81] Yet if the reader's attention is brought to the specific language with which the Duke speaks, it becomes clear that the reader had all along recognized the words as belonging to someone else:

> We may ask ourselves whether in reading we imaginatively hear the words of the poem as spoken by the Duke, and of course we reply that we do. We may then ask ourselves if we understand the rhymes that we hear in the poem as part of the Duke's speech, and we discover that we do not.[82]

This fact of the reader's experience, as Rader uncovers, shows multiple levels of tacit awareness by which the mind responds to create meaning. It is neither Browning, as author of the poem, nor the fictional Duke alone that are present to the reader in the cognitive event of reading. The reader "responds to the Duke not as an independent speaker but with a definite tacit awareness and appreciation of the fabricating poet behind him."[83] These two agents are integrated into a single comprehensive meaning.[84]

Indeed, as Rader demonstrates, Browning has created a poem that evokes multiple agents in the mind of the reader. "As a cognitive necessity, simply to render the words of the poem intelligible," Rader argues, "we must imagine the Duke as their agent, the gallery and the Duke's presence in it, the unknown auditor, and the Duke's as yet unrevealed purpose in speaking to him about the duchess and her portrait."[85] The human mind is capable of tacitly recognizing

[81] Rader 1974*b*: 91.
[82] Rader 1974*b*: 91.
[83] Rader 1974*b*: 92.
[84] See discussion of *implied authors* in Booth 1983: 70–77.
[85] Rader 1974*b*: 91.

these multiple actors, and the reader forms a single meaning from these layers of meaning and action within the work.

Rader's description of the reader's response to Browning's poem is consistent with the poem and its characters functioning as beings of fiction.[86] The way each is evoked in the reader's imagination shapes the effect of the text on the reader: it is the reader's instaured notions of the Duke, the portrait, the person to whom the Duke speaks, and all others imagined by the reader that act. These beings of fiction are attached to the text and reader, enabling meaning and also modifying meaning. What matters in an actor-network approach, then, is the way these beings of fiction are instaured and configured alongside other notions and other objects, human and nonhuman.[87]

4.2.5 A Simplified Model of Cognition

To summarize, the cognitive model of interpretation I am developing here has these theoretical components:

Writing is a cognitive event, the result of which is a text. Writing is a form of intentional utterance in which the author writes with anticipation of the reader's cognitive event, and the text functions as the embodiment of this utterance.

Reading is a corresponding cognitive event. Interpretation of the cognitive event embodied in the text involves tacit processes in which the reader forms a comprehensive sense of the meaning of the text. The reader recognizes, if tacitly, that the text embodies an intentional utterance through which it is expected that the reader will be able to understand the author's intentions. To do so, the reader's mind performs a cognitive act not unlike that of interpreting an optical illusion—there may be many possible meanings encoded in the linguistic content of a text, but the reader, using reconstructed notions of authorial intent as an interpretive key, among other notions, resolves this into a single meaning which can be grasped and understood.

At the core of this theoretical approach is an argument that the reader reconstructs what the author was doing and that this *reconstructed notion* is authoritative. The reader's notion of the author need not be accurate. What matters is the *reader's notion* of what the writer has done,

[86] See Chapter 3.
[87] I will return below to Fish, Rader, and ANT below.

not what could be empirically shown to be true of what actually occurred in the writing event, if that were somehow possible. There are, consequently, ethical implications to this model, and one may argue that the processes of interpretation *should* occur differently or one may work to change the way reading *does* occur, and I will return to these ethical implications later in this chapter. In this sense, this is a purely pragmatic and mechanistic approach—what I describe as a *Realhermeneutik*—to understanding textual performativity.

4.3 Fish, Rader, and Reader Cognition

Stanley Fish and Ralph Rader both locate meaning in reader experience rather than in the artifact that is read. In this way both work from a shared theoretical starting point, even if their conclusions are at odds. Indeed, Rader refers to Fish's approach as "a theory like mine of literary experience but in method and result nearly its polar opposite."[88] Both are interested in what is evoked during the reading event, seeing meaning in terms of *what readers experience* rather than meaning as something independently located in an artifact. They disagree, however, on the characteristics of that cognitive experience, including on matters of whether there are facts of reader experience that can be used to say something about a text, on the way reader cognition is structured, and whether notions of authorial intent function as authoritative for the reader.

4.3.1 Fish and Rader on Whether Anything Can Be Said about Meaning

On one hand, Rader and Fish are in agreement with the view that, as Rader puts it, "the facts of the literary text do not speak for themselves."[89] Both agree that there is a multiplicity of meaning in the linguistic content of texts and it is impossible to say anything directly about what words encoded in a text mean. On the other hand, Rader finds fault with Fish's argument that there is nothing that can be said about shared meaning experienced by readers. Rader critiques this view, writing, "Fish's words really say, not that meaning is human, but that the effort to understand meaning is hopeless, that meaning does not mean."[90] The difference is that Rader believes facts of human cognition are such that the meaning of a text's linguistic

[88] Rader 1974*a*: 262.
[89] Rader 1974*a*: 272.
[90] Rader 1974*a*: 271.

content, as it is experienced in the human mind, is constrained by what the reader infers about what the author was doing with the text, and he believes there are limits to what humans can and will experience. For this reason, Rader can claim "invariant" facts of reader experience.[91] Fish, in contrast, holds to, and indeed seems to celebrate, the view that there are no constraints to the meaning that could be experienced. Fish rules out the possibility of finding consistent meaning in reader experience and, by extension, rules out using analysis of that experience as a basis to come to conclusions about the text. Fish does believe that within a specific context a reader will be able to find unambiguous meaning in a sentence; but he rejects claims that there is a single consistently experienced meaning to be found for that same sentence in different contexts or when read by other readers.[92]

As I have discussed, part of this difference is in where *meaning* is located. With Fish's definition of meaning as that of reader experience, his argument makes a fair amount of sense—what can be said about a human experience when every human, and every moment of human experience, is unique? Rader, on the other hand, wants to say something about the meaning of *texts* even though he, like Fish, recognizes meaning emerging in the reading event. Rader thinks that readers do have broadly shared cognitive experiences, analysis of which is then possible. His method is aimed, then, at working backward from reader experience to make claims about the nature of the texts themselves. In other words, something can be said about reader experience, and on the basis of there existing some consensus about the facts of interpretation and experience of texts, it is possible to come to some conclusions about the texts themselves.

4.3.2 Fish and Rader on How Cognition Is Structured

Although Fish and Rader agree that meaning is located in reader experience as it emerges in the reading event, they disagree on the structure of that experience. Fish emphasizes mistakes and false starts as an integral part of the meaning experienced whereas Rader emphasizes the way the mind makes use of the tacit conceptualization of the whole. Both emphases reflect what they are doing with their respective theoretical approaches: Fish wants to bring attention to the way in which meaning is entirely contingent on the reader; whereas Rader wants to

[91] Rader 1974*a*: 246.
[92] See Fish 1980: 283.

create a model in which creative intentions and structural features encoded in a text can play a role in the meaning identified by a reader.

Rader objects to Fish's *additive* and *atomistic* approach, particularly as it is evident in Fish's analysis of the sentence from Browne's *Religio Medici*.[93] He characterizes Fish as presenting "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader to the words as they succeed one another, as if the reader were conscious of and actively entertained all the meanings which the words at each stage of reading might *potentially* produce."[94] Rader states, "I do not believe that we read this or any other sentence in the piece-meal way Professor Fish suggests."[95] It is clear that Rader believes reader cognition is much more holistic in practice than what Fish describes.[96] Even though readers do in fact read progressively, moving forward in time as they move through the words and sentences that compose a work, this is not—in Rader's view—an adequate description of how the brain creates meaning.

In Rader's model of interpretation, readers form an overarching sense of the text through a process that is in large part tacit and involves reconstruction of authorial intent for the work. Following Polanyi's argument that too much focus on the particular harms conceptualization of the whole, Rader suggests analysis of the type of meaning that is *experienced by readers* requires a kind of distance, keeping a comprehensive sense of the text in mind.[97] Rader argues that analysis that focuses too closely on individual components of a text not only fails to see the whole but also makes it impossible to do so. In this view, the tacit ability to construct meaning is compromised if one practices Fish's momentary, line-by-line close reading—what Rader calls a "slow-motion analysis."[98] On the *Religio Medici* sentence, Rader writes: "I believe that, even without a context, a reader reads this sentence (fairly easily) as he reads all sentences, by hypothesizing a comprehensive intention in terms of which the words make collective sense."[99] Moreover, in Rader's view, meaning arises within the "cognitive force field of the generic structure."[100]

[93] Rader 1974*b*: 88–90.
[94] Rader 1974*b*: 88. This is not an entirely charitable way of interpreting Fish's argument, as I discuss below.
[95] Rader 1974*b*: 88.
[96] Rader 1974*b*: 90.
[97] Rader 1974*a*: 263; Polanyi 1966: 18.
[98] Rader 1974*a*: 263.
[99] Rader 1974*b*: 88.
[100] Rader 1974*b*: 90a.

Authors use features of genre and literary convention to intentionally convey meaning in an intelligible way, and readers in turn identify these structures and conventions, recognizing them as intentional features of a text and making use of that fact in order to interpret a work.

Fish, on the other hand, characterizes Rader's model in terms of a "desire, a wish" for "single intentions single-mindedly comprehended."[101] Fish argues that Rader, with his focus on the tacit apprehension of the whole, does not recognize the temporal effects of the preliminary acts of interpretation, which Fish thinks are an integral part of reader experience.[102] Fish thus accuses Rader of using "a model of reading and writing in which unambiguously embodied intentions are straightaway retrieved," an approach which Fish thinks reflects wishful thinking more than reality.[103] Moreover, Rader appears to be mistaken in confusing Fish's argument that a reader *could* potentially produce any meaning with an argument—not made by Fish—that a single reader *does* entertain all possible meanings. Indeed, responding to Rader, Fish restates the point made from *Religio Medici*: "what the sentence does, I argue, is give the reader something (encourage him to settle into a stance) and then take it away (by making the stance he had settled into unavailable)."[104] This is not Fish suggesting that the reader explicitly considers all linguistic possibilities, but rather an argument for the importance of recognizing the mechanisms by which meaning is identified, including processes of a reader making preliminary conclusions about meaning only to discover they were wrong. "I attempt to describe what it's like to read the sentence," he writes.[105]

4.3.3 Cognition About Cognition

What Rader is arguing—in effect—is that reconstructed notions of authorial intent enable a reader to make sense of a work. One can follow Fish in defining meaning as the entirety of the reader's experience, and one can also follow Rader in recognizing meaning is the outcome of tacit processes and that any tacit cognition of author's intentional use of genre, literary convention, or any other features of a text do factor into reader experience.

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[101] Fish 1980: 140.
[102] Fish 1980: 143–144.
[103] Fish 1980: 140.
[104] Fish 1980: 141.
[105] Fish 1980: 141.

To be clear, Rader is not claiming the authority of *original* authorial intent. What matters for Rader—and this is central to my own argument—is the reader's own cognitive act; it is the *reader's* notion of authorial intent which enables the mind to resolve an unambiguous meaning from a text. And here, I would argue, the role of these notions may not be as straightforward as Rader suggests. The act of writing and the act of reading—like all communication—is often confused, uncertain, ambiguous, and riddled with errors. Those acting in either event, those initiating and those receiving acts of communication, mistakenly construct notions about the reciprocal act of cognition. For this reason, Fish is right with his criticism that communication rarely involves "unambiguously embodied intentions" which can be "straightaway retrieved."[106] Note, however, that even with this skepticism of authorial intent, Fish is not rejecting the possibility that readers may use constructed notions of authorial intent in their own attempts to read and interpret a text. Fish writes, "I assume that readers are always performing interpretive or structuring acts—variously characterized as pieces of deliberative reasonings, instances of perceptual strategies, specifications of authorial intentions, enterings into relationships with—and lo and behold I discover readers who are performing just those acts."[107] Fish does allow for notions of authorial intention to be part of interpretation—just not for authorial intent, or any other approach to the form reader cognition *must* take, to be considered determinative from the outset.

Even if Rader's model is overly simplistic—as indeed most theoretical models are—it serves as a starting point for conceiving of how readers attempt to resolve ambiguities and multivalent meanings of texts in the real world. Rader may be too optimistic or too wishful in his thinking that actions have a singular, easily identifiable intent, or that actions and their intent can be reconstructed with any reliability or certainty.[108] The fact is writers do write with intentions, and readers do—at least sometimes—try to uncover those intentions as they engage with texts in the act of reading. This is evidenced, as Rader discusses, by reader experience of unreliable narrators, such as is found in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*. On one hand, the existence of unreliable narrators demonstrates how it is sometimes difficult to identify authorial intent; on the other hand, their existence also illustrates the way that readers *do* attempt to recover authorial

[106] Fish 1980: 140.
[107] Fish 1980: 146.
[108] Fish 1980: 72, 140.

intent.[109] Rita Felski makes a similar point, writing, "the literary device of the unreliable narrator can always be overlooked or misunderstood—and yet it has also schooled countless readers in how to read against the grain and between the lines."[110] To reframe this in terms of ANT, notions of authorial intention could be described as one of Latour's actants/actors; a notion of intent has agency and does things, but it does not act alone and it is not determinative.

4.3.4 Can Both Models Work Together in Actor-Networks?

Although Fish and Rader disagree on what conclusions can be made about human experience in the reading event and whether that experience can serve as a basis for arguments about the meaning of a text, neither method entirely invalidates the other. Both show ways in which configuration of a text-reader hybrid matters, both in the temporal experience of trying to figure out a difficult text and in the tacit understanding of a whole. If neither method is taken as prescriptive, both models contribute to understanding how meaning is formed in the cognitive event of reading. Both ascribe *meaning* to the reading event, and the difference between them is in the extent to which this meaning can be characterized and systematized in order to say something about the underlying text. In practice, I think, readers read using a combination of elements of a temporal, piecemeal process and with a concomitant tacit comprehension of the intentions of an author and of the features of the work as a whole. If Fish is not thought to rule out the role of a reader's theory of mind in forming a notion of intent and meaning, and if Rader's approach is not necessarily taken as one in which reader cognition *always* occurs in the same way for every person, their two methods can work together.

Fish is trying to describe what happens in a reader's mind, and in doing so his model is one in which anything *can happen* and nothing can be said about what *will happen*. Along these lines, Fish describes his own model as "an interpretation of reality rather than an approximation of it."[111] Likewise, Fish explains that his method "is oriented *away* from evaluation and toward description."[112] Because Fish refuses to make any claims about how the mind works—other than

[109] Rader 1974*a*.
[110] Felski 2015*b*: 164.
[111] Fish 1980: 146.
[112] Fish 1980: 50. See discussion of the politics of hermeneutics later in this chapter. On a distinction between a *model of* and a *model for*, see Geertz 1973.

that the mind is entirely indeterminate when it comes to the meaning of a text outside of a specific community and context—his method does not allow for any conclusions to be made about the meanings that will be evoked by a text. Indeed, Fish states that his method "does not permit the evaluation of literature as literature, as apart from advertising or preaching or propaganda or 'entertainment' " and that "it provides no way to distinguish between literary and other effects."[113]

Rader's method, in contrast, is aimed at identifying the way meaning emerges in the human mind. On the basis of consistent, shared characteristics of experience, he wants to be able to specify facts of the texts, such as the very types of categorizations that Fish rejects. Rader is, in effect, arguing that there is something about *human* experience which provides texts with certain meanings *to humans*. Moreover, in Rader's argument one of the things texts do is prompt the reader to imagine what an author intended. Like Fish, Rader also works to model what happens to the reader, but he thinks there is universal human experience—part of which is the way that readers' cognitive events happen with awareness, if perhaps tacit, of the author's cognitive event. With his argument that it is possible to say something about texts based on the facts of reader experience, Rader is doing more than describing processes; he is approximating meaning using reports of how people experience meaning, which is exactly the method of which Fish is skeptical.

Fish argues that although Rader claims to be descriptive, he is, in fact, being prescriptive with his model.[114] Specifically, Fish takes issue with Rader's claim that his approach "allows" elimination of ambiguities, arguing that in fact Rader "directs" or "requires" a certain way of reading.[115] Where Rader tries (or claims to try) to describe facts of interpretation, he is, in Fish's view, prescribing his values by not only arguing that that authorial intent *can* play in reader cognition, but that interpretation *should* follow this method. Fish calls this "a set of marching orders."[116] Moreover, Fish argues that Rader justifies his own assumptions and starting point by seeking to eliminate reader experience that does not hold to his model.[117] In Fish's view, Rader is not describing a universal human experience; he is describing the human experience only of those

[113]Fish 1980: 50.
[114]Fish 1980: 137.
[115]Fish 1980: 148; Rader 1974*b*: 86.
[116]Fish 1980: 138.
[117]Fish 1980: 136–138.

who think authorial intent is important and who use their notion of intent to interpret a text. In a way, Rader and any others who prescribe interpretive methods create a tautology: if one thinks authorial intent is important, then it is. And that is the problem, according to Fish, with seeing Rader's approach as describing a universal fact of interpretation rather than as a fact of interpretation simply for those who interpret texts as Rader does.

It seems to me that both Fish and Rader oversimplify and overstate their theoretical approach for the sake of argument and likewise miss the value of each other's core arguments. Specifically, Fish may err in rejecting the notion that anything—and thus nothing—can be said about shared experience. There is a difference between saying that anything is possible and that nothing can be said about typical human experience. Indeed, Fish makes claims himself on the basis of what he thinks is typical of reader experience—both in his work on Milton and in the *Religio Medici* example. Conversely, Rader may give insufficient attention to the fact that just because many readers do experience a text a certain way does not mean that all readers do, much less *should*, experience it that way.

What I am trying to show, in dialogue with both Fish and Rader, is that the action of texts is contingent on the way a text is read. In order to develop my own model of texts in actor-networks, Rader's model serves as a starting point for understanding what happens when a reader does try to come to a sense of meaning that reduces or eliminates ambiguities and incoherencies. This is not to say that readers *must* read this way or *should* read this way—only that this is how reading sometimes happens. A core part of reader experience, for many, if not all readers, is an attempt to reconstruct the intention behind the act of writing. An author was doing *something* in writing—writing content with some illocutionary and perlocutionary intent—and part of forming a sense of meaning is to try to reconstruct what that something was. For this reason, Rader's model of two answering acts of cognition *is* reflective of general human experience, even if it is not *always* the case or even *should* be the case.

To say tacit processes occur or that a reader's notion of authorial intent would figure into their interpretation of a text is entirely consistent with Fish. What Fish rejects is making claims to universal meaning experienced by all readers or making prescriptive claims about how readers *should* read. To say that readers should attempt to reconstruct authorial intent is prescriptive,

but to say simply that readers sometimes *do* reconstruct intent is not at all in conflict with Fish. To say that the reading event *always* involves a reconstruction of authorial intent would be another matter.

Their two approaches both contribute to my model of textual performativity in actor-networks. Fish's method makes no conclusions about texts prior to the cognitive event in which readers create meaning. Rader's method, by implication, is one in which it is thought that, given the other texts and notions to which a reader is attached, texts will inevitably be interpreted in light of what is known about ways authors communicate and the forms works can take. Despite their different emphases, Rader's model slots into Fish's overall approach. Fish's reader response theory allows for any method and theory of meaning as long as it works to create meaning in a reading event. To the extent Rader is *describing* rather than *prescribing* ways in which a reader *may* create meaning using their own notions of an author, there is no inherent conflict with Fish. Although Fish takes issue with the prescriptive elements of Rader's description of his theoretical approach, Fish recognizes that notions of authorial intent and any other ways the mind tacitly processes meaning do shape reader experience. Along these lines, Fish writes about Rader: "my model is more generous than his because I can acknowledge his 'reality' while he must exclude mine."[118] Indeed, Fish concludes about Rader, "what I have demonstrated is that he is right."[119]

4.3.5 Events in Actor-Networks

To review, with this discussion of Fish and Rader I am developing a model of textual performativity in which a reader tacitly understands the two answering acts of cognition as events embedded in actor-networks. Fish and Rader present models of meaning in which meaning is the outcome of a *cognitive* event, and their work serves as a theoretical framework for incorporating reader cognition into ANT. In an actor-network approach, there is no methodological difference between the action of human and non-human actors, and the theory treats sentient and non-sentient actors symmetrically.[120] However, because reading is a cognitive event, there is value in tracing how the actors assembled in the reading event modify human cognition. In other

[118] Fish 1980: 146.
[119] Fish 1980: 146.
[120] See Chapter 1.

words—how is meaning created from a text, and more specifically, how does that contingent meaning emerge in the assemblage of text together with the humans and nonhumans, including any notions of the text, with which the text is associated?

Rader's approach is complicated by the fact that the text has autonomy from its author, able to move into new situations far removed from the context of the creative event. Although the human mind is exceptional at piecing together past events from fragments of information available to it and using this to make meaning, there is no guarantee that the reader's notion of the author can be accurately reconstructed.[121] For this reason, the attempt to recreate authorial intention is sometimes difficult and liable to be misled by unreliable narrators, poorly executed intentions, misdirection, and miscommunication. Even if the text were still closely attached to its creation event, it is recognized in a Latourian approach that as a *mediator* the text transforms and even betrays the intentions of the author. Moreover, other actors assembled alongside the text may or may not be trustworthy. The reader's notion of intent is always at best an approximation, and in the end it may be nothing more than fiction. Thus there is reason to agree with Fish that all that can be said is that the reader experiences *something*—but we cannot predict what that will be from the text alone. In this way one could follow Rader in recognizing that there are some facts of readers' experience and something *can* be said about this experience, even as one could, at the same time, follow Fish in acknowledging the indeterminacy of texts.

Fish's way of locating meaning in the event rather than artifact lends itself to making visible the role of assembled actors and configuration of the text-reader hybrid within an actor network. For instance, defending his argument that texts only have meaning within a reading community, Fish describes "layers of interpretive assumptions" by which texts are interpreted. He writes:

> in any situation there are always assumptions so deeply held that the entities they make available are perceived as part of the world and not as the products of assumptions at all. One feels about such entities that they are being apprehended directly, without the mediation of interpretive activity, and that it is on their foundation that acts of interpretation build.[122]

[121] On the role of biographical facts in interpretation, see, for instance, Cioffi 1964.
[122] Fish 1980: 297.

What I am doing, here, is reinterpreting Fish in the language and ideas of ANT. In my model, these deeply held assumptions are Latourian actors. They make available the texts with which they are assembled in a text-reader hybrid. The meaning experienced by a reader within the constraints of a reading community is, in ANT terms, the meaning of a reader embedded in an actor-network. What Fish does is develop an approach from which it is possible to argue that the meaning of a text is in what it does to this assemblage of text, reader, notions, and other objects.[123]

I am proposing a Latourian approach in which one can recognize that all notions and all theories—including notions of authorial intent—are actors that modify reader experience. Within an assemblage of actors in a text-reader hybrid, a reader will come to some conclusion, accurate or not, about the authorial intent that gave rise to the text. This notion will be authoritative if the reader treats it as authoritative—whether that is by some tacit process or involves explicit recognition—and the reader's notion of the author's action then operates to control and guide the reader's attempt to make sense of what the text is saying. Moreover, as Fish notes, meaning is altered as we consider meaning.[124] Any notions loaded into a text-reader hybrid object modify that hybrid, altering how all the actors are configured together.

In this way the reader's social knowledge enables, shapes, and constrains the possible meanings the reader can generate from a text. Notions of authorial intent, genre, and literary features are not derived from the text alone but are constructed in light of the other notions the reader has access to and trusts. Within a text-reader hybrid, people and texts are actors, as are notions about the text, and notions about the community, and even notions about notions. Participating in the reader's cognitive event are the historical and biographical facts, beliefs, mistaken ideas, reception criticism, other texts, and all other notions that compose the reader's social web-of-belief.[125] Meaning is contingent on all these notions and practices that a reader brings to a text as their mind works to resolve the language in a text into something understandable and graspable. This emergent notion of the text then shapes how the reader interprets the text's content, function, and significance.

[123] See similar point discussed in Felski 2015*b*: 11, 175.
[124] Fish 1980: 94–96.
[125] Again, on the role of external notions available to a reader, see Cioffi 1964.

Self-reflective analysis of reading practices modifies those reading practices, and as such this project necessarily has ethical implications. Following a Latourian approach, it is possible to make judgments about the quality of fabrication of the theories and notions brought to a text and emerging from the text. ANT does not itself provide the value system by which to judge, but it does provide a system in which one's own values can be loaded and applied. For this reason I am not weighing in on whether one notion of an author is more accurate than another, or even whether one method of reading is more valid than another. Nor am I trying to provide a model of how to more accurately reconstruct authorial intention—although perhaps ANT could assist with that. My theoretical model of an autonomous text mediating between two events is in a sense value-neutral, looking only at what a reader's reconstructed notion of authorial agency—as it occurs in practice—contributes to performativity of a text. What I am doing is thus not the kind of close investigation of texts or history that one might see in work aimed at investigating a text's origin and its original situation or context. That historical and philological work is valuable for how it enables approximation of authorial intention and does shape how readers interpret texts, but that is not what I am myself doing with this project.

4.4 Alfred Gell's Theory of Art and the Meaning of Texts

In this chapter I have argued for a model of textual performativity in which there are two events, an author-text creative event and a text-reader interpretive event, between which meaning and action is mediated by a text as an autonomous artifact. In dialogue with Stanley Fish and Ralph Rader, I have developed a model in which the reader's notions of the first event, including any notions of the creative intent of an author, modifies the emergent meaning of the second event.

I will now turn to the work of Alfred Gell to develop this model further. I will argue that the text as locus of action functions as an index through which a reader can identify multiple sources of action responsible for the text's creation. In this way I extend my approach from the singular creative intention of an author in Rader's model to that of a reader inferring multiple sources of agency and action. This model allows for notions of those multiple inputs, acting in the past, to shape reader cognition about the meaning and function of a text in the present, and these constructed notions about creative agency then to serve as a means by which a reader is able to create meaning from the text.

To reframe Gell in terms of ANT, as I will do below, the author-text creative event occurs within an actor-network, and the reader's notion of this past event's embeddedness and configuration within this actor-network modifies the current interpretive event. Artifacts index the action of those involved in their creation, allowing readers, themselves embedded in actor-networks, to reconstruct a sense of how that past actor-network was configured. The artifact mediates the past into the present, and reconstructed notions of this past action, along with the present interpretation of the meaning of that past action, modify the meaning, and thus performative action, of the artifact. In this way the performativity of a text emerges in the specific configuration of an assemblage of text, reader, artifacts, and notions of the text, including notions of its genre and function, of its intended use, what it was meant to mean and say, and for what purpose it was written.

4.4.1 An Anthropological Theory of Art

In *Art and Agency*, Gell develops a theory of art that uses theory of social relations rather than aesthetics as its starting point.[126] His interest is in a theory that encompasses any number of aesthetic notions of what constitutes art, and he rejects any approach that distinguishes between Western and non-Western forms of art. Likewise, he writes that he is not interested in specific criticism of any single work of art, wanting instead to develop what functions as a kind of universal, non-culturally specific anthropological theory. For this reason, he writes, "a purely cultural, aesthetic, 'appreciative' approach to art objects is an anthropological dead end."[127] Rather than creating an entirely new theory of art, however, Gell explains he wants to develop "a new variant of existing anthropological theory" and "apply" it to art. "I just want to be unoriginal in a new way," he states.[128] Toward this end, Gell is not interested in what is interior to human minds but in how the social world is composed of objects: "Aesthetic judgements are only interior mental acts; art objects, on the other hand, are produced and circulated in the external physical and social world."[129] Similarly, he argues, "culture has no

[126] Gell 1998: 1–5. See also De La Fuente 2010.
[127] Gell 1998: 5.
[128] Gell 1998: 4.
[129] Gell 1998: 3.

existence independently of its manifestations in social interactions."[130] For Gell, then, a theory of art is ultimately a theory of social relations applied to art.

4.4.2 The Interpretation of Social Objects

Gell argues that art cannot be *art* without human involvement and recognition of that art as art by humans. "The aim of anthropological theory," Gell writes, "is to make sense of behavior in the context of social relations." An anthropological theory of art is thus one that will "account for the production and circulation of art objects as a function of this relational context."[131] There is no art that does not involve human action and human relationships: art objects are social objects, made by humans for humans, and having meaning only in relation to humans.[132] An art object, by implication, is only *art* because it is recognized as such—having been created, collected, displayed, and interpreted as art.

This human recognition of art as *art* parallels a recognition of texts as *texts* in the model of textual performativity in that I am developing. Although I do not claim that text objects and art objects are identical, what Gell argues to be true about the human relationality of art objects is closely related to the way that texts are caught up in human relationships. Importantly, Gell avoids defining what precisely makes something an art object and instead develops an anthropological theory in which the definition of art is left open and into which any social object could be substituted.[133] I argue what is true of art objects is true of texts: they, too, are created, collected, presented, and interpreted. For this reason, *texts* can be slotted into Gell's theory. Social objects have meaning within social relations and the meaning of a text object or an art object emerges with the way in which these human actions are perceived and interpreted.

Gell's anthropological approach to social objects involves a heuristic which intentionally anthropomorphizes art objects in order to elucidate the way they mediate human action and human relations. In his method, he explains, "art objects are the equivalent of persons, or more precisely,

[130] Gell 1998: 4.
[131] Gell 1998: 11.
[132] Found objects that are displayed as art are an exception in that they are not created by humans but otherwise still function as social objects. See Gell 1998: 30–31.
[133] Gell 1998: 5–7.

social agents."[134] This relational approach is similar to ANT in that it effectively objectifies persons and personifies objects in the same way that ANT flattens all action into a single plane of action in which humans and nonhumans are treated symmetrically.[135] What matters for Gell is the way an art object, of any sort, functions within human relations. He writes:

> in fact anything whatsoever could, conceivably, be an art object from the anthropological point of view, including living persons, because the anthropological theory of art (which we can roughly define as the 'social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency') merges seamlessly with the social anthropology of persons and their bodies.[136]

A difference, however, between ANT and Gell's approach is that where ANT depersonalizes action in order to emphasize the contribution of nonhuman objects in society, Gell is, in a sense, humanizing objects in order to make clear the way they are relational.[137]

To understand the relational action of art objects, one could ask how humans would interpret art objects if the art object were human. By doing so it is possible to identify some of the ways that humans relate to art objects, even if this is not the same type of interpersonal relationship one would find between two humans. To be clear, Gell is not suggesting that static, non-human objects have feelings, emotions, and thoughts of their own. What Gell's theoretical approach reflects is the way that, by nature, humans are interested in what other humans are doing. Social objects integrate and mediate the actions, feelings, emotions, intentions of the humans that created and collected them, and in Gell's theoretical framework, these objects are caught up in human relations and interpreted by humans in much the same way that humans themselves are.[138]

Gell provides a means for recognizing the role of human cognition in the way humans and other objects interact. As is the case in Rader's model of tacit cognition, the viewer may not be explicitly aware of their own cognitive act, but a tacit inference of an art object's relationality still functions to modify the viewer's notion of the art object. An art object is created, collected, put on display, and viewed by humans. Any individual human participating in this process recognizes the role

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[134] Gell 1998: 7.
[135] See Chapter 1.
[136] Gell 1998: 7.
[137] On the use of anthropomorphism in Latour's theoretical approach, see Latour 2008.
[138] This humanization of art objects is, in a sense, similar to Umberto Eco's use of *intentio operis*, or "intention of the text," to understand the relationship between readers and texts. See Eco et al. 1992: 63–64. See also the notion of art objects wanting something in Mitchell 2005.

of other humans in the art object's life as a social object, even if that recognition is tacit. Through the art object, the viewer gazes into the actions of its creators. Who made it and for what reason? What meaning and purpose were there for creating and displaying the object? What were the humans involved trying to do? What Gell argues is that the meaning of the art object to the viewer is a meaning constituted, at least in part, by the viewer's notion of this human action.

The theoretical approach I am developing, in dialogue with Gell and ANT, provides a method for analysis of this social relationality of objects. Where Fish and Rader illustrated the way in which meaning is contingent on reader experience and how that experience involves cognition about authorial intent, Gell's theory enables analysis of the way in which social objects make visible the action of a multiplicity of actors, of all those assembled in the actor-network in which the object was created as *art*. The art object mediates this past action, placing it in front of the viewer to be interpreted, and the interpretation of this past action then changes the viewer's own relationality with the art object. In this way Gell's work contributes a framework by which to analyze the hermeneutics of social objects within an actor-network.

4.4.3 Gell, ANT, and Agency

Gell takes a different approach to nonhuman agency than that of an actor-network approach, but his overall theoretical method remains consistent with ANT. In Gell's definition an agent is "one who has the capacity to initiate causal events in his/her vicinity, which cannot be ascribed to the current state of the physical cosmos."[139] Unlike ANT, Gell's approach excludes the possibility of non-sentient, nonhuman objects having agency. For Gell, events that occur naturally, without intentional human action, are things that "happen" rather than "actions."[140] But even as Gell says he holds to this philosophical definition of agency, it is clear he finds it too constraining for his own theoretical work, and to work around the problem of having no philosophical method to allow for art objects to be recognized as agents, he adopts an anthropological method that arrives at the same aim. Even if he himself cannot go so far as to recognize nonhumans as having agency, he does suggest acknowledging " 'folk' notions of agency." He notes, for instance, "in practice, people do attribute intentions and awareness to objects like cars and images of the

[139] Gell 1998: 19.
[140] Gell 1998: 16.

gods."[141] Instead of arguing that art objects *are* agents, Gell simply suggests that people *do* sometimes regard nonhuman objects as if they were agents.

In Gell's approach to agency, it is legitimate for *things* to be thought of as agents to the extent they are *things involved in social relationships*. In this way it is possible to recognize what he identifies as the secondary agency of nonhuman objects.[142] Gell argues that human agency and action require mediation by nonhuman objects, and as noted above, objects in the vicinity of humans are often attributed with agency by humans. For these reasons it is fair to consider these objects that mediate human agency or are attributed with agency by humans as themselves secondary agents. A child's doll, for instance, effectively has agency because the child acts as if it had agency.[143] In this scheme the humans who fit the classical definitions of agents in Gell's philosophical method are primary agents. Secondary agents would be those who are attributed agency by humans, whether because they are thought, in some way, to mediate the agency of humans or because a human acts as if the object were thought to be alive in some sense. In other words, as Gell argues, "attribution of agency rests on the detection of the effects of agency."[144] In this sense, the orbits of planets would not qualify as agents since they are not social agents and their movement is not the outcome of being entangled in human action.[145]

While this distinction between primary and secondary agency is itself incompatible with ANT—as I have discussed in Chapter 1, ANT flattens human and nonhuman action into a single plane of action—there is, nonetheless, value to recognizing notions held by humans about action downstream of human intent as different from the notions held about passive, non-intentional action. Intentional beings would not be assigned to a unique category of agents in ANT, but the distinction between human and nonhuman—or what Gell categorizes as primary and secondary agents—does serve a *hermeneutic* function to the extent it raises questions about how cognitive

[141] Gell 1998: 17. In Gell's description cars are felt to be almost a part of one's own body, a means by which others may evaluate oneself, and felt to have their own personality. He notes, for instance, they are objects with which one can have an emotional relationship, and they can even evoke feelings of betrayal. See Gell 1998: 18–19.
[142] Gell 1998: 20.
[143] Gell 1998: 17–20.
[144] Gell 1998: 20.
[145] In some cases celestial bodies, too, could be considered social agents due to their function in human beliefs about astrology. Gell 1998: 15.

notions modify action in an actor-network. Within the flattened plane of action to which all actors, human and nonhuman, belong, Gell's approach provides a heuristic for addressing the cognitive impact of a hermeneutics of meaning and action. Thus, even as I am using a definition of agency that would necessitate rejecting Gell's philosophical approach in which human intent or will is exceptional, Gell's method has value in practice for its recognition of the cognitive component of human action. In this way, Gell contributes toward my own framework in which there is recognition that notions of human agency and human social action modify human response to that agency and action.

4.4.4 Social Objects and Semiotics

Gell's theory of social objects is primarily a non-linguistic semiotic approach which centers on the notion of a social object as an *index* of agency.[146] The index, Gell explains, is "an entity from which the observer can make a causal inference of some kind, of an inference about the intentions or capabilities of another person."[147] Examples referred to by Gell include that of smoke indexing a fire or a smile showing friendliness.[148] Gell follows Umberto Eco, who cites Pierce, in terming the inferences made from the indexes *abductions*.[149] In this semiotic approach an art object functions to index the intentions and capabilities of the creator of an art object. "Manufactured objects," Gell writes, "are 'caused' by their makers, just as smoke is cause by fire; hence manufactured objects are indexes of their makers."[150]

These intentions and capabilities indexed by an artifact are abducted by the viewer in the process of interpreting the meaning of the art object. Gell describes, for instance, how one abducts what is happening in a portrait:

> When we see a picture of a smiling person, we attribute an attitude of friendliness to "the person in the picture" and (if there is one) the sitter or "subject" of the picture. We respond to the picture in this way because the appearance of smiling triggers a (hedged) inference that (unless they are pretending) this person is friendly, just as a real person's smile would trigger the same inference. We have, in short, access to 'another mind' in this way, a real mind or a depicted mind, but in either case the mind of a well-disposed person.[151]

[146] See Gell 1998: 14–15.
[147] Gell 1998: 13.
[148] Gell 1998: 13.
[149] Gell 1998: 14; Eco 1976: 131–133; 1984: 39–43.
[150] Gell 1998: 23.
[151] Gell 1998: 15.

As noted in this example, abductions are provisional and, indeed, may be wrong. Smoke can be made without fire and, Gell notes, a smile can be false.[152] Along these lines, Gell quotes Eco in describing abduction as "tentative and hazardous."[153] This tentative and hazardous quality of abductions is key to Gell's approach, in that abduction is a form of cognition in which inferences are made about things that are not known with factual certainty but that still guide human actions.[154]

To the extent abducted notions of origins and intention shape an object's interpretation, the abduction shapes what the object *does*. What I am interested in doing here is not to directly evaluate the accuracy or quality of these abductions but, instead, to create a model in which it is possible to take note of the performative impact of the abductions that *do* occur.[155] In other words, following Gell, this approach looks for the effects of what people actually think, not what they *should* think. If humans make abductions from art objects and texts, the question is then, what does this reconstruction, accurate or not, do to the viewers' relationality to that object and its emergent performativity?

4.4.5 A Chair as Social Object

To return to an illustration from Chapter 2, consider the pristine white chair located in a museum exhibit, which a visitor initially mistakes for an art object and then is led to believe to be a chair, only to, in the end, end up questioning the notion of art entirely. The white chair in this illustration is an *index* by which the visitor to the museum makes abductions. In seeking to understand the function of the white chair, the operative question for the visitor is *what is this object meant for?* In effect, the visitor attempts to determine the intention of the artist, curators, and museum staff. The visitor recognizes—perhaps tacitly—that the object mediates the agency of others, and the visitor's notion of function emerges with what the artist and others are thought to have been doing with the object.

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[152] Gell 1998: 13.
[153] Gell 1998: 14; Eco 1984: 40.
[154] Gell 1998: 13–16.
[155] I will return later in this chapter to discussion of social knowledge and politics and to the accuracy and quality of these abductions.

In my story, the initial abduction was that chair was created to function as an art object. The visitor made note of other objects to which it was attached, including what appeared to be a descriptive label, in an attempt to construct a sense of why the chair mattered and how to relate to it. The staff member's words reshuffled those abductions such that chair was no longer interpreted as an index of the actions of the artist and curator but instead interpreted as an index for the thoughtfulness of the museum staff, and perhaps a commercial interest of a chair manufacturer.

In this example, the chair functions as a social object through which and around which multiple sources of action, human and nonhuman, are brought together and made available for interpretation. The chair mediates the action of many others—museum staff, curator, artist, builders, multi-national corporations, trade agreements, plastics technology, and the lumber industry, among others. Indeed the concept of a *chair* itself is a social notion brought with the visitor to the museum. In an attempt to understand the chair's function, the visitor abducts what these actors have done and are doing—to the extent that these actors have left a trace that can be abducted from the index and the objects alongside which it is assembled. From this reconstructed notion, the visitor is able to create a working notion of the chair's function, purpose, relationality, and meaning.

These abductions are tentative and hazardous, and the visitor may never be fully sure whether their visit made them an unwitting participant in some sort of performance art. Indeed, that possibility is itself an abducted notion that functions to unsettle rather than stabilize the configuration of the visitor-chair-notions-museum. Ultimately, what matters in this story is the abducted notion of the chair, not the fact of whether the chair was indeed an art object or a chair-to-sit-on. In other words, what matters is the content of these abductions, not their accuracy. It is the abductions made, not the facts themselves, that alters what happens. This is not to argue that there is no relation between facts and abductions, only that ultimately all that matters in my model is what is *thought* to be the case about an object's origins.

4.4.6 Art Object as Index and Nexus

To understand how art and text objects serve as indexes from which humans make abductions, it is helpful to think of the object in terms of a *nexus* through which and around which action occurs. Like any object within an actor-network, a text or art object mediates the action of many

others, human and nonhuman. Bringing Gell's framework into dialogue with ANT provides a method to identify and analyze the ways in which humans perform a reconstruction of these multiple sources of action functioning in and around the nexus.

Gell systemizes reconstruction of agency and action in terms of four categories of actors which he identifies as mediated through the art object: *artist*, *index*, *prototype*, and *recipient*. These terms refer to the creator of an art object (artist), the art object itself (index), that which the object represents (prototype), and the patron or viewers for whom it is created (recipient).[156] I will return to Gell's categories in more detail below when examining how some of these specific agent-patient relationships are abducted by viewers and readers. For now I will note that the *recipient* may be the one who commissions a piece of art, the original viewers, or some later viewing public, as is the case with artifacts put on display in a museum. Likewise, some works may reflect the contributions of multiple *artists*. With contemporary texts in this scheme, the roles author, editor, and publisher, for instance, would be subsumed in the category of *artist*. Moreover, the index may reflect a series of modifications by successive communities. The term *prototype* could include that which is invisible or abstract—for instance a spirit or god or an abstract concept such as love.[157]

The relationships between the artist, index, prototype, and recipient can be described in philosophical terms of *agency* and *patiency*.[158] What the viewer of the art object does, Gell argues, is abduct the action that is mediated by the art object. The contributions of an agent in any one of these categories could be abducted in terms of its relationship to a patient in any other category. The viewer might recognize, for instance, the artist as the creative agent responsible for creation of the index, in what would be a straightforward agent-patient relationship between artist and index. It could also be thought that the art object is acting on the artist, in what would be an abduction of an index-artist agent-patient relationship. With any art object there are multiple potential combinations of how these categories could represent what is abducted in the agent or patient position. Indeed, the same actor can be both agent and patient in relationship to

[156] Gell 1998: 23–27.
[157] See Gell 1998: 25–26.
[158] See Gell 1998: 21–23, 28–29.

itself.[159] Agents in these four categories, moreover, can form nested hierarchies. The art object, for instance, could be thought to mediate the agency of the artist who in turn mediates the agency of the art object itself, as well as mediating the agency of the prototype represented in the art object and the interests of the eventual recipient.[160]

The notion of art object as nexus serves to highlight the way these agent-patient relationships are mediated through the art object, and how in mediating these multiple interacting sources of action, human and nonhuman, the art object indexes them to makes them available for abduction. In Gell's words, the art object "reveals, and potentiates, agency exercised and patient-hood suffered on either side of it."[161] To borrow an example from Michel Serres, a comparison could be made to a single grain of sand moving through the neck of an hourglass, mediating between time past and time to come, between the actions that have occurred in the creation of the art object and the interpretive and performative actions that will occur downstream of the object.[162] In this way the art object functions as nexus, mediator, and index: the art object *reveals* and *potentiates* the agencies it mediates, and, in doing so, enables the viewer to fabricate a set of notions about purpose, function, and meaning of the art object.

4.4.7 From Art Object to Text Object

Gell leaves open his definition of *art* with the intent that any culturally specific definition of art may be slotted into his theory. Moreover, an object need not be something recognized as art at all for Gell's theory to be relevant, and, as noted above, Gell's theory could be extended to any social object. What matters to Gell, as I have described above, is "social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency."[163] Thus, he writes, "the art object is whatever is inserted into the 'slot' provided for art objects in the system of terms and relations envisaged in the theory."[164] I have been explaining Gell's work in terms of art objects since this is how he described his own theoretical approach. My intent in doing so, however, is to substitute *text* for *art*. Gell states he is uninterested in doing so himself, writing "I do not wish to discuss literary theory, since I am

[159] Gell 1998: 28.
[160] I will return to more detailed analysis of these agent-patient relationships below.
[161] Gell 1998: 37.
[162] Serres 1982: 44.
[163] Gell 1998: 7.
[164] Gell 1998: 7.

only interested in visual art," but in my view his work has direct implications for the way readers relate to texts.[165] Instead of a viewer or viewing public as recipient, we would have a *reader* and *reading public*. The text functions as an index of the agency of authors, readers, the reality or notions that inspired its creation, as well as its own agency as index.[166] A reader detects these threads of agency mediated by a text, and in so doing constructs a sense of the text's meaning, genre, and function. In this way, a text functions as a nexus of agency and action, in which the readers' abduction of that agency and action modifies the emergent performativity of the text.

4.4.8 Art Objects in Actor-Networks

Here, with conceptualization of the art object as index and nexus, the value of adopting Gell's theoretical approach within a broader ANT framework becomes evident. The potentially infinite combinations of nested actors whose agency is mediated by the art object might best be described as itself an actor-network. There is no limit to the number of possible combinations of nested agency one could describe and a viewer of an art object could abduct. Consequently, however, in analyzing sources of action mediated by an object, there is a tension between a theoretical method, following ANT, of tracing all the actors and the value of telling a story about an object's creation. The latter inevitably involves making decisions about which actors to include and which to let fade into the background. A typical viewer of an art object or reader of a text certainly would not attempt to abduct *all* the actors to which the object is associated in an actor-network. For this reason, Gell's approach is valuable as a more narrow heuristic framework for identifying how readers attempt to abduct the contribution of *some* of these actors. What matters, then, is identifying the notions human readers abduct and use in the text-reader event.

This Gell-derived framework is important because the specific question I am addressing here is *what agencies are identified by a reader*? This is not an attempt to identify all the actors indexed in a text, but rather an attempt to identify the actors abducted by the reader of a text. The first is better served by an ANT method of tracing all the actors. The second is well-served, at least as a starting point, by Gell's system of classifying abducted sources of agency and action in terms of his four categories. And if these categories of *artist*, *index*, *recipient*, and *prototype* are somewhat

[165] Gell 1998: 34.
[166] See, for instance, Flood 2006.

fluid and imprecise, it does not pose a problem since in my model these categories primarily serve as a heuristic for identifying the types of agency and action that may be abducted—in other words, serving to illustrate what is happening in the reader's experience of a text rather than to exhaustively categorize all the action mediated by a text.

In this way, Gell's approach serves to extend the model I began developing earlier in this chapter. An art object functions not only as a nexus through which many sources of action are mediated but also as a nexus around which an interpretive hybrid object is formed. Moreover, art objects are not viewed or interpreted in isolation: it is not a single individual who makes interpretive conclusions about meaning but, rather, an assemblage of humans and nonhumans, and the abducted sense of the art object's relationality emerges with the notions and practices brought to the art object. These notions are themselves social and distributed, contingent on the configuration of humans and other objects assembled alongside the art object. The text sits at the core of this hybrid, functioning as a nucleus, holding the assembled hybrid together while serving as an index though which abductions can be made and to which notions of the text can be attached.

4.5 Permutations of Agency and Action Mediated and Indexed by a Text

Above I have summarized Gell's anthropological theory of art and discussed how it is valuable as a framework for analyzing readers' cognitive reconstruction of a text's origin and its function within human social relations. I will now show how several different combinations of relationships between artist, recipient, prototype, or index in an agent and/or patient role reveal ways in which readers construct the meaning and function of a text.

4.5.1 Artist as Agent

The contributions of an author to a text is one of the most basic abductions performed by a reader. This can be thought of in terms of two relationships: an artist–index and an artist–recipient relationship. The abduction of the first is a reconstruction of what happened in the author-text creative event; the second is a reconstruction of what the author was trying to do, or in fact did do, to the reader.

Artist–Text Relationship

First, let us consider how a text is an index of the creative agency of its author. This artist–index relationship is what Gell describes as "the elementary formula for artistic agency."[167] For example, Gell writes, "the brushwork in works by Van Gogh emanates an almost palpable sense of the artist's presence, smearing and dabbing the still viscous oil paint."[168] To apply Gell's theory to texts, in one sense this would be equivalent, in my model, to a reader attempting to reconstruct a sense of past action and skills on the part of the author. What creative contributions are evident in the text? Did the author, for instance, have a unique way with words or ability to capture a narrative in writing? Does the text show strong linguistic skills, or, conversely, a poor grasp of language? More than analysis of the creative skill of an author, however, this abduction is also one of identifying authorial intent. The reader's abduction of what occurred in the author-text creative event is a reconstruction, from textual clues, of a notion of the content the author intended to encode in the text and of characteristics such as genre, style, authorial voice, and other features the author had in mind.

In my scheme of three discrete layers of possible meanings—that of author-text event, text-artifact, or text-reader event—this abduction focuses on recovering the meaning of the author, not of the text itself or of reader's experience. In contrast to Fish who is interested purely in the reader's meaning in the text-reader event, this abduction locates meaning in the author's meaning in the author-text event. Even so, because this is an *abduction* of meaning, not the actual meaning of the author, what I am describing remains consistent with Fish. This abduction is the *reader's* abduction of a notion of meaning as the *reader* thinks it occurred for an author.

There is a difference, of course, between visual art objects and texts constituted with words. Whereas art objects, such as paintings, might be expected to evoke a sense of wonder about an artist in the way Gell describes, texts often do not do so to the same extent. It is true that a skillful turn of phrase in a novel might also make one think about artistic agency. In other cases, such as a badly translated instruction manual, the translator—whom I would place in the *artist* category—likewise becomes unexpectedly present to the reader. In many cases, however,

[167] Gell 1998: 33.
[168] Gell 1998: 33.

one might not even consider the fact someone had to write the words being read. A reader may indeed be less likely to think deeply about an author's skill with words than a viewer of a painting is to think about an artist's brushwork, but Gell's framework is not prescribing how a recipient *ought* to abduct agency, only categorizing what *may* be abducted and what the effects of these abductions would be when they occur. In both the case of an art object and a text, it is the *recipient's* abduction that matters.

Artist–Recipient Relationship

Second, consider how a text mediates the action of an author upon a reader. In Gell's terms this relationship would be an artist–recipient relationship, an agent-patient formula which "expresses the power of the artist as a social agent over the recipient as a social patient."[169] Along these lines, Gell writes, "many works of art inspire wonder, awe, fear, and other powerful emotions in the spectator." It is the "technical prowess" of artists, Gell argues, that "enables them to produce these powerful effects on recipients."[170] In an abduction of the artist–recipient relationship, the viewer of an art object may experience these effects and attribute them to the actions of the artist.

Here it is helpful to return to Austin's speech-act theory, in which "to say something is to do something."[171] In my model of action, writing functions as a form of mediated speech-act, and if we extend Austin to written texts, as I have been doing, *to write something is to do something*. To abduct the author–reader relationship is to ask what an author *was doing* in writing. This abduction could take any number of forms: What did the author want to communicate to readers? In what ways did an author make use of, or indeed subvert, literary genres and other conventions?[172] What impact *on a reader* was intended for the text? What did the author's communicative act achieve, regardless of intentions? What response did the author hope would be evoked, or how did the author hope the text would configure the social reality of the readers? Indeed, for which readers did the author intend to write?[173]

[169] Gell 1998: 39.
[170] Gell 1998: 39.
[171] Austin 1962: 12.
[172] See Miller 1984.
[173] See discussion of *hypothetical intentionalism* in Livingston 2010: 408–411.

To return to Rader's cognitive approach, it would be this author-reader abduction that enables a reader to assign meaning to a text. In Rader's argument the reader tacitly reconstructs a notion of what the author was doing, on the basis of a working assumption that the author wrote with the expectation that a reader would be able to recognize the meaning embodied in a text. Thus this abduction is, in effect, describing the reader's *answering act of cognition*, as Fish terms this approach.[174]

This analysis raises two issues for consideration of biblical texts: what happens when the reader *does not* recognize the contribution of an author to a biblical text—in which case the agency of the author is erased—or the reader fails to recognize the contribution of the text as Latourian *mediator* which modifies the action it mediates—in other words reading the Bible as if it were a Latourian *intermediary*. I will return to these issues in my discussion of abductions of biblical texts.

4.5.2 Performativity of the Index

Above I examined categories of abducted relationships in which the author is recognized as acting on text or reader. I now turn to a different type of relationship, that of text acting on reader, which would be labeled an index–recipient relationship in Gell's terminology. Here instead of asking what the *author was doing* in writing, this approach asks what the *text does now* to readers. This question of performativity is, in large part, what distinguishes an author-text abduction from a text-reader abduction: the first has no concern with the performativity of the text whereas this text-reader abduction is concerned only with what the text does and has little concern for authorial intent. Likewise, the difference between an author-reader relationship and a text-reader relationship is the former downplays the role of *mediation* while the latter emphasizes the text's autonomous characteristics.

An abduction of the index–recipient relationship is one of what the art object does and what its effects are. Mimesis, for instance, is one mechanism by which art objects act. Gell writes, "to perceive (to internalize) is to imitate, and thus we become (and produce) what we perceive."[175]

[174] Fish 1980: 136.
[175] Gell 1998: 31.

In this way, "the spectacle of a painted saint at prayer is conducive to piety, of an amorous couple, to lustfulness, and so on, as has been endlessly commented on since ancient times."[176] Another case would be attributes such as the capacity of an art object to evoke an emotional or psychological response. Consider, for example, a warrior's shield decorated with grotesque images. Gell argues the shield "is an index which, in context, possesses agency, having the power to demoralize the enemy warrior (the recipient/patient)."[177] Texts and art objects share an ability to generate performances by those who engage with them.[178] Texts hold social power, configure and enact social reality, evoke emotional and psychological responses, and otherwise act on readers bringing about performative responses. An abduction of a text-reader relationship is thus both an abduction of what the text *does to* the reader and also an abduction of what the reader is *made to do* in response.

4.5.3 Recipient's Agency and Action

Another set of relationships are those with the recipient in the agent position. Those for whom an art object is made have agency in creating the object if the object is created for them or with them in mind. Gell describes this agency of the recipient acting on the creation of the index as "the elementary formula for 'patronage' and/or 'the spectator as agent.' "[179] For example, Gell points to the agency abducted in the creation of a carved wine cup belonging to the emperor Shah Jehan. The agency of interest to viewers is not that of the artist or creator of the cup, now lost to history if ever widely known, but rather that of Shah Jehan as someone who used his power to have objects for display created. Gell writes, "Shah Jehan's agency is not as a maker, but as a 'patron' of art, and his cup indexes his glory in this respect, which contemporary potentates can only emulate in feeble, vulgar, ways."[180]

Consider also the case of found objects in which there is no creator, such as a chip of stone mistakenly thought to be an ancient art object.[181] Likewise, Gell argues, Japanese art "is particularly rich in the use of found objects for artistic purposes, for instance, the natural boulders

[176] Gell 1998: 31.
[177] Gell 1998: 31.
[178] See Chapter 3.
[179] Gell 1998: 33.
[180] Gell 1998: 24.
[181] Gell 1998: 16.

which are deployed in Japanese gardens."[182] A found object does not have a creator in the same way that an object created as art would, and it only become an art object when someone makes the decision to display it as such. Even as an uncreated, found object, there is still artistic intentionality and agency represented in its display.

The public can be agents in a work of art because they, like Shah Jehan, have caused it to come into being so that the work can be viewed. Gell explains, "even if one is not 'the patron' who caused the work of art to be made, any spectator may infer that, in a more general sense, the work of art was made for him or her."[183] He further writes, "a work of contemporary art indexes the contemporary art public, who constitute the intended recipients of such work."[184] Of course, some art is viewed by people who were never intended to be its recipients. For instance, Gell writes, "while I am able to feel that I belong ... to the 'intended' public for contemporary art, I know perfectly well that the Egyptian art in the British Museum was never intended for my eyes."[185] Yet even Egyptian art continues to be art held and displayed by the British Museum due, at least in part, to the agency of the viewing public and the museum's patrons.

This notion of the recipient as agent has implications for the readers of texts. Consider the case in which recipients abduct themselves as agents in the case of religion:

> A religious congregation, for instance, is entitled to think that their piety and devotion were contributory to the causation of the cathedral in which they worship, even though this cathedral was constructed centuries earlier, because they (not unreasonably) believe that the cathedral was erected *with them in mind*, the future generations of worshippers therein.[186]

This notion of an object being created with the recipient in mind, in effect putting that use of the object in the agent position, has clear implications for biblical texts. With this approach are questions such as, how do readers abduct themselves as agents for whom the text is created, and how does this relationality to the text modify how they understand its meaning?

[182]Gell 1998: 30.
[183]Gell 1998: 34.
[184]Gell 1998: 24.
[185]Gell 1998: 24.
[186]Gell 1998: 34.

The Reader as Agent and Meaning in the Reader

Readers' notion of themselves as agents has another implication for the meaning of texts. One of the questions about Fish's work is to what extent he gives the reader agency in assigning meaning to a text. On one hand, Fish can be understood as arguing that the meaning evoked *by a text* is contingent on the community that reads it. On the other hand, Fish's argument can be reframed to be that meaning emerges as *a reader* projects meaning onto a text, making the text a passive non-contributor to meaning, which is a only a short step away from saying meaning is whatever the reader *decides it should be*. My own position is the first, in which it is a text that does something to a reader, giving priority to the text as agent. The latter position is closer to a case Gell describes, however, in which viewers of an art object see themselves as agents:

> One can hardly fail to take note of the fact that many members of the contemporary art public have actually internalized the view critics take of their agency as recipients of art, that is, they attribute creativity to themselves as spectators, who can 'make something' out of the raw material presented to them in the art gallery.[187]

When readers actively take meaning to be whatever they make it to be, they take a position similar to Gell's spectators as agents.[188] Along these lines, Gell writes, "readers, according to some critical theorists, have been promoted to a status hardly distinguishable from that once occupied by writers."[189] Gell himself does not apply his theory of art to writing, but he does recognize the implications of a recipient as agent for interpretation of both texts and visual objects.[190]

Self-Reciprocal Agency

This category of relationships, in which the recipient is in the agent position, raises an issue of self-reciprocal agency. What happens when the same category—prototype, artist, index, or recipient—is both agent and patient of that which is mediated through the index? Abduction of the recipient as agent and patient, for instance, raises a number of issues for consideration. Describing this case, Gell writes:

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[187] Gell 1998: 34.

[188] This also maps to Umberto Eco's distinction, following Richard Rorty, between *interpretation* and *use* of a text. By implication, interpretation would be keeping the text in the agent position, whereas *use* would be putting the reader in the agent position. See Eco 1990: 57–62.

[189] Gell 1998: 33.

[190] Gell 1998: 33–34.

> This type of self-reciprocal agency/patiency exercised by the prototype of an index with regard to itself is actually very familiar to us. If we look into the mirror, and dislike what we see, or indeed approve of what we see, we are responding, as patients, to an index (the mirror image) of which we are the agents.[191]

This abduction of one's relation to oneself in the mirror is on its own not very interesting, but it does raise broader issues of what happens when that which humans construct (or *fabricate* to use Latour's term) acts back on those humans. When we construct the text in our own image, and then struggle with how that image acts back on us, perhaps this is the same as what Gell describes in Churchill's response to his portrait: "Churchill considered himself the victim of the agency of the artist, rather than his own agency as an ugly person."[192]

When biblical text acts as a sort of fetish object, through which God is thought to speak, for example, another of Gell's examples is illustrative:

> an idol is simultaneously an index through which the god mediates his agency over his devotees, who submit to him in the form of his image; but at the same time, the devotees actually have power over the god via his image, because it is they who have made, installed, and consecrated the idol, it is they who offer sacrifices and prayers etc., without which the god would hardly be so consequential.[193]

The Bible has power in American evangelicalism because it is read, listened to, followed, and enforced by the evangelical communities that read it and hold it sacred. At the same time, that power is contingent, at least to some extent, on the notions those same communities bring to the text or collectively abduct from the text about its function, its authority, and its meaning. The text's agency is, in this sense, subordinated to the agency of the reading community who delegate their own meaning and power to the text.[194]

4.5.4 Prototype as Agent

Another set of agent-patient relationships to consider include those where the *prototype* is in the agent position. To recognize the prototype as an agent is to recognize that reality impinges itself on text, writers, and readers. Here, the role of text and author are placed in the background, subordinated to the action of that which is depicted in the text.

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[191] Gell 1998: 49.
[192] Gell 1998: 50.
[193] Gell 1998: 40. See also Latour 2010*c*.
[194] On delegated social power, see Brey 2008.

Consider, for example, an agent-patient relationship abducted from a photograph. Gell writes, "photography was, once upon a time, considered to be an 'artist-less' mode of image-production, and is still so seen by some."[195] Even if a photograph is recognized to be an artistic production, in an abduction of the prototype's agency, someone viewing a photograph might note the beauty of a person or scenery captured rather than note the skill of the artist in framing the photo or the type of lens, film, camera, or filters used to capture the image. In doing so, the role of the index and artist is downplayed, if not erased, as the recipient abducts the contribution of the objects portrayed (i.e., the prototype) in the photograph.

Primary and Secondary Agencies

To understand this agency of the *prototype*, it is helpful to return to Gell's distinction between primary and secondary agencies. As I discussed above, in Gell's system only humans can be primary agent, and those objects in relationships with humans are labeled secondary agents. *Artists* as humans with self-transcendence and ability to perform intentional actions would be labeled primary agents in this scheme, as would human *recipients*. Indexes, on the other hand, typically function as secondary agents. Gell writes, "they borrow their agency from some external source, which they mediate and transfer to the patient." Indeed, it is an art object's role as mediator between human artists and human recipients that makes these social objects *social*. Otherwise, Gell argues, art objects would only be things involved in "causal interaction between things."[196]

A prototype, when abducted as an agent, would be a *secondary* agent in Gell's scheme. Consider an apple for instance:

> an apple (say) does not 'intend' to appear to us (or to a painter) as round, red and green, of certain dimensions, etc. Nor does it intend to be represented at all.... The apple is a 'secondary' agent though, in that it is only by 'submitting' to the apple, by allowing the apple to impress itself on him, that the artist can attain his goal (as an agent) of 'representing an apple'.[197]

[195] Gell 1998: 35.
[196] Gell 1998: 36. Note, again, ANT itself can be applied to relationships between things alone or to relationships between things and humans—it makes no difference.
[197] Gell 1998: 36–37.

As Gell argues, despite not being human, an apple may still be considered an agent that shapes its own depiction.

The categorization of prototypes as secondary agents is not always straightforward, however. A prototype could be a human being and, thus, also categorized as a primary agent. Gell explains his system:

> In short, where the prototype is an object not normally thought capable of exercising primary agency 'in the world', then as the subject of representation, it will convey only secondary agency; but where the prototype of an index is an entity (such as a king, magician, divine being, etc.) endowed with the ability to intend its own appearance, then the prototype may be partly or wholly a primary agent as well as a secondary agent.[198]

When the prototype is a human (or other living, sentient being) who exerts his or her own will on the artist, the prototype, then, is a primary agent in one sense, but also a secondary agent in the sense that it is another who creates the art object. The recipient is then the patient of their combined agency.

Recall that there are two questions that can be asked here: one question is what agencies a *reader* abducts, or in other words, what *is thought* to be primary; the other question is what sources of action are *in fact* mediated by a text, regardless of what the reader believes to be the case. The agency abducted by a reader may or may not coincide with that which might be given priority from an external ANT perspective. Ultimately, however, the question of which agent *should* be named primary agent is irrelevant to the matter at hand of what *is* given priority by the reader in their abduction of agency. It is this abduction that shapes and configures the meaning of the text, and for this reason it is the *reader's abduction* that is the focus of what I am calling a *Realhermeneutik* perspective.

Prototype as Agent in Relationship with Author, Text, and Reader

When reality, as prototype, is thought to be an agent, the reader abducts what that prototype does to the artist, to the text, and ultimately to the reader. For a reader to identify the prototype as agent in this relationship is to, in effect, recognize that a prototype has acted on an author, text, or reader in some way. Gell writes about art objects, for instance, "anyone who has tried

[198] Gell 1998: 37.

and failed to draw a 'difficult' object, such as the human hand, will know what it is to be an artist in the 'patient' position, confronted by the prototype-as-agent."[199] In this prototype as agent relationship, the human hand, the apple, or other object exerts itself through the artist who mediates the prototype's agency onto the index, which then depicts that reality.

There are a number of ways in which an abduction of a prototype's agency and action could work in practice for a reader of a text. A reader might ask, for example, to what extent a text's portrayal of something resembles the thing itself—an abduction of the *prototype–text* relationship. Through abduction of a *prototype–author* relationship, the reader may infer answers to questions such as to what extent a prototype impinged itself on a writer. In what ways, one might ask, was the creator of a text constrained by the prototype? To what extent, on the other hand, did the author's own creative contribution shape the depiction of the prototype?[200] A third abduction, of a *prototype–reader* relationship, would be similar to Gell's example of photography, where the reader engages directly with the action of some sort of thing in the world.

4.5.5 Hierarchical and Nested Agent/Patient Relations

We can now return to the concept of a *nexus*. As I have argued, following Gell, the text mediates multiple agent/patient relationships. I have discussed some of the more straightforward one-to-one agent/patient relationships of the many combinations of *prototype*, *artist*, *index*, and *recipient* as agent or patient. What I will turn to now is the way in which a reader abducts multiple nested and hierarchical agent/patient relations indexed by a text.

The Text as Index of the Multiple Relationships It Mediates

Within an ANT approach, it is understood that prototype, author, index, and reader are embedded in an actor-network. Each entity is a mediator situated upstream and downstream of many others. The author may be the primary agent who creates a text, but in doing so the author is caught up in a web of action. That which the author seeks to portray, for instance, acts on the author even as the author writes and creates. The prototype influences, compels, inspires, constrains, and even coerces or forces an author to write in certain ways, even as texts as tools of

[199] Gell 1998: 36–37.

[200] It may be helpful to think in terms of what the prototype *affords* for its own depiction. See Costall 1995: 472–474.

communication, likewise, impose constraints, inspire their creators, enable one to reach a much larger audience with one's words, and modify what can be—and is—said and done.[201] One might ask, then, to what extent does the reader see the text as indexing the author or prototype alone, or, in some way, recognize multiple actors contributing to the meaning and action indexed by a text?

On one hand, for instance, the reader may see the prototype as primary and the author and text as mere *intermediaries*. In these cases the reader fails to recognize the contribution of author and text, seeing the world projected by the text as if it were an unfabricated depiction of some reality prior to the text, as if what happened in the past (the prototype) were faithfully recorded and transmitted through the text. In doing so, readers erase the agency of authors and text, with implications for the performativity of the text.

On the other hand, readers may abduct the prototype as the primary agent while also identifying—perhaps tacitly—multiple sources of action. To recognize the agency of the prototype does not necessarily erase the author or deny the transforming effects of mediators. Even as the prototype is thought to bring about its own representation, the reader may also respond to the contribution of the author and text as mediators who add to, subtract from, transform, and translate that action as it is transmitted to the reader. Recall, for instance, Rader's discussion of Browning's "My Last Duchess." As Rader argues, the Duke is so vividly portrayed that the reader thinks of the Duke as in some way real, even as one recognizes Browning's voice as the author of the poem.[202] Biblical authors, likewise, can be admired for their poetry and also be thought to faithfully represent that which they depict. It is fully possible for the reader to appreciate both the primary contribution of a prototype and the mediating function of author and text, recognizing the unique skills brought to bear as the author takes something complex and hard to depict and translates it into the form of a new and expertly presented textual depiction.

The text, as index of these relationships, can be thought to act on the reader in three ways:

First, the text acts as an autonomous object, acting just as all objects act on those to which they are attached. From this perspective, how the text once came to be is irrelevant. All that matters is how the text's content acts on the reader as it is now configured with the reader and others.

[201] A similar point made in the introduction to *Art from Start to Finish*. See Becker et al. 2006: 3–4.
[202] Rader 1974*b*. See discussion earlier in this chapter.

Second, the text is a mediator of action, and mediators are not faithful, passive transmitters of action; they contribute something to that action. The text not only modifies the action first performed by the author, but it then modifies again the action that it transmits to the reader. In this way, the text is not a passive index, but active. The text mediates all the upstream actors in the actor-network, but it also mediates its own action.

Third, the text presents this action for the reader to abduct, functioning as an index by which readers can abduct the relationality of the text with others. The text as nexus sums up and presents these multiple agencies, including its own, to the viewer to detect. It is in this third sense that a text performs a hermeneutic function, and indeed, this is Gell's contribution: reader relationships with texts are more than just events in which words are assigned meaning, but rather relational events in which the reader's own cognition about the text's social relationality modifies the reader's relationship to the text.[203]

Gell's categories of *prototype*, *artist*, *index*, and *recipient* provide a simplified framework with which it is possible to begin to analyze the vast web of action mediated by a text. The aim of using this framework is to elucidate and make explicit the abductions performed by a reader, including both those that are tacit and those of which the reader is fully conscious. What I have argued, following Gell, is that the reader can detect multiple interacting agencies, sometimes in simplified one-to-one relationships of agent and patient and sometimes as complex integrations of multiple agents acting together. Any combination is possible. Indeed they can be nested, hierarchical, and self-reciprocal. It is along these lines that Gell refers to "the myriad possibilities for art objects to mediate social relations."[204] What Gell's framework does is provide a way to tease apart these interacting webs of agency in order to identify how the reader's abduction of this web of action modifies the meaning of a text.

Multivalent, Hierarchical Agency Mediated by a Portrait

To illustrate the way these multiple sources of agency can be abducted together, Gell contrasts a Reynolds portrait of Samuel Johnson with that of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Referring to the 1772 *Samuel Johnson* portrait held by the Tate Gallery, Gell writes:

[203] Recall that, following Latour, it is recognized that the social includes nonhumans.
[204] Gell 1998: 52.

> This portrait, excellent example though it is of Reynolds's art, is none the less seen primarily as an icon of Dr Johnson, a culture hero of the English. Reynolds, in painting his portrait, is understood by us to be as much in awe of the lexicographer as we are ourselves, and this has affected the way in which the sitter is portrayed.[205]

In this case, from what Gell describes, the prototype (Johnson) is seen as the primary agent and the artist (Reynolds) is secondary although the agency of both are still abducted by the viewer of the painting.

The abducted agency in the case of the *Mona Lisa* is reversed, such that the artist rather than prototype is abducted as the primary agent. Gell writes, "the features, or some semblance of the features, once possessed by the woman referred to in Leonardo's picture, are significant only in so far as they mediate our awareness [of] Leonardo's art as a painter."[206] Gell continues, "Leonardo is seen as responsible for the Mona Lisa's appearance, or at least, what is fascinating and compelling about her appearance from the patient/recipient's point of view; whereas Reynolds is *not* seen as responsible for the compelling aspects of Dr Johnson's appearance."[207] This is not to say that the viewer will not appreciate Reynolds' artistic talent or that focus on Leonardo's talent would prevent one from simultaneously pondering the individual Leonardo once painted. Indeed, as Gell points out, his framework of *prototype*, *artist*, *index*, and *recipient* serves to create models for "all possible combinations" of how social objects are caught up in human relations.[208]

To further clarify the way these nested and hierarchical abductions of agency work in practice, Gell's comparison of syntactic constructions referring to these artworks is illustrative. Consider, for instance, the difference between the sentences, "Leonardo da Vinci painted the *Mona Lisa*" and "The *Mona Lisa* was painted by Leonardo da Vinci." The first places the artist in the primary agent position; the second places the index as primary.[209] Neither erases the agency of the artist; the difference in sentence construction simply shows which is given priority. To emphasize this difference in abduction, Gell suggests another phrasing: "The *Mona Lisa* (which was painted by Leonard da Vinci) blew my mind away when I was a kid." Consider, likewise, the agency

[205] Gell 1998: 52.
[206] Gell 1998: 52.
[207] Gell 1998: 53.
[208] Gell 1998: 53.
[209] Gell 1998: 57.

implied by this alternative statement: "Leonardo da Vinci (who painted the *Mona Lisa*) blew my mind away when I was a kid."[210] In both cases the recipient is in the patient position, but the primary abduction is of the agency of the index in the first and of the artist in the second.

Syntactic Abduction of Agency in Romans 5:8

The roles of these multivalent, hierarchical abductions are similarly visible in several different ways of framing a quotation from Romans 5:8. Consider the difference between these sentences:

1) "The Bible says that 'while we still were sinners Christ died for us.' "
2) "The Apostle Paul wrote that 'while we still were sinners Christ died for us.' "
3) "God says that 'while we still were sinners Christ died for us.' "
4) "Did you know that 'while we still were sinners Christ died for us'?"

Each of these sentences attributes primary agency differently, even as the index is recognized as participating in this communication. The first attributes primary agency to the text (index), the second to the Apostle Paul (author), the third to God (author and/or prototype), and the fourth directly to the prototype. All of these attributions of agency would be acceptable within evangelicalism, and indeed it is common practice to speak of the Bible, the words of a human author, and the word of God as equivalent—as well as to expect that another person will recognize the biblical citation even if left implicit.

We could also imagine two more attributions of agency:

5) "The NRSV translation says that 'while we still were sinners Christ died for us.' "
6) "I believe that 'while we still were sinners Christ died for us.' "

In the fifth case the translator is the focus of the abduction even as the other forms of agency are also recognized. In the sixth case, the agent/patient relationship is nested such that it is the speaker who is the primary agent in choosing to accept their own role as patient.

[210] Gell 1998: 57.

In all six sentences, there is an abduction of multiple sources of agency. For evangelicals, none of these sentences would be taken to suggest that God is not the authoritative voice behind the text. Even if the citation of the specific translation were implied to be a mistranslation, the underlying untranslated text would be attributed to the agency of an inspired author. In this sense, Gell's comment on *Mona Lisa* is relevant: "Leonardo is like God, invisible himself, but visible via his works."[211] In each of my sentences, there is a recognition, if tacit, of multivalent agency mediated by the text, and in each an evangelical reader would abduct the action of God speaking and acting through the text. The difference between the sentences is in the way the configuration of these hierarchical relationships is abducted—and Gell's approach provides a heuristic for recognizing these different ways in which readers recognize their own and others' relations to the text.

Multivalent Agencies and the Meaning of the Words of a Text

What are the implications for meaning of the abduction of these multivalent agencies? In the previous examples, the question was one of which actors a viewer of a painting or a reader of a biblical text gives priority in their own abductions of agency.

Here, a discussion of English law in James Simpson's work on biblical hermeneutics is illustrative. Simpson quotes Lord Reid on the role of the English judiciary in interpreting the meaning of a law: "We often say that we are looking for the intention of Parliament, but that is not quite accurate. We are seeking the meaning of the words which Parliament used. We are seeking not what Parliament meant but the true meaning of what they said."[212]

To bring Gell's framework to this analysis of textual meaning, to seek Parliament's meaning would require an artist–recipient abduction; to seek the "true meaning" of the law as written would be, in contrast, an abduction of an index–recipient relationship. Lord Reid could be said, by implication, to be arguing for meaning to be found in the index exclusively. He could also be thought to be, in a sense, recognizing the multivalent agency mediated by a text, in which he gives priority to the index as primary agent but not the *only* agent. The question for judges following Lord Reid's approach, then, is whether Parliament's intention has *any bearing* on the meaning of

[211] Gell 1998: 58.
[212] Lord Reid, quoted in Simpson 2003: 221.

the words of the text. Moreover, it might be recognized that Lord Reid's approach, by implication, also places judges as recipients in a position of agency as they determine the meaning of the law.

An abductive approach recognizes that one does not need to select one source of meaning at the expense of the other; it is possible to recognize the words of the text as having priority but also see them as mediating Parliament's action and being mediated by the judges' interpretation. One could similarly argue for Parliament's intention as primary but yet still recognize that the words of the text, *as written*, do have agency. In both cases Parliament and the law are abducted as agents—the only question is which is seen as primary in this multivalent, hierarchical abduction.

4.6 Abducting the Agency and Action of the Biblical Texts

In this chapter I have argued that the text functions as an index through which a reader can abduct the text's relationality with its creators, with that which it represents and depicts, with its readers, and with all the actors to which it is attached in an actor-network. I will now turn to examples of abductions *in* and *about* biblical texts in order to show how these abducted notions function to modify the way readers relate to the Bible. I will also discuss some of the implications of abducting or not abducting various permutations of prototype, author, text, and reader as agents or patients, particularly in the way evangelical readers approach the Bible as an authoritative index of God's action, of past historical events, and of what God is speaking to them in the present.

4.6.1 Abductions in *Reading Sacred Scripture*

Stephen and Martin Westerholm's book, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, on the historical reception and interpretation of the Bible illustrates some of the ways that readers abduct the relationships between text, reader, prototype, and author. In their introduction the authors ask whether the Bible should be read like any other book, and, if not, how should it be read?[213] To answer they argue that the Bible "calls for a particular kind of reading," one which is "the kind of reading called for by the biblical writings themselves."[214] In this way, the approach taken by the Westerholms serves as an example of how abductions of various agencies and relationships indexed by a text can be performed in the process of identifying a text's meaning and function.

[213] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 1.
[214] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 1–2.

Abductions of Authorship in Pauline Texts

Reading Sacred Scripture's analysis of how the Bible should be read begins with the letters attributed to Paul. In a footnote the Westerholms acknowledge that authorship of some of these letters is contested. In support of referring to Paul as author of the entire corpus, however, the Westerholms argue, "each of its letters invokes Paul's authority and—what is crucial in a historical survey—each has been read as possessing it."[215] Notice, here, how they perform more than one abduction with this argument: first, they cite the fact the index directly names its author, in doing so abducting an author–text relationship in which Paul is author; second, they note that some readers accept Paul as author of all the Pauline texts but others do not. In this way their work identifies various possible author–reader relationships, reflecting the fact that notions of the author differ for different reading populations. Many evangelical readers would believe Paul is the author, simply by virtue of the text saying so, whereas biblical scholars may find convincing evidence suggesting Paul did not write some of the texts attributed to him. For the Westerholms what has priority, it seems, is that the historical readers of the type they survey in their book refer to Paul as author. By implication, they are giving priority to these historical author–text abductions, which—interpreted in the model I am developing—would then be a case of an abduction of historical author–reader relationship on the part of the Westerholms.

This analysis raises questions of what notions are brought *to the text* and participate in the process of making abductions *from the text*. In this analysis of Pauline authorship, for instance, notions of biblical authority and trustworthiness contribute to the weight given to the text's own claim about its authorship, as does a notion that the text should be read in the way called for by the text itself. As evident here, abduction of a text's relationality is contingent on prior notions of a text's relationality, in what functions as a kind of hermeneutical circle. Likewise, it seems clear from the Westerholms' analysis that a notion of Paul as author is both abducted from and brought to the text. As the Westerholms make explicit, notions of how the Bible has been historically interpreted—in other words, notions of historical author–reader relations—are external notions that contribute to their abduction of Paul as author.

[215] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 2 note 3.

This analysis of Paul's letters reflects a multilayered abduction of authorial agency, in which human authorship and the action of God are thought to be indexed by the words of the text. The Westerholms argue, for instance, "Paul's (human) words served as the vehicle for the word of God."[216] Similarly, they state, "we may assume that the letters were acknowledged by their first readers to be what they purported to be: authoritative communications from an apostle commissioned by God, conveying a divine message to God's people."[217] Terms such as *vehicle*, *convey*, *words of*, and *message from* each serve to make visible the role of multiple agents in the relationships indexed by the text. Implied is an abduction of a God–text and God–reader relationship, in which God is the primary agent but also into which the agency of the author and the text as secondary agents are subsumed. In this case, the Westerholms' abduction of God as primary agent could be thought to fit within Gell's *artist* category (or *author* in my terms) but could also be interpreted as implicitly recognizing God as a *prototype* whose agency and action is then mediated by Paul as creator of the text. Note that my emphasis here is on using Gell's categories as heuristic tools to identify and analyze the action indexed by the text, more than identifying the precise category of abduction. Whether God's action is labeled that of *artist* or *prototype*, there is an abducted sense of the human author as *patient* and mediator of God's agency and action, and this notion provides the text with authority.

Abduction of Authorial Intent in the Gospels

Analysis of the Gospels in *Reading Sacred Scripture* focuses in large part on the abducted intentions of the biblical authors. The Westerholms take an approach to Mark's Gospel, for instance, in which they "ask *why* the evangelist reports the incidents as he does," and they characterize intent in terms of what the author "is concerned to convey" or "wants his readers to take note."[218] With this description of what the author *was doing* in writing, the Westerholms are performing a reconstruction of the author-text cognitive event, analyzing the event in terms of what the author intended for text and reader—or, in other words, what can be inferred about author–text and author–reader relations.

[216] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 4.
[217] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 6.
[218] Emphasis added. S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 8.

In order to make sense of the question of how the Bible should be read, the Westerholms try to reconstruct what the author did in the author-text event in order to create a text that would do something to the reader. Their analysis is, in effect, an abduction of the Gospel author's intent for text-reader performativity. This involves a two-part abduction of what the author wrote (author–text) and what that writing has done (text–readers). For instance, consider this statement about how Matthew's Gospel recounts what Jesus said and did: "Matthew expects that ... his readers will see parallels to their own lives and sense the need to respond appropriately."[219] Reframed in terms of the model I am developing, the argument made in *Reading Sacred Scripture* is, by implication, that the author of Matthew intends for the text to mediate Jesus' words and actions to the readers with performative effect. The Westerholms argue, "it is clear that the evangelist intended his work to serve as a handy but authoritative guide to Jesus' life and teaching."[220] Similarly, they conclude the outcome of the writer's actions: "Matthew has provided an authoritative record of Jesus' teachings—to be read, taught, and obeyed."[221] These inferences about the intentions for the text require hierarchical and nested abductions on the part of the Westerholms about what Matthew's author intends for the text to do to the reader (author–text, text–reader relationships). Similarly, the Westerholms are describing how the biblical author expects the reader to abduct their own relationship with the prototype (author–reader, prototype–reader relationships).

Similar to their interpretation of Matthew, in the Westerholms' analysis of Luke's Gospel they ask, in effect, what were the biblical author's intentions for the text–reader relationship? They draw attention, for instance, to "the *story* Luke wants to tell" and they argue, "such *news* by its very nature invites, if not demands, telling."[222] There is, however, another level of abduction subsumed within this analysis: what prototype–author and prototype–text relations did the author intend for readers to abduct? For example, the Westerholms note the role of *eyewitnesses* in Luke's Gospel: "That his readers were 'eyewitnesses' was an important assurance, for readers ancient as well as modern, of the reliable nature of his account."[223] There is, then, in this example

[219] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 11.
[220] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 12.
[221] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 14.
[222] Emphasis added. S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 16.
[223] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 16.

an abduction within an abduction, in which the abduction of an author–reader relationship has nested within it the biblical author's notion of a prototype–reader relationship.

There is also an abduction of the writer's intent for the text to mediate the action of the prototype. Analyzing the Gospel of John, the Westerholms note the text's claim that "Christ spoke 'the words of eternal life,' " and they argue that "John wrote his Gospel to mediate those words—and their power—to all who hear or read its message."[224] Likewise, they write, "John's Gospel reproduces and thus preserves the testimony of John the Baptist, of the Samaritan woman, of the mighty works and words of Jesus."[225] From an actor-network perspective, the text mediates the words and action of multiple actors: Jesus, John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman, and all others whose stories are told in the text. In Gell's system all of these actors fall within the *prototype* category. With their analysis of the author's intent for the text to mediate this action, the Westerholms are abducting the author's intent for a prototype–reader relationship.

It is useful, here, to return to the notion of beings of fiction. If we label Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Samaritan woman *beings of fiction*, this enables analysis of what the characters in the text do while bracketing off the matter of whether these beings of fiction are well-fabricated representations of historical facts. In writing John's Gospel, the author creates beings of fictions which are mediated by the text to the reader. In using phrasing such as "reproduces and thus preserves," the Westerholms demonstrate their own abduction from the text a sense that it mediates historical facts rather than the creative agency of its author. For them, then, the beings of fiction present in the text accurately reflect historical people and words once spoken in the past. This is also what they think the author of Gospel intended readers to believe. In other words, for the Westerholms it seems there is an abducted prototype–author relationship in which what *really* happened acts on the author who faithfully transmits that past words and actions to text and reader, with the intent for that past action to act on the reader via the text.

Within the context of answering the question of how the Bible should be read, the Westerholms' analysis of authorial intent in the Gospels is ultimately a prototype–contemporary reader abduction. They summarize, "the Gospels were intended at the time of their writing to be

[224] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 21; John 6:68.
[225] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 20.

authoritative accounts of the words and deeds of Jesus, and to serve as the medium by which God would address readers with demands of discipleship."[226] In interpreting the biblical texts this way, the Westerholms show the impact of their own notions held alongside the text. Notions of *authority* and *trustworthiness* in particular are both brought to the text and abducted from the text. They abduct the intentions of authors, but they do so within their own sense of the prototype as the primary agent that exerts itself on author and text in order to act on readers. What the Westerholms do not fully recognize, in my opinion, is that a contemporary reader may join them in recognizing that ancient readers may indeed have had a prototype–reader relationship in which they thought the content of the text was factual, but that the contemporary reader may at the same time find fault with this as an inadequate abduction of agency. Contemporary readers may instead see the human author as primary agent and not entirely trustworthy even while recognizing the historical relationality noted by the Westerholms. To say the Gospels were *intended to be*, and indeed in the past *taken to be*, authoritative historical accounts does not say much about how current readers should now, or do now, engage with the text.

Agency Indexed by the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Reading Sacred Scripture's analysis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament returns focus to the text itself with abduction of both a text–reader and a reader–text relationship. Here, the authors in effect recognize the performative action of the text and also recognize the reader's own agency in how they approach the text. Whereas the Gospels and Pauline texts were interpreted, at least in part, with notions abducted about the intentions and actions of the authors of those texts, their analysis of the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible emphasizes autonomy. They write, for instance: "Not only could God's word not 'fall to the ground' (cf. 1 Sam. 3:19); it would freshly address new generations."[227] Likewise, "the 'word of the Lord' was thus seen ... as divine force that, once spoken by the prophet, was 'released' into the world where it might *shape* any number of events: as the word of God, it remained living and active and could not fail to have effect."[228] In this way, the abduction is of an autonomous text–reader relationship, and what matters is the performativity of the words themselves, not who first spoke them or with what

[226] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 32.
[227] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 23.
[228] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 24.

intent.[229] At the same time, even as the prophetic texts are autonomous from their author and their creation, they are also thought to mediate the agency of the divine force of God—what I would label as the *prototype*—such that there is a concurrent text–reader and prototype–reader abduction on the part of those who interpret and respond to prophecy.

With this analysis what the Westerholms argue, in effect, is that in indexing the agency and action of the God, the biblical text acts upon readers, modifying them and modifying how they read. With this, they suggest, is an obligation on the part of the reader. Along these lines, the Westerholms characterize the Old Testament in terms of a "call to live responsibly before God," a text–reader relationship which serves as their organizing principle for how to interpret the text.[230] Any demand on readers also necessitates, however, the possibility of *neglect* to heed that demand.[231] Thus, the Westerholms argue the reader must bring to the text certain notions and attitudes in order for the text to function: "the message of the Old Testament narratives is heard only by those with the imagination and spiritual insight to see, beyond the details of an ancient story, how they impinge on their own lives and frame the world in which they live."[232] In this way, *Reading Sacred Scripture* both describes but also prescribes. To reinterpret the Westerholms' argument: one must come to the text with the intent to listen and respond in order to rightly abduct the text–reader relationship and to fully accept the agency of the text.

4.6.2 When the Bible Mediates the Agency of the Reader

One of the ways contemporary evangelical readers of the Bible sometimes abduct its relationship is with themselves in the agent position. This is similar to Gell's example of Shah Jehan's cup, where agency is traced to Shah Jehan rather than the artist who created it. To the extent evangelicals consider themselves holding to the same beliefs and practices of faithful men and women at the time of the text's creation, there is an abducted sense in which the Bible was

[229] By contrast, John Barton's work on the theology of Amos draws readers' attention to a number of abductions. Barton performs author-text abductions with his historical-critical analysis of who wrote the text and with what purpose, prototype-author and prototype-text abductions in tracing the origins of the theological concerns addressed in the text, and text-reader abductions with his work on reception of the text. See Barton 2012.

[230] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 23.

[231] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 23.

[232] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 26.

created for them. As in Gell's example of worshipers seeing themselves as the "teleological cause of the cathedral" in which they worship, with the notion that it was "erected with them in mind," there is a sense for evangelical readers that they are the teleological cause of the Bible.[233] Thus, the abduction of biblical texts is one in which the prototype, author, and text are in direct relationship with the current reader. When Pauline texts, for instance, say something about drinking alcohol, gender, or sexuality, it would be abducted as the text saying something to contemporary Christians, not just the original intended recipients. Indeed, this is the type of abduction performed in *Reading Sacred Scripture* when the authors try to identify "the kind of reading called for by the biblical writings themselves."[234] There is an abduction of the text's relationship with past readers, but there is also a concurrent abduction of its relationship with present readers. This is central to evangelical notions of biblical authority, and when the text is abducted as a communication from God, it is thought to be a communication from God *to people in the present*. This notion of an authoritative text directed at contemporary believers then configures relationality with the Bible.

One of the consequences of readers identifying themselves in the agent position is that they see scripture as meant for them to use, and there is not only an abduction of meaning but also of function. Arguing that the narrative content of Old Testament "resists confinement to the past" and, of this narrative, that "their characters, long dead still speak," the Westerholms write:

> Instinctively, we sense that the very essence of these stories is missed by those who would domesticate them, whether historians occupied only with establishing what really happened *in the past*; or tunnel-visioned apologists, concerned only to prove that what really happened *in the past* was precisely what the texts say happened; or moralists, determined to discover *from the past* "three lessons we may learn" for the present.[235]

For readers who take the Westerholms' approach, the meaning of the text is not only in abduction of past relationships; rather, meaning is formed from abductions of the present relationship between text and reader, and indeed between God and reader. The abducted function is as a text in which the reader sees God speaking in the present.[236]

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[233] Gell 1998: 34.
[234] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 2.
[235] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 26.
[236] See similar analysis in Flood 2006.

4.6.3 The Implications of the Author and Text as *Mediators*

Where creators of social objects (artists or authors) might normally be thought to be primary agents in an object's creation, and abducted notions of their actions and intent would then be authoritative for interpretation, this is not necessarily what happens with the Bible in evangelicalism. What happens, instead, is that creative agency is sometimes lost to the readers and biblical authors are seen as non-agents—or to the extent they are recognized as agents, it is only as agents with minimal contribution—or, in effect, as intermediaries. Moreover, notions such as authority, inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration can configure the text-reader relationship to evoke some abductions and prevent others, particularly regarding the human agency of the authors and what that agency or non-agency entails for how they wrote.

Abduction of Mediator or Intermediary

Recall from Chapter 1 that *mediators* are never passive carriers of action; they modify the action they mediate, bringing changes to actions performed upstream and then translating, transforming, and betraying the action mediated. As Latour argues, there is always something added by a mediator. A Latourian *intermediary*, in contrast, refers to cases in which action is thought to be carried unmodified by inert vehicles. But intermediaries are not real; they do not exist. No object can transmit action without modifying that action in some way. In effect, to reframe Latour in the terms of the relational hermeneutic I am developing, the term *intermediary* implies an incomplete, and perhaps malformed, abduction. Intermediaries are the fiction created when the transforming and surprising effects of *mediators* go unrecognized.

This has clear implications for abduction of agent/patient relationships. A difference between Gell's method and ANT is that where Gell aims to identify the actors that *are abducted* in practice, ANT as a method is aimed at making visible those actors that are overlooked and invisible. The first tries to identify what humans recognize as important; the second aims to identify all that contributes to action, whether recognized by humans or not. To abduct the relationships between different permutations of agent/patient categories is by necessity to emphasize the role of some actors and deemphasize the role of others in order to create stories of action that are conceivable to the human mind. Inevitably, in this process, some of the actors that mediate action will be downgraded in the mind to something more of an *intermediary*

than *mediator*, and some actors will be made altogether invisible to the one making abductions. In other words, every actor *is* a mediator, but not every actor is *abducted* as a mediator. Gell's method, then, raises hermeneutical questions about the contributors to agency and action that humans are *not abducting*: What happens when it is not realized *by an interpreter* that there is a missing relationship? And what is the effect of an abduction performed in such a way that a mediator is thought to be an intermediary?

Biblical Text as Mediator

One form of mediation to note is that of the biblical text itself as mediator which acts on the author and reader, modifying the meaning and action transmitted. In Gell's terms this would be an abduction of the *index* in the agent position. When the performativity of a social object—text or art object—is recognized, that would be a case of abducted index–recipient relationality. The index not only acts on the recipient, however; it also acts on the artist who creates it. Gell describes, for example, "instances in which the material index dictates to the artist, who responds as 'patient' to its inherent agency."[237] Along these lines, the physical material from which the object is made may lend itself toward a certain creative outcome or the object could "dictate its form simply on the basis of traditional knowledge."[238] Authors making use of preexisting literary genres and other standard textual features, as described by Rader, would be one example of the agency of a text functioning as *mediator* that modifies the communicative action performed by the writer before they begin to write.[239] And when a reader identifies these intentional uses of genre or other literary features, they are, in effect, abducting the effect of textual mediation.

What are the implications, then, for abduction of biblical text as *mediator*? One could identify ways that biblical authors responded to the dictates of their writing materials and created texts consistent with ancient expectations for genre and style. *Reading Sacred Scripture*, for instance, performs this sort of abduction of the relationship between Luke's Gospel and ancient literary forms: "Luke dedicates the work to a certain Theophilus, following a format—with its implicit request for help in circulating the dedicated work—that was common in literary compositions

[237] Gell 1998: 28. A similar point is made in Becker et al. 2006: 3–4.
[238] Gell 1998: 29.
[239] Rader 1974*b*.

of the period."[240] In this way the meaning and function of the text in the present are configured by the reader's notion of how the author was responding to and working within the constraints of writing and its expected forms at the time of writing.

One could also, then, ask what happens in the absence of an abduction of the text's mediating role. What happens when readers do not recognize rhetorical styles? In the case of the story of Jonah, for instance, was the text written in the form of something akin to satire, or was it meant to taken as historical fact? If one does not abduct this relationship between textual forms and the intentions of an author, these sorts of questions are difficult to answer—and indeed may never even be asked.

Gell's distinction between found and made objects raises another point about the theological implications of abductions of the Bible's origins. Gell notes that many objects are "thought to be of divine origin or to have mysteriously made themselves."[241] When the Bible is equated with the *word of God*, there is a sense to which Scripture is the agent, to which an author responds by writing it. To the extent the Bible functions as a something similar to a *found* object rather than a human-created object, the role of author is downgraded to that of *intermediary*. The origin abducted by the reader then alters the way the text is perceived and understood, and this abducted notion of origin and creative agency is an actor attached to the text itself, modifying the performativity of the assemblage of text and reader. Indeed, as Gavin Flood describes, text may be abducted as "living entity," which is "revealed from a non-human source to a community who receives it as sacred."[242]

Authors and Texts as Mediators in Genesis

Consider, for example, the way many evangelicals interpret the story of creation found in Genesis.[243] Here, instead of recognizing the text as mediating the action of an author, the text is either thought to be acting as an autonomous artifact *or* transmitting the unmodified action of the prototype. For young earth creationists, what matters is the *fact* of a six-day creation event.

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[240] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 14.
[241] Gell 1998: 23.
[242] Flood 2012: 102.
[243] See Chapter 5.

Because the text is thought to faithfully recount what happened, those responsible for creating the story—whether one person or many—are not recognized as altering the events transmitted by the text in any meaningful way. The intentions and the contributions of the creators of the text are not seen as significant, or if significant, only in a secondary sense. In this case, neither text nor author are recognized as *mediators*. What matters, for young earth creationists, is the text's abducted status as a scientifically accurate account of the origins of the world.

What, then, is lost when the author and the text are not recognized as *mediators*? If the author were abducted as an agent, one might attempt to reconstruct a notion of *why* the story of Genesis was written this way: *what was the author trying to do* or *what did the author want?*[244] Likewise, if the text were recognized as a *mediator* with its own agency, one could look for the impact of the narrative itself, as it is written, on readers. This is to ask, in a sense, *what is the text doing* and *what does the text want?* When the focus is on the facts transmitted rather than the contributions of author and text, these questions are overlooked.[245]

Representing Difficult Objects

Gell's case of "a 'difficult' object" where an artist is "confronted by the prototype-as-agent" provides insight into abductions of the difficulty faced by biblical authors when trying to recreate or adequately represent that which they believed, had visions of, and wanted to communicate but that was not straightforward to put into words.[246] These sorts of "difficult" objects are not portrayed with complete accuracy, and, even in the case of a faithful depiction, there is still a contribution on the part of the author to make accessible that which is difficult to portray. Authors are acted upon by the object they are trying to write about, by the constraints of writing itself, and by anticipation of the knowledge, interpretive skills, and expectations of their readers. Moreover, sometimes that which is written is simply wrong. Even when a difficult object is captured accurately, that depiction will be unique, reflective of the style and vision of a specific author, and different from what another author would have done.

[244] As I do elsewhere in this thesis, here I use "author" to black box the actor-network in which and by which a text was composed.
[245] See further discussion in Chapter 5.
[246] Gell 1998: 36–37.

This discussion raises a question for biblical interpretation: to what extent do evangelical readers recognize the complex relationships between difficult-to-depict objects and the authors who wrote about them? Much of what is written about in biblical texts—God, angels, ethics and morality, sexuality, gender relations, Jesus's life and message, for instance—would be difficult to depict. In abduction of relationships with the prototype in the agent position, the recognition, or non-recognition, of prototypes as difficult objects modifies the way readers relate to the text. This difficulty is lost, however, to the extent that the biblical texts are seen as something like a photograph. When it is thought that the objects in the text and prototypes are in effect identical, the abduction excludes the agency of the author in mediating that communication.[247] Moreover, the possibility of misportrayal is rejected when the text is thought to be inerrant. The author becomes a missing mediator, and the difficult object is seen as a straightforward object. In some ways this is what *Reading Sacred Scripture* does with its analysis of John's Gospel. Instead of recognizing the writer as a creative force making a difficult object (Jesus' life) accessible, it is seen as simply *reproducing* and *preserving* the action of the prototype.[248] When difficult objects are abducted as non-difficult, the abduction fails to allow readers to engage with the fact of *mediation*.

The Agency of Imaginary Objects

The prototype which the reader abducts need not necessarily be a physical thing in this world. An artist may attempt to reproduce an apple or human hand, but the art object may also be an abstraction or symbolic representation, such as a god that is thought to be represented by a stone.[249] The prototype may be real or non-real, concrete or abstract, visible or invisible, immanent or transcendent—all that matters for abduction is that it be something that is represented or depicted in some way.[250] Consider three implications for prototypes that are not readily visible in concrete form:

First, the prototype may be autonomous, but instead may require human belief in it for its existence. A prototype, in this case, may be a fabrication of an individual or something imaginary imposed on the artist from outside. Take for example what John Searle calls *institutional*

[247] See Gell 1998: 35.
[248] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 20–21.
[249] Gell 1998: 25.
[250] See beings of fiction in Chapter 3.

facts—money, marriages, and presidents, for instance—which are not made up by an artist or author but also do not exist outside of human belief in them.[251]

Second, in the case of both real and imaginary objects, it may not be the thing itself but the notion of the thing that acts.[252] Along these lines, Gell writes, "a depiction of an imaginary thing (a god, for instance) resembles the picture that believers in that god have in their minds as to the god's appearance, which they have derived from other images of the same god, which this image resembles."[253] The gods Gell refers to do not exist as anything other than beings of fiction and yet they, too, act as prototypes which impose themselves on creators of social objects. I am arguing, then, that notions of things, physical or non-physical, have their own autonomous existence apart from any single artist or art object and thus, in effect, can control their own depiction, just as any other object does. What is unique to beings of fiction as imaginary objects is that the *thing itself* may not exist, and only the *idea of the thing* may be acting on the author as he or she writes.

Third, because our focus is on the *abduction* of the prototype in the agent position, it does not matter whether that prototype actually exists or has agency outside of the abducted relationship. The facts of whether the prototype is fabricated by an author, is based on some sort of shared social notion, is an institutional fact, or is a thing that does exist apart from notions of it are, in this sense, irrelevant. All that matters, in this case, is what readers of a text *think* the source of creative agency to be. What do readers, for instance, believe to be responsible for, or at least have contributed to, the creation of a text? "What matters," Gell argues, "is only that people believe that the causal arrow is orientated in the other way; they believe that the god, as agent, 'caused' the image (index), as patient, to assume a particular appearance."[254] This is what I would argue is the case within evangelical abductions of the origins of the Bible, where God is thought to have caused the Bible to be written a particular way.

Gods, angels, or other characters and beings in the narrative need not be verified, or exist as anything other than beings of fiction, to have agency in shaping their depiction by the authors of

[251] See Searle 1995.
[252] I am following Ian Hacking on the distinction between *things* and *the idea of things*. See Hacking 1999.
[253] Gell 1998: 25.
[254] Gell 1998: 25.

biblical texts.[255] Whether God as an autonomous being is responsible for the Bible's content or whether that content reflects the community's notion of God—or indeed both—is something to which we need not make a conclusion in order to recognize that evangelical readers abduct God's agency in the biblical text. The words are traced to the God who spoke through a human or directed events leading to the text's creation, and, indeed, it is common practice to equate saying "God says" with "the Bible says," such that the biblical texts assembled as *the Bible* function as a black box and being of fiction. Thus it does not matter, for this analysis, whether the text originated with God or creative human imaginations—what matters, for interpretation by evangelical readers, is that the beings of fiction present in the text are thought to exist and have shaped their own depiction.

I am not arguing that the biblical texts are fictive—and this analysis brackets off questions of veracity of the content of biblical texts. My point is that one need not take a position on the origins of that which is presented in the text in order to recognize that God and angels, whatever their ontology as actors, have had effects on what the biblical authors wrote.[256] To recognize God, angels, demons, and fantastic stories within the narratives as beings of fiction is not to say these are unreal. It is to note and acknowledge that ideas of that which cannot be empirically verified or visibly seen do act on the reader—they are Latourian actants/actors. One could believe in the action of the Spirit of God in inspiring authors to write, as evangelicals do, or one could see only the traces of a social imagination reflected in the text. In both cases, the prototype is thought to have agency on author, text, and reader. Ultimately, what matters for this analysis is what the reader abducts from the index about the agency of the beings represented in the text and thought to be participating in the author's action.

Implications of Difficult and Imaginary Objects

What are the implications, then, of these difficult and imaginary objects as prototypes? On one hand, there is no implication other than that recognizing them for what they are helps make clear what readers abduct in practice. This theoretical method makes it possible to identify

[255] See Chapter 3.

[256] The term "actant" as sometimes by Latour as others may be helpful here for the way that it denotes the indeterminate ontology of these actors.

what is happening (mostly tacitly) in the reader's interpretive event and to analyze the role of notions brought to the text and abducted from the text in the process of reading and interpreting. On the other hand, there are ethical implications for readers. When readers are aware of the mediating role of authors in making accessible to the reader that which is difficult to convey, and likewise the role of beings of fiction in shaping their own depiction, it enables those readers to better identify which abducted permutations of agency are being given priority and which might be overlooked in their own reading practices. In doing so, it is also possible to better fabricate the author's cognitive act—if this sense of an author's meaning is thought to be valuable for a reader's own understanding of the Bible.

Mediators, Intermediaries, and Imaginary and Difficult Objects in 2 Peter

The importance of abduction of the agency of difficult and imaginary objects, as well as other abducted relationships between text, author, prototype, and readers, is evident in the content of the Second Epistle of Peter. In claiming to be written by the apostle Peter, for instance, the text is also claiming to mediate Peter's authority and agency.[257] This would be an author–text and author–reader relationship, in which the author of the text intends for the reader to abduct the agency of the apostle in the creation of the text. Moreover, by claiming that those in the authorial community were faithful eyewitnesses to Jesus' life, as 2 Peter 1:16-18 does, the text is making a claim to a prototype–author relationship, in which the author *transmits*, rather than *fabricates*, the action of these eyewitnesses and, indeed, what really happened. In other words, by attempting to establish the agency of the prototype in relationship to the text, the text also works to create an prototype–reader relationship. Both the claim of Peter's authorship and of a transmission of historical facts work to establish the text as a trustworthy *intermediary*.

The text, moreover, claims that it and other texts are not indexing imaginary objects and reassures the reader that the difficult objects which are reproduced and communicated were in fact portrayed without modification or betrayal. For instance, the text rejects the possibility that the authorial community was taken in by "cleverly designed myths" and likewise rejects the possibility that "prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation."[258] Furthermore,

[257] 2 Peter 1:1
[258] 2 Peter 1:16, 1:20 (NRSV).

the text states, "no prophecy ever came by human will" and that those "moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."[259] In doing so, the role of the biblical author is likewise downgraded from *mediator* to *intermediary*.[260]

In contrast to this self-portrayal of unmediated transmission of reality by text and author are placed the unfaithful, fabricated untruths of false prophets and teachers.[261] Truth-tellers, in the view of the text, faithfully transmit what happened. Others, for their own twisted reasons, fabricate a reality using their own artistic and creative talent, in effect functioning as *mediators*. Indeed, for this reason, the contemporary reader, aware that the text's claims of authorship by Peter are often viewed as a fabrication, might think it ironic for the text to perform the same sort of creative identification of authorship that the text itself equates with false teaching. Left unsaid, of course, is that all texts are mediators and all stories are fabricated. The question, from a Latourian perspective, is the quality of these fabrications and the effects of this mediation. The difference, from this perspective, between trustworthy authors and false teachers would be in the quality and characteristics of that mediation.

4.7 Facts, Values, and *Realhermeneutik* in Actor-Networks

In this chapter I have been developing a model of textual performativity in which texts are thought to function as autonomous artifacts that mediate between an author-text creative event and a text-reader interpretive event. In this model meaning is located in the second event—in reader experience, not in the mind of the author or in the content encoded in the text itself. I have argued, following Fish, the *only* meaning is the reader's meaning. What the author thought, the context of a text's creation, the history of a text, what might be a felicitous reading, and so forth are irrelevant *to this model*.

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[259] 2 Peter 1:21 (NRSV).

[260] Notice that I am referring to the English text provided by the New Revised Standard Version. One of the abductions performed by readers of English versions of the Bible is of the relation between text and translators. It is recognized, in some way, that to translate is to *mediate*. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 1, the notion of translation is used in ANT as a way to describe the effects of mediation. See Callon 1986*a*; Latour 2005*b*.

[261] See 2 Peter 2-3.

What does matter is reader cognition about the text. Following Rader and Gell, I have argued that within this text-reader event, the meaning that emerges is contingent on any reconstructed notions of the first author-text event, notions of the text-artifact, and any other notions brought to the text or derived from the text. Any notions of meaning, use, or function—including notions of what the author was thinking or of past context—modify the meaning and performativity of the text. Thus, while the author's intent itself has no direct impact on meaning, in this model, *notions* of the author's intent are recognized to be central to how meaning emerges in the text-reader event. To be clear, this is not to say that there *necessarily is* or *should be* reader cognition along these lines; my argument is simply that any cognitive acts that do occur then shape the way the reader relates to and interprets the text.

We can now turn to an is/ought, fact/value distinction and why I have called this approach a *Realhermeneutik*. I have used the term to refer to an interpretive approach which asks what *does* happen in practice, not what *should* happen. As I have argued, and will argue below, the reading event is social and political, driven by values and interests as much as by facts and verifiable conclusions. Moreover, this text-reader relationship never occurs alone; readers are attached to other readers, to other texts, and to many other humans and nonhumans. Readers are embedded in communities, and the action of a text-reader hybrid emerges with this configuration of actors (see Chapter 2). In this sense, I use *Realhermeneutik* in the way one might use *realpolitik*: to refer to a sense of reading and hermeneutics as it is, not as it should be.[262] As is the case with realpolitik, this term carries with it a recognition that there are practical and ethical implications to recognizing how meaning and action emerge in the configuration and makeup of the text-reader hybrid—and with this recognition there is a possibility of reconfiguring the text-reader hybrids through which meaning and action emerge in order to create change.

4.7.1 *Is* and *Ought* in Reading and Critique

With this model there is an important distinction to be made between *reading* and *critique*. To say readers must or should read a certain way would be inconsistent with an approach which emphasizes recognizing things *as they are*. At the same time, even as I avoid actively prescribing a

[262] My approach here is informed by Latour's notion of *Dingpolitik*. See Latour 2005*a*. See, also, Gries 2015.

model for how readers should read, I am making an argument, following Latour in dialogue with Fish, Rader, and Gell, that there is a certain form this analysis should take. In other words, my own project is not directly prescriptive in terms of *reading*, but it is prescriptive for *analysis* of reading.

In Rader's example of the duck-rabbit optical illusion, which shows how the mind resolves meaning from ambiguity, there is no single right way to resolve the illusion. The image can be seen as a duck, a rabbit, or a squiggly line plus dot; no way of seeing the drawing is inherently more valid than the others. As Rader illustrates, readers do identify *some* meaning in that with which they engage. In the same way, my model of hermeneutics is value-neutral: it states what *does* happen (resolution into some meaning), not what *should* happen (not which specific meaning). Likewise, in my approach it does not matter what notion of authorial intent a reader identifies in a text; what matters is that they *do* identify authorial intent—if they do—and then use that notion to resolve meaning. If the reader were not to identify any form of authorial intent, that is a form of cognition in which notions of authorial intent simply have no bearing on meaning. To say that Rader's optical illusion *should* be seen one way or another is prescriptive; on the other hand, to say that it *is* typically interpreted as, say, a duck rather than a rabbit would be description. What would be clearly wrong in this case, however, would be to claim that it *is always* interpreted one way or another.

Likewise, with analysis of how biblical texts are read and analyzed, there is a similar difference between descriptive analysis of how the Bible *is* read and interpreted in practice—making an argument, for instance, about the cognitive mechanisms that may be present in the text-reader event—and prescriptive analysis of how it *ought* to be read. In the same way, there is a potential error to be made in the difference between *sometimes* and *always*: a claim that readers *always* read a certain way will be hard to defend, especially when making generalized claims of that which may vary with human experience, genres, expectations, and other aspects of the reading experience. To say readers *sometimes* read a certain way is to trace mechanisms by which readers *may* configure their own text-reader cognitive event.

Analysis of *what is there* in a text and *what readers see* are, likewise, two separate matters. A critical project analyzing what the text could accurately be said to index would be an important

contribution for readers—but that it not what I am calling a *Realhermeneutik* approach.[263] Both approaches will have prescriptive elements, but a critical discussion of how one should analyze *what is there* is different from one of how to analyze *what readers see*. Critical analysis of Rader's duck-rabbit illusion might focus, for instance, on the pen strokes that compose the drawing itself, examining *what is there* with precision, a different task than identifying what human viewers think they see when looking at the illusion. As I discussed, both Fish and Rader see each other as being prescriptive for reading, and while that may be true to an extent, what I think is happening is that both are prescriptive in terms of what they think is appropriate *critical* work, even as both attempt to describe a non-prescriptive model of what happens when readers read.

In contrasting reading and critique, I am making a distinction between the process by which meaning emerges within a community and the analysis of that process. Thus, two friends arguing about whether an optical illusion should better be described as a duck or rabbit *is not* itself critique in this sense. It is, in my model, part of the reading experience. Likewise, for a small group to discuss the meaning of a biblical text they are reading, and indeed to consult a biblical commentary, is also not what I am considering critique. A *Realhermeneutik* approach is one that identifies these types of processes, inputs, and attachments by which meaning emerges. It is recognized that critical arguments about what is there in the text, how a text should be read, or how a text is read in practice—if accessed by the reading community—will have some impact, even if not what one might expect, on what readers see in the text. Thus one cannot draw a hard line between the criticism of reading and the act of reading itself.

This distinction between *what is there* and *what readers see* is similar to the difference between *mediated* agencies and *abducted* agencies. One reflects facts of what has happened, or is happening, in the relationship between texts and humans; the other reflects human ideas of what has happened. Moreover, this distinction between analysis of mediated agencies themselves and of reader abductions of these agencies raises a question: what are the missing agencies and what are the missing abductions? The first is a question of the interactions between humans

[263] For an outline of a philological approach to Hebrew Bible scholarship, see Najman 2017. On how biographical and historical facts are helpful for readers, for example, see Cioffi 1964.

and text that did not occur and the effects of their absence. The second is a question of what readers are not seeing, and of the effects of these missing abductions.[264]

I would argue this is one of the contributions of feminist, queer, postcolonial, and other similar forms of hermeneutics, in which what *what ought* to be noted in interpretation is contrasted with what *has happened* in reception history.[265] In this sense, these critical approaches address a problem Latour identifies, where that which is not valued by a community is excluded from analysis: "When we look outside, we see a whole still to be composed, made up of excluded entities (humans and nonhumans) in whom we have explicitly decided not to be interested."[266] Indeed, with these approaches, it is possible to move from *what is* to *what should be*.

4.7.2 *Realhermeneutik* and Latour's Ecological Politics

I have argued there is a difference between *is* and *ought* in reading and critique and that what matters in a *Realhermeneutik* approach is only *what happens*—not a perspective external to a reading community on *what should happen*. However, the *what is* of reading experience cannot be isolated from notions of *what ought to be*, and it should be recognized in an actor-network approach that the politics and values of a community are part of what constitute the text-reader event. In practice this means readers' notions of what a text indexes are not straightforward. The way the human mind works and the way knowledge is social mean that what can function as a trusted notion—a fact or strongly held belief—is entangled with community values, interests, and concerns.[267]

I will now turn to Latour's ecological politics and his work on climate change to conclude development of my *Realhermeneutik* model. As I will argue, following Latour, descriptive notions modify the emergent meaning and performativity of a text, and, for this reason, descriptive notions are caught up in the political and social matters entailed by that performativity.

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[264] Miranda Fricker's work is relevant to the effects of missing hermeneutical notions. See Fricker 2007.
[265] See for example, Yvonne Sherwood's analysis of the reception of Hosea 1-3. Sherwood 1996.
[266] Latour 2004*a*: 126. The context of this quote is Latour's critique of a modernist approach in which science and nature are thought to be accessible as authoritative facts independent of human values and interests.
[267] On social knowledge, see Goldman 1999.

Description Entails Prescription

In *Facing Gaia*, Latour presents a story of how those concerned with the economic implications of climate change policy saw a means to derail environmental and energy regulations by questioning the underlying science of climate change. In his account, those who knew that scientific conclusions were unfavorable to their interests weaponized uncertainty to forestall what would happen if climate change science were widely accepted by the general public. Facts, opponents of climate change policy realized, are performative, and by preventing the conclusions of climate science from being accepted as fact, they were able to preempt the performative implications of the data scientists were gathering.[268]

To illustrate this thinking, Latour turns to a leaked strategy memo written by conservative pollster and strategist, Frank Luntz, which outlined strategy for a political response to environmental concerns. "Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled," Luntz is quoted, "their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue."[269] As Luntz recognizes, facts and values are intermingled, and description entails prescription. Luntz's view, Latour argues, is one in which "the *description* of the facts is so dangerously close to the *prescription* of a policy that, to put a stop to the challenges addressed to the industrial way of life, one has to cast doubt on the facts themselves."[270] In other words, Latour summarizes, "the prescriptive charge of scientific certainties is so powerful that these are what must be attacked first."[271]

What Latour's climate change example illustrates is that description does more than inform; description is a performative act that brings about change in the world. Indeed, it is hard to imagine description done as an intentional act for *no purpose at all*. Description, in Latour's approach, is recognized as a form of speech act, in which constative utterances are made "in order to elicit a reaction."[272] Some descriptive statements may have little impact, and thus, to say all description is performative is not to say that all statements are high impact or that there is

[268] Latour 2017: 24–28.
[269] Quoted in "Environmental Word Games" 2003; Latour 2017: 25.
[270] Latour 2017: 25.
[271] Latour 2017: 25.
[272] Latour 2017: 47–48.

strongly implied action entailed in the content of what is spoken or described. In speech act theory, description, even if uninteresting, is nonetheless a form of action—and, like all action, there is *some* consequence, even if not very notable.

The descriptive utterances to which Latour refers are those with an implied call to action. The statement "there's a baby on the seat," is one such performative utterance, if, for example, "you are on a bus and you see that a passenger is about to sit down on a seat where you have put your baby."[273] In the same way, scientific description in which humans are shown to be the cause of climate change is not neutral. Rather, Latour argues, "the imputation of responsibility demands a response."[274] Indeed, Latour frames climate change controversy using verbs that convey the illocutionary force of description, arguing that "to describe is always not only to inform but also to alarm, to move, to set into motion, to call to action, perhaps even to sound the death knell."[275] Constative, descriptive utterances, thus, may appear to be passive statements of fact, but encoded within these utterances are implied values and calls to action.

Latour rejects "the old idea that description entails no prescription," arguing that this notion is a consequence of the way description *seems* to be free of specific instructions about what must be done.[276] He writes:

> This claim of descriptive neutrality made it possible to forget that one never plunges into description except in order to act, and that, before looking into what must be done, we must be impelled to action by a particular type of utterance that touches our hearts in order to set us in motion—yes, to move us. Astonishingly, this type of utterance now comes not only from poets, lovers, politicians, and prophets but also from geochemists, naturalists, modelers, and geologists.[277]

Scientific description, no less than the rhetoric of poets and politicians, evokes response and action, even if the content and form of the speech act seems entirely different.

This performativity of facts and description has clear implications for my *Realhermeneutik* model: any descriptive work involving texts entails prescription. As I have argued, notions abducted from texts or brought to texts modify the way readers relate to those texts and thus the meaning and

[273] Latour 2017: 47.
[274] Latour 2017: 26.
[275] Latour 2017: 26.
[276] Latour 2017: 48.
[277] Latour 2017: 49.

action that emerge in the text-reader event. To provide biographical information, to characterize genre, to place texts in a historical context, to analyze the meanings of words used, is descriptive work with performative effect. Likewise, the notions abducted from a text—notions of function, genre, origins, accuracy, authority, among others—are not inert. Assembled together with other descriptive notions, they have illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect, evoking response, modifying how a community relates to a text, and requiring readers and their communities to act.

In this sense, to make a statement about the origins of a biblical text is not unlike stating that a baby is on the bus seat. When constative statements are made "in order to elicit a reaction"—no matter whether said passionately or with dry academic language—within these statements there are strongly implied values and prescribed action.[278] Consequently, the politics of interpretation are unavoidable, and indeed necessary, and the *is* and the *ought* of reading and interpretation, and, likewise, the facts of a text and a community's values, cannot easily be disentangled.

Matters of Fact and Matters of Concern

In *Politics of Nature*, Latour identifies two ways of relating to the production of facts: as *matters of fact* and as *matters of concern*.[279] In Latour's system of thought, all facts are fabricated, all contingent on the actor-networks in which they are produced, held together, and recognized as facts.[280] The notion of a *matter of concern* is one that recognizes that, like any other entity in an actor-network, facts are not constructed autonomous of their downstream effects. Rather, with a matter of concern it is recognized that description entails prescription, facts and values are interdependent, and production of facts is political.[281] Latour explains his approach to facts as matters of concern:

> To deal with them, we do not have the social or political world on one side and the world of objectivity and profitability on the other.... and this may be the strangest thing of all, they can no longer be detached from the unexpected consequences that they may trigger in the very long run, very far away, in an incommensurable world.[282]

[278] See Latour 2017: 47–48.
[279] Latour 2004*a*. See also Latour 2010*a*.
[280] On fabrication of facts, see Latour 2004*a*: 95–102.
[281] Norbert Elias makes a similar argument about the is/ought relationship and the way facts and values are entangled with emotions and strongly held beliefs. See Elias 1991: 83–86.
[282] Latour 2004*a*: 24.

In this way, the term *matter of concern* serves as a way of recognizing the provisionality and contingency of the production of facts, including the way their production is tethered to their social and political effects.

In contrast, *matters of fact* are similar to Latour's *intermediaries* in that they are something that do not actually exist, other than as a mistaken notion.[283] A matter of fact is a black box, a simplification, in which things *seem* as if they were autonomous and untethered from the actor-networks in which they are manufactured. Latour argues that matters of fact are, in effect, a modernist notion in which it is thought to be possible to free oneself from a mistaken intermingling of facts and values:

> In the past, our ancestors confused facts with values, the essence of things with the representations they had of things, harsh objective reality with the fantasies that they projected onto reality, primary qualities with secondary qualities. Tomorrow, the moderns are sure, the distinction will be sharper; we shall be able to pry the established facts more decisively away from their matrix of desires and human fantasies.[284]

However, in the present, too, what is accepted as fact is tied to human interests and desires. Matters of fact are fabricated by ignoring the way that description is entangled with its performativity. They are, in a sense, the effect of treating *description* as a straightforward illocutionary act with no perlocutionary effect.[285]

It should be noted that there may be a problem of language, here, with the term *fact*. In Latour's usage, a *fact* is a proposition (a statement about how things are).[286] In my understanding of Latour, when he refers to facts, he is referring to this type of propositional reference to reality. This may not correspond to how others—including most scientists—would think of facts, however. One might agree that *statements* about facts are contingent and provisional, emerging within an actor-network, but reject the idea that the underlying reality to which a statement about a fact refers is itself contingent or provisional. In this way, the same word may evoke different notions for Latour than it does for others. In other words, within Latour's system of thought it is entirely correct to recognize propositions as fabricated, but one need not necessarily

[283] On *intermediaries*, see Chapter 1.
[284] Latour 2004*a*: 188–189. See also, Latour 1993.
[285] Dan Kahan and coauthors make a similar argument about reception of scientific facts and cultural cognition. See Kahan et al. 2012: 732; Kahan 2010.
[286] See Latour 1999*c*: 95–96, 156–157. See also Latour 1987; Latour and Woolgar 1986.

think the fact itself is contingent, only its discovery or production. Thus, it could be argued that facts, if in the form of propositions, are manufactured in a Latourian sense, but the reality to which those propositions point, more or less accurately, is not fabricated.[287] In this sense, well-fabricated facts are the ones that could be said to have been produced such that they have a high quality in their way of pointing to underlying reality. Or, for lack of a concise definition, one might say well-fabricated facts are those that would be found to be *factual* in their description of what exists independent of human belief or understanding of it.

The Performativity of False Facts

It is not just facts that are performative. False notions are also performative. Facing the implications of climate change science, and the demands of the public that would follow if that science were widely accepted, the solution turned to by opponents of climate change policy was to create an alternative set of facts. Latour writes, "the lobbyists have set into motion a whole panoply of communicators, paid experts, and even academics above suspicion, to generate a demand on the part of the public for something entirely different, on the strength of quite different facts."[288] This arrangement of human and nonhuman actors, in effect configuring an actor-network and social web-of-belief in which climate change is distrusted, then prevents adoption of climate change policy. Latour writes, "no doubt about it: other non-facts will result in other non-policies!"[289]

A similar kind of network of false facts can be found assembled around performative texts—particularly those with cultural, political, or religious impact. Because notions of the Bible are performative, any notions of the Bible's origins, reliability, and function that conflict with religious values—such as inerrancy and authority of the biblical texts, importance of evangelism and conversion, and values for sexuality and gender—are problematic for the religious communities that hold these values. In response, false facts are created, repeated, and held together in an interlocking networks. Christian books, speakers/preachers, authors, magazines, fundraising letters, radio, conversations that constitute conservative evangelical social knowledge function in the same way for biblical interpretation as Latour's "whole panoply of communicators" does

[287] Unless, of course, it is a social fact of some sort, which by definition would be fabricated. See Searle 1995.
[288] Latour 2017: 27.
[289] Latour 2017: 27.

for climate change.[290] This is not to argue that the notions of the Bible that configure evangelical readings of the Bible are necessarily false—although it does seem that many of them may not withstand close scrutiny. It is only to say that there are notions, true or false, with political and religious impact that are assembled together such that they are accepted as fact and enable a way of relating to the Bible consistent with and, indeed, interdependent on evangelical values.

Distortion and Dingpolitik

What Latour recognizes with his ecological politics is that what is *accepted as fact* is attached to community values and interests. Production of facts is not free from "a strong temptation to include in the world of facts one of the values that one hopes to advance."[291] Latour argues, "the reality of what *is* gradually comes to include everything that one *would like to see in existence*." In this way, "the common world and the common good find themselves surreptitiously confused, even while remaining officially distinct."[292] One may wish there were such things as matters of fact, believing it is possible to entirely separate facts and values, but, in Latour's thinking, this can never be. The notion of a matter of concern, then, is one that recognizes that what is accepted as a fact emerges with the humans and nonhumans—and their values and practices—to which that fact is attached.

A problem with matters of fact is that this notion of value-free knowledge distorts the production of knowledge and the formation of values. Latour describes "two types of fraud: the one in which values are used in secret, to interrupt discussions of facts ... and the one coming from the opposite direction, in which matters of fact are surreptitiously used to impose preferences that the user does not dare admit or discuss frankly."[293] For example, Latour argues, "if the lobbyists had said, 'We do not *believe* in these facts; they do not *suit* us; they lead to sacrifices that we do not *want* to make,' ... everyone would have seen through them."[294] In the same way—to substitute the Bible for climate change—if the fundamentalists had said, "we do not believe these facts about the Bible; they do not suit us; they lead to religious complexity we

[290] Latour 2017: 27.
[291] Latour 2004*a*: 98.
[292] Latour 2004*a*: 98.
[293] Latour 2004*a*: 100.
[294] Latour 2017: 27.

cannot accept," everyone would, likewise, see through them. To simply say the fundamentalists' facts and beliefs are wrong is also no solution; it, too, ignores the fact-value entanglement at the heart of human beliefs and knowledge.

Latour's politics of things and their representation, or what Latour calls *Dingpolitik*, calls for actors and interests that function as stakeholders to be named—to be upfront about the interests and powers that constitute an actor-network.[295] At the core of Latour's *Dingpolitik* is what he describes as a "continuous linkage" between facts and values, arguing "actions that begin with facts that are extended into a warning and that point toward decisions—a process that goes in both directions."[296] In Latour's political ecology, to recognize this linkage allows a community to better work at building a common world, whereas to ignore the interdependency is to distort both facts and values. In effect, in a Latourian approach, the lobbyists should be recognized as representing stakeholders with interests in the consequences of the politics of climate change. To attempt to cut attachments is not the path to liberation; rather, the solution is to be better attached, to increase attachments.

The notion of a *matter of concern* enables this kind of politics. Matters of concern, for Latour, are "entities that provoke perplexity and thus speech in those who gather around them, discuss them, and argue over them."[297] In Latour's view, it is right, and indeed necessary, that these notions and facts be considered together with the values that they entail, with the aim of better constructing facts and values, recognizing both to be embedded within actor-networks.

A *matter of fact*, on the other hand, is a notion of knowledge that pretends the contingency, if not corruption, of facts is not so. A matter of fact sterilizes facts and artifacts, attempting to kill off the human interests that shape, enable, and control their production and maintenance. Rather than sanitizing facts and values, what happens instead is this kind of attempt to assemble autonomous facts and values becomes sensitive to an overgrowth of the kind of poorly fabricated facts and values that were feared in the first place.

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[295] On *Dingpolitik*, see Latour 2005*a*. On the broader context of Latour's ecological politics in general, see Latour 2004*a*; 2017; 2018.

[296] Latour 2017: 49. See also, for example, Latour's argument that economics is by turn descriptive and prescriptive: Latour 2004*a*: 134–135.

[297] Latour 2004*a*: 66.

In other words, in Latour's thinking, we have no choice other than to engage in politics. In the introduction to *Politics of Nature*, Latour writes, "we cannot choose whether to engage in political ecology or not; but we can choose whether to engage in it surreptitiously, by distinguishing between questions of nature and questions of politics, or explicitly, by treating those two sets of questions as a single issue that arises for all collectives."[298] The only question is how to participate. To do otherwise, to claim to be free of politics, is to distort the notions of the objects to which we are attached.

Realhermeneutik and Matters of Concern

In my *Realhermeneutik* model, the abductions, inferences, and notions formed from and brought to a text are recognized as matters of concern. Every conclusion about a text's origin, meaning, or function entails some action, some responsibility for a community's way of relating to the text. For religious texts, such as the Bible, this is clearly evident: notions of the meaning of the text, what to do with it, where it comes from, what authority it should be given, and what authority it inherently has are all matters of concern. This way of relating to texts exhibits Latour's continuous linkage, in which that which the text is thought to mean and index, on one hand, and the values of the community, on the other, emerge together and in turn are modified by the other. Likewise, notions of authorship, intent, trustworthiness, meaning, and function all force the reader to reconcile their own way of relating to the text, or to the world, with the implications of those notions. Facts of the Bible are not straightforward for the simple reason that those facts carry with them prescriptive implications about what the reading community *should* or *must* do. In other words, facts and beliefs about biblical texts are not neutral and cannot be detached from values. Any descriptive work is caught up in the downstream moral implications of that description.

For this reason what might otherwise be accepted as factual—about the origins of a text or the clear meaning of a phrase, for example—is contested within a reading community. It is as Latour argues: "Facts, as they say, are presumed to be 'stubborn'; that is their way of *prescribing*. One can't negotiate with them or adjust them to suit oneself."[299] However, if a fact is not a fact, if the notion is rejected as being factual, the prescriptive implications of that fact can be preempted. In

[298] Latour 2004*a*: 1.
[299] Latour 2017: 27.

evangelicalism, where the text exercises a form of delegated social power over the communities that consider it authoritative, this is all that much more evident. Consequently, instead of having open conflict over the values of the community—to empower women in leadership roles, or to welcome and include gay people, for instance—conflict is carried out by proxy over the facts of what the biblical text says. What readers will accept as true about a text—what they find indexed in a text or resolve from ambiguity in the text—cannot be untethered from values for the text, the social concerns of the community in which the text is read, the corresponding politics, and the world in which people want to live.

In the theology of evangelicals, moral values are thought to be found in biblical facts. What is not often recognized, however, is the extent to which these notions of the Bible, which are said to be authoritative for the faith and practice of the faith community, are tethered to that community's moral values.[300] When a religious community makes a moral claim about sexuality or gender, for instance, and comes to some conclusion on what *must* be done because this *is simply what the Bible says*, this functions as a description against which there can be no argument. Within evangelicalism one cannot contest the commands of the Bible; to do so, to argue against the Bible's authority, so would be, in effect, to self-exile from evangelicalism.

Realhermeneutik in Reading Sacred Scripture

The Westerholms' description of the biblical texts in *Reading Sacred Scripture* demonstrates this link between description and prescription. As I outlined above, to answer the question of how the Bible should be read, the Westerholms turned to a descriptive analysis of "the kind of reading called for by the biblical writings themselves."[301] In this way, they *described* the origins and content of the biblical texts in order to answer a *prescriptive* question. Following a Latourian approach, it can be recognized that the Westerholms' conclusions about what the Bible says about itself are attached to their own interests and values. A reference to Paul, for instance, as the author of the entirety of the letters attributed to him—in part because "each of its letters invokes Paul's authority"—and a description of Paul's writing as "authoritative

[300] On transitivity, and the way that biblical interpretation sometimes functions to connect beliefs to the Bible more than derive beliefs from the Bible, see Malley 2004.

[301] S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 2. See discussion of abductions above.

communications from an apostle commissioned by God" are consistent with a stated value for accepting what the text says about itself.[302] In their analysis authority and trustworthiness function as both descriptive and prescriptive notions, found to be *fact* but also applied as a *value*. Indeed, the Westerholms take this approach throughout their analysis of the biblical texts, and description of authorial intent, past reception, and other abductions from the text are tethered to their prescription for reader response.

In a Latourian approach this link between fact and value is not a basis for preemptively dismissing their analysis. There may be clear interests and values brought to the text by the Westerholms, but this does not invalidate their conclusions—to think otherwise would be to think that it were possible to access *matters of fact* regarding the Bible. Clearly different values—if the Bible were distrusted instead of trusted, for instance—would lend themselves to a different hermeneutic approach. If one approaches biblical texts expecting to see the kind of non-factual storytelling, self-interested narrations, and outright misrepresentations that are present in most, if not all, other works throughout history—whether religious or nonreligious—then one might be less inclined to abduct the authorship of some of the New Testament texts as belonging to their named authors. Likewise, in that case a reader may be less likely to conclude that the text accurately indexes the facts of what once occurred. In this case, "eyewitness" of the sort the Westerholms refer to would be abducted as indexing the creative work of an author, driven by that author's own interests in writing.[303]

The problem, from a Latourian perspective, with this interdependence of fact and value, is not that it occurs but that it occurs in silence or involves a process that is poorly configured. To recognize that all descriptive endeavors are attached to values is not a claim of equivalency: no approach is value-free, but this does not mean that nothing matters. For this reason, there are clear ethical implications entailed by this model. A Latourian approach requires one to consider the quality of fabricated notions and to attempt to find means of better fabrications. To be aware of how description and prescription, is and ought, and facts and values are attached allows for

[302] See prior discussion on abductions from Pauline texts. S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: p. 2 (note 3), 6.
[303] See S. Westerholm and M. Westerholm 2016: 16.

readers to attempt a more ethical form of reading. Thus, it may be valuable, for critical analysis, to recognize the role one's own values play in configuring one's interpretive response to a text, and, perhaps, to try to imagine other ways of reading. This would not, however, free oneself from interests, even if it would enable a higher quality of fabricated notions.

Realhermeneutik and Actor-Network Theory

As I have argued, the meanings of texts emerge alongside both the representations of things—the ideas of things—and the things themselves. Notions of a text, including those abducted from what is thought to be indexed by a text, are matters of concern, fabricated collectively within an actor-network and entangled with the interests to which their description has prescriptive significance. In this way, text and notions of the text are cases of Latour's "entities that provoke perplexity and thus speech in those who gather around them, discuss them, and argue over them."[304] In my model it is recognized that these notions—these ideas of things, including texts—are matters of concern, emerging in specific human-nonhuman configurations within an actor-network, in which values and ideas of the text are contingent on each other and all the other actors to which they are attached. What *is* true about a text, in a community's social knowledge, cannot be untethered from what *ought* to be true, given a community's values. The link is not necessarily direct and not always worked out in the way one would expect, but it is always there, modifying how people read and the meaning and performativity that emerge in the text-reader event.

To recognize the role of politics and matters of concern, as I am doing, is not to argue that this is what readers think they are doing, want to do, or intend to do surreptitiously, as climate change lobbyists are doing in Latour's depiction. The reading community may not—and often cannot—recognize their own descriptive notions along the lines of what would be matters of concern in Latourian language. In many cases the way the mind resolves meaning is experienced as natural and straightforward. Indeed, as Rader suggested, much of interpretation and formation of meaning is tacit, involving the mind's ability to piece together notions of intention, genre, and so forth. Readers may relate to the text as if the notions of the text—those inferred from the text

[304] Latour 2004*a*: 66.

and those brought to the text—were straightforward matters of fact. In effect, what is thought to be a plain meaning or literal sense—what is thought to be inherently, obviously *true* of the biblical texts—functions equivalently to how Latour describes the common use of notions of *Science* or *nature* as authorities accessible free of human values.[305]

To reiterate, for this *Realhermeneutik* approach, all that matters is identifying *what is* happening in the reading community, not *what should be*. To make note of something equivalent to *matters of fact* at the core of how people read the Bible is not a dismissive critique—indeed there is simply no way for humans to function without doing so, at least to some extent, and Latour is not suggesting otherwise. The way humans read texts—black boxing complex notions and mistakenly treating them, in effect, as matters of fact—is what makes meaning possible. Thus, recognizing the way this occurs is relevant to my model because it helps uncover *what is happening* in the way readers relate to texts. What I am doing here, then, is not critiquing the fact that this happens itself. In this sense, I am developing a model *of reading* not a model *for reading*, although the first can certainly serve as the starting point for the second.[306]

With this description, I should note that there is a risk in referring to values in the way that I have done. One of the features of ANT as theoretical framework is its rejection of broad references to power or values or any other non-concrete entities as a shortcut to the work of tracing how these are embodied, constituted, and enacted in the specific actors constituting an actor-network.[307] On one hand, then, I am arguing that values are configured together in dialectical relationship with notions of the text. On the other hand, I am recognizing that values must be composed and mediated within a specific arrangement of actors, human and nonhuman, that constitute the text-reader hybrid in which text and reader are embedded. Values, in this sense, are not *causal* but are an outcome of how humans and nonhumans are configured together.[308] Nonetheless, even at the risk of oversimplification, it remains helpful to try to recognize this way in which

[305] On *nature* and *Science*, see Latour 2004*a*: 9–10.

[306] See previous discussion of Fish and Rader and description versus evaluation. On a *model of* versus a *model for*, see Geertz 1973.

[307] See Chapter 1.

[308] On the way that power, or in this case, *values*, must always be composed and mediated within actor-networks, see Callon and Law 1997*a*; Latour 1986; 2005*b*.

interests and values exist and have power, as well as the way that things and ideas of things cannot be isolated from values for how objects, human and nonhuman, should relate to each other.

4.8 From Texts to Politics

In this chapter I have applied a Latourian approach to a hermeneutic problem: are texts autonomous from their creators and the events in which the texts were created? I have developed a model for a dialectic tension in which, on one hand, it is a fact of interpretation that texts are autonomous from their creators and the creative event, and, on the other hand, it is also a fact of interpretation that reader notions of a text's creation modify the text's meaning and action.

Following Fish, I have argued for a definition of meaning as that which occurs in the text-reader interpretive event, not in the text as autonomous artifact or the author's intention in the author-text creative event. Following Rader, however, I have also argued that how the reader relates to the text is contingent on the reader's notion of the creative agency responsible for the text. What the reader thinks an author or others involved in a text's creation meant for the text modifies how the reader makes sense of the text. This reconstruction is pieced together though a tacit, intuitive cognitive process, recreating the event of writing and using that fabricated notion to shape the meaning and function of the text in the present.

Bringing Gell's relational theory of art into dialogue with Fish and Rader enables a relational hermeneutic approach to the notions that modify the text-reader event. Texts mediate the relationality between texts, readers, creators, and the worlds—fictional or real—to which the text refers. These abductions shape the reading community's notion of what the text is, says, and means—along with how seriously to take the text, how to read it, and what to do with it. In this model, then, notions held of an author's intent and action, of intended community, and of past reception, and any other notions of the text are recognized to be constituents of the text-reader hybrid, despite the very fact of autonomy that is a feature of this model of textual performativity.

For this reason, *authorial intention* does matter, but not the authorial intention that once existed in an ancient writer's mind; it is only the fabricated *notion of intent* held by the present reader that matters. Following my argument in Chapter 3, the author is a being of fiction, and the reader reprises his or her meaning. In doing so the author-in-one's-head is instaured as a component of

the text-reader hybrid. These fabrications created about past intentions act as virtual objects that do things in present text-reader assemblages, altering the meaning and performativity of the text. Ultimately, then, although the text may in fact be autonomous—as it is in my model—it does not function in the mind of the reader as if it were.

Moreover, as I argued following Latour's work on ecological politics, the notions inferred from a text or brought to a text are caught up in politics and values. What a reader, and the reader's community, can and will accept as true about a text cannot be untethered from the prescriptive implications those notions have for what the text means and how it functions within a community. In effect, as Latour shows with his climate change work, a web-of-belief and web-of-values are not separate webs; they are not two discrete layers with only a few points of contact but instead an intricate, connected, three-dimensional web of notions, people, and artifacts in which any single notion of the text is attached to many other notions, people, and artifacts. In conclusion, a *Realhermeneutik* approach recognizes *what is happening* and attempts to identify, name, and characterize the set of facts, values, and other notions that constitute a text-reader hybrid and, then, shape the emerging meaning and action of a text. A *Realhermeneutik* model—in the Latourian approach I have adopted—is thus a model of the performativity of texts in actor-networks.

5

Can a Text Change the Weather?

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Chapter Overview

In previous chapters I have argued for a Latourian hermeneutic approach in which the Bible is recognized as an actor embedded in actor-networks. The Bible functions as a *mediator*, transmitting action, but also modifying, transforming, and betraying the action it mediates, even as it modifies the action of those whose action it mediates. Like every Latourian actor, the Bible acts and is made to act, both an agent and patient of action, and its action emerges with the action of the other objects with which it is assembled. For this reason, it is not only the Bible itself that acts, but also notions of the Bible, including of its function, its authority, how it should be read, its meaning, and any other notions brought to the text or derived from the text.

This performativity of the Bible is notable in American evangelical discourse about climate

change, and here, to demonstrate this method, I trace the action of the Bible in the politics of climate change. As I will argue, there is a clear role of the Bible in this political discourse, such that biblical texts, and notions of biblical texts, are caught up in attempts to mobilize the Bible toward specific, and often opposing, policy positions. Notions of stewardship of creation, care for the poor, whether God would allow catastrophic climate change, what Genesis 1-11 says about the age of the earth, and, indeed, whether there was a global flood a few thousand years ago all shape how people approach climate science and policies. In this way, I argue, using an actor-networks approach to trace the action of the Bible makes evident that the way American religious conservatives respond to climate science is entangled with their approach to the Bible.

5.1 The Politics of Climate Change

In a January 2019 interview, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, White House Press Secretary for President Trump, was asked to respond to concerns raised by Congressional Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez about the imminent catastrophic impact of climate change. Ocasio-Cortez had been quoted as saying "the world is going to end in 12 years if we don't address climate change," a statement which she later described as nonliteral "dry humor + sarcasm" meant to emphasize the urgency of enacting climate change policy.[1] When asked about the President's response to Ocasio-Cortez's statement, Sanders replied that climate change is something "we will leave into the hands of a much, much higher authority" and that the White House would "certainly not listen to the freshman congresswoman on when the world may end." Instead, Sanders argued, what matters are "some of the current problems that we know exist ... not things we will leave up to the hands of something and someone much more powerful than any of us."[2]

In response Ocasio-Cortez tweeted excerpts from a *Relevant* article by Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, National Organizer and Spokesperson for Young Evangelicals for Climate Action.[3] Citing Genesis 1 and 2 and Leviticus, Ocasio-Cortez wrote, "Genesis 1: God looked on the world &

[1] Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (@AOC), Twitter Post, 22 January 2019, https://twitter.com/AOC/status/1087722312168812551
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (@AOC), Twitter Post, 12 May 2019, https://twitter.com/AOC/status/1127604746066583552
[2] Burris 2019.
[3] Meyaard-Schaap 2019.

called it good not once, not twice, but seven times. Genesis 2: God commands all people to 'serve and protect' creation. Leviticus: God mandates that not only the people, but the land that sustains them, shall be respected."[4] Moreover, she stated, "You shouldn't need a Bible to tell you to protect our planet, but it does anyway."[5]

From an opposing side, Senator James Inhofe, evangelical Republican and former chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works—who famously brought a snowball to the floor of the U.S. Senate to argue against global warming—has made arguments similar to those of Sanders.[6] He has been known, for instance, to state that "God's still up there" as part of his broader argument that climate change is a "hoax" that has been "perpetrated on the American people."[7] Moreover, Inhofe has pushed back on attempts to claim evangelical support for climate change policy. In his 2012 book, *The Greatest Hoax*, Inhofe recounts public statements by Senator Barbara Boxer, then chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, that evangelicals were supporting climate change policy, claims which Inhofe described as "pushing the idea that evangelicals were on board with global warming hysteria."[8] To rebut Senator Boxer's claims, Inhofe pointed to statements and declarations by the Cornwall Alliance (previously Interfaith Stewardship Alliance) in which evangelical leaders expressed concern about the impact of climate change policy and skepticism of the underlying science.[9] Indeed, when Inhofe preceded Boxer as chair, he released a "Dear Colleague" letter, further distributed as a press release by his committee, announcing that the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and evangelical leaders associated with the Cornwall Alliance had informed him that, contrary to media reports, the NAE would not be taking a position of support for climate change legislation.[10]

[4]Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (@AOC), Twitter Post, 23 January 2019, https://twitter.com/AOC/status/1088200188089565184
[5]Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (@AOC), Twitter Post, 23 January 2019, https://twitter.com/AOC/status/1088200189524017157
[6]Barrett 2015.
[7]Bruenig 2015; McCammack 2007: 655–656; Inhofe 2005.
[8]Inhofe 2012.
[9]Cornwall Alliance 2000; 2009.
[10]United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works 2006.

As evident in the statements of Inhofe and Boxer, evangelicals have not been unanimous in their positions on climate change, with many, such as those in the Cornwall Alliance, taking a skeptical approach to climate science and expressing strong opposition to climate change policy, whereas a smaller number of others, such as those represented by the Evangelical Climate Initiative or Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, have argued that evangelicals have a responsibility to act.[11] In analysis of evangelical magazines, specifically *World*, *Christianity Today*, and *Sojourners*, approximately representing conservative, moderate, and progressive evangelicalism, Sabrina Danielsen found that evangelical responses to climate change have hardened along political lines, such that conservative evangelicals have become strongly opposed to climate change policy, while moderate to progressive evangelicals have remained open to, if not supportive of, climate change policy.[12] In addition she found that over time discourse among evangelical leaders has moved from *theological* to *political* concerns, with this increased polarization mapped to the politicization of evangelical responses to climate change.[13] Consequently, theological responses to climate change have become politicized, and those who most strongly identify with conservative politics, such as *World* readers, or more recently, Trump voters, are most likely to hold positions skeptical of climate change science and opposed to climate change policy.[14]

Groups such as the Cornwall Alliance or Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) recognize the political power held by evangelicals and attempt to mobilize this power for or against climate action.[15] This awareness of political impact is evident, for instance, in the preamble to the NAE statement, "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility":

> Evangelical Christians in America face a historic opportunity. We make up fully one quarter of all voters in the most powerful nation in history. Never before has God given American evangelicals such an awesome opportunity to shape public policy in ways that could contribute to the well-being of the entire world.[16]

[11] See, for instance, Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006; Meyaard-Schaap 2019. See also discussion in Danielsen 2013; McCammack 2007; Nagle 2008.
[12] Danielsen 2013.
[13] Danielsen 2013: 199.
[14] To provide a sense of the political configuration of evangelicals, in Pew Research analysis white evangelical voters composed 20% of the electorate and supported Trump over Clinton 77% to 16%, a margin of support similar to the vote for the Republican candidate in the 2012 Obama-Romney election. Evangelicals were found to have made up approximately a third of Trump's support in the 2016 election. See Pew Research Center 2018.
[15] See Nagle 2008: 54.
[16] National Association of Evangelicals 2004.

Although the NAE itself does not take a position on the issue of climate change, an ECI statement signed by a number of evangelical leaders, including Rick Warren, cites the NAE statement in their argument for why evangelical Christians must act on climate issues:[17]

> As American evangelical Christian leaders, we recognize both our opportunity and our responsibility to offer a biblically based moral witness that can help shape public policy in the most powerful nation on earth, and therefore contribute to the well-being of the entire world. Whether we will enter the public square and offer our witness there is no longer an open question. We are in that square, and we will not withdraw.[18]

On an opposing side, the Cornwall Alliance and others skeptical of climate science likewise recognize the political impact of evangelicalism, as indeed demonstrated in the statements and actions of people such as Senator Inhofe and Press Secretary Sanders. It is widely recognized that evangelicals hold some level of power in politics; the difference among evangelicals is one of how that political power should be mobilized and to what end—whether in support or opposition of policy that recognizes and tries to mitigate the impact of climate change.

5.2 The Bible in Politics

One of the core theological values in evangelicalism is the authority of the Bible, and there is a clearly traceable participation of the Bible in American politics. Evangelical statements of faith typically make this notion of biblical authority explicit, as is the case in the NAE's statement of faith, which cites the Bible as "the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God."[19] There is a question, however, regarding the extent the authority of the Bible functions only at a personal level, informing religious beliefs and practices, and the extent to which it extends beyond the religious communities that hold it authoritative and into broader culture and politics. The authority of the Bible and evangelical politics was made explicit in a statement by Russell Moore, currently president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, made before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works in 2007. Moore stated, "Southern Baptists and other evangelicals are not afraid of saying 'Thus saith the Lord' to issues clearly revealed in Scripture—calling for the protection of innocent human

[17] Goodstein 2006.
[18] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.
[19] National Association of Evangelicals 2019.

life, for instance."[20] In the same appearance, it should be noted, however, Moore distanced himself from an overly theocratic interpretation of the Bible, stating evangelicals "do not demand that our fellow citizens adopt our theological convictions, though we are quite willing to discuss how our commitment to biblical principles shapes the questions we ask on such matters."[21] Given evangelical political activism on issues of human rights, equality, and access to abortion, however, Moore's statement is questionable for understating the extent to which American evangelicals want a legal system that enforces their values. In any case, as Moore and others make clear, to the extent evangelicals hold political power, the Bible is also a stakeholder in American political discourse. Because of this function of the Bible as authoritative for evangelicalism, when groups such as NAE or others participate in political discourse and activism, they are, in a Latourian sense, attaching the Bible to those political issues.

The authoritative role of the Bible in politics is made explicit in the statements and declarations of evangelicals on climate change and care for the environment, and indeed it is on the basis of being "biblical" that evangelicals advocate for various political positions.[22] Indeed, it is reference to the authority of Bible that makes evangelical activism and policy positions specifically *evangelical*, as Randall Frame, writing for *Christianity Today* in 1990, argued: "The key to remaining distinct from secular environmentalists ... is to focus on Scripture. Such a commitment has led evangelicals to part paths with secular counterparts at some points."[23]

A 1993 declaration by the Environmental Action Network calling for "creation care," for instance, begins with the statement, "As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the full authority of the Scriptures, and aware of the ways we have degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems."[24] More recently, on the topic of climate change specifically, ECI frames their "Call to Action" in terms of "biblically based moral witness" and "biblical convictions."[25] Beisner et al., responding to ECI on behalf of the Cornwall Alliance, acknowledge that evangelicals on both sides "share the same Biblical world view, theology,

[20] Moore 2007*b*.
[21] Moore 2007*b*.
[22] See McCammack 2007: 647–648; Nagle 2008: 59, 66; Danielsen 2013.
[23] Randall Frame, quoted in Danielsen 2013: 207.
[24] Evangelical Environmental Network 1993.
[25] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.

and ethics" even as they come to opposite conclusions regarding climate science and policy prescriptions.[26] Senator Inhofe, in his book calling climate change a hoax, writes, "I do not pretend to be a biblical scholar, but I have read a lot of work by scholars on the topic of man's relation to creation and what stewardship means from a biblical perspective." Inhofe then quotes Genesis 8:22 and Romans 1:25 to argue that worry about climate change is mistaken.[27] Ken Ham, founder of Answers in Genesis, an organization associated with the Ark Experience and the Creation Museum, argues that a biblical view is incompatible with belief in evolution and climate change, stating, "when you start with a biblical view of Earth's history, you reach an entirely different conclusion about the nature and cause of climate change."[28] In the *Relevant* article cited by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Kyle Meyaard-Schaap frames his argument in support for climate change activism in terms of the authority of the Bible, arguing that "evangelicals love and cherish the words of Scripture," and he cites a number of biblical texts to make a case that following scripture requires people to respond to climate change.[29]

To interpret this performativity of the Bible in Latourian terms, the Bible is embedded in an actor-network, upstream and downstream of many other actors, human and nonhuman: Inhofe, Boxer, Senate Committees, Presidents, Press Secretaries, Ocasio-Cortez, UN reports, scientists, declarations, statements, alliances, donors and funders, CO_2, fossil fuels, energy industries, energy needs, ocean currents, ice layers, evangelicals, evangelical leaders, evangelical magazines, statements of faith, Genesis, other biblical texts, the notion of the Bible, and the notion of biblical authority, to name just a few. The list of actors is endless, of course, traceable as far as one would choose to follow these innumerable chains of action. Each entity is acting and made to act, and within this web of action, the Bible is mobilized toward the aims of others, assembles communities around itself, exerts itself on others, drives discourse, is at the receiving end of discourse, and otherwise participates in climate change.

[26] Beisner et al. 2006.
[27] Inhofe 2012.
[28] Ham 2015.
[29] Meyaard-Schaap 2019.

5.3 Climate Change and Notions of *Stewardship* and *Concern for the Poor*

It is clear that the Bible is a participant in the politics of climate change. What is unclear, at first glance, is why the same set of biblical texts would seem to have an inconsistent performativity—participating in activism both for and against climate change policy. One possibility is that the function of the Bible is primarily passive, not doing much other than serving as a symbolic object to be wielded by whoever appropriates its name. And while I would not dismiss this as a very real occurrence, a Latourian approach allows for the action of the Bible to be traced in ways that reveal a more complex mechanism of participation in climate change discourse and politics.

Recall Latour's argument, discussed in Chapter 2, that gun violence cannot be blamed solely on guns nor on people but is instead what emerges with what he describes as a gun-citizen hybrid. As Latour argues, the gun-in-the-hand has different action than the gun-in-the-drawer. Likewise, the action of the Bible in climate change politics is neither the action of the Bible alone nor evangelicals alone, but an evangelical-Bible hybrid, whose action in climate change emerges with the specific configuration of actors assembled together with the Bible.

Recall also that in a Latourian actor-network approach, there is no ontological distinction between human and nonhuman actors. As Latour argues, the chimp and the stick reach together for the banana.[30] In the same way, the Bible and its readers form a hybrid object that acts. But whether this text-evangelical hybrid object reaches to *stop climate change* or to *stop climate change activism* is contingent on which other actors are configured along with the Bible and reader.

Here I argue that two specific notions, *stewardship* and *concern for the poor*, are attached to the text-reader hybrid, configuring its action. These notions, I argue, are mobilized by evangelicals, such as Meyaard-Schaap or ECI signatories, in order to attach the Bible to climate change, such that the authority of the Bible in evangelicalism becomes a driver of action to prevent and mitigate climate change. However, the action of this text, reader, and notions hybrid is modified by attaching new objects or reconfiguring the same actors to have different attachments. These same notions of *stewardship* and *concern for the poor* are also mobilized by opponents of climate action such that the text-reader hybrid is reconfigured to ensure the Bible functions

[30] See Chapter 2; see also, Latour 1994.

to prevent, rather than support, enactment of policies to reduce CO_2 emissions or otherwise reduce or respond to climate change.[31]

5.3.1 *Stewardship* and *Concern for the Poor* in the Statements of Proponents of Climate Action

In his *Relevant* article, Meyaard-Schaap argues that God loves the created world and that humans have a duty to care for this world. "The Bible is filled with affection for the created world," he writes, citing examples from Genesis, Leviticus, Psalms, and Job.[32] He also cites Matthew 22, writing, "Scripture speaks unequivocally of the requirement for the people of God to love God and to love our neighbor."[33] On this basis, he argues, Christians have an obligation to act on climate change:

> If God loves His world—as Scripture clearly attests—and if the cultures and livelihoods of our neighbors around the world are being threatened by a changing climate—as headlines, scientific reports and firsthand accounts all confirm is occurring at an alarming rate—then acting to address the threat of climate change isn't optional. It's what it looks like to follow Jesus in the 21st century.[34]

It is for this reason, he notes, that he and other evangelicals participated in the 2017 U.N. Climate Change Conference, COP23. "We went," he concludes, "because we are trying to love God by loving the world that He loves. We went because we are trying to love our neighbors by fighting for their right to live their lives on a habitable planet."[35]

To analyze the above in the Latourian approach developed in this thesis, one can see that with arguments of what the Bible *attests* or *speaks of*, Meyaard-Schaap performs abductions of a text-reader relationship, identifying meaning in the Bible and, from that descriptive work, making prescriptive claims for the relationship between humans and God, other humans, and the planet. Like many others, he identifies authoritative notions in the biblical texts—what evangelicals might describe as *biblically based* notions—that God loves the world, both humans and nonhumans, and that humans should love and care for other humans and care for the planet.

[31] The role of Psalm 139 in pro-life (anti-abortion) and LGBTQ equality discourse is another case of the same biblical notion being invoked by opposing factions. See discussion in Runions 2017.
[32] Meyaard-Schaap 2019.
[33] Meyaard-Schaap 2019.
[34] Meyaard-Schaap 2019.
[35] Meyaard-Schaap 2019.

This itself is not a novel argument, and it would be fair to argue that Meyaard-Schaap himself brings these notions to the text rather than first deriving them from the text. What is novel, however, is the way that Meyaard-Schaap, and others making similar arguments, attach these notions to climate change science and climate action. If one accepts the fact of climate change and the authority of the Bible, there is, in Meyaard-Schaap's argument, no choice but to act to prevent harm to people at risk and to the planet itself.

Others, too, have argued for integrating a theological and biblical basis for environmental care and action. One statement, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action," released by ECI in 2006 on behalf of a number of evangelical leaders, has been cited by a number of opponents of climate change action, including, notably, the Cornwall Alliance. Similar to Meyaard-Schaap's later article, the ECI statement made arguments both in terms of stewardship of creation and caring for those at risk. For instance, the ECI signatories state, "this is God's world," arguing by implication, "any damage that we do to God's world is an offense against God Himself."[36] Citing Genesis 1, Psalm 24, and Colossians 1:16, the authors write, "Christians must care about climate change because we love God the Creator and Jesus our Lord, through whom and for whom the creation was made." Moreover, noting that climate change is a consequence of human action, ECI cites Genesis 1:26-28 to argue "Christians ... are reminded that when God made humanity he commissioned us to exercise stewardship over the earth and its creatures. Climate change is the latest evidence of our failure to exercise proper stewardship..."[37] Similar arguments have been made by others for a biblical basis for Christian concern for environmental care.[38]

In attaching *stewardship* to the Bible and to *climate change*, multiple notions are brought to and derived from the text. This includes a notion that God created the world and gave humans responsibility to care for it. From the creation story in Genesis 1:26-28, for instance, is derived a notion that "God ... commissioned us," and this text is interpreted to mean that humans have the

[36] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.
[37] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.
[38] The Evangelical Environmental Network declaration, released in 1993, argues for a biblical basis for environmentalism in general. Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical made a detailed biblical and moral case for action of climate change and care for the planet. See Evangelical Environmental Network 1993; Pope Francis 2015.

responsibility to "exercise proper stewardship" in relation to climate change.[39] In this way, the narrative in Genesis is understood to be prescriptive for contemporary readers, in an abduction of what could be labeled a prototype–reader relationship. Evangelical climate activists attempt to attach notions of *creation stewardship* to both the Bible and to climate change, such that to fail to address climate change would be, in effect, to go against the Bible. And, to the extent this argument is successful—if text and readers are assembled and configured in this way—the Bible acts, through its followers, to prevent and mitigate climate change.

ECI signatories also attach *climate change* to notions of *caring for one's neighbors and the poor*, in the same way that Meyaard-Schaap does in his later *Relevant* article.[40] The ECI statement asserts, for instance, "the consequences of climate change will be significant, and will hit the poor the hardest" and that "millions of people could die in this century because of climate change, most of them our poorest global neighbors."[41] To make this an explicitly Christian concern, ECI attaches this impact of climate change to biblical texts, citing Matthew 7:12, 22:34-40, and 25:31-46: "Christians must care about climate change because we are called to love our neighbors, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and to protect and care for the least of these as though each was Jesus Christ himself."[42] In this way, what the gospels narrate Jesus saying becomes a prescriptive claim for the present, in the form of "we are called," and in so doing, ECI abducts from the narrative a normative claim about the relationship between those who see the Bible as authoritative and those at risk.[43] With this interpretation of biblical texts, the ECI statement assembles the Bible, readers, Christian moral beliefs, and notions of responsibility to care for those at risk together with notions of climate change to form a text-reader hybrid acting against climate change and, in this argument, saving lives.

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[39] The use of a masculine reference to God in ECI's quote is also a reflection of the set of notions brought to the text and abducted from the next, although perhaps not itself a matter directly relevant to a discussion of the Bible and climate change.

[40] A similar move is also made by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si*.

[41] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.

[42] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.

[43] See Chapter 4 for discussion of similar abductions performed in *Reading Sacred Scripture*.

5.3.2 Shared Notions of *Stewardship* and *Concern for the Poor*

Environmentalist evangelicals are not the only ones, however, who make the case that biblical *stewardship* and *concern for the poor* require environmental action. From the statements of evangelicals who are more skeptical of climate change, it is clear that they do not disagree with notions that the Bible requires stewardship of the earth and care for those at risk—it is only the policy implications of these notions that are contested. Russell Moore, for instance, provided the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's "Policy Statement on Global Warming," which outlined a biblical argument for creation care not dissimilar to what is argued by Meyaard-Schaap and ECI.[44] A statement by the Cornwall Alliance responding to ECI—and also provided to the Senate by Moore—likewise makes clear that these notions themselves are not a point of conflict: "With the general assertions that Christians must care about climate change because we love God and are called to love our neighbors and that God has given us stewardship over the earth, we agree."[45] Indeed, the authors of the Cornwall statement claim, despite strong overall disagreement with the signatories of the ECI statement, "we are motivated by the same deep and genuine concern they express for the poor not only of our own nation but of the world."[46] In comments given at a conference hosted by the Vatican—again provided to the Senate by Moore—the lead author of the Cornwall statement, E. Calvin Beisner, points to Galatians 2:10 as a basis for policy that takes into account the "effects on the most vulnerable among us," arguing that "when we consider what policies to pursue in response to climate change, we, too, must first of all remember the poor."[47] Young earth creationists skeptical of climate change, including those associated with Answers in Genesis, similarly recognize responsibility to care for other humans and the planet as biblical notions.[48]

5.3.3 Mobilization of *Stewardship* and *Concern for the Poor* as Latourian Actors

It is unclear that mobilization of notions of *stewardship* and *concern for the poor* has been performed to support political agendas in which care for the planet or concern for human

[44] Lewis 2005; Moore 2007*b*.
[45] Beisner et al. 2006: 15.
[46] Beisner et al. 2006: 1.
[47] Beisner 2007: 4.
[48] R. J. Martin 2010: 91; White 2015.

impact were in fact the primary concerns.[49] Sabrina Danielsen argues, for instance, that non-progressive evangelicals writing for *Christianity Today* and *World*, "generally only advocate for 'creation care' when no concrete environmental action is specified or, if it is, action is at the individual or congregational level."[50] Brian McCammack, on the other hand, suggests that progressive evangelical focus on the human impact of climate change serves as a means to mobilize evangelicals for environmental issues:

> To achieve their desired ends, liberal evangelical environmentalists may have found that it pays to craft a message more universally palatable to evangelicals. While creation care represented what at least seemed like a new—and potentially hazardous—theological approach to man's relationship with the environment, arguing climate change from the angle of its impact on the poor strikes a more familiar chord with evangelicals.[51]

Initial focus on issues such as endangered species required emphasis on *stewardship*, McCammack argues, but with recognition of the human impact of climate change, environmentalists were able to reshape their arguments in terms of a "more anthropocentric New Testament theology."[52] In other words, to the extent analysis by Danielsen and McCammack can be said to meaningfully describe the motivations behind evangelical theologizing on these issues, *stewardship* is a notion only adopted by conservatives when it has no climate change policy implications, and conversely, *concern for the poor* is adopted by progressives precisely because it does have environmental policy implications.

To be clear, identifying political calculations that factor into evangelical theologizing is not to dismiss these notions as non-genuine or somehow irrelevant. Notions of *stewardship* and *concern for the poor* are biblical, in an evangelical sense, and neither side claims otherwise. Recall also that in Latourian thought to say these notions are mobilized toward some aim does not mean that these notions are not themselves acting. Every actor is a mediator, and every mediator is an actor, each made to act but also acting. These notions may be located downstream of some other actor, meant to simply transmit as an *intermediary*, not originate action—but they are Latourian actors nonetheless, and, like all actors, they transform and betray the action they mediate.

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[49] See, for instance, Katharine Wilkinson's history of evangelical opposition to climate policy in Wilkinson 2012.
[50] Danielsen 2013: 207.
[51] McCammack 2007: 651.
[52] McCammack 2007: 650.

In this sense, they function as Latourian *black boxes* that, once fabricated, can be utilized toward some end or, alternatively, deconstructed.[53] For these two notions, however, evangelicals on both sides are happy to maintain the notions as they are. The black box that is disassembled by opponents of climate policy is that of *climate change* itself, such that the way these notions are attached to *climate science* or *climate skepticism* modifies the impact of the Bible in evangelicalism. Along these lines, John Nagle argues, "evangelicals recognize as well as anyone else that scientific arguments are the preferred currency of the policy realm."[54] It is, thus, *climate science* with its prescriptive implications that is the black box that must be deconstructed and reattached in the form of *climate skepticism*.[55]

5.3.4 Reconfiguring Notions of *Stewardship* and *Concern for the Poor*

Opponents of climate policy perform two moves: detaching climate science from creation care and attaching climate policy to *economic harm* to those at risk. One means of detaching climate science from the biblical notion of stewardship is through emphasizing caution and pragmatism. In his testimony to the Senate, Moore claimed Southern Baptists have a commitment to environmental care, but at the same time he cautioned that they are not convinced that policies to prevent and mitigate climate change are needed: "The Bible does call us to serve as guardian stewards of the earth and her resources, but the global warming debate is not simply between those who argue for such stewardship and those who argue against it."[56] Moore instead urged caution on climate change policies, and expressed worry that people were misusing the Bible in support of climate activism. Moreover, he reframed the debate in terms of "prudence," communicating evangelical questions about the extent to which climate change is of human origin.[57] In a blog post following his appearance before the Senate, Moore describes himself as a conservative who is likely "to the left of most of my fellow Southern Baptists on environmental issues."[58] It is from this perspective that he urges caution: "I don't deny that there has been climate change. I don't

[53] See discussion of black boxes in Chapter 1.
[54] Nagle 2008: 74.
[55] On description and prescription, and scientific facts as *matters of concern*, see discussion of Latourian ecological politics in Chapter 4.
[56] Moore 2007*b*.
[57] Moore 2007*b*. The notion of *prudence* and similar concerns about "rash action" are likewise emphasized in other statements provided by Moore to the Senate. See, Beisner et al. 2006; Lewis 2005.
[58] Moore 2007*a*.

deny that human beings are a factor in this climate change. What we don't know with any level of certainty is how much human beings have caused so-called global warming and what it would take to reverse the effects."[59] In expressing this kind of guarded uncertainty, he takes a fairly mainstream evangelical approach in which climate change is not outright denied, but he also downplays climate change as an issue to which much can, or should, be done—thus effectively detaching the notion of *climate change* from that of *stewardship* without entirely dismissing the possibility that climate change could be a future problem.

Moreover, broad skepticism within evangelicalism toward the conclusions of climate science further serves to make biblical notions of *stewardship* irrelevant to climate change policy. As an example, Nagle quotes David Barton's testimony to Congress, in which Barton stated that evangelicals "tend to be comfortable with theological teachings that have endured millennia but not with science that often reverses its claims on the same issue."[60] Along these lines, McCammack argues:

> the challenge for liberal evangelical environmentalists now is less about proving and defending their theological foundations and more about arguing the scientific legitimacy of reports that anthropogenic emissions are contributing to a potentially catastrophic warming of the earth. This shift opens up entirely new problems for those seeking to mobilize evangelicals on environmental issues since so many remain deeply suspicious of science.[61]

Indeed, Moore summarizes the concerns of many evangelical leaders: "To tie the authority of the Bible to the shifting and revisable scientific and public policy proposals of one's global warming agenda is unhelpful to the debate at best and trivializing of Christian faith at worst."[62]

And many, such as those forming the Cornwall Alliance, take an even more insistent position of skepticism.[63] Beisner et al., for instance, use language such as "unsubstantiated," "would have to prove," "improbable risks and solutions," and "no data anywhere suggest anything remotely like that" to describe their opponents' claims.[64] These authors further describe the notion of scientific

[59] Moore 2007*a*.
[60] David Barton, quoted in Nagle 2008: 73.
[61] McCammack 2007: 652–653.
[62] Moore 2007*b*.
[63] Latour excoriates this type of approach as a "plunge little by little into a parallel world." See Latour 2017: 11.
[64] Beisner et al. 2006: 16. Senator James Inhofe similarly strongly denies that there is evidence for climate change. See, for example, Inhofe 2005.

consensus on climate change as "dubious at best" and present skepticism as a virtue, citing Thomas Kuhn and Robert Merton, lending further credibility to their rejection of scientific consensus on climate change.[65] In this way, skepticism of climate change science is mobilized as a notion that, when attached to the Bible and *stewardship*, reconfigures the action of the evangelical text-reader hybrid against, rather than for, climate change prevention and mitigation.

While the Cornwall Alliance statement does not use Latourian concepts to explain their arguments, the authors recognize, in some way, that their opponents' arguments are contingent on assembling notions of *stewardship*, *care for the poor*, and *catastrophic climate change* together with the Bible. The Cornwall Alliance statement acknowledges that they, like ECI, recognize "that Christians ... are called to love our neighbors and that God has given us stewardship over the earth."[66] However, it is argued, these assertions "address motive" but "do not specify action."[67] In doing so the Cornwall authors reject ECI's attempt at using description—specifically, what the Bible says about general principles of stewardship and care for others—to make prescriptive claims about what evangelicals should do on the issue of climate change. Moreover, the Cornwall statement decouples scientific description from biblical description. "It is not sufficient ... to have good intentions," they argue. Rather, these intentions "must be linked to sound understanding of relevant principles, theories, and facts."[68] Indeed, Beisner et al. claim, "that linkage is lacking for the ECI's 'Call to Action.' "[69] In other words, they are arguing that ECI has good biblical theology but bad science. And in recognizing the prescriptive implications of climate science, the Cornwall statement is, by implication, recognizing ECI's approach to climate change as a Latourian matter of concern, as evident in their implicit awareness that facts and values are entangled within climate change discourse.[70] By accepting their opponents' claims about what is biblical but contesting the science and policies that drive the corresponding climate activism, the Cornwall Alliance attempts to detach the evangelical text-reader hybrid from climate change.

[65] Beisner et al. 2006: 9.
[66] Beisner et al. 2006: 15.
[67] Beisner et al. 2006: 15.
[68] Beisner et al. 2006: 1.
[69] Beisner et al. 2006: 1.
[70] On *matters of concern* and the interdependence of facts and values, see discussion of Latour's ecological politics in Chapter 4.

Not only do opponents of climate change policy attempt to evoke skepticism of climate change science, they further make the argument that, in fact, acting to stop climate change will *hurt*, not help, the very people said to be at risk. McCammack explains:

> While liberal evangelical environmentalists view climate change from the perspective of how the *environmental consequences* of climate change will affect the poor, their conservative counterparts focus on the potential *economic impacts*. Both sides cast themselves as defenders of the poor, but disagree on the scientific basis and economic impacts of climate change.[71]

Along these lines, in light of what he sees as uncertainty about the contribution of CO_2 emissions and the difficulty in implementing policies to address climate change, Moore asks rhetorically in his statement to U.S. Senators, "what would be the cost—in terms of loss of economic security, private property, national sovereignty, personal liberty—for such initiatives to be put into place?" To which, he responds, "Christians can and do disagree on such questions."[72]

Indeed, where ECI claims that "millions could die" due to the catastrophic impact of climate change, the Cornwall Alliance argues, in dramatic terms, that millions would die due to remaining trapped in poverty as a consequence of the crippling economic costs of climate change prevention:

> Millions of poor people in developing countries die every year because they lack clean water and indoor plumbing, electricity (forcing them to burn wood and dung for cooking and heating and to live without refrigeration and air conditioning), sewage treatment, jobs, access to affordable medical care, and adequate nutrition—not to mention just and orderly legal and economic systems. Not only will the policies proposed by the ECI not solve any of these real, present, and vast problems, but instead they will slow down and in some cases prevent their being solved—all for the sake of responding to speculative and likely exaggerated risks far in the future, through measures that would be ineffective anyway.[73]

Similar concerns are raised by others about hindered economic development, crippled economies, lost jobs, lost opportunities for pollution reduction measures that accompany economic development, reduced resilience to natural climate changes and natural disasters, and general suffering that would be caused by implementation of climate change prevention and mitigation policies.[74]

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[71] McCammack 2007: 652. See also Nagle 2008: 68.
[72] Moore 2007*b*.
[73] Beisner et al. 2006: 16.
[74] Lewis 2005; McCammack 2007; Moore 2007*b*; Nagle 2008; Spencer 2010; White 2015.

These claims are contested, with proponents of climate change policies denying that they would be enormously expensive and economically damaging. Andy Crouch, writing for *Christianity Today*, argues, for instance, "we have little to lose, and much technological progress, energy security, and economic efficiency to gain, if we act on climate change now—even if the worst predictions fail to come to pass."[75] ECI likewise argues, "these efforts can easily be shown to save money, save energy, reduce global warming pollution as well as air pollution that harm human health, and eventually pay for themselves."[76] For those who are inclined toward taking climate scientists seriously and acting to reducing climate change, finding affordable solutions that will ultimately be successful is an important consideration; for those, however, who are opposed to climate change science and policy in the first place—for political or theological reasons—the economic arguments for climate change policy may not be as compelling as those against.

What conservative evangelicals do with these arguments, in effect, is detach the notion of *caring for the poor* from *climate action* and reattach it to *doing nothing* on climate change. Indeed, Cornwall Alliance uses terms such as "immoral and harmful" to describe the costs of climate change policies.[77] Alan White, writing for Answers in Genesis, argues, "we should speak up and defend those that will be hurt the most by the corrective actions—the poor."[78] In this way, the biblical response to climate science, in this configuration of text and readers, is to save people from harm not by reducing CO_2 emissions, but by not acting at all on climate change, or perhaps by acting to prevent misguided climate activists from bringing about this pending catastrophic economic harm to those at risk. This stance conveniently coincides with a laissez-faire economic approach favored by conservatives, in which the best action on the part of government to help less developed countries is, effectively, no action—with the additional benefit of requiring no sacrifice on the part of Americans, at least not in terms of increased taxes or regulatory burden. What happens then, with this reconfiguration of the text-reader hybrid, is that, in a Latourian betrayal, the very notion of *concern for the poor* functions to ensure that no climate action is performed.[79]

[75] Crouch 2005.
[76] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.
[77] Beisner et al. 2006: 16.
[78] White 2015.
[79] A 2015 study provides evidence that this disassociation of *climate action* from *concern for the poor* has been effective. Although 77% of evangelicals reported that caring for the world's poor is personally important

5.4 The Climate Impact of a Biblical Meta-Narrative and Literalist Readings

Responding to the use of "general 'creation care' concepts" by ECI and the Cornwall Alliance, Rod Martin, writing in Answers in Genesis' *Answers Research Journal*, critiques what he sees as an argument that is not uniquely biblical or Christian:

> Both evangelical groups resorted to these concepts, yet they both also stated that they wanted to bring a decidedly Christian perspective to the debate on global warming. Are very general 'creation care' concepts all the guidance the Scriptures provide? Are concern for the poor and a desire to wisely steward the earth exclusively Christian positions? Many non-Christians also share these concerns.[80]

If the implications of biblical notions of stewardship and concern for the poor are contingent on how one views climate science, then, are there any arguments that could be made about climate change directly based on biblical notions? Evident in the arguments of opponents of climate change policy, there are two ways in which evangelical notions of biblical content are mobilized against climate change prevention and mitigation. One is the kind of approach favored by Senator Inhofe, in which there is a general trust, based on biblical principles, that God will not allow the earth prematurely to come to harm. The other emerges with the kind of literal reading of biblical narrative as historical fact, as is the case with Martin and other creationists.

5.4.1 No More Global Catastrophes

One biblical text which has played an outsized role in evangelical discourse on climate change is Genesis 8:21-22, in which God promises Noah that a flood-like catastrophic event will not happen again:

> I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.[81]

Accordingly, for those who view the Bible as trustworthy—and this text as applicable to the possibility of climate change—a catastrophic change in climate due to CO_2 emissions is inconsistent with what God has promised.[82]

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to them, only 33% believed that reducing global warming would help those same people. See Leiserowitz et al. 2015: 20–21.

[80] R. J. Martin 2010: 91.

[81] Genesis 8:21-22 (NRSV)

[82] See, for example, Beisner 2007: 3; R. J. Martin 2010: 95; Foley 2014; Ham 2015.

Senator Inhofe, for instance, cites the daily devotional, *Promises*, written by Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, a book which Inhofe describes as one he has "read nearly every day for twenty-five years."[83] "Many times during my global warming fight," Inhofe writes, "I turned to Day 36 of *Promises* which features one of my favorite Bible verses, Genesis 8:22." Inhofe then retells a story of a preacher who is thankful for wintry weather, writing that in response to a question of why the preacher would celebrate the bitter cold, the preacher replies, "more than 3,000 years ago God promised that cold and heat should not cease, so I am strengthened by this weather which emphasizes the sureness of His promises." For the preacher, and for the Senator, the cold in winter is an opportunity for "thanking God for keeping His Word." Inhofe concludes, "this is what a lot of alarmists forget: God is still up there, and He promised to maintain the seasons and that cold and heat would never cease as long as the earth remains."[84]

With this argument Inhofe performs a typical evangelical abduction of the agencies mediated in the text, seeing a narrative in Genesis as intended to be taken as a promise from God relevant to humans now dealing with contemporary crises of their own making. Subsumed in this interpretation are notions of the biblical text mediating what "God promised," such that the possibility of climate change is now a matter of "God ... keeping His Word." In this way, the role of authorship, the function of narration, the specific contexts of the story or its intended readers are folded into this abducted prototype-reader relationship. Inhofe thus does not ask, and precludes asking, questions such as: Did a global flood happen? Were these words spoken by God to Noah? Did God intend for these words—what was said to Noah or what the text says to contemporary readers—to be taken as speaking to present readers? Does the text—whatever its meaning and origin—even apply to catastrophes of human origin? And even if the planet itself will be fine, what about the human impact of rapid climate change?[85] These interpretive questions are obscured when the text is handled as an *intermediary* that directly transmits—authoritatively and without error—what God is thought to say to present readers.

[83] Bright 1998; Inhofe 2012.
[84] Inhofe 2012.
[85] A comment by NAE spokesperson, Richard Cizik, raises the issue of human impact: "Environmentalists say the Earth is in jeopardy. The Earth will go on. I believe human beings are in jeopardy." Quoted in McCammack 2007: 652.

Latour notes a similar citation of Genesis 8:21 by Congressman John Shimkus in a meeting of the United States Energy Subcommittee on Environment and Economy, to which Latour is unsparing in his criticism: "With such solid assurance, it would be wrong indeed to worry!"[86] And in a typical Latourian style of writing, Latour describes the corresponding attempt to delay and oppose any action on climate change on the basis of climate science skepticism together with a belief that God would not allow the planet to come to harm as a "form of a low-level madness that can be characterized as *quietist*, with reference to a religious tradition in which the faithful trusted in God to take care of their salvation."[87]

While the use of Genesis 8:21-22 on its own as a basis for disbelief in climate change may be questionable, even by evangelical interpretive practices, this text also serves as more than just a prooftext for climate change deniers. In many ways the content of Genesis 8:21-22—as evangelicals understand it—with its description of the origins of human evil and God's control over the planet, is consistent with, and to some extent symbolic of, how evangelicals understand the entirety of the narrative of the Bible through which evangelicals see their own relationality to God, other humans, and the world. Indeed, Moore describes this narrative arc to the Senate, stating, "an evangelical Protestant commitment to creation is built on an understanding of the narrative of history as outlined in Scripture.... In Christ, Christians believe, God is redeeming the world—by putting away sin and death. And, ultimately, God will redeem his creation by freeing nature from its curse."[88] Ken Ham similarly, argues, "we can have confidence that humanity won't be snuffed out by climate change. Instead, we know that God is in control of history and it will not end until Jesus Christ returns."[89] In this way, evangelical Christian faith is one that looks to God's salvation of individual humans but also sees human life and human relationship to the planet in the context of the biblical meta-narrative they find in the Bible.

Moreover, environmentalist discourse on climate change is seen to be simultaneously both too apocalyptic and too utopian. For many evangelicals, the notion of a planet ravaged by climate change is inconsistent with core evangelical beliefs, making the kind of catastrophic climate

[86]Latour 2017: 11.
[87]Latour 2017: 11.
[88]Moore 2007*b*.
[89]Ham 2015.

change scientist have warned about simply inconceivable.[90] In an "Open Letter" released by the Cornwall Alliance, for instance, conservative theologian Wayne Grudem is quoted dismissing this possibility of apocalyptic climate change:

> It does not seem likely to me that God would set up the world to work in such a way that human beings would eventually destroy the earth by doing such ordinary and morally good and necessary things as breathing, building a fire to cook or keep warm, burning fuel to travel, or using energy for a refrigerator to preserve food.[91]

John Nagle, summarizing evangelical views, explains, "evangelicals object to what they describe as the secular view of the apocalypse presumed by those who are most concerned about climate change. Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth described the future effects of climate change as 'almost like a nature hike through the book of Revelation.' "[92] Along these lines, Moore's statement to the Senate similarly makes clear that the Southern Baptist Convention and other evangelicals cannot "share a radical environmentalist's apocalyptic scenarios of 'earth in the balance.' "[93] In a later blog post following his testimony, he explains that he is "deeply suspicious of the kind of doomsday scenarios laid out for us by Al Gore and others in a kind of secular Left Behind series."[94]

Undue pessimism and optimism both, however, are inconsistent with the biblical meta-narrative of evangelicals. Even as he rejects "apocalyptic scenarios," Moore informed the Senate that "Southern Baptists and other conservative evangelicals are wary of the utopianism present in many of the environmentalist proposals on climate change—both secular and religious."[95] This suspicion of the effectiveness of government policy—a conservative political orientation shared by many evangelicals—puts Moore at odds with progressive evangelicals, and he explains in his blog post that he rejects "an evangelical utopianism that believes, in the words of one evangelical leader, that we can 'restore Eden' through legislative means."[96] In contrast, he argues, "we must maintain the limits of environmental action, knowing that the ultimate liberation of

[90] On why climate change is inconsistent with evangelical readings of biblical texts which describe God's control over the planet and, moreover, with a biblical meta-narrative more broadly, see Beisner 2007; Ham 2015; R. J. Martin 2010; White 2015.
[91] Cornwall Alliance 2006.
[92] Nagle 2008: 70.
[93] Moore 2007*b*.
[94] Moore 2007*a*.
[95] Moore 2007*b*.
[96] Moore 2007*a*.

creation has everything to do with our resurrection and the resumption of human rule through Christ over this universe."[97]

By contrast, others, including Catholics and evangelicals, see a possibility of climate change that is catastrophic without necessarily being apocalyptic in a biblical sense. In arguing that the poor will be hurt by climate change, ECI argues, for instance, "the earth's natural systems are resilient but not infinitely so," noting the extent to which "human civilizations are ... dependent on ecological stability and well-being."[98] Pope Francis states environmental concerns in dire, although not quite apocalyptic terms, in his encyclical, writing: "Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth."[99] And even if one does not believe that God would allow the planet, or the people living on it, to be severely harmed by climate change, one could argue that the mechanism by which God would prevent this apocalyptic scenario is through the very secular and religious activists working to prevent and mitigate climate change.

5.4.2 Genesis 1-11 and Climate Change

A direct connection between the Bible and opposition to climate change science and policy emerges with a conservative theological reading of Genesis 1-11. If the stories of creation and the flood are taken as literal, historical fact, and the earth is as young as young earth creationists believe, then the evidence for climate change is necessarily suspect. Moreover, from this point of view, climate change researchers will necessarily misinterpret historical data because they fail to recognize the facts of the Bible. For this reason, to believe in climate change is felt by many conservatives to be a denial of the Bible's authority and trustworthiness.

Writing for *Christianity Today*, Andy Crouch connects climate skepticism to the controversy over evolution.[100] He writes, "if evangelicals mistrust scientists when they make pronouncements about the future, it may be because of the history of antagonism between biblical faith and evolution."[101] Crouch argues this ongoing creation-evolution debate shapes evangelical responses

[97] Moore 2007*b*.
[98] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.
[99] Pope Francis 2015: 161.
[100] Crouch 2005.
[101] Crouch 2005.

to climate change. "Perhaps no result of the creation-evolution stalemate," he writes, "is as potentially disastrous as the way it has stymied courageous action on climate change."[102] Crouch does not take a strong position in terms of his own belief in creation or evolution, and he describes himself as more concerned with "evolutionism," which he describes as a "a naturalistic worldview that excluded the biblical Creator," than the problem of whether the earth was created through an evolutionary process.[103] On the issue of climate change, he argues that the risk of being wrong is too high and many of the proposed policy solutions are worth enacting even if the science is uncertain.

In one sense, skepticism of climate science is an outcome of general evangelical distrust of any science that has religious implications. Richard Cizik summarizes this attitude, commenting, "historically, evangelicals have reasoned like this: Scientists believe in evolution. Scientists are telling us climate change is real. Therefore, I won't believe what scientists are saying."'[104] This is effectively what Crouch argues as well, seeing general evangelical distrust of climate science as one of many "unfortunate consequences" of the "battle between evolutionism and Christian faith."[105] Moreover, as Nagle posits, "most evangelicals are like the vast majority of the public who have no scientific expertise but who must make a scientific judgment in order to articulate an informed policy preference." For this reason, a general distrust within evangelicalism of any sort of science related to the planet is sufficient to drive climate skepticism.

Evangelical distrust of climate science is also grounded in the details of the Genesis 1-11 narrative. Crouch, for instance, notes the way "some Christians resorted to a wooden interpretation of the first pages of Genesis."[106] What is recognized in Crouch's statement, however, is that for those who take Genesis 1-11 as historical fact, it is difficult, if not impossible, to accept the science of climate change. Indeed, Crouch's own argument demonstrates the inherent incompatibility between a literal hermeneutic approach and acceptance of climate science. The facts of a young earth and a global flood simply do not align with the facts of climate change science—one

[102] Crouch 2005.
[103] Crouch 2005. Brian McCammack similarly describes evangelical concerns about science acting as a religious system. See, McCammack 2007: 653, 656. See also, for example, Ham 2017.
[104] Richard Cizik, NAE Spokesperson, quoted in Nagle 2008: 72.
[105] Crouch 2005.
[106] Crouch 2005.

cannot hold to both. For this reason, those like Crouch who are open, if not accepting, of climate science are seen by conservative evangelicals to be taking a position that denies the factual authority of biblical narrative.

Evangelical positions on evolution and climate science are not monolithic, as made clear in Nagle's analysis of climate change and evangelicalism. Similar to Crouch and Cizik, Nagle argues, "evangelical attitudes toward climate change are shaped by the unique relationship of evangelicals to contemporary scientific argumentation."[107] He notes, however, there is variation within evangelicalism on this: "it is difficult to explain why some evangelicals accept the popular scientific consensus regarding climate change while others do not."[108] The incompatibility between young earth creationism and climate science, however, is clearly one source of climate skepticism among evangelicals. Indeed, as Nagle notes, "evangelicals are especially wary of scientific claims they regard as contrary to biblical teaching. This is particularly obvious in the ongoing dispute between theories of evolution and creation."[109] Moreover, he also recognizes, "there is a notable diversity of opinion among evangelicals with respect to the precise relationship between biblical teaching about creation and scientific teaching about evolution."[110] Along these lines, Brian McCammack reports that "no aspect of Christian religious belief other than a fundamentalist biblical literalism" has been found to be "an accurate predictor of negative environmental attitudes."[111]

The ECI "Call to Action" identifies the stakes of this distrust in climate science: "Because all religious/moral claims about climate change are relevant only if climate change is real and is mainly human-induced, everything hinges on the scientific data."[112] For ECI that is a reason to take the science of climate change seriously; but the opposite is true for conservatives who prioritize biblical narrative—which is trusted as accurate historical fact—over contemporary

[107] Nagle 2008: 71.
[108] Nagle 2008: 71.
[109] Nagle 2008: 71–72.
[110] Nagle 2008: 72.
[111] McCammack 2007: 659.
[112] Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006.

science—which is seen to be provisional, if not misguided. The fact that scientific data cannot—in the view of biblical creationists—be valid means that all their opponents' claims about climate change are irrelevant, if not outright harmful.

Climate Science and Narrative History

This incompatibility between a fundamentalist evangelical approach to scripture and climate science is made clear in a number of articles and blog posts written by authors associated with Answers in Genesis (AiG). In a web article titled "Science Confirms Climate Change!", AiG writer Avery Foley asks, for instance, "did you know that what you believe about origins will affect how you view climate change?"[113] Rod Martin, in an article published in AiG's *Answers Research Journal*, argues, "the biblical history of the earth, contained in the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis, provides a useful and sufficient framework for evaluating the current global warming issue."[114] Ken Ham, whose creation-evolution debate with Bill Nye, "The Science Guy," at the Creation Museum drew millions of viewers,[115] argues "believers must start with the history in God's Word."[116] And "when you start with a biblical view of Earth's history," he writes, "you reach an entirely different conclusion about the nature and cause of climate change."[117]

AiG's arguments against evolution and climate change illustrate the thinking of many evangelicals who take biblical narrative as historical fact. Ham, for instance, writes, "some say Genesis is just poetry and not meant to be taken as literal history. But Genesis is not written as poetry—it's historical narrative—the account of the only 100% true and reliable history of the earth and universe."[118] This literal approach is presented as a straightforward or plain reading: "When we take the Bible literally, we are reading it in what is called a natural manner—recognizing that the Psalms, for example, are poetry, that there are parables in the Bible, and so on."[119] AiG writers use language such as, "the true history book of the universe," "divine revelation," "biblical view of Earth's history," and "the history in God's Word" to describe their approach to narrative.[120]

[113] Foley 2014.
[114] R. J. Martin 2010: 104.
[115] Answers in Genesis 2014; Nye and Ham 2014.
[116] Ham 2018.
[117] Ham 2015.
[118] Ham 2017.
[119] Ham 2014.
[120] Foley 2014; Ham 2014; 2015; 2018.

Ham sees the historicity of Genesis as entangled with the trustworthiness of the New Testament matter as well, writing, "Jesus quoted Genesis regarding the historicity of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:3–6), Noah, and the Flood (Matthew 24:38–39)." According to Ham, then, if one were to say "that we cannot trust the Bible when it comes to Genesis," it is "essentially calling Jesus a liar—as well as the Apostles Peter and Paul!"[121] Ham also cites Luke 17:26-27, 1 Corinthians 11, and Hebrews 11:7, arguing that if Genesis is thought to be myth, then New Testament texts likewise cannot be trusted.[122]

Evident in this argument are a number of notions brought to and abducted from the biblical texts, assembled with text and reader, to create what young earth creationists see as a factual guide to history. In a Raderian inference of genre intent, for instance, Ham recognizes the presence of poetry, parables, and historical narrative in the Bible, and uses an notion of intended historicity to create meaning from the narrative.[123] Attached to this notion of genre are notions of reliability and trustworthiness, and a notion that a literal reading is natural. One could as easily argue that a mythological reading is natural, but what *could be* read in the text is irrelevant to a *Realhermeneutik* approach which traces how the Bible is read in actual practice—and in this case it is a notion of *literal* as natural that conservative evangelicals bring to the text.[124] AiG's notion of divine revelation, moreover, reflects an abduction of a relationship between text and God, with its implied prescriptive relationship between text and reader. As evident in Ham's argument, multiple biblical texts are assembled together. Genesis 1-11, for instance, is attached to New Testament texts, and both are attached to creationist notions and creationist artifacts—including museums, books, web articles, YouTube videos—and many other actors, human and nonhuman. This assemblage of texts, notions, readers, and many others is one in which the text acts as trustworthy guide to the facts of what happened in the past.

From this perspective, trying to unify the narrative in Genesis with evolutionary science—or indeed climate science—is simply impossible. Ham writes, "Christians who add evolution to the

[121] Ham 2014.
[122] Ham 2014.
[123] See Chapter 4 for discussion of Ralph Rader's work on genre and intent.
[124] For an alternative theological interpretation of the creation narratives, see, for instance, Middleton 2018. See also Pope Francis' citation of the creation story as a theological basis for a view of human dignity and human relationality in Pope Francis 2015: 65–66, 81. On a *Realhermeneutik* approach, see Chapter 4.

Bible are making man's word infallible and God's Word fallible!"[125] In Ham's view, to question the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible is to drive people away from Christian faith, and rejection of biblical authority is, moreover, responsible for many societal ills.[126] For this reason, he writes, "at Answers in Genesis our focus is not a young earth but biblical authority, and as a consequence we are young earth."[127] In this way, biblical authority and contemporary science are placed at odds, requiring those who think the Bible must be interpreted literally to choose between science or their faith.[128] In effect, the Bible, as it functions in these communities, holds social power and requires action against climate change policy.

The young earth beliefs of creationists, along with corresponding belief in Noah's flood as a global event, are incompatible with geological dating core to climate science. Ham states, for instance, "much of the climate change alarmism is based on dating methods, such as ice core dating, that supposedly give the climate tens of thousands of years ago. But the earth isn't that old!"[129] Foley argues, "if you start from the perspective that Earth is billions of years old and that Earth's temperature has been stable for over 10,000 years, you will reach an entirely different conclusion than if you start with a belief in a young Earth radically reshaped by a global Flood."[130] Data from fossil records, tree rings, or other methods that assume a history longer than creationists are willing to stipulate, or that require the absence of a global flood, is thus all found suspect.[131] A creationist literal reading of Genesis as recording a global flood is particularly problematic for climate science predictions given that on this basis creationists challenge current notions about global temperatures, polar ice, and the origin of fossil fuels. Ham describes this view, explaining, "our climate is indeed changing but this is nothing new. Temperatures have been changing since the time of the catastrophic Flood of Noah's day around 4,350 years ago."[132] In this way

[125] Ham 2017.
[126] Ham 2014; 2019.
[127] Ham 2017.
[128] I am using the term *science* in its secular sense, as reflected by both mainstream philosophy and professional practices, not in the sense that many creationists and climate skeptics would use when claiming scientific support for their decidedly unscientific views.
[129] Ham 2017.
[130] Foley 2014.
[131] Foley 2014; Ham 2017; 2018; White 2015.
[132] Ham 2015.

climate change itself is not denied but rather made irrelevant, as scientific conclusions about the significance of human contribution to global warming are said to be based on invalid data.

These views are not just the fringe views of Answers in Genesis. For example, E. Calvin Beisner, lead author of the Cornwall Alliance response to ECI, argues for burning fossil fuels on the basis that the formation of these carbon sources was a consequence of Noah's flood:

> According to both the Bible and sound science, the great pools of oil and veins of coal formed from sudden, simultaneous deposits of vast numbers of plants and animals in a great geological cataclysm—what Christians recognize as the Flood of Noah's time. That flood was an exercise of God's judgment on sin.[133]

Beisner argues that increased CO_2 will contribute to human flourishing through increased efficiency of plant growth.[134] If fossil fuels are a consequence of human sin which led to the death of many living plants and animals, it is also, he suggests, redemptive to use those fossil fuels to return CO_2 to the atmosphere.[135] He concludes, "the sad irony is that millions of people fear what should lead them instead to praise God. Added carbon dioxide from fossil fuels isn't pollution; it's part of the solution to human poverty and to the thriving of the whole Earth."[136] This is not necessarily reflective of the views of the entirety of the Cornwall Alliance, but Beisner, as its spokesperson, also cannot be said to be unrepresentative.[137]

Design and Resilience

One notion that emerges with a literal reading of Genesis 1-11 and other biblical texts is that of a climate engineered by God to withstand variations in CO_2 levels. This is the view expressed by Grudem, when he comments that he does not believe "God would set up the world to work in such a way" that normal human activity and energy usage would be catastrophic.[138] In this sense, skepticism of catastrophic climate change is partially an outcome of creationists' interpretation of Genesis and partly based on the biblical meta-narrative which underlies evangelical beliefs. Foley argues, for instance, that the earth "was designed by the all-knowing, all-wise Creator

[133] Beisner 2007: 7.
[134] Beisner 2007: 6.
[135] Beisner 2007: 7.
[136] Beisner 2007: 7.
[137] Although Moore himself did not make creationist claims in his own testimony, he did include Beisner's comments as an appendix to his testimony. See Moore 2007*b*.
[138] Cornwall Alliance 2006.

God," and thus, "surely the God who equipped life to survive on a changing Earth also designed Earth with the necessary features to deal with environmental changes."[139]

Where climate activists such as Meyaard-Schaap argue that the Genesis narrative shows God's affection for the world—and, by implication, human responsibility to take care of it—climate skeptics such as Beisner take the same as evidence that human contributions to climate change are not of concern. Meyaard-Schaap writes, for instance, "God looked on the world He had made and called it good not once, not twice, but seven times."[140] Beisner, however, makes the same point to opposite ends: "The Bible teaches that our wise Creator made a magnificent creation and, when finished, pronounced it 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). In contrast, a common theme of almost all environmental writings is that the Earth is fragile."[141] Where on one side, the notion of a world created and designed by God motivates care and concern to take good care of the planet, on the other side it drives the notion that no concern about CO_2 emissions is needed—and when this notion is combined with young earth creationism, climate activism becomes untenable for those who claim belief in the Bible's authority.

5.5 The Bible in Actor-Networks

In the account I have outlined above, the Bible acts alongside many other actors, human and nonhuman. It is a stakeholder that does things in the politics of climate change, but so are many other actors. To extend the preliminary list previously outlined, consider the contribution of CO_2, the planet as a whole, the sun, plants, ocean currents, ocean levels, polar ice, ice layers, tree rings, things more than a few thousand years old, global temperatures, local temperatures, hurricanes, heatwaves, cold snaps, snowballs, the Senate, the House of Representatives, Senators, Representatives, Senate committees, COP23, Bonn, Germany, the United Nations, individual governments, evangelicals, evangelical leaders, evangelical statements and declarations, voters, evangelical voters, Cornwall Alliance, Evangelical Environmental Network, Evangelical Climate Initiative, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, Answers in Genesis, *Christianity Today*, *World*, *Relevant*, humans, developing countries, homes and

[139] Foley 2014. See similar arguments in Ham 2015; R. J. Martin 2010; Spencer 2010; White 2015; 2016.
[140] Meyaard-Schaap 2019.
[141] Beisner 2007: 3.

families, human lives, climate policies, legislation, Sarah Sanders, James Inhofe, Barbara Boxer, Russell Moore, E. Calvin Beisner, Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, Ken Ham, scientists, creationists, biologists, geologists, climatologists, astronomers, the Bible, individual biblical texts, blog posts, YouTube videos, and Twitter. Consider also notions of climate change, stewardship, concern for the poor, poverty, a young earth, an old earth, God, Jesus, God's word, biblical authority, trustworthiness, narrative, historical fact, Noah's flood, a six day creation, among countless other notions. There are, furthermore, networks of funders, lobbyists, activists, international climate change negotiators, and networks of actors that enable fabrication of scientific data and fabrication of evangelical theology.[142]

In American politics, the Bible-evangelical hybrid has power, in large part, because evangelicals hold political power; in the case of the planet, the Bible has power due to the outsized influence the United States has in negotiating and implementing international policy agreements. This performativity of the Bible and its action on climate emerge with the configuration of humans and nonhumans within this vast actor-network. The text-reader hybrid acts on, even as it is being made to act by, the other entities, human and nonhuman, to which it is attached, and thus the action of this hybrid emerges with its attachment to other actors. What the Bible does, then, is modified by how it is configured internally within a text-reader hybrid and also by how it configured with external actors. For this reason, the configuration of political alliances, organizations and institutions, and social webs-of-belief that constitute the actor-network likewise configure the action of the Bible.

5.5.1 Networks of Fear and Distrust

The action of the Bible in politics is shaped also by evangelical distrust of non-evangelicals. Within conservative evangelicalism, in particular, there is a prevalent sense of an us-versus-them position that shapes engagement with environmental politics. Ken Ham illustrates this attitude with his description of belief in evolution as the "pagan religion of our age," and he critiques "organizations like Biologos" which, he writes, "are no different from the priests of

[142] I use *fabrication*, here, in the Latourian sense of something along the lines of *to manufacture*, *to produce*, or *to create*. Some scientific data is fabricated in the sense of being false, but all scientific data, according to Latour, is fabricated. The question is always one of the quality of this fabrication.

Israel who compromised with the pagan religions of their age (1 Kings 12:26–31)."[143] It is, moreover, not just fundamentalist evangelicals who hold such concerns. Moore, for instance, informs the Senate of a 2006 Southern Baptist Convention resolution that "warns against a 'neo-pagan' environmentalist replacement of God the Father with Mother Earth."[144] In his accompanying blog post, he similarly cites "the neo-pagan pantheism of some environmentalist spirituality," although he does indicate that this is not his own primary concern.[145] On the difficulty of engaging evangelicals on environmental issues, given these perceived characteristics of environmental activism, Nagle quotes author Alexander Zaitchik: "Convincing pro-life evangelicals to join forces with secular and left-leaning environmentalist groups will require overcoming a deep-rooted prejudice that associates environmentalism with paganism, pantheism and the Counterculture and New Left revolts of the 1960s—all Godzilla-sized bogeymen in the evangelical worldview."[146]

Moreover, there are concerns that environmentalist motivations are fundamentally anti-human.[147] Moore states, "any public policy proposal on global climate change that seeks to enlist the support of evangelicals must address the role of population control in such an agenda."[148] Explaining his concerns further, he writes, "many of the proposals of global warming activists (population control, for instance) are in direct contradiction of a Scripture that celebrates the blessing of children."[149] Moore also writes in his blog post, "whatever the environmentalists tell us, humanity is not a 'cancer' on the earth…or a 'virus,' or a 'fever.' "[150] The concern about evangelicals being coopted by population control efforts is indeed validated by EEN's declaration, which associates population growth with environmental "degradation."[151] It should be noted here that the association of overpopulation and climate efforts is not only a concern of evangelicals. Jade

[143] Ham 2017.
[144] Moore 2007*b*.
[145] Moore 2007*a*.
[146] Alexander Zaitchik, *Jesus Wore Birkes*, quoted in Nagle 2008: 78.
[147] See for instance, Nagle 2008: 78–79; Ham 2015; Veith 2006.
[148] Moore 2007*b*.
[149] Moore 2007*a*.
[150] Moore 2007*a*.
[151] Evangelical Environmental Network 1993.

Sasser, for instance, problematizes population control efforts from the perspective of women's rights and international development.[152]

Clearly within evangelicalism there is a broad association of environmentalists with beliefs and causes that are strongly opposed by many evangelicals. Danielsen quotes Gene Edward Veith, who writes in *World* that "the current environmental movement has been hijacked by the far left ... amidst the calls to save the earth, you will find the whole agenda of today's socialists, feminists, gays, abortionists, and pacifists."[153] In the same article, Veith also argues, "there is, in fact, a new environmentalist religion, the worship of Gaia, the ancient name for the earth goddess," an arguably misplaced, but nonetheless intriguing, fear given Latour's recent, and entirely secular, work on political ecology, *Facing Gaia*.[154] Danielsen also quotes Howard Snyder from a 2001 article in *Christianity Today* on evangelical perceptions: "we generally stay away from groups and organizations working on environmental issues because we suspect they are either 'liberal,' 'New Age,' or both. Indeed, some groups may have New Age ties, and political liberals may in fact seem to have cornered the environmental market."[155] Snyder frames this association of environmentalism with liberalism as problematic, writing, "happily, more evangelicals are being motivated more by obedience to God's Word than by fears spread by environmental extremists."[156] Danielsen's analysis indicates, however, that Snyder's optimism was misplaced, with evangelical views on climate change becoming increasingly polarizared, reflecting evangelicalism's general alignment with conservative politics.[157]

Despite this stated concern, it is unclear to what extent the values and politics of environmentalists would prevent political collaboration on issues of shared interest. On one hand, Nagle notes that the Southern Baptist resolution on environmentalism—provided to the Senate by Moore—"sought to 'resist alliances with extreme environmental groups whose positions contradict biblical principles,' citing the warning in 2 Chronicles 19:2 not to 'help the wicked

[152] Sasser 2018.
[153] Veith 2006; Danielsen 2013: 209.
[154] Latour 2017; Veith 2006.
[155] Snyder 2001; Danielsen 2013: 208.
[156] Snyder 2001.
[157] Danielsen 2013.

and love those who hate the Lord.' "[158] On the other hand, Nagle comments that when asked in an interview about the Southern Baptist resolution, Richard Cizik "noted the collaboration of evangelicals with Tibetan Buddhists for international religious freedom, feminists against human trafficking, the American Civil Liberties Union against prison rape, and gays and lesbians for AIDS relief."[159] On the issue of climate change specifically, however, it seems there may be little room for compromise, especially if one takes the words of Senator Inhofe seriously:

> If we allow these detractors of everything that has made America great, those ranging from the liberal Hollywood elitists to those who are in it for the money, if we allow them to destroy the foundation, the greatness of the most highly industrialized nation in the history of the world, then we don't deserve to live in this one nation under God.[160]

Some evangelicals, such as the ECI signatories, or even moderately skeptical evangelicals such as Moore, may be open to reasonable solutions. However, judging from the discourse of opponents of climate change policies, it seems clear that in the absence of a shared interest, evangelical demonization of their opponents on climate change does not lend itself to charitable interpretations of, or even any attempts at understanding, the intentions or evidence of climate scientists and activists.[161]

5.5.2 Cultural Cognition and Social Webs of Belief in Actor-Networks

If the language of evangelical discourse is to be taken seriously, what has happened, then, is that the actor-network in which the Bible is embedded has essentially bifurcated. The alarmism characterized above is almost certainly overstated, but the effects of groupthink and rooting are, nonetheless, significant.[162] If, as Crouch writes, "all science is ultimately a matter of trust," then this distrust of scientists and policymakers means that the notions configured with the Bible will bring about action that diverges from what would otherwise be the case if the Bible were attached to mainstream science and policy.[163] This is somewhat inevitable given that, as Crouch acknowledges, "the tools, methods, and mathematical skills scientists acquire over years

[158] Nagle 2008: 79.
[159] Nagle 2008: 79.
[160] Inhofe 2003: S10022; McCammack 2007: 655.
[161] The nomination of Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential election is one case in which, for the sake of political power, conservative evangelicals embraced someone representing religious views to which they previously had expressed strong antagonism. See Salek 2014.
[162] On *rooting*, see Kerievsky 2010.
[163] Crouch 2005.

of training are beyond the reach of the rest of us, even of scientists in different fields."[164] For this reason, as Nagle notes, individuals often rely on "heuristic clues" to interpret complex data.[165] The fact is humans rely on a social web-of-belief to come to informed decisions about things that they simply cannot have enough personal experience to otherwise evaluate. The way an actor-network is configured thus shapes how humans form notions of other humans, of artifacts, and all other objects with which they interact.

Along these lines, Dan Kahan, writing in *Nature*, describes the effects of *cultural cognition*, arguing that on issues such as climate change, "people endorse whichever position reinforces their connection to others with whom they share important commitments," and, likewise, that "the experts whom laypersons see as credible ... are ones whom they perceive to share their values."[166] Moreover, in what would seem to be a counterintuitive finding, Kahan reports that "cultural cognition ... causes people to interpret new evidence in a biased way that reinforces their predispositions. As a result, groups with opposing values often become more polarized, not less, when exposed to scientifically sound information."[167] Interestingly enough, conservative evangelicals, too, recognize this tendency for groupthink, even if using the notion as a means to discredit their opponents rather than for self-reflection on their own practices.[168] To reframe Kahan in the concepts of ANT, climate activists and climate skeptics are both attached to the same scientific data—in other words attached to the planet via the scientists and experiments that *mediate* this attachment—but the configuration of that attachment is such that the same data has different, indeed opposing, performativity in these two configurations of actors.[169]

To be clear, this relationship between social configurations and the Bible is not unidirectional.[170] To the extent the Bible assembles a community around itself, one could also argue that it is the Bible that arranges the actor-network such that it is surrounded by economic and social

[164] Crouch 2005.
[165] Nagle 2008: 75; Kang 2003. For discussion of how people use epistemic clues to evaluate facts and expertise, see also Goldman 1999; 2001.
[166] Kahan 2010: 296. See also, Kahan et al. 2012.
[167] Kahan 2010: 296.
[168] See, for instance, Inhofe 2005; Ham 2014; 2017; Spencer 2010.
[169] On cognition and discourse, see also Elizabeth Ervin's analysis of academic participation in debate over creation and evolution in Ervin 1999.
[170] Recall that I use *social* in a Latourian sense which does not exclude the artifacts and other nonhuman objects that function to constitute, stabilize, and configure human relationality.

conservatives of the type that are disinclined to accept climate change. Ultimately, a Latourian approach is not one that can make claims about causality but rather a method for tracing associations and attachments. To reemphasize this central notion of actor-network theory, the Bible as actor is one that is both acting and being acted upon, as indeed are all the other actors that constitute the web of action through which it acts.

Nonetheless, the point can be made, if evangelicals trust their leaders as experts, and if the leading voices, at least among conservative evangelicalism, effectively frame environmentalists as untrustworthy, then the interpretive notions attached to the Bible, including notions of climate science and climate policy, will be configured accordingly. In this case, even if conservative evangelical notions of the Bible were not already nearly impossible to reconcile with climate predictions—and if Genesis 1-11 were absent for instance—it could be argued that this configuration of evangelicals and political conservatism would still be one in which a Bible-evangelical hybrid actor would act to block climate policy. Indeed, it is possible that evangelicals would hold to the same anti-climate policy positions without tracing that position to the authority of the Bible, but in American evangelicalism, as it is configured, it is clear that the Bible is a participant in preventing action on climate change.

Conclusion

My starting point for this thesis, with which I first approached this topic, was a notion that Austin's speech act theory could be said to apply to texts, that to write something is to do something. If texts are performative, making people do things and creating change, what is the mechanism by which they do that? Or, in other words, what do texts do and how do they do it?

It could be argued that, like speech, texts have a locution, illocution, and perlocution, but unlike speech, texts are free to travel, free to move through time and space, outlasting their authors and moving beyond their reach. Indeed, as Ricoeur argues, what a text does is different from what an author does—the text is brought into this world by a human but at some point it escapes the author, becoming autonomous, free from that human's wishes and control. From the point a text leaves the vicinity of an author, the text's illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect are contingent on the context and community in which a text is read. Thus, a text does something, but what it does depends on where it is and who is reading it.

Within religious contexts in which a text holds social power, such as the Bible in evangelicalism, this performativity is evident. Particularly in an American context, where the Bible is cited as an authority in matters such as sexuality, gender, marriage, race and ethnicity, evolution, abortion, climate change, and even economic policy, there is a clear entanglement of the Bible, culture, and politics. But even outside the American culture wars in which the Bible's authority is invoked, there is a performativity of biblical texts in enacting and configuring social relations, ways of imaging the word, notions of human dignity and the human condition, and one's own embeddedness within this world. Many ways in which the Bible functions within American evangelicalism—and indeed within any community in which it is read or acknowledged—are visible, and many more are not. Other texts likewise act, inside and outside of evangelicalism, enacting and configuring social reality.

For this thesis, actor-network theory, as developed by Bruno Latour and collaborators, provided a theoretical model with which to approach these questions of what texts do and of the mechanisms of that performativity. Moreover, with ANT it is possible to address an otherwise unresolved tension between whether *texts do things in communities* or, in fact, *communities do things with texts*. The question I asked instead was one of how texts act and bring about change *within the actor-networks in which they are embedded*.

ANT provides a theory of action in which nonhumans are recognized as actors, in which agency is distributed among all the actors in an actor-network, and every actor is both acting and being made to act. In this way, an ANT methodology is one that traces the action of humans and nonhumans symmetrically. Moreover, within ANT, it is recognized that action emerges with the specific configuration of these actors. When objects, human or nonhuman, are assembled together in what can be thought of as a hybrid object, that hybrid has different action than the same, or different, objects configured in other ways—to the point that a slight difference in configuration of actors within an actor-network can mean that the same text will have a vastly different action and effect.

After building a theoretical model of texts in actor-networks, I considered what happens when hermeneutical notions and concepts are themselves named as actors. In evangelicalism, for instance, hermeneutical notions of *authority* and *inerrancy* are often attached to the Bible itself, so that when the text acts, it is not only the text and reader, but text and reader, notion of authority, and notion of inerrancy that configure this performative Bible-reader hybrid. Thus, the notions that a reading community bring to a text and infer from a text—such as notions of how it should be read, what it means, who should read it, what kind of authority it has, who is speaking through the text, and many other notions—are assembled together to configure a text's action. In effect, the text is both artifact and being of fiction. It exists as something external to a reader and their community, but it also exists as the notion of itself that grips readers and configures their relation to the text.

This model is one in which the text's action in the reading event is contingent also on any notions about what occurred in the writing event. From Ricoeur, I adopted the theory of texts as exteriorized fixation of discourse which mediates between writing event and reading event.

From Fish I borrowed a definition of meaning as that of the meaning of *the reading event*, as distinct from meaning of the *writing event* or the meaning of the text as *autonomous artifact*. I followed Rader in arguing that readers tacitly reconstruct an author's intention. And from Gell I drew upon a model in which the reader abducts action, past and present, indexed in a text. The text, in effect, functions as a nexus of agency and action, past and present, mediating and presenting this action to the reader.

A key component of this texts-in-actor-networks model is this recognition that the text-reader hybrid is composed, in part, of notions of what happened in the writing event. The text is both autonomous from its author and yet reattached to the author *through the reader*. In this way, I follow Fish in arguing that meaning is the reader's meaning but also follow Rader in recognizing that the reader's meaning is composed, in part, of any notions, implicit or explicit, of an author's meaning held by a reader. Any notions abducted from the text or brought to the text—true or false, well or poorly constructed—are performative, and these notions configure the emergent meaning and action of the text-reader hybrid.

Moreover, because these notions are performative, they cannot be disentangled from the politics evoked by their implications for the agency and action of a text. Consequently, reconstructed notions of authorial intent and other notions about a text are not straightforward but always caught up in the interests and concerns of a reading community. Or, to frame this in ANT terms, the reader's notion of the actor-network in which the text was composed is contingent on the configuration of the actor-network in which text and reader are located. For this reason, this approach forms what I call a *Realhermeneutik*, in which it is recognized that the action of the text emerges with configuration of the reading community *as it is*, not *as it should be*. To identify what a text does and the mechanisms by which it acts, what matters is this configuration of text, reader, and other actors in an actor-network.

This thesis concludes by bringing the theoretical method developed here to analysis of the participation of the Bible in climate change discourse and politics in the United States. I argued that given the political power held by evangelicals, the Bible functions as a stakeholder in climate change policy. In this context, the action of biblical texts such as Genesis 1-11 are contingent on notions of the Bible—that it provides scientifically accurate historical accounts,

for instance—and the specific configuration of biblical texts with other notions of climate change. In discourse it is evident that opposing sides have claimed the Bible's authority, attempting to mobilize biblical texts toward support of their own policy prescriptions, even as the balance of power has shifted toward those who have successfully mobilized the Bible in their attempts to derail any action on climate change.

With this approach to textual performativity in actor-networks, I have developed a theoretical model for tracing the agency and action of texts in actor-networks—in a sense bringing actor-network theory back to texts—and contributed what I believe to be a novel approach to hermeneutical questions of autonomy and the location of meaning.

Where to Go From Here?

This approach has several implications for the study of production and function of texts, which I have only given cursory attention to in places. In recognizing texts as produced within actor-networks, a historical approach, for instance, may consider how the text represents the configuration of humans and nonhumans at the time of the writing event. In this sense, the question is one of the composition of the actor-network mediated by the text. What happened in the actor-network in which the text was written, and what configuration of actors, real or imagined, does the text represent? Moreover, an actor-network approach identifies texts themselves as actor-networks, composed of many texts, people, and artifacts. Indeed, as I have noted, I have typically referred to texts and authors in the singular—black boxing the vast number of actors that were assembled together to produce a text—but this, of course, does not reflect the way in which biblical texts were produced. To bring an actor-network approach to production of texts would be valuable for making visible these layers of authorship and rewriting of which texts are composed.

On a more contemporary note, this texts-in-actor-networks model of performativity makes evident some of the ethical implications of reading. As I have alluded to throughout this thesis, when the mechanisms of textual performativity are made visible, reading communities—within evangelicalism or elsewhere—can better make informed decisions about how to configure their own assemblage of humans, artifacts, texts, notions, and other objects. I have not, for the most part, provided normative suggestions on how texts should be read, but I have, where possible,

pointed out how texts could be read differently with different performative effects. In this sense, this theoretical approach does not attempt to define the values that a community should hold, but does attempt to enable communities to better evaluate whether their own reading practices enact and configure a social reality consistent with their own values.

And, finally, this approach enables those outside a reading community to recognize the role of texts as authoritative stakeholders for those within a community. To negotiate with evangelicals about social policy is to negotiate, also, with the biblical texts they hold authoritative. What may otherwise appear irrational becomes understandable, if not relatable, when the function of texts in stabilizing and configuring the social knowledge, beliefs, and practices of a community is made visible. To enact change, then, is not simply a matter of convincing someone their beliefs are wrong but, rather, requires reconfiguring the actor-network in which the text, readers, and others are assembled together. When one recognizes that texts are actors with contingent action, one can investigate what texts are doing, with what religious, political, commercial, or instructional effect—to name a few areas of textual performativity—and then ask how this might be otherwise, either with different texts or different contingent configuration of actors alongside the text.

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