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A Cognitive Model of Reading Autofiction

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ABSTRACT

Autofiction is a genre in which the author appears as a character, the nonfiction of their autobiographical life combining with the fiction of invention and fabrication. Critical discussions of autofiction are dominated by arguments concerning its dual narrative structure evoking a duet of imaginative visions which, in turn, requires reading strategies that shift between fact and fiction. These critical intuitions are perceptive, yet they remain unfounded since they make claims about reading and interpretation that can only be explained by recourse to cognitive frameworks and substantiated by empirical research. To rectify this, I propose a cognitive model of the processes involved in reading autofiction, combining the storyworld, Text World Theory, conceptual blending, and the person model. My cognitive model includes two new concepts: the "author model" and "ontological dissonance". Analysis of Michelle Tea's autofiction *Black Wave* alongside reader responses tests my proposed model and ultimately validates it.

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The main character of Michelle Tea's *Black Wave* (2016) is a writer named Michelle who grapples with the dilemmas of fictionalising people and events from her life. When confronted about this, she responds to her subject's objection, "It's Not Really You. She's Based On You, But She's Different".[1] This contention articulates the paradox that Gérard Genette sees as characteristic of autofiction (sometimes also called autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography)—a hybrid genre wherein the author appears as a character, the nonfiction of their autobiographical life combining with the fiction of invention and fabrication. For the author (and by extension, the author-character), Genette postulates, autofiction surmounts to a narrative act whereby "I, the author, am going to tell you a story of which I am the hero but which never happened to me".[2] As such, he continues, "It is I and it is not I".[3] This internal contradiction lies at the heart of autofictions like *Black Wave* and poses challenges for models of the reference or fictionality of such ontologically hybrid narratives as well as for accounts of how readers engage with these works. Critical discussions of the complicated fictionality of autofiction are abundant and are routinely accompanied by pronouncements concerning

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[1]Tea, 141. In *Black Wave*, Tea uses title case as a marker of her main character Michelle's speech.
[2]Genette, 76.
[3]Ibid., 77.

the related reading experience. These pronouncements are consistently made on the basis of introspection and/or academic intuition rather than cognitive or empirical validity and consequently have the status of untested hypotheses or critical conjecture.

In contradistinction to existing scholarship on autofiction, I adopt a cognitive approach, bringing cognitive frameworks and reader response data to bear on assessments of the autofictional reading experience. This permits both the generation of a credible model of the processes involved in reading autofiction *and* a means of assessing that model using textual analysis and reader responses. This article delivers three original contributions to knowledge. First, it presents, and substantiates the value of, a cognitive model that captures how readers engage with ontologically complicated texts. Precisely because this model is built using cognitive frameworks, it supersedes existing critical accounts in terms of apprehending the reading strategies and felt effects of autofiction. As part of this cognitive model, I propose two new concepts which, in turn, form the second and third significant advances of the article: the "author model" as a knowledge store—active during reading—that readers draw on to make inferences about authors and texts; and "ontological dissonance" to describe readers' experience of nonfitting relations between ontological incompatibilities.

1. Critical intuitions about autofiction

Philippe Lejeune is often credited with inspiring the explicit recognition of autofiction as a genre when, in "The Autobiographical Pact", he theorises the differences between autobiography and fiction. For Lejeune, the most decisive marker distinguishing autobiography from the novel is the synchrony or discrepancy of identity—primarily signalled by name—between the protagonist and the author.[4] Lejeune identifies four "pacts" between author and reader, two of which appear relatively straightforward: the fictional pact, wherein the author and protagonist have different names, supposedly excluding a reading of the work as autobiographical; the referential, autobiographical pact where author and protagonist share onomastic self-identity. Lejeune's third pact is the absent pact, its defining feature being that the protagonist is unnamed. Such works are indeterminate so, for Lejeune, the pact can become autobiographical or fictional depending on clues provided by the author in the composition of the text and the interpretive assumptions of readers.[5] Finally, Lejeune questions whether a work can be labelled as novel/fiction in the face of onomastic likeness between protagonist and author, as in autofiction. Such works, Lejeune observes, cast "more doubt than ever before on the boundary"[6] between autobiography and fiction and he ultimately associates them with his fourth pact, the phantasmatic pact.[7]

When the phantasmatic pact is in play, the reader is "invited to read novels not only as *fictions* referring to a truth of 'human nature', but also as revealing *phantasms* of the individual".[8] In consequence, "it is no longer necessary to know which of the two,

[4]Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," 15–28; cf. Genette, 68–79. Genette follows Lejeune in tracing identity and voice relations as a determiner between factual and fictional genres, incorporating first-person homodiegetic and third-person heterodiegetic narration.
[5]Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," 16.
[6]Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact (bis)," 135.
[7]Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," 26–28.
[8]Ibid., 27; original emphasis.

autobiography or novel, would be truer"; rather, both pacts are in operation and must be read "one *in relation* to the other".[9] Because of this, for Lejeune, autofictions deliver a "[d]ouble blow, or rather double vision—double writing, the effect, if I can risk this neologism, of *stereography*".[10] Stereographic projection involves superimposing two pictures to generate a combined, three-dimensional image. Thus, what Lejeune means by the visual metaphor of stereography is that autofictions simultaneously open up two distinct narrative possibilities, one autobiographical and one fictional, and that these are fused together somehow in readers' interpretation.

Although Lejeune was foremost in theorising that autofictions give rise to a double pact and corresponding doubling in the imagination, countless scholars since have recited and reinforced his argument. Dorrit Cohn acknowledges Lejeune's autobiographical and fictional pacts, before claiming that "all fictional autobiographies offer a telescoped *double* pact: an autobiographical pact impacted within a fictional pact".[11] Frank Zipfel sees autofiction as "characterised by a double author-reader contract: the autobiographical contract demanding the author to tell the truth about his life, and the fictional contract allowing fabulation and invention".[12] Marjorie Worthington believes that a "primary pleasure of the autofictional text arises from a double awareness of knowing that any of those [seemingly real] events are actually fictional".[13] Doubrovksy—who was one of the first to use the term "autofiction"[14]—claims that his own autofictional writing gives rise to a narrative structure in which everything is twofold, generating "an asymmetric duplication in which the two halves cannot be superimposed, an unmastered duality".[15] And, after stating that "any autofiction is itself a doubling", Henrik Skov Nielsen describes what he sees as the effect of autofiction using a figurative description, "double exposure", which echoes Lejeune's original visual metaphor of stereography: For Skov Nielsen, "the reader sees the sum of two pictures or two narratives superimposed over each other and haunting each other".[16] Consequently, there is undeniable accord that autofictions engender a dual narrative structure that, in turn, evokes a duet of imaginative visions.

Additionally, there is relative agreement about the strategies that readers must adopt, described as forms of oscillating. For Zipfel, autofiction creates an "unresolvable paradox" that leads to "contradictory reading strategies".[17] Doubrovsky claims that autofiction generates "a perpetual oscillation" between autobiography and fiction.[18] And Worthington alleges the reader must "perform continuous adjustments to the reading process, as the novel vacillates between biographical fact and outright fiction".[19] These assertions imply that reading autofiction involves a shifting stance between inferred referentiality and fictionality, and that the two ontologies interact in terms of meaning-making and experience.

[9]Ibid., 27; original emphasis.
[10]Ibid.; original emphasis.
[11]Cohn, 33; original emphasis.
[12]Zipfel, 36.
[13]Worthington, 17.
[14]Doubrovsky, *Fils*.
[15]Doubrovsky, 34.
[16]Nielsen, 136.
[17]Zipfel, 37.
[18]Doubrovsky, 34.
[19]Worthington, 151–2.

Given such unanimity, it seems likely that there is something to these extant critical intuitions. Indeed, my own instinct is to agree with such claims. Nevertheless, current criticism is not robust in and of itself, precisely because it attempts to describe the *reading strategies and interpretive effects* of autofiction without evidencing how these strategies and effects result from the mental processes involved in reading. As such, current criticism ultimately takes the form of figurative reasoning and unconfirmed theoretical speculation. In contrast, I adopt three combined actions to advance autofiction scholarship: (1) Because there is such uniformity in existing autofiction scholarship and because this scholarship emerges from critics' introspections and/or intuitions, the academic insights reviewed in this section can be taken as a preliminary form of (professional) reader response data; (2) Cognitive frameworks about how the mind processes discourse can then be used to explain and underwrite an account of how readers—modelled initially on these critics—experience autofiction in a scientifically grounded way; (3) Incorporating further empirical data in the form of real (lay) reader responses can test the validity of such an account. In the next section, I introduce a cognitive framework for tracking readers' mental representations. This will underwrite the model I subsequently propose to explain the reading experience of autofiction.

2. Cognition, worlds, fictionality

Cognitive stylistics and cognitive narratology are two related disciplines that have principally contributed to developing understanding of literary reading experiences. Although, traditionally, stylistics places a greater focus on the language of a text and narratology on the larger discursive structures, both are interested in how the composition of a text generates meaning.[20] The two approaches are increasingly united in contemporary research, particularly in studies which draw on insights, conceptual models, and analytical frameworks from across the cognitive sciences. Two models have developed independently in cognitive stylistics and cognitive narratology that use a "world" metaphor to account for readers' imaginative experiences. In narratology, David Herman proposes the concept of storyworlds, which he defines as "global mental representations enabling interpreters to draw inferences about items and occurrences either explicitly or implicitly included in a narrative".[21] In stylistics, in an approach now known as Text World Theory, Paul Werth conceived of text-worlds as "mental models constructed in the course of processing a given discourse" (74).[22] Thus, the storyworld stands as a mental representation operating at the global level of the narrative universe and text-worlds account for local scenes and events in the sense that each text-world "is a deictic space, defined initially by the discourse itself, and specifically by the deictic and referential elements in it".[23] Text-worlds are therefore constructed based on micro-level linguistic and narrative details such as time, place, and ontological grounding. Since text-worlds are deictically

[20]Shen. Dan Shen offers a comparative discussion of the similarities and differences between the two disciplines.
[21]Herman, 10.
[22]Werth, *Text Worlds*, 74. "Text World Theory" is always presented in title case with each word capitalised (e.g. Text World Theory) and, although Werth did not do so, the framework now adopts the practice of hyphenating the term "text-worlds" (as well as the related term "discourse-world", which I discuss below).
[23]Ibid., 20; cf. Scott, 93. Scott also observes that the storyworld is a larger-scale concept to text-worlds. The storyworld model and Text World Theory are highly compatible, not least because, in both, deixis is a fundamental driver of the construction of mental representations.

discrete, when narratives shift across temporal, spatial or ontological boundaries, readers are required to switch imaginatively to a new text-world that represents the new parameters. In analysis, many Text World Theorists (myself included) at times generalise or extrapolate in such a way that the text-world concept is implicitly reconfigured and deployed as a superordinate category. I therefore recommend the explicit addition of an intermediary form of mental construct, a macro-level text-world that accounts for readers' recognition of ontologically distinct narrative planes within the global story-world (such as the diegetic levels involved in embedded narratives).[24] These three world-types are all mental representations, differing only in the degree of ontological granularity. In this article, I focus primarily on macro-level text-worlds and the story-world, since my interest is in tracking readers' perceptions of ontology and fictionality at a more global level. Due to the acute attention to ontological distinctions in Text World Theory, characters are referred to as "enactors" to account for "different versions of the same person or character which exist at different levels of a discourse".[25]

There is one final category in this cognitive worlds-based approach, known as the "discourse-world", wherein authors and readers—as real, flesh-and-blood people—reside as "participants". The discourse-world is a mental representation of the "immediate situation" of the communication (e.g., the interaction via the text between author and reader) and includes participants' background knowledge.[26] Accordingly, the discourse-world has a different ontological disposition, as Werth emphasises: "To the extent that it is founded on interpretation, and is 'filled in' and edited, the discourse world is a construct, although one which we may suppose is founded on 'real' external circumstances". Operationalised together in analysis, this quartet of worlds is advantageous as the basis of a cognitive model for reading autofiction: because it permits and engenders an account of the imaginative constructions provoked by a given discourse across various narrative planes, it can capture if and how readers are required to develop dual mental representations.

Both Joanna Gavins and Ernestine Lahey argue that readers infer relations between text-worlds and discourse-world, including between fictional character- and/or narrator-enactors and the author-participants who invent them. Gavins advises that readers' knowledge about authors can influence their imaginative construal of enactors: "although fictional narrators are textual constructs, the reader-participants in literary discourse-worlds often map their knowledge of real-world authors onto these text-world beings".[27] Lahey subsequently reads this system of influence as duplex: "we can expect readers' perceptions of authors to be shaped by their experience of the narrators those authors create" and this is what "allows us to talk of fictional characters as alter egos of their creators".[28] Lahey goes on to claim that "where readers discern specific

[24]Gibbons, "Interpreting Fictionality"; "Fictionality and Multimodal Anthropocene Fiction"; cf. Werth, 108–9. As it has developed, Text World Theory has done away with narrative hierarchies between imagined (micro-level) text-worlds, for good reason. However, Werth does conceptualise narrative levels (or "levels of reporting" as he calls them) within his framework. Thus, capturing this separately in macro-level text-worlds is, I argue, a useful conceptual move that avoids the problems associated with narrative hierarchy at the micro-level.
[25]Gavins, 41.
[26]Werth, *Text Worlds*, 17.
[27]Gavins, 129.
[28]Lahey, "Author-Character *Ethos*," 47.

correspondences between the contents of a fictional narrative and elements in their 'real world', there will be a stronger tendency for bi-directional mapping of features in reader's representations of both worlds".[29] This bi-directional mapping is theorised by Lahey as a "cognitive feedback loop" (shown in Figure 1).[30] This facet of the Text World Theory framework will help to track the ostensible reading strategies of autofiction in terms of the connections readers may make between imagined storyworld and text-worlds and their discourse-world knowledge, which includes their knowledge about the author.

Storyworlds and text-worlds can be fictional or non-fictional, because "[a]ll narratives have world-creating power"[31] and "*all* situations must be *represented* in the minds of the participants, whether they refer to the real world, to memory or to imagination".[32] When it comes to how/why mental representations are perceived as fictional or autobiographical, fictionality is understood as an attribute construed by participants:[33] Narratives—especially in the form of published literature—are pieces of discourse, constructed purposely by their authors, that may contain "signposts" of their fictionality or referentiality,[34] and readers make fictionality judgements based on both the text and their assessments of authorial intentions. Werth only offers brief comments on fictionality but, even so, they are incisive. Conceptualising the relation between text-worlds and discourse-world as a linked embedded structure, with the text-world as an inner world and the discourse-world as an outer-world, Werth asserts:

> Truth-assessment (as opposed to the logical determination of truth-conditionality) takes place in the outer-world: the present approach contends that such assessment is a two-part process, corresponding to the inner-outer distinction. Thus, the first-stage consists of calculating the truth or probability of the propositions in the text in terms of the CG [common ground or shared knowledge] constructed by the text together with relevant background knowledge; the second stage consists of modifying that calculation in terms of the reliability and the claims of the speaker in the outer-world situation.[35]

This process is vital and less straightforward for autofiction or what Werth calls "intermediate or indeterminate cases" that cannot be easily classified as fictional or non-fictional.[36]

This cognitive worlds-based framework excels at tracking mental representations imagined during the act of reading so is ideally placed to explain the processes leading to doubled imagination that critics identify as central to autofiction. Moreover, because of its ontological acuity, the framework lends itself to analysing the complex fictionality of a genre like autofiction. For the same reason, however, the approach observes a binary distinction between fictionality and referentiality. Consequently, it requires further augmentation to deal with the ontological hybridity of autofiction.

[29]Lahey, "World-building" 67 [sic: the error in possessive apostrophe—as singular rather than plural—is in the original].
[30]Lahey, "World-building."
[31]Herman, 16; cf. Werth, *Text Worlds*, 210.
[32]Werth, *Text Worlds*, 156; original emphasis.
[33]Gibbons, "The 'Dissolving Margins'."
[34]Cohn.
[35]Werth, *Text Worlds*, 210.
[36]Ibid.

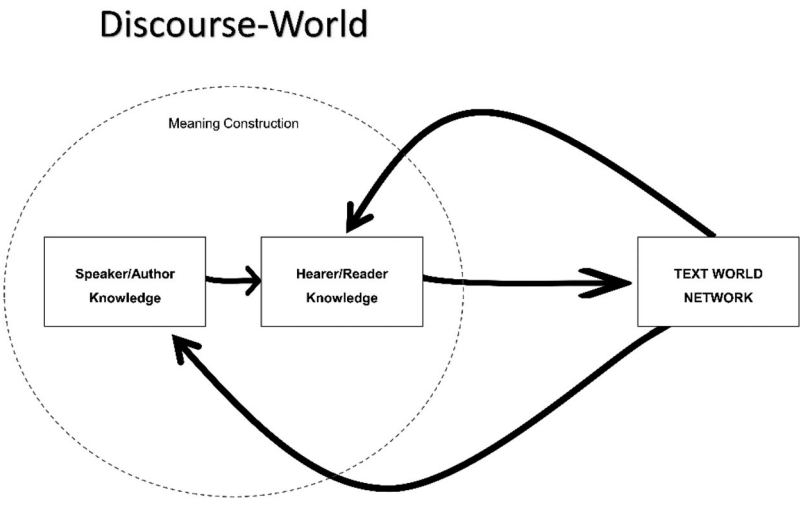

Figure 1. Lahey's cognitive feedback loop.

3. Cognising autofiction and conceptual blending

There is only a small pool of research which takes a cognitive approach to autofiction. Such studies have sought to consider the micro-level textual formations that highlight the factual and fictional domains of knowledge that readers bring to and draw on in the act of reading, the stylistic features that anchor the fiction of autofiction in the reality of autobiography, and the processing of memory in autofictional writing.[37] Consequently, they do not explicate the conceptual operations and/or imaginative experiences of autofiction. To do so in this article, I combine the cognitive worlds-based approach outlined above with conceptual blending (or conceptual integration as it is also called), a cognitive linguistic model proposed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. It involves mental spaces—conceptual bundles or "sets of activated neuronal assemblies" built dynamically during meaning making.[38] Blending occurs when discrete mental spaces are combined or merged in some way and, as such, the framework can be synthesised with the worlds-based approach to account for the ontological hybridity of autofiction.

Figure 2 shows a schematic for how blending works, based on Fauconnier and Turner's basic diagram of a conceptual integration network.[39] In *The Literary Mind*, Turner describes blending in relation to literature, citing the trope of the talking animal—such as the perpetually late, worrisome white rabbit in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*—as an archetypal literary blend.[40] In real life, animals do not talk or express concern over their punctuality; these are human traits. Understanding talking, emotionally intelligent animals therefore involves two separate mental spaces, one

[37]Effe and Gibbons; Gibbons "Autonarration"; Giovanelli; Gibbons, "The 'Dissolving Margins'." My own previous research uses Text World Theory and mind-modelling as an approach to fictionality and autofiction. The present article is a development of this thinking.
[38]Fauconnier and Turner, 40.
[39]Ibid., 46.
[40]Turner, 57.

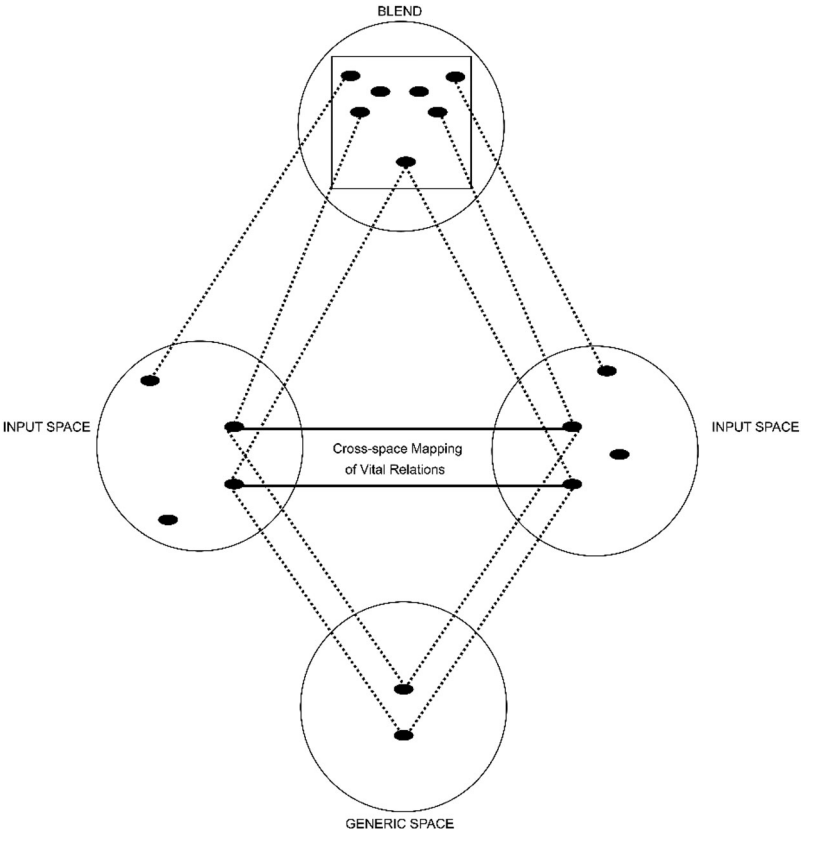

Figure 2. A basic conceptual integration network.

"input space" for the animal in question (e.g., a rabbit) and another for a human (who talks and worries). As "counterparts", the animal and human are connected to each other through "cross-space mapping" to create "vital relations" between the input spaces; and the properties common to both (e.g., being alive, having the capacity for motion) are mapped from each input space into the "generic space" which functions as the foundation for the process of conceptual integration.[41] Finally, these shared, generic attributes and the unique properties from the input spaces are projected into a blended space (sometimes just called "the blend"[42]), which gives rise to emergent structure and meaning: "The result is an impossible blend with animals that are simultaneously beasts of burden and intentional agents with sophisticated mental capacities".[43] Although conceptual blending (and the related integration network) may, on the face of it, seem like a complicated process, Fauconnier and Turner argue that it is a "basic mental operation, highly imaginative but crucial to even the simplest kinds of thought",[44] and can be performed with ease, often unconsciously.

[41]Fauconnier and Turner, 41.
[42]Ibid., 41.
[43]Turner, 60.
[44]Fauconnier and Turner, 18.

Conceptual blending has been extolled in discussions of paradoxical or ontologically complex literature: Jan Alber proposes that blending is a reading strategy adopted by readers of unnatural narratives—fictions that entail "physically, logically, and humanly impossible scenarios and events", like talking animals;[45] Hilary P. Dannenberg uses conceptual blending to explore the narrative emplotment of counterfactual fiction. Dannenberg's characterisation of blending as essential to "the cognitive dynamics of counterfactuals" enhances the rationale for my use of blending in a model for reading autofiction,[46] not least because autofictions similarly ascribe fictional actions onto historical individuals (e.g., the real author) and thus can—Jean-Marie Schaeffer notes—"be seen as a special case of such counterfactual fictions".[47] Nevertheless, neither Dannenberg nor Alber develop an applied model of reading that can predict and track reader responses, as is my goal in this article.

Where the rigid ontology of a cognitive worlds-based approach may have struggled to map the ontological complexity of a genre like autofiction, conceptual blending can show how ontological blends transpire and are negotiated in reading. Gavins has already integrated the mechanics of conceptual blending into Text World Theory. Werth explored extended metaphor through Text World Theory, arguing that metaphors are a "'double vision' phenomenon", whereby "we see both simultaneously, or one through the other. Metaphor, that is to say, does not merely substitute one area of experience for another; it combines the two kinds of experience into a third, new way of seeing".[48] Granting that text-worlds can operate in the same way as mental spaces, Gavins builds on Werth's account,[49] proposing that readers resort to conceptual blending when metaphors occur in texts: the two aspects of a metaphor act as separate text-worlds with relevant structure projected into a "blended world" (in essence, following conceptual integration principles).[50] In his original postulation of "double vision", prior to his invention of Text World Theory, Werth argues that the conceptual phenomenon is not restricted to metaphor but also pertains to irony and literary ambiguity.[51] It is therefore logical that Werth's "double vision" and Gavins augmentation of Text World Theory through blending can also be applied to ontological ambiguity. It is, moreover, remarkable that to describe the conceptual layering, Werth chooses the trope of "'double vision', or if you want a more impressive term, *diplopia*: the reader, like the viewer of a Cubist painting is allowed, and in fact encouraged, to glimpse two or more aspects of meaning simultaneously".[52] Werth's "double vision" thus resonates with extant critical theories about reading autofiction, particularly Lejeune's original postulation.

4. A cognitive model of reading autofiction

The cognitive model I propose is shown in Figure 3. It has been designed to account for extant critical intuitions—as preliminary reader response data—about the autofictional

[45]Alber, 25.
[46]Dannenberg, 60.
[47]Schaeffer, online.
[48]Werth, "Extended Metaphor," 80, 83.
[49]Gavins, 153. Gavins cites Werth's work on extended metaphor and argues that text-world blending creates "a kind of conceptual double-vision".
[50]Gavins, 149.
[51]Werth, "The Linguistics of Double Vision."
[52]Ibid., 9.

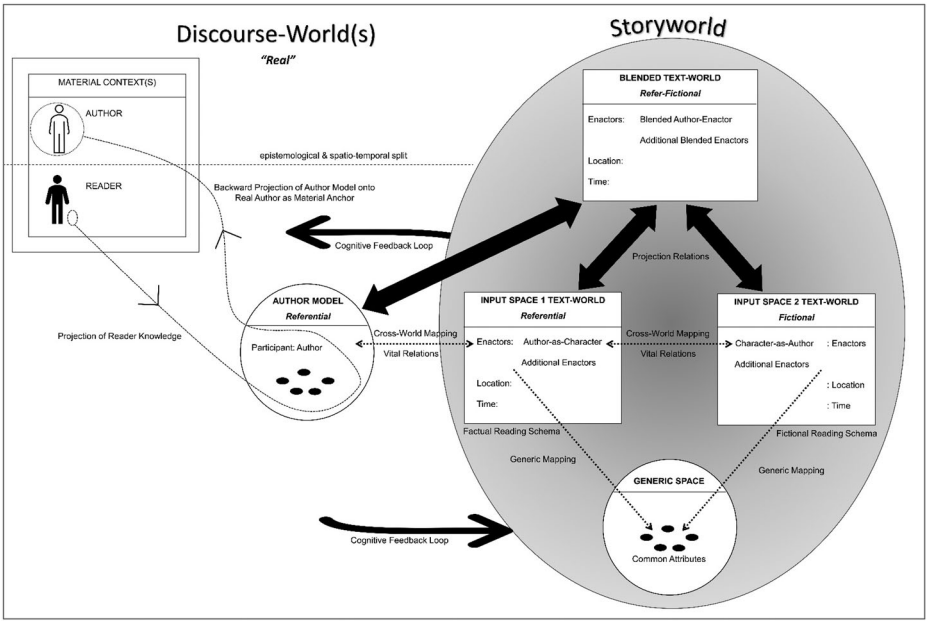

Figure 3. Cognitive model of reading autofiction.

reading experience. The diagram depicts the discourse-world, occupied by the author and reader(s) and the box placed around these participants indicates the physical and perceptual context(s) of their acts of writing and reading. This materiality is not usually accentuated in Text World Theory modelling but it is important for distinguishing the external circumstances of the immediate situation from discourse-world knowledge. The dashed horizontal line that cuts through the material context and the discourse-world more generally represents the "split" between writer and reader who are not co-present. In Text World Theory, this "split" is recorded to mark spatio-temporal division.[53] Herein, I additionally recognise and emphasise the epistemological split between author and reader, in that—even though literary communication is a joint endeavour in which meaning is always negotiated—participants have distinct consciousnesses. To quote Werth:

> each one has a cognitive environment which includes some representation of a physical environment, and some representation by each participant of the knowledge, probable and possible, of the other participants, of their relative social position (age, education, politics, economic status, etc.), their reliability, generally and on specific subjects, and any shared experience.[54]

The discourse-world is often diagrammed as a discrete box (e.g., like the text-worlds shown in Figure 3) but, following Lahey's illustration of the cognitive feedback loop, I present it here as the background from which all cognition pertinent to the discourse

[53]Gavins, 26.
[54]Werth, *Text Worlds*, 149.

takes place. This enables us to explicitly plot relevant knowledges brought to the literary experience.

As Lejeune theorises, likenesses between author and character determine the nature of the literary pact and thus readers' interpretations of whether a text is autobiographical or fictional.[55] In the case of autofiction, a reader's knowledge about the author is crucial so is shown on the diagram in what I am calling the "author model". This is an author-specific take on a "person model", a model utilised in cognitive science and philosophy to capture the "unity of properties or features that we represent in memory as belonging to one individual".[56] Person models can operate at an implicit schematic level or become explicit and more detailed in order to form "a unity of relatively easily and explicitly available information about a person, including her mindset".[57] Information held in a person model, and by extension a reader's author model, "include names, descriptions, stories, whole biographies, and visual images highlighting both mental and physical dispositions as well as episodes".[58] The author model therefore represents a readers' archive of personal knowledge about the author. It will differ between readers based on their respective knowledge and is activated by virtue of entering into a literary communication—or to use Lejeune's term, a "pact"—with the author.

There is abundant evidence in psychology and neuroscience that the construction of mental imagery is empirically valid.[59] Using the worlds-based model described earlier, then, as a reader engages with the text, they develop a mental model of the storyworld and this encapsulates all of the text-worlds—macro- and micro-level—that a reader necessarily constructs during the literary act. The cognitive feedback loop applies, so discourse-world knowledge is recruited and influences readers' interpretations of a storyworld and its text-worlds. These mental representations can in turn impact on discourse-world knowledge. When reading an autofiction, readers will encounter a character that either explicitly or implicitly represents the author, prompting them to create a text-world—first at a micro-level but this is extrapolated (both in the diagram and in the reading experience) to a macro-level—which includes that enactor of the author. Depending on the choice of name for this author-enactor and on a reader's assessment of the accuracy of the depiction (of the author, of events in text-worlds or the storyworld at large), this text-world will be assigned either a referential or fictional status and thus read in relation to corresponding factual or fictional pacts. At some point in reading the autofiction, scenarios or identity attributes of the enactor will contradict a readers' initial ontological assignation, and in such a way that they cannot neatly revise the interpretation by replacing fictionality with referentiality or vice versa. As such, readers will be required to create a new, distinct text-world, contrasting in its ontological status. The felt effect of this tension can be described as "ontological dissonance", the experience of nonfitting ontological relations.[60] Because both text-worlds apply to the reading and interpretation of the autofictional narrative, neither can be dismissed: Readers must

[55]Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact."
[56]Newen, 11–12.
[57]Ibid., 17.
[58]Ibid.
[59]Abraham, 4200–4202.
[60]Festinger, 3. Dissonance theory was developed in social psychology by Festinger and describes "the *experience* of nonfitting relations among cognitions" (my emphasis). Here, I reframe this experience in relation to ontological (in)coherency.

maintain these parallel mental representations, thus giving rise to the simultaneous doubling of incompatible yet co-referential narrative structures, as noted by critics. Indeed, this is the foundation of Genette's disparagement of autofiction: "It is I and it is not I", it is the author and it is not the author, it is referential and it is fictional.[61]

To make sense of the phantasmatic situation depicted in the text, readers must therefore resort to running a blend, as signified by the thick arrows in Figure 3. The two irreconcilable text-worlds are mental representations that are used as input spaces. In the conceptual integration network mapped in Figure 3, all except the generic space are recast as text-worlds. The reason for the exception is that input spaces are text-worlds prompted by narrative and stylistic details of a discourse, and the blended space the result of their combination, whilst the generic space remains a schematic mental space functioning solely to track shared structures. Because running the blend combines a referentially interpreted mental representation and a fictional one, the blended space becomes refer-fictional or, in other words, autofictional. As blending is a dynamic process, its moment-by-moment compression and decompression during reading captures—in cognitive terms—the oscillating experiences and fluctuating reading strategies that critics identify as being generated and required by autofiction.

Additionally, the model needs to explain the way in which readers experience textual manifestations of an author in relation to the real author. While the cognitive feedback loop accounts for knowledge transfer between text-worlds and discourse-world, if readers think a fictional character is an alter-ego of the author, this interpretation is not *only* the result of a cognitive feedback loop (as in Lahey's description) but *also* necessarily involves conceptual blending. I thus argue for the applicability of the blending of the author-model regardless of fictionality/referentiality. Blends can therefore transpire to merge the real author and: a fictional character in works of fiction; an autobiographical character in memoir; and the duality of fictional and autobiographical counterparts in autofiction. In all cases, the reader's mental model of the author is crucial, available for use as another input space in the blend. For autofiction, where readers are required to develop two incompatible avatars of the author, this therefore leads to the blending of three input spaces.

Backward projection between mental spaces allows each to be modified in light of the blend and its emergent structure. Backward projection from the blend into readers' mental model of the author is part of the cognitive feedback loop: mapping occurs between text-world structure and discourse-world knowledge, as in Lahey's discussion of how readers judge authors in relation to their characters. The backward projection of the blend does not stop at the mental model, though, but is paired to the real, flesh-and-blood author. This is another reason why the framework must acknowledge embodied materiality: the real author is the supreme "material anchor" of the correlating conceptual model and a reader's perception of the real author will be affected by each literary encounter with them. Indeed, Fauconnier and Turner argue:

> Personal identity itself involves a diffuse network of mental spaces whose compression in the blend creates a unique person. Conceptually, a person is involved in mental spaces over many times and places, through many changes. All these spaces contribute to a blend

[61]Genette, 77.

> that has the single unique person. There is a physical material anchor for this conceptual blend—the active living biological body that we can see and with which we interact.[62]

This model has been designed based on the intuitions of autofiction scholars, which can be seen as a preliminary form of (professional) reader response data. It consequently seeks to explain the necessity of author knowledge in fictionality/referentiality assessments of autofiction as well as its doubled narrative experience. Moreover, unlike existing autofiction research, it draws on cognitive principles to map the conceptual processes at work during reading. To test the value of the model's explanatory power, I undertake an analysis of Michele Tea's autofiction *Black Wave* alongside corresponding (lay) reader response data. For the latter, review comments about the book were gathered from the social reading site Goodreads.[63] This yields qualitative data through an established naturalistic method of reader response research and minimises researcher interference (Gavins 2013, 7–8; Harrison 2017, 6; Nuttall 2018, 6–7). All available comment-reviews were collected up until the end of January 2021 and, after excluding any in which there was a conflict of interest (e.g., readers disclosed that they were given a free copy by the publisher), this yielded a corpus of 80 reviews. Reader identities were anonymised during data collection, using an acronym based on the book's title and a number. The reviews were then coded in the software NVivo, using predetermined codes based on this article's concerns; namely, author knowledge, author-character relation, fictionality.

5. The autofictional experience of reading *Black Wave*

Michelle Tea is known for writing both fiction and memoir and many of her works—amongst them, *Valencia*, *Rent Girl*, and *Black Wave*—are autofictional. *Black Wave* (2016) features a protagonist called Michelle and is divided into two parts signalling the location of the narrative: "San Francisco" chronicles Michelle's romantic liaisons and drug dalliances; when both infatuations reach an all-time low, Michelle decides to move to "Los Angeles".

According to my cognitive model, on choosing to read the book, a reader's author model of Michelle Tea will be activated. Depending on readers' prior knowledge, this can include what Tea looks like, that she is female and identifies as a lesbian, her professed alcoholism and drug misuse, as well as her previous writings and penchant for autobiographical and autofictional modes. In the Goodreads data, there is evidence that readers draw on their knowledge about the author, with 27 (33.75%) of the 80 readers acknowledging how much or how little they know about Michelle Tea. Of these 27, 3 readers confess that *Black Wave* is their "first Michelle Tea book".[64] Thus, the knowledge captured in their author model will be relatively scant and schematic prior to reading *Black Wave* but will develop based on this first literary encounter.

[62]Fauconnier and Turner, 205.

[63]Ethical approval for this reader response project (Ethics Review ID: ER35435638) was sought and granted through Sheffield Hallam University's online Ethics Review system prior to data collection. Since this was low-risk covert research, informed ethical consent from participants was neither possible nor required.

[64]BW-30. These citations indicate the identity of the quoted reader with quotes given as they appear online: any typos or spelling errors etc. are present in the original.

The remaining 24 readers who disclose prior knowledge about the author self-identify as fans of Tea's writing (e.g., "I've always loved Michelle Tea's books"[65]), and seem familiar with the author, her literary style, and her opus. These readers provide information suggesting they have detailed author models, e.g.,:

> I love Michelle Tea. I've seen her perform or read like 4 times. I've got signed copies of *Rent Girl* and *Chelsea Whistle* and *Rose of No Man's Land* as well as a huge signed photograph of her running with a popsicle hanging in my living room;[66]

> I have a soft spot for Michelle Tea. When I was a baby dyke, I devoured her poetry and *Valencia* and *Rent Girl*. I hear rumblings she is problematic, but that might just [be] the loud rustling from the tenderqueer echo chamber.[67]

These readers not only reference Tea's previous writings, they display rich recognition of her personhood: they have seen her read her work in real life, possess fan merchandise, and understand her status as a figure in the queer cultural scene. Furthermore, although the latter reader does not disclose what may be "problematic" about Tea in the context of LGBT+ politics, the comment shows awareness of larger sociocultural debates surrounding the author. The response data thus offers evidence of the array of social and personal knowledges that readers bring to texts, establishing the importance of including the "author model" in a cognitive account of any and all literary experiences, not only autofiction.

Black Wave begins, "Michelle wasn't sure when everyone started hanging out at the Albion".[68] This opening sentence introduces an enactor "Michelle" but the use of third-person narration creates ontological complexity, since it paradoxically coincides with the introduction of a character whose forename is identical to the author's, producing a discursive split in self-presentation. Depending on readers' perceptions of fictionality, Lejeune argues that readers could overlook third-person narration, thus continuing to interpret the text and author-character autobiographically, or the narration could "be taken in the perspective of the phantasmatic pact ('this has meaning in relation to me, but it is not I')".[69] Because this is the first sentence of *Black Wave*, readers may hold off on judging ontological status, allowing at this point for some indeterminacy, though the name strongly encourages them to link the character to the author.

At the end of *Black Wave*'s first paragraph, readers learn that the Albion is "a heterosexual martini bar where men who smoked actual cigars drank chocolate martinis and harassed the women who passed by on Valencia. It was 1999".[70] The past temporality ("1999") suggests a retrospective view and since this is characteristic of autobiographical recollection, readers will probably now assign referential status to their text-world representation(s). The Valencia location adds weight to this assumption, not only because it is a real street/area in San Francisco but because it also the setting of several of Tea's previous autobiographically-informed works. Indeed, 1 of the 24 readers to disclose prior knowledge of Michelle Tea makes a clear connection between *Black Wave* and

[65]BW-38.
[66]BW-71.
[67]BW-8.
[68]Tea, 1.
[69]Lejeune, "Autobiography in the Third Person," 33.
[70]Tea, 1.

Valencia: "We start just about where *Valencia* left off: late 90s San Francisco nostalgia from the perspective of queer, mostly white, artist-gentrifiers".[71] Another reader explains:

> This book started roughly for me, as I was feeling some of the same frustrations I did with *How to Grow Up: A Memoir*. I felt, in fact, like I was reading that book again, and I wondered how Michelle chose which details to change and which to keep for this gently fictionalized memoir.[72]

Although this latter reader is aware that *Black Wave* is "fictionalized", this is downplayed by "gently" and the reader traces correspondences with another text in Tea's oeuvre that is explicitly nonfictional. In these past reading experiences, then, these readers have blended their author model of Michelle Tea with the autobiographical representation of Michelle as enactor(s) depicted in *Valencia* and *How to Grow Up*. Their author model was consequently updated as a result. Activated again, the updated author model is subsequently brought to bear on *Black Wave*, prompting an initial interpretation of the book as autobiographical. The blending of the discourse-world author model and the referential text-world enactor characteristic of reading strict autobiography is, I suggest, almost imperceptible for readers: due to the high number of vital relations, the blend seamlessly compresses identity relations into an integrated fusion whereby the text-world enactor appears as an accurate portrayal of the author.

The autobiographical interpretation of *Black Wave* is encouraged further on the next page: "Michelle was a poet, a writer, the author of a small book published by a small press that revealed family secrets, exposed her love life, and glamorized her recreational drug intake".[73] The character's name, biography, and self-identity as a writer act as vital relations between the text-world enactor and the reader's author model, enhancing the autobiographical blend of the author-character. Nevertheless, a straightforward reading of *Black Wave* as a referential narrative is soon problematised by details pertaining to the storyworld: "It was 1999 and the earth's decline was accelerating. Most native plants and trees were gone, leaving hardier invasive species".[74] Due to bi-directional knowledge transfer in the cognitive feedback loop, this creates a tension: although the "earth's decline" through processes of climate change has indeed been "accelerating", environmental conditions are not so hostile that most vegetation has been wiped out in 2016 when *Black Wave* was published, let alone in 1999. Furthermore, in *Black Wave*, this acceleration leads ultimately to the catastrophic end of the world at the end of the book, thus clearly signalling fictionalisation within the storyworld parameters. As such, the experience of reading *Black Wave* becomes ontologically dissonant (it cannot be strict autobiography if it is set in an unreal 1999), and this leads to the double vision of autofiction, with readers required to generate dual mental representations at the macro-level, one referential and the other fictional. Reading *Black Wave*, then, results in the generation of three discrete macro-level mental representations—the author model, the referential text-world allowing Michelle in San Francisco to be interpreted autobiographically, and a fictional text-world, populated by a fictional Michelle, in which climate change is having deadlier consequences than it really did in

[71]BW-54.
[72]BW-20.
[73]Tea, 2.
[74]Ibid., 8.

1999. These act as input spaces to be blended in the autofictional reading experience. Conceptual blending of these three input spaces has not been captured before in existing research on autofiction.

33 (41.25%) readers mention the fictionality or referentiality of *Black Wave* in their Goodreads reviews. The majority of these, 32 readers, discuss the book as blurring fiction and memoir. 2 of these 32 readers frame *Black Wave* as referential but the way they hedge this assessment suggests enough doubt as to signal an additional awareness of fictionalisation: "*Interesting* takes on narrative and what it means to write memoir"; "The parts where Michelle is listening to her family members panicking about impending doom struck a chord with me because they *felt* very realistic".[75] Finally, only 1 reader referred to the book as purely fictional.

Cross-referencing readers' broader fictionality/referentiality assessments with comments about the character Michelle's relation to the author Michelle Tea can test the viability of my proposed model. 13 (16.25%) readers made comments that reveal their interpretations about the author-character relationship, 12 of which offer support for conceptual blending processes. For instance, the character is described as "Michelle, Tea's autofictional avatar" and a "protagonist, whom I couldn't help but think of as the author's alter ego".[76] This suggest that vital relations have been mapped between the imagined enactor and readers' sense of the real author, forming counterpart relations across the text-world and the author model as part of the blending process. Another reader questions, "do i know this woman? i feel like i do. in the first section she works in a "bookstore in the mission"—and from the back sleeve photo i keep thinking—dog eared books? adobe? aardvark?"[77] This reader recruits information from within *Black Wave*—that Michelle works in a bookstore—in order to flesh out their author-model of Michelle Tea. This is apparent in the reference to the "back sleeve photo", presumably depicting the author, which the reader then uses to guess at which bookstore chain the real Tea may have been employed. A blend must therefore be constructed, whereby the real author works at a bookstore just like the fictional character. Another reader expresses frustration:

> It [*Black Wave*] honestly started out just like all her memoirs and most of her fiction, obviously about her life even when its thinly veiled as fiction. Even the main character here is named Michelle. I mean come on! I want to know that she can make up something so far off from her life that it doesn't even read like a Michelle Tea book.[78]

For this reader, the cumulative effect of knowledge gleaned from previous Michelle Tea reading experiences captured in their author model makes it impossible not to create a blend that projects an autobiographical interpretation to the start of reading *Black Wave*. 3 of the 12 readers do make a distinction between the author and the character, e.g.,: "author Michelle's gentle, affectionate irony toward the trainwreck that is character Michelle".[79] However, because they also note that the book had a "memoir-ish approach",[80]

[75]BW-39; BW-10; both my emphasis.
[76]BW-76; BW-3.
[77]BW-17.
[78]BW-71.
[79]BW-29.
[80]Ibid.

this combination ultimately suggests that conceptual blending was at work but that readers can decompress the blend, particularly in relation to author-character counterpart relations.

The only reader to consistently discuss *Black Wave* as a "novel" also distinguished between the enactor Michelle and the author Michelle Tea by emphasising "the fictional Michelle's story" and the "narrator Michelle (not to necessarily be confused with the author)".[81] This indicates that they did not blend the enactor with their author model (despite onomastic likeness) and that their interpretation of *Black Wave* was strictly fictional. Interestingly, this reader is also 1 of the 3 readers who were unfamiliar with Michelle Tea, "an author previously unknown to me", and thus the atypical response reveals that autofictional blends—both of author-characters and a work's referfictionality—are significantly influenced by the background knowledge readers have recruited to their author model, prior to reading.

The Goodreads data therefore corroborates the necessity of the author model, containing prior knowledge about the author that readers bring to the reading experience. Processes of conceptual blending enable readers to make sense of characters who resemble authors as well as the ontological duplicity of autofiction. In the data, several readers commented specifically on a key scene, related to character Michelle's relationships and writing, in the middle of *Black Wave*. It is therefore worth examining these reader responses to see what additional insights they may provide about the processes of reading autofiction.

Michelle's sexual escapades are restricted to the "San Francisco" part of *Black Wave*, in which she has three notable relationships: initially, Michelle is in a "messily open relationship"[82] with Andy who, when they break up, yells at her, "*Don't you ever fucking write about me!*";[83] Michelle has a heroin-fuelled one-night stand with eighteen year old performance poet Lucretia who she first saw at a Youth Poetry Slam Championship; lastly, Michelle meets a married yet "androgynous person"—"Michelle couldn't tell if the person was a boy or a girl or someone born male who dressed like a girl or a dyke who was somewhat transgender or what"—named Quinn, whom Michelle introduces to heroin and who drives her to LA.[84]

The "Los Angeles" section of *Black Wave* starts with a metatextual scene in which Michelle is struggling to write:

> All the writing had exhausted Michelle. She recalled Andy's parting words, a curse, really—*You better not ever write about me!*—is that what she said? Michelle felt bound to it, though she had never agreed, never made such a promise. Still, it would be lousy of her to break Andy's heart and then tell her secrets. It made Michelle's stomach lump. She began a screenplay based on Quinn's relationship with her husband. That was better … [85]

Michelle's solution to writer's block is to write about Quinn instead of Andy but as Michelle constructs the scene, Quinn suddenly materialises behind Michelle to protest:

> *I'd rather you didn't write that*, Quinn said. *The story of my marriage*. Her hands went up to her head and felt around her messy curls, making sure they hadn't morphed into

[81] BW-45.
[82] Tea, 35.
[83] Ibid., 59. Character speech that is not Michelle's is presented in italics in *Black Wave*.
[84] Ibid., 92.
[85] Ibid., 140.

> ponytails. *And why would you give me long hair? I have never had long hair. Not even when I was a kid.*
>
> Sorry! Michelle was a little defensive. I Was Trying To Make You More Universal. Plus It's Not Really You. She's Based On You, But She's Different.
>
> *I see she's different*, Quinn said. *She has long hair. But that's it. She has a husband who's a glass blower, she works at an art museum, she's having a heroin affair with a lesbian writer. The changed hair doesn't do anything. It's like you just wanted to humiliate me or something. If you're going to write about me at least give me good hair.*[86]

This passage portrays and performs the ontological bifurcation at the heart of autofiction, since it explicitly cues two simultaneous but clashing text-world representations of Quinn, with/without long hair. Since they cannot both be true, this creates story-world-internal ontological dissonance, with the scene directly commenting on how autobiographical details get changed in the process of fictionalisation.

As the scene continues, readers learn: "In reality, Quinn and Michelle weren't scheduled to meet one another for over a decade".[87] Quinn experiences existential confusion about this, so Michelle tries to explain:

> This, Michelle told Quinn, Is My Memoir.
>
> *Memoirs are true*, Quinn, also a writer, pointed out.
>
> This One Is Part True And Part False. All That Stuff I Just Said, About When We Dated, Is True.
>
> *God*, Quinn said. *It doesn't make me look very good. Did I tell you you could write about me?*
>
> No, Michelle said, But You Didn't Tell Me I Couldn't. The Person I Really Came To Los Angeles With Is Lucretia. I Actually Wrote The Whole Book With Her In It. Our Whole Story. Eight Years, Five Hundred Pages.
>
> Quinn whistled through her teeth. *Eight years! The slam poet from the first part of the book? You were with her for eight years?*
>
> I Know, Michelle said. It Was Really Complicated. She Didn't Want Me To Write About Her But Our Breakup Was So Shitty And Awful I Just Really Needed To Tell The Story.[88]

8 readers (10% of the 80 readers in the corpus) made comments that suggest they were struck by the metatextuality and the seemingly autobiographical admissions in this scene. One reader enthuses, "The writer with the same name as the author, having written one memoir, trying to write fiction that's not just thinly veiled memoir, while readers are in fact reading the exact same thing? Brilliant".[89] Other readers ruminate on the relation between truth and fiction that the scene purports to expose. For instance, one reader notes that Tea "mentions that what was presented as a fling lasted eight years, but the subject wanted to avoid appearing in her fiction. The walls she spent the first third constructing begin to crack, making you doubt anything she's telling you".[90] Another reader

[86]Ibid., 141.
[87]Ibid., 143.
[88]Ibid., 145–46.
[89]BW-71.
[90]BW-25.

found that the "disjointedness of her story rings true, and I wonder how much of this tale was inspired by the author's life. Michelle, the character, refers to relationships that don't correlate to her age or her story within a story timeline".[91] In speaking of walls that "begin to crack" and "relationships that don't correlate", these comments suggest that the metatextual act of self-disclosure problematises vital relations between biographical details of Tea's love life and those of Michelle in the narrative. Another reader explains that although they didn't enjoy the first 150 pages (roughly equating to the end of the "San Francisco" section), their experience changed when "BAM. My perspective shifted somehow. The book kind of made me lose footing and I got really hooked";[92] the metaphor of "footing" indicating a shift in the ontological grounding of the narrative. In deconstructing the preceding narrative, this scene not only explicitly dramatises the bi-stability of the book's autofiction: it also triggers the decompression and disintegration of relations that readers have previously blended in their reading of *Black Wave*.

In terms of the thematic associations between writing and romance, this metatextual episode stages what Rebecca Evans refers to as "the *real* catastrophe at the center of Michelle's life", namely "how to write about yourself without exposing and almost certainly hurting those whom you love".[93] Through metatextual exposition, the character Michelle appears to function as a mouthpiece for author Michelle Tea, expounding that *Black Wave* is autobiographical but that, to respect the wishes of the real ex-lover, the ex-lover's identity is concealed by splitting it across three different characters. Michelle's comment that "The Person I Really Came To Los Angeles With Is Lucretia. I Actually Wrote The Whole Book With Her In It" therefore acts as a prompt for readers to construct a new blend consisting of all three girlfriend characters—Andy, Lucretia, Quinn—in order to get a sense of the single, ex-lover whom Michelle claims they all represent.

Readers appear to also seek extratextual referents for Michelle's fictional girlfriends. For instance, one reader discloses:

> I felt the absence of the intensely personal (although I hold 'Lu' responsible for that)—but I think she dealt with it so WELL. It was bonkers, in the best way. I loved that she deleted characters as she was writing about them. I love that she wrote about herself struggling to write this book.[94]

The inverted commas placed around the character's name suggest that this reader has in mind a counterpart to the fictional Lucretia in their discourse-world knowledge. "Lu" most likely represents transgender hip-hop artist Rocco "Katastrophe" Kayiatos—whom Michelle Tea is known to have dated, and whose career began in San Francisco after he won the 1998 Youth Poetry Slam—since he seems to share characteristics with both Lucretia and Quinn. Nevertheless, regardless of who this reader has in mind, their comment intimates that they have created a fourth input space, in the form of an image of the real ex-lover from their author model of Michelle Tea, to be blended with the characters of Andy, Lucretia, and Quinn. Additionally, Evans suggests that Quinn (whom Michelle has yet to meet in the 1999 of *Black Wave*) is "an edited but

[91] BW-46.
[92] BW-2.
[93] Evans, online; original emphasis.
[94] BW-58.

recognizable version of Tea's actual partner and co-parent, Dashiell",[95] a statement that discloses another new blend, combining the fictional Quinn with Dashiell Lippman to whom Michelle Tea was married from 2013.

Considering readers' comments about this pivotal scene in *Black Wave* strengthens the evidence in favour of the cognitive model I have proposed in this article. It demonstrates the dynamic nature of the blends formed in reading autofiction and the cognitive and ontological ruptures caused by autofictional metatextuality. Not only do readers create initial blends in order to interpret *Black Wave* autobiographically and autofictionally but changing information in the narrative—creating clashes between or deconstructions of blended identities and elements—can lead to decompressions as well as the generation of new blends. Each new blend adds to the stereographic imaginative experience of autofiction while fluctuations in compressing and decompressing the blend are at the root of the genre's contradictory reading strategies.

6. Conclusion

Whilst existing discussions of the doubling effect and vacillating reading strategies of autofiction were astute, they were nevertheless vulnerable to denunciation. This is because they made claims about the autofictional reading experience that were not substantiated with empirical evidence. The cognitive model proposed herein does not revoke extant critical intuitions; rather, using them as a preliminary form of reader response data, it explains and bolsters them using cognitive insights and frameworks to explicate the mental processes that underwrite the autofictional reading experience. My cognitive model combines the storyworld, Text World Theory, conceptual blending, and the person model. Since this model is derived from and tested with empirical reader response data, it offers both an evidenced based and a more nuanced account of the processes, effects, and imaginative constructions involved in reading autofiction. It shows that readers: draw correspondences between the mental representations generated by the text and their knowledge of the author; blend mental constructs in order to interpret characters as representations of real people such as the author and to comprehend the ontological duality of autofiction; and compress and decompress these blends as their sense of the ontological grounding of the narrative shifts or as the storyworld is deconstructed. Moreover, ontologically dissonant mental representations seem central to the felt effects of autofiction's duality.

During analysis, the author model was shown to be particularly valuable. It captures the rich array of personal, social, and literary knowledges related to the author that readers bring with them to any reading experience. It is also vital to readers' assessments of the autobiography or fictionality of the text and their interpretations of text-world enactors—whether in autobiography, fiction, or autofiction—as counterparts of discourse-world authors. Such interpretations, I argue, are necessarily underwritten by acts of blending. Whilst in autobiography, readers may not be aware of this process, autofiction foregrounds it through ontologically dissonant narrative information with matches and mismatches across input spaces. Dynamic compressions and decompressions of the blend in the moment-by-moment of reading explains the felt effects of

[95]Evans, online.

autofiction as simultaneously separate and combined ontologies, as double vision and as stereographic distortion, as well as the reader's shifting stance in schematic reading strategies.

The idea of narrative doubling is rife not only in accounts of autofiction but in discussions of various genres and media in which fictionality and referentiality are blurred. As such, the model proposed in this article can be applied not only to other autofictions, but also to other genres such as counterfactual fiction, other media such as photographs, and to discussions of complicated fictionality more generally.[96] Ontologically duplex narratives such as autofictions are challenging texts, both as reading experiences and as academic case studies. This is because, as one reader in my corpus puts it, "[t]here's a few different layers of reality here".[97] My analysis of the textual composition of and reader responses to Michelle Tea's *Black Wave* corroborates the explanatory power and potential of my cognitive model of reading autofiction.

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[96]Dannenberg; Haverty Rugg; Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh. These citations are examples of (non-empirical) discussions of oscillating reading strategies and doubled onotology in other text types.
[97]BW-7.

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