

## Open and closed texts\*

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Eco's book is a collection of nine essays organized into three sections: 'Open', 'Closed', and 'Open/Closed'. Eco sees the opposition between open and closed texts 'as a special case of a more general semiotic phenomenon: the cooperative role of the addressee in interpreting messages' (p. vii). Hence the title of the book: *The Role of the Reader*.

Focus on the reader, or more generally, a widening of perspective to encompass both text and context is currently very fashionable. However, Eco's essays do not totally reflect current trends, in that some of them were written about 20 years ago, and only three were written since 1976 — a long introduction, an essay on Peirce, and a detailed analysis of Allais's 'Un drame bien parisien'.

In some respects the earlier essays make more satisfying reading than the more recent ones — but this has to do, in part, with matters of expression rather than content. Eco himself wrote the three most recent essays in English, whereas the remaining essays were translated, by others, from the original Italian. Eco's English, unfortunately, continues to manifest some of the same shortcomings that marred his *Theory of Semiotics*. One reviewer said of that book that it was 'written in such ungainly and obscure language. In some passages the text is unidiomatic or ungrammatical, or breaks down into plain unintelligibility...' (Lepschy 1977: 713). Here is one example of problematic prose from the present book (which may or may not be compounded by a typographical error): 'In the light of the Peircean notion of interpretant, one no longer needs a finite set of metasemiotic construction. Any sign interpreting another sign, the basic condition of semiosis is its being interwoven with signs sending back to signs, in an *infinite regression*' (pp. 188–189).

The most recent essays do not lack the 'up-to-date jargon' that Eco notes as missing from the earlier essays, and some people may regard the

\* Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (=Advances in Semiotics). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.

jargon as one of the problems of expression. However, specialized terms are necessary for the sort of rigorous, technical investigation that a 'semiotics of texts' should represent. The problem I have with some of Eco's use of terms is primarily conceptual. Eco tends to use technical terms, drawn from a variety of theories, in a rather casual way, creating the impression of dilettantism. Consider, for example, the following: 'In other words, the Model Reader is a textually established set of felicity conditions [in the sense of speech act theory] to be met in order to have a macro-speech act (such as a text is) fully actualized' (p. 11). This may seem to be a debatable example, in that some readers might feel that such a statement could be justified. The point, however, is that Eco tosses out this remark without bothering to explain the technical sense of *felicity condition* in speech act theory or to argue for its applicability in the present context. The same goes for *macro-speech act*.

*Open* and *closed* are two of Eco's key terms; and he does attempt to explicate what he means by them, but the discussions are not completely satisfactory. Because the notions of open and closed texts are of some interest, they will be the focus of this review article.

Let us begin with a very brief consideration of the acceptance of the terms *open* and *closed*, especially in structuralist discussions. A closed system is a configuration of elements in fixed, stable relation to each other, with a clear-cut boundary between elements 'in' the system and elements 'outside' the system. The very notion of structure implies a closed system in this sense (cf. Piaget 1970: 13–14; 1973: 7). As for an open system, perhaps the clearest instance is living matter. A living organism must be continually reconstituted through exchanges with the outside world, which provide the supplies for metabolism. Nevertheless, we can talk about the 'structure' of a living organism, thanks to the principle of homeostasis — the components of the system achieve a state of internal equilibrium. The open system can thus be said to have a cycle closing in on itself (Piaget 1973: 16). But the system, to repeat, is not self-sufficient.

A text is not a living organism, so it might seem that all texts are closed systems. However, it is possible to apply the open–closed distinction to texts by seeing it in terms of the issue of self-sufficiency or autonomy. A closed text is one that is regarded as autonomous, in the sense that it is separable from the author, the readers, and the social and cultural context in which text production and reception take place. An open text, inversely, is one that is conceived as a component part of the communicative situation.

Open and closed, in the above interpretation, do not necessarily constitute mutually exclusive properties of texts; rather, they can be correlated with complementary analytic approaches within semiotics,

which differ in the level of abstraction at which the text is examined. At the highest level, there is a concern for constituent units of a text and their interrelations with each other, on the one hand; and, on the other, there is a concern for the intensional meanings of these units (textual syntactics and textual semantics, respectively). A less abstract, more inclusive study would examine the text in relation to its context, including its users (textual pragmatics). A 'pragmatic' approach, in this general sense, might be said to view the text as open. Strictly speaking, however, such an approach is not at all incompatible with the view that all texts are intrinsically closed, for nothing precludes a self-contained structure from being incorporated, as a substructure, into a larger structural whole (see Piaget 1970: 14; 1973: 7). In the case of texts, this larger whole would be the communicative setting.

There is at least one problem with the preceding interpretation of the open-closed distinction. Typically, proponents of textual pragmatics would argue that a text is 'open' in the sense that it is not fully constituted as a whole unless contextual elements are taken into account. A clear-cut example concerns the presence of *exophoric elements* in oral discourse (see Halliday and Hasan 1976: 33). For example, the personal pronouns *I* and *you* as they occur in conversation are different from third person *he* in that they do not have antecedents in earlier occurring sentences. *I* denotes the person speaking at that exact moment of enunciation; and *you*, the receiver of the message at that exact moment. Thus speaker and hearer are incorporated into the utterance, in that they serve to semantically complete the forms *I* and *you*. The status of *I* and *you* in written texts is, of course, somewhat different. In a fictional narrative in the first person, for instance, *I* denotes the narrator, not the actual writer of the story. And if *you* occurs, it is a rhetorical appeal to the 'implied' reader. Proponents of textual pragmatics would argue that the roles of writer and reader are only less obvious in a written text, but that they are just as crucial to its complete analysis and understanding. That is to say, the notion of the self-sufficient text is rejected, with the consequence that all texts are regarded as open.

To sum up, there are two major conceptions of open and closed literary texts. One is that all texts are intrinsically closed, though amenable to a contextual analysis. The other is that all texts are inherently open, in that they cannot be adequately apprehended as self-sufficient entities. Where does Eco stand on this issue? Some of his remarks favor the pragmatic position that every text is open, or should be analyzed from an 'open' perspective. For instance, at one point Eco, alluding to Jakobson's typology of language functions, states that 'even from a structuralist point of view, such categories as sender, addressee, and context are indispens-

able to the understanding of every act of communication' (p. 4). But the major thrust of his discussion is that some texts are intrinsically open, whereas other texts are intrinsically closed. In intent, Eco is a centrist, advocating a position that moderates the two prevalent conceptions of open and closed, which we have just examined. However, matters are not quite so simple, partly due to the fact that Eco's discussion of open and closed spans two decades; and his conception has undergone shifts. But disconcerting shifts or ambiguities exist even within a single essay. The upshot is that the distinction between open and closed comes to be highly problematic. Furthermore, when his work is viewed from a wider perspective, it will be seen that, in the final analysis, Eco has a closed conception of the literary work, in the sense that he focuses on the text and not the context.

Let us begin our detailed examination of Eco's open-closed distinction by considering what is perhaps the clearest example of the open work that Eco presents — post-Webern musical compositions that involve the collaboration of the individual performer to make them into a finished whole. One particular work Eco cites is the first section of Boulez's Third Sonata for Piano, which is made up of ten different pieces on ten corresponding sheets of music, the performer having a choice of the sequences in which he arranges these pieces.<sup>1</sup> This type of work, as Eco emphasizes, is not amorphous: 'The *possibilities* which the work's openness makes available always work within a given *field of relations*' (p. 62). The open work is a *work*, not a conglomeration of random elements. An example of something radically 'open', but not a 'work', is the dictionary — it 'presents us with thousands upon thousands of words which we could freely use to compose poetry, essays on physics, anonymous letters, or grocery lists' (pp. 62–63).

Eco refers to works such as Boulez's as possessing an incomplete 'structural vitality' (p. 63), which may call to mind the notion of the open living system; however, the analogy is far from exact. A living system is structurally complete; it just cannot maintain that structural equilibrium without outside replenishment. The open work is in a permanent state of structural equilibrium, but it is incomplete; it is up to the performer to complete it.

Eco's discussion of musical compositions seems relatively unproblematic — though perhaps it would not seem so to a musicologist. The bulk of Eco's discussion of the open work is devoted to verbal texts. Since Eco deals specifically with written prose material only, his discussion of musical compositions does not transfer to the verbal domain, for written texts lack a performative dimension comparable to that of music. Eco tries to establish a link by claiming that 'every "reading", "contemplation", or

“enjoyment” of a work of art represents a tacit or private form of “performance” (p. 65). Eco fails, however, to provide any clear-cut examples of literary works that are open in a sense analogous to the post-Webern musical compositions he cites. That is, he does not cite a work in which the author gives the reader the freedom to choose the order in which he reads the chapters, or to select episodes from a paradigm of possibilities. It is quite another matter if someone willfully reads the chapters of a book in a nonsequential order — an act comparable to someone playing side 2 of a phonograph record before side 1.<sup>2</sup>

Eco himself has to concede that literary texts ‘are substantially different from the post-Webernian musical composers’ in that their openness is ‘based on the *theoretical, mental* collaboration of the consumer, who must freely interpret an artistic *datum*, a product which has already been organized in its structural entirety . . .’ (pp. 55, 56). Presumably, what Eco has in mind is exemplified in his brief discussion, in another context, of the role of the reader in ‘interpreting’ Baudelaire’s sonnet ‘Les Chats’. He cites two examples of interpretive activity: (i) in the sonnet the noun *chats* occurs only once, being replaced in subsequent verses by anaphoric pronouns; and (ii) a semantic affinity exists between various words, e.g., between *Erebe* and *horreur des ténèbres*, which ‘does not lie in the text as an explicit linear manifestation; it is the result of a rather complex operation of textual inference based upon an intertextual competence’ (p. 4).

From these examples it would appear that what Eco has in mind is the role of the reader in ‘actualizing’ the text, i.e., in receiving the complex linguistic signal and decoding it. If so, then Eco has shifted perspective. When structuralists refer to the self-sufficient text, or to the text as closed, they obviously do not mean that the text processes itself; they take it for granted that the text must be processed. The claim of self-sufficiency is the claim that the reader, with a knowledge of intersubjective, conventional codes, can interpret the text without appealing to elements ‘outside’ the text, save those inferable from intrinsic elements by means of conventional rules. In the case of anaphoric pronouns, as we pointed out earlier, their antecedents are found within the text; the reader of, say, ‘Les Chats’ does not have to go outside the boundary of the text to interpret the pronoun *il*. The situation is different, as we have noted, with exophoric elements — but Eco does not invoke these.

Actually, it quickly becomes obvious that Eco is not really concerned with the cognitive activity of readers in processing texts. For example, with respect to the anaphoric elements in ‘Les Chats’, Eco states that their presence entails invoking, ‘if not a precise and empirical reader, at least the “addressee” as an abstract and constitutive element’ (p. 4). Additional

remarks can be quoted that clearly indicate that, for Eco, the 'reader' is a constituent of texts. For example: 'To postulate the cooperation of the reader does not mean to pollute the structural analysis with extratextual elements' (p. 4). 'An open text outlines a "closed" project of its Model Reader as a component of its structural strategy' (p. 9). Eco elaborates somewhat by saying, apropos Joyce's *Ulysses*, that a profile of a good reader can be extracted from the text itself 'because the pragmatic process of interpretation is not an empirical accident independent of the text *qua* text, but is a structural element of its generative process' (p. 9).

Eco does waver somewhat in his conception of the reader. At one point, in discussing the 'honesty' of the text of Allais's 'Un drame bien parisien', Eco states that 'it never says that Raoul and Marguerite have lovers. Therefore it is the reader (as an *empirical accident independent of the text*) who takes the responsibility for every mistake arising during his reading...' (p. 206; emphasis added). But two paragraphs later Eco contradicts himself and expresses the position he most consistently holds: 'The reader, however, has been more than authorized to make such a hypothesis. *Drame* takes into account his possible mistakes because *it has carefully planned and provoked them*'.

The notion of Model Reader remains unclear; and it is confusing insofar as it calls to mind the 'empirical' reader. Ultimately what Eco seems to have in mind is that the text has points at which inferences have to be made, and it is the summation of these points that he dubs the 'profile of the Model Reader'; this, at least, seems to be the upshot of his observation that ideally one should be able to represent a text 'as a system of nodes or joints and to establish at which of them the cooperation of the Model Reader is expected and elicited' (p. 11).

Strictly speaking, the reader's cooperation is elicited at every point in a text, in that each sentence has to be linguistically processed. However, Eco's intent is to restrict these 'nodes' to units of narrative structure (plot, character, theme), which transcend the language of the text — i.e., they are not in a one-to-one relation with sentences of the text — but at the same time are controlled by the language. The distinction between the processing of the sentences that constitute a text and the drawing of inferences from such sentences is muddled by Eco's example of anaphoric elements, which is an example of the 'processing' of the language of the text itself. The distinction could be clarified by invoking the notion of the narrative text as a manifestation of a second-order semiotic system (see Hendricks 1973b, 1975b). The establishment of correlations between the first-order system (a natural language) and the second-order system (narrative syntactics and semantics) can be viewed as an inferential process — and this is apparently what Eco calls *inferential walks*. For

example, at one point in Allais's 'Drame', Raoul is pursuing his wife Marguerite, and the text states, 'La main levée, l'oeil dur, la moustache telle celle des chats furibonds, Raoul marcha sur Marguerite...'. Eco notes that 'The reader understands that Raoul raises his hand to strike, even though the linear text manifestation shows neither the fact nor the intention... The inference is possible only because the reader was resorting to the conventional *frame* "violent altercation"' (p. 20).

It would be more exact to state that the reader infers the generic or 'molar' action of violent altercation on the basis of particular actions depicted in the text that are encompassed within the generic designation. That is, generic action *A* is made up of the steps, or 'molecular' acts, *a*, *b*, *c*, ... *n*. A text may represent, say, *a*, *b*, and *d*, which would suffice to allow the reader to infer the whole.

The notion of frame (or script) is widely used in artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology, but the notion appears to overlap with what Barthes calls the *proairetic code*. This code, in effect, establishes a correlation between a sequence of sentences in a text that represents a series of 'molecular' acts and a generic name for the unitary event. As Barthes phrased it,

whoever reads the text amasses certain data under some generic titles for actions (*stroll, murder, rendezvous*), and this title embodies the sequence; the sequence exists when and because it can be given a name...; its basis is therefore more empirical than rational...; its only logic is that of the 'already-done' or 'already-read' — whence the variety of sequences... and the variety of terms (1974: 19; cf. also 82).

Eco seems to have the same notion in mind, in that he refers to inference by *intertextual frames*: 'No text is read independently of the reader's experience of other texts' (p. 21).

There are, however, some problems with this interpretation of Eco's notion of the open text. The Model Reader is supposed to be inscribed within the text — but no one text can incorporate innumerable other texts. The notion of intertextuality, of course, assumes that individual readers have the experience of reading various texts stored in their memory; that is, the notion of intertextuality implies empirical readers. However, Eco makes clear that the Model Reader is not the empirical reader. Furthermore, the Model Reader is said to control what empirical readers do, but the notion of intertextual frames seems inadequate for this function. A reader's experience of other texts is open-ended, at least in theory. If a reader has read a given text at time *t* and later rereads that same text at time *t + i* after having read other texts in the interval, then his

inventory of intertextual frames may have increased, and this can cause him to interpret the text in a different way. Also, no two people will have read exactly the same set of texts. The result will be a range of interpretations of one and the same text that is totally independent of the text itself.

It is true that Eco also appeals to *common frames*, which are said to derive from a person's 'storage of encyclopedic knowledge and are mainly rules for practical life' (p. 21). Eco's exposition of this notion is as sketchy as that of intertextual frame, but it seems clear that the notion is as empirically based as that of intertextual frame. While people's daily experiences in a given culture may have more intersubjectivity than their reading habits, there still remains the potential for major differences (subcultures); a person brought up in New York City has daily experiences quite different from those of someone raised on a farm in Iowa.

What Eco's conception of the text requires is the existence of a 'grammar' of narration, whereas the notion of common and intertextual frames corresponds more to the lexicon and to the encyclopedia, which contains more particularistic detail than the lexicon. Consider the fact that speakers of English do not have identical vocabularies; and during the period of acquisition of English they are not exposed to the same set of sentences. However, all native speakers acquire essentially the same grammatical system, which assures that communication can occur with reasonable success. The question, of course, is whether a projective system can be generalized from experience with a finite number of texts or from one's everyday actions and interactions. If so, this would imply an innate *faculté de narrativité*, which would require only minimal encounters with narrative texts to be activated.

The preceding remarks are highly speculative; but one is not limited to idle speculation. As a first step away from empirically based intertextual or common frames, one can undertake a type of semanticological analysis of plot units. Such work has been carried out on Propp's original inventory of 31 functions, resulting in a reduced inventory (see Hendricks 1973a, 1977a for discussion). The ultimate aim, to repeat, is the removal of narrative units from the category of encyclopedic knowledge into that of a supraindividual projective code. It is only in terms of such a code that Eco's notion of Model Reader can be understood — though once understood in these terms, it seems a superfluous notion.

We are still left with one major problem. The preceding interpretation of the notion of Model Reader will not accommodate a distinction between open and closed texts. All prose narratives lack a one-one relation between sentences of the text and units of the underlying plot structure. Hence, all texts are open in that they require the 'theoretical,

mental collaboration of the consumer', who must establish correlations between the two strata of the narrative text. The only possible distinction would appear to be a quantitative one — an open text would be one that offers more points at which inferences have to be drawn or one in which a greater number or range of inferences can be drawn. Certain remarks by Eco can be cited that support this interpretation.

So-called open texts are only the extreme and most provocative exploitation — for poetic purposes — of a principle which rules both the generation and the interpretation of texts in general. (pp. 4–5)

There exist works which, though organically completed, are 'open' to a continuous generation of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli. (p. 63)

Among the works Eco cites as being open in this sense are: (i) the novels of Kafka, for there is no one 'key' for interpreting them; (ii) Brecht's plays, which require the audience to devise its own solution to the problem that has been dramatized; (iii) Joyce's work, particularly *Finnegans Wake*, where elaborate puns can yield numerous 'readings' for each sentence.

Closed texts would be ones that could not sustain such multiple interpretations. As examples, Eco cites the James Bond novels of Ian Fleming and the Superman comic books, each the subject of an individual chapter in his book.

Incidentally, on the basis of these examples it might seem that Eco's distinction between open and closed corresponds to that traditionally drawn between 'high' and 'low' literature. But matters are not that simple. For instance, Allais's 'Drame', which Eco refers to as 'a "minor" work of literature, indeed, if such a high-brow distinction still makes sense', is regarded as a hybrid of open and closed (pp. 39, 256). Furthermore, Eco regards literary works produced in conformity with the medieval theory of allegory, which posited four levels of interpretation, as being closed, for the reader is not allowed to move outside the strict control of the author (pp. 50, 51).

We can intuitively sense a difference between an Ian Fleming novel and a Kafka novel, but it is entirely another matter to make explicit the basis of this distinction. Eco fails to provide an explicit basis. Another problem is that the preceding discussion primarily invoked multiple symbolic interpretation as characteristic of the open work. The ambiguity or suggestiveness of, say, Kafka's *Der Prozess* is primarily a matter of symbolism, not plot structure per se. However, the examples of intertextual inference previously discussed pertain to the establishment of units of plot structure. And plot structure is usually not regarded as ambiguous or polyvalent.

Eco does apply the open–closed distinction to plot. The closed plot is one in which there are periodic places at which the reader can forecast what the next stage will be, but the writer continually ‘reasserts, so to speak, the rights of his own text, saying without ambiguity what has to be taken as “true” in his fictional world’ (p. 34). An open plot is one that does not end in its final state, e.g., a play by Brecht. However, only a few works are open in this sense; and we still have the problem that inferential walks are necessary for all texts, regardless of the nature of plot construction.

The quantitative distinction between open and closed is ultimately unsatisfactory. For one, it implies an empirical foundation: if one determines, as a matter of fact, that actual readers can interpret one work in more ways than another, then that work is (relatively) open. But this does not square with Eco’s insistence that since the Model Reader is inscribed within the text, interpretation is not an empirical accident. Furthermore, as an empirical fact almost any work can give rise to multiple interpretation, though not necessarily of a type that would gain consensus among readers. It is possible, as Eco points out, that someone might interpret the relationship between Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, in the detective novels of Rex Stout, as a variation of the Oedipus myth (p. 9). Eco’s position is that ‘a text so immoderately “open” to every possible interpretation will be called a *closed* one’ (p. 8). If this is not confusing enough, Eco goes on to suggest that the open text is not so open after all; e.g., Brecht’s plays are said to be ‘rhetorically constructed in such a way as to elicit a reaction oriented toward . . . a Marxist dialectic logic as the basis for the whole field of possible responses’ (p. 62).

The open–closed distinction at this point seems to dissolve into a paradox. However, a new avenue of exploration, which offers the possibility of resolving the paradox and salvaging the distinction, is offered by this remark of Eco’s: ‘Thus it seems that a well-organized text on the one hand presupposes a model of competence coming, so to speak, from outside the text, but on the other hand works to build up, by merely textual means, such a competence . . .’ (p. 8). Extratextual competence is a matter of the codes we have discussed (e.g., intertextual frames or a projective equivalent). But we have not yet dealt with the possibility that an open text ‘creates the competence of its Model Reader’ (p. 7).

The preceding statement may seem to be equivalent to the statement that the profile of the Model Reader is inscribed within a text. I believe, however, that Eco can be interpreted as meaning something different. Confusion results because this new interpretation requires a new interpretation of the notion of a Model Reader. The conception is not quite that of the empirical reader; it might be said to be, or be akin to, the author’s image of the empirical reader. Consider in this context Barthes’s

dictum that 'in the text, only the reader speaks' (1974: 15). This was made with reference to this sentence from the Balzac story 'Sarrasine': 'La Zambinella remained thoughtful, as though terror-struck'. Barthes was bothered by the expression *as though terror-struck*, since the narrator knows that Zambinella really is terrified. His conclusion was that here the discourse is speaking according to the interests of the reader — the reader wants to be enlightened, but not too soon; otherwise the pleasure of an enigma is spoiled.

What I am suggesting is that Barthes's dictum can be interpreted as characterizing the open text in particular. The writer provides the reader with the pertinent information that will make him a competent reader of the text. This suggestion can be clarified by considering the following remark Eco makes about the closed text: the closed text is one in which the author does not take into account the possibility that his text may be interpreted by means of codes different from those he intended; the authors of such texts 'have in mind an average addressee [belonging to one precise sociopsychological category: "soap-opera addicts, doctors, law-abiding citizens . . .", etc.] in a given social context' (p. 8).

Eco's intent would appear to be as follows. A closed text is written at a particular time and place to appeal to people at that time and place. The author therefore takes for granted social or cultural information, beliefs, and attitudes that are prevalent at that time and place. For instance, in his discussion of the James Bond novels, Eco notes that

It is difficult, after the analyses we have carried out, to maintain that Fleming is not inclined to consider the British superior to all Oriental or Mediterranean races or that Fleming does not profess to heartfelt anti-Communism. Yet it is significant that he ceased to identify the wicked with Russia as 'soon as the international situation rendered Russia less menacing according to the general opinion . . . Thus arises the suspicion that our author does not characterize his creations in such and such a manner as a result of an ideological opinion but purely for rhetorical purposes. By 'rhetoric' I mean an art of persuasion which relies on *endoxa*, that is, on the common opinions shared by the majority of readers. (p. 161)

We can thus postulate that the open text would not take 'common opinions shared by the majority of readers' for granted; rather, the author would build into the text whatever information would be necessary to create the proper opinions. A comparison can be drawn with the notion of *intratextual contextualization*, the creation of a context of situation within the literary work by verbal means. Consider, for instance, a story in which elliptical dialogue between two characters occurs. The author, by means of descriptive and expository writing, can delineate the communicative

setting and background in enough detail to allow the reader to 'expand' the utterances.

Another comparison that may shed further light on the open-closed distinction is with Bernstein's (1972) distinction between *elaborated* and *restricted* codes of speech. A restricted code is said to be one in which meanings are particularistic, implicit, and tied to a given context. An elaborated code is one in which meanings are universalistic, explicit, and less tied to a given context; hence they can be understood by others lacking access to the context in which the speech originally occurred. This general formulation of the distinction is rather vague. The emphasis — rightly — is on semantics, but what is lacking is a specification of the syntactic correlates. Bernstein has pointed out that restricted code makes extensive use of exophoric expressions, but this does not go far enough.

Needless to say, Bernstein's distinction cannot be directly applied to written literary texts. All such texts, whether a novel by Kafka or one by Fleming, are in what Bernstein would call an elaborated code. But, insofar as a Kafka novel can better transcend the circumstances in which it was written than a Fleming novel, then it seems reasonable to see them differing in a way analogous to that between messages produced by an elaborated code and a restricted code, respectively. Obviously, this does not solve the problem of characterizing open and closed texts — it merely redefines it. Such a redefinition will, hopefully, be more productive than merely appealing to the presence, or absence, of encyclopedic information.

The definition of an open text as in an elaborated code that allows it to transcend its context and that of a closed text as in a restricted code that is tied to a particular context has an interesting consequence: this usage of *open* and *closed* reverses the basic sense of these terms that provided our point of departure. It will be recalled that an open text was initially characterized as a text that lacks autonomy from its context, whereas a closed text was characterized as self-sufficient.

It may be that the whole issue of context is something of a red herring in explicating what Eco means by *open* and *closed* as applied to narrative texts. Eco's basic intent seems to be to regard as open a text that can legitimately sustain multiple thematic or symbolic interpretation; and to regard as closed a text that cannot legitimately sustain such interpretation. Critics have traditionally drawn a distinction between variant readings and misreadings, but without much success in providing a rigorous, explicit basis for it, which presumably resides in some inherent property of texts. Eco has been no more successful. However, the characterization of open and closed texts in the preceding terms overlaps with the two types of narrative structure that I have postulated elsewhere, namely dramatic and instrumental (Hendricks 1975a, 1977b).

There is space here only for the barest outline of the features of these two types of structure. A dramatic structure has two main characters with conflicting goals who come into direct opposition over some issue. The opposition or polarity pervades the narrative. All of the characters can be seen as 'satellites' of one or the other main character, and their opposition can be given a thematic interpretation. For example, in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily' there is direct conflict between Miss Emily and the town's Board of Aldermen, who try to collect her city taxes. This opposition can be interpreted as one between past and present, the old social order of the South and the new social order (see Hendricks 1977a).

In the case of instrumental structure, there is only one main character, who is attempting to achieve a particular goal. Other characters may try to impede his activity, but they do not pursue an opposing goal. A slight variation of the scheme would be one in which the goal of the hero is to act as an opposer to the nefarious activities of another character. The James Bond novels, judging by the schema Eco presents, exemplify instrumental structure. By and large, each novel begins as follows: 'Bond is sent to a given place to avert a "science fiction" plan by a monstrous individual of uncertain origin ... who ... helps the cause of the enemies of the West ...' (p. 160). However, Eco also characterizes the Bond novels in terms that apply to dramatic structure. For instance, 'The novels of Fleming seem to be built on a series of oppositions ... I have singled out fourteen couples, four of which are opposing characters, the others being opposing values, variously personified by the four basic characters' (p. 147). The opposing values include love-death, cupidity-ideals, etc.<sup>3</sup> If the Bond novels in fact do have an exclusively instrumental structure, then it represents an act of misreading to try to impose a dramatic structure onto the novels. Such an imposition results in 'the most unforeseeable interpretations, at least at the ideological level' (p. 8) that Eco saw as a possibility with closed texts.

Our discussion of Eco's distinction between open and closed texts has, hopefully, been extensive enough to demonstrate that Eco, in the main, continues the structuralist focus on the text itself. In order to throw into relief the text-centered nature of Eco's work, we will conclude this essay with a very brief survey of some of the work currently being done in textual pragmatics. As a point of departure, consider the following specification of the domain of pragmatic studies:

The pragmatic properties of any message depend upon the past experiences of the sender or the recipient, upon their present circumstances, their states of mind, and upon all matters personal to them as individuals. Into this level we may enter all psychological aspects of the communication process; such, for instance, as the problems of perception, recognition, or interpretation of messages; studies of

verbal or visual memory, of effects of environment upon the recipient; and all those aspects which serve to distinguish one communication *event* from any other where the sign *types* may be the same. (Cherry 1957: 225)<sup>4</sup>

The opening sentence of Eco's 'Introduction' does contain a parenthetical comment about the open text 'constituting a flexible *type* of which many *tokens* can be legitimately realized' (p. 3); but Eco has in mind multiple thematic interpretations, all of which are viewed as somehow contained 'in' the text; he does not have in mind the pragmatic factors introduced by empirical readers. Eco, however, is not unaware of such pragmatic factors: 'Every work of art, even though it is produced by following an explicit or implicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal *performance*' (p. 63). But Eco explicitly separates his term *open* from this sense (see p. 49).

However, it was the pragmatic sense of *open* that Lévi-Strauss had in mind in reacting against Eco's notion of the open text, as indicated by this remark, which Eco quotes: 'When Jakobson and myself tried to make a structural analysis of a Baudelaire sonnet, we did not approach it as an 'open work' in which we could find everything that has been filled in by the following epochs' (pp. 3–4).

The reference to 'everything that has been filled in by the following epochs' calls to mind Riffaterre's (1966) notion of the *superreader*, which he developed in a paper written in reaction to the Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss analysis of 'Les Chats'. A major complaint Riffaterre has, and it is primarily a complaint against Jakobson, is that a detailed grammatical analysis of a sonnet conflates purely linguistic features with those that are 'poetic' or serve a stylistic function. Many of the linguistic symmetries Jakobson uncovers are not deemed perceptible by the reader. The truly poetic features are perceptible, for their very function is to catch the reader's attention, to elicit some sort of response. According to Riffaterre, poetry is a special kind of linguistic communication,

for the speaker — the poet — is not present; any attempt to bring him back only produces interference... The message and the addressee — the reader — are indeed the only factors involved in this communication whose presence is necessary. As for the other factors — language (code), non-verbal context, means of keeping open the channel —, the appropriate language of reference is selected from the message, the context is reconstituted from the message, contact is assured by the control the message has over the reader's attention, and depends upon the degree of that control. (1966: 214)

To attain a proper segmentation of the poem into units of the poetic structure, one must attend to the responses of readers. The problem here, as Riffaterre sees it, is that responses of readers are subjective, dependent upon 'the reader's culture, era, esthetics, personality', or they reflect an instrumental, nonliterary use of the poem, e.g., as a historical document (1966: 215). Riffaterre's solution is to empty the responses of all content, since it is the fact of a response itself that is significant; and to multiply the response, that is, utilize a number of informants. The result is what Riffaterre calls the *superreader*. His superreader for 'Les Chats' is composed of various critics, translators, philological or textbook footnotes, and various informants, such as students.

It should be obvious that there are marked similarities between Riffaterre's notion of superreader and Eco's notion of Model Reader. The major difference is that for Eco the Model Reader consists of the points in a text where the reader is engaged, whereas Riffaterre's concept is an amalgamation of reader responses. But since Riffaterre empties these responses of all content, he ultimately has as closed a conception of the literary work as does Eco. Riffaterre lets in the reader only to throw him out. The notion of the reader becomes superfluous.

The content of individual reader response, however, has become the focus of attention for some researchers in recent years. Some of the earliest of modern work in this area has been carried out by Norman Holland. In his *Dynamics of Literary Response* (1968) he developed a 'bi-active' theory, which assumed that the responses of the reader are caused in part by the text and in part by the reader. Holland regards his later attempts to validate this theory as unsuccessful. His procedure was to have English majors read a story and then answer open-ended questions, such as 'How did you feel toward character X?' Contrary to his expectation, he failed to discern a commonality in reader response that could be said to be 'caused' by the text; rather, he was overwhelmed by differences in the responses of readers to the same story.

Holland then changed his procedure to one of looking for similarities in an individual reader's responses to different texts. This proved possible, and the emergent similarity he termed the *identity theme*. He labels this new approach *transactive criticism* (Holland 1978). It is not clear, however, why Holland considers this approach to be a form of literary criticism or textual analysis. It may tell us something about readers, but not much about texts. Holland in fact states that his subjects' asides about politics, university matters, etc. contributed to his inference of each individual's identity theme.

Holland claims that his research demonstrates that there is much greater subjectivity in reader response than the structuralist or semiotic

approach assumes. The text's control of the reader, which both Eco and Riffaterre stress, certainly seems minimal on the basis of Holland's results. However, Holland stacks the deck in favor of subjectivity by asking his subjects open-ended questions about particularistic details that would not be included in a structuralist representation of narrative structure.

Precisely what role, if any, can the responses of actual readers play in the structuralist or semiotic study of narrative? Riffaterre has provided one answer. However, the value of reader response in delineating structural units seems debatable. In the case of narrative discourse, a detailed theory of narrative, along with knowledge of some of the formal cues of unit boundaries, is more crucial to the delimitation of units. It is conceivable, though, that reader responses can bring a property of texts to the attention of analysts that they might otherwise overlook, a property that proves to be grounded in precise structural characteristics. Consider, for example, memorableness and its opposite, ephemerality. High literature, poetry in particular, is often characterized as being memorable — it tends to remain in one's mind. What is not so often stressed is the fact that certain kinds of texts, detective novels for example, tend to be forgotten almost as quickly as they are read. I have found that I can reread an Agatha Christie mystery novel after a few years with absolutely no recollection of having ever read it. In contrast, I recently reread Joyce's *Ulysses* and was rather impressed with how much of the text I had retained from my first reading about 20 years ago. This type of observation can elicit stock responses from critics about the difference between high literature and trash, but it would be interesting to know if there are any precise structural features that can account for this phenomenon.

The first step, however, would be empirical research to determine how widespread the phenomenon is, and its exact nature. There is no universal assent among theorists to the memorableness of literature. Barthes claimed that 'it is precisely because I forget that I read' (1974: 11). He referred to the 'plural' text in this connection, which seems to correspond to Eco's notion of the open text. In the case of the plural text, forgetting is not a fault; 'it is an affirmative value, a way of asserting the irresponsibility of the text, the pluralism of systems (if I closed their list, I would inevitably reconstitute a singular, theological meaning)'. Conversely, Eco's observations on the detective novel might suggest that it should be memorable:

in every detective story . . . there is no basic variation, but rather the repetition of a habitual scheme in which the reader can recognize something he has already seen and of which he has grown fond. Under the guise of a machine that produces information, the criminal novel produces redundancy; pretending to rouse the

reader, it in fact reconfirms him in a sort of imaginative laziness and creates escape by narrating, not the Unknown, but the Already Known. (p. 160)

This observation could be reconciled with the claim that detective fiction is ephemeral if it could be demonstrated that the scheme or formula is so familiar that it overwhelms the individual details that flesh it out in individual books.

Memory is one of the classic subjects of investigation in experimental psychology. In recent years there has been a shift toward the use of stories in studies of recall and of comprehension.<sup>5</sup> Eco himself skirts this topic. In an appendix to the book he describes a limited experiment with a set of actual readers of Allais's 'Drame'. His intent was to see whether an empirical approach would agree with the extrapolation of the profile of the Model Reader from the text.

A clearer formulation of intent would be as follows: the experiment was undertaken to determine if readers make the inferences his analysis of the text would indicate, and if there is general agreement among the readers as to the inferences they draw. This seems to be more or less what Eco had in mind, judging from what he says about his procedure. He had students of semiotics read the text and then write a summary of it. He then 'scored' the summaries by noting whether they provided correct answers to such questions as 'Are Raoul and Marguerite remembered as husband and wife obsessed by mutual jealousy?' 'Are either or both Raoul and Marguerite identified with the Templar or with the Pirogue attending the ball?'<sup>6</sup> Eco reports that, based on the summaries his readers produced, 90% of the readers identified the two main characters and about 42% did identify Raoul and Marguerite with the Templar and Pirogue, respectively (p. 262).

The appendix is only about two pages long, so that not much detail is provided about the design of the experiment and the results. The overall impression, however, is that Eco did not have a very sophisticated methodology. There would seem to be more direct ways of testing Eco's hypotheses — though part of the problem is that Eco is vague about exactly what hypotheses he wanted to test.<sup>7</sup>

Professional psychologists command sophisticated experimental procedures — though all such procedures at their best have real limitations. In an experiment the variables have to be rigorously controlled, resulting in a highly artificial situation that bears little resemblance to the circumstances of actual language use. Another limitation of psychological research into story comprehension is that psychologists rarely command a sophisticated theory of narrative structure. Nevertheless, the empirical investigation of the processing of narrative discourse should be en-

couraged. Such research could have a number of practical applications, e.g., improvement in the teaching of reading.

It is not immediately obvious that such research will have much relevance for poetics proper. While a formal theory of narrative can serve as a valuable aid to the psychologist in devising experiments, it is hard to see exactly what relevance the psychologist's findings have for the formal representation of narrative structures. The situation is comparable to that of linguistics *vis-à-vis* neurophysiology. Advances in knowledge of the biological foundation of language and the brain mechanisms underlying its storage and use will not necessarily lead the linguist to abandon the type or form of the grammars he writes. Note, for instance, that a representation of phonological units as matrices of distinctive features may be closer to the way language is stored in the brain, but such a representation is much more awkward, and less perspicuous, than the conventional one in terms of phonemes or morphophonemes.

The preceding sketch of textual pragmatics has neglected many of the approaches currently being pursued under that rubric, as well as the serious issues in textual analysis that they raise. The intent, to repeat, has only been to highlight the fact that Eco essentially continues the structuralist focus on the text itself. But this is not in itself cause for censure. The paradigm of the self-sufficient text is far from exhausted. Numerous problems in textual analysis still exist that are not solvable by the simple expedient of shifting perspective from text to context.

### Notes

1. Note that the role of the performer clearly goes beyond that associated with a closed work, where the interpretive freedom results primarily from inadequacies of musical notation.
2. Eco might be on firmer ground in comparing music and verbal texts if he took as his point of departure the fact that the audience for a musical performance is the analogue to the readers of a literary text.
3. Eco suggests later that the opposing characters are variants of archetypal elements from fairy tales, hence of universal appeal (p. 161). This observation would seem to contradict the earlier suggestion that the Bond novels are closed because they utilize temporally dated elements, such as the menace of Russia.
4. It would be a mistake to equate pragmatics solely with the study of individuality, of tokens. Speech act theory, as developed within analytic philosophy, is generally regarded as falling within the domain of pragmatics. However, this theory makes use of abstract categories such as *S* and *H*, for 'speaker' and 'hearer' respectively. Consider, for example, this extract from Searle's (1969: 57) extended discussion of 'how to promise': 'Given that a speaker *S* utters a sentence *T* in the presence of a hearer *H*, then, in the literal utterance of *T*, *S* sincerely and non-defectively promises that *p* to *H* if and only if the following conditions 1-9 obtain: ...'. Here *S*, *H*, and so on have a status strictly analogous to the linguist's *N* (noun), *V* (verb), etc., in terms of which he formulates a

grammar of, say, English. The grammar in itself says nothing about actual sentences, such as *The man hit the ball*. It is up to the user of the grammar to recognize that a given empirical sentence is a manifestation of a grammatical pattern.

5. For a very elementary introduction to this topic, along with some references for further reading, see Clark and Clark (1977: 166–173).
6. Note that Eco's reference to 'scoring' the summaries indicates that, in his view, the text is the ultimate authority; the reader's task is to perceive what is objectively present in the text.
7. For a sketch of a methodology of narrative structural analysis that could provide a starting point for an experimental investigation of how actual readers process texts, see Hendricks (1973b: ch. VII). The methodology as presented, it should be stressed, makes no pretense to providing a cognitive model of discourse reception or comprehension.

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