Kvantifikator för en Dag

Essays dedicated to Dag Westerståhl on his sixtieth birthday

Art as Meaning and Manipulation

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Abstract

Questions about the role of artist's intentions in the interpretation of art have been ubiquitous in modern aesthetics, with defenders of intentionalism often taking Paul Grice's analysis of communicative intentions as a point of departure. In this paper I distinguish Gricean intentions from different species of "manipulatory" intentions. I argue that artists typically intend to manipulate an audience rather than to be understood, and that this is just what the audience wants them to do. I further clarify the role of intentions in aesthetic interpretation by factoring interpretations into "readings" and "claims", separating different types of claim, and arguing that acts of reading are in themselves claimless.

1   Introduction

Contemporary theories of art are dominated by an intellectual approach. Works of art are meaningful entities; they exist to be understood and they are approached through interpretations. On the other hand, according to the same received wisdom, works of art do not carry messages, and interpreting them is not trying to find out what they were designed to say. Works of art are seen as autonomous objects, and if they taken as related to anyone's subjectivity it is only to the subjectivity of the receiver—the artist falls outside the equation. Many streams have contributed to this dominating current, starting, perhaps, with New Criticism and "The Intentional Fallacy", and continuing through different strands of structuralism and post-modernism.[1]

There is, of course, a counter-current. In analytical aesthetics there are many defenders of different brands of intentionalism, more or less remotely inspired, usually, by considerations from general speech-act theory or pragmatics. But they seem to share the intellectual bias of the opposing camp: meaning, understanding and interpretation are still the key concepts in the analysis of how works of art are supposed to do their thing.

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[1]Wimsatt and Beardsley (1987 [1946]), Barthes (1977 [1968])

I will align myself with the second camp in starting from an agent-action-product perspective on art, but I will take a much broader and less intellectualistic view on the types of goal that artists typically are trying to achieve in designing their works. In the process, I will find myself vindicating some of the claims made by representatives of the first camp.

2   Manipulation

To produce a work of art is to do something, or rather, if an action is defined by its purpose, it is to do many things at the same time. Many of these purposes, and perhaps some of those that are most important from the point of the agent, fall outside the scope of aesthetic reflection—like trying to be rich and famous or to impress one's friends. What is an aesthetically relevant purpose? Let me start from the simple thought that works of art are designed for the sake of a receiver: novels are made to be read, paintings and sculptures are made to be seen, music is made to be heard, films are made to be viewed, and so on. Works of art are made to influence the cognitive and emotional states of someone, an audience.

This makes art-making part of a large class of actions that we may call communicative or symbolic, in a very broad sense. One characteristic of such actions is that they involve "nested intentionality". They involve intentional states, in the phenomenological sense (states of believing, wishing, intending, etc.), that in themselves refer to further intentional states.[2] I will speak of intentionality of different "orders" according to the degree of nestedness it involves. A first order intentional state involves no nestedness at all: for example believing that there is a cat in the basket. A second order intentional state contains a reference to a first order state: for example believing that you think that there is a cat in the basket. In analogous fashion we can envisage intentional states of any order: for example, intending to make you believe that I think that you believe that there is a cat in the basket would be a 4th order intentional state.

The best known analysis of communicative actions in terms of nested intentionality is, of course, Paul Grice's theory of non-natural meaning. I will come back to that theory below, and will use it as a foil for some other notions that I want to introduce. Meaning something, in the Gricean sense involves intentionality of (at least) the 3rd order: the speaker intends that the hearer shall come to believe that the speaker has certain intentions. But I will start from something simpler that I will call "manipulation", taking its place between simple first order actions, on the level below, and "full-blown communication" on the level above.[3]

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[2]Use of this terminology in relation to actions introduces a perhaps unfortunate ambiguity in the word "intention". On the one hand we have the ordinary word "intention" which is roughly synonymous with "purpose". On the other hand we have the broader phenomenological notion, according to which ordinary intentions are just one type of intentional "act" or "state" among many others.

[3]"Full-blown communication" is Thomas Wetterström's term for Grice's non-natural meaning, or rather for

The term "manipulation" is not an entirely happy one—while it fits certain central cases quite well, it may seem to misrepresent others—but I have found no better alternative. I will present some different forms of manipulation by means of three examples, making some general observations as I go along.

2.1 The Applicant

Wearing clothes is a type of action that can have different purposes—to cover the body, or to protect against the weather, for example. Let me use the word "functions" for such non-semiotic purposes.[4] Now, suppose that one day, when I'm going to the bank to apply for a loan, I dress in a different way from what I usually do—instead of my habitual jeans, t-shirt and sweater, I put on a suit and a tie. From a functional perspective there is nothing to motivate the change—rather the reverse, as I will feel a bit uncomfortable in my disguise. So why do I wear it? In order to make a certain impression, of course, on the bank's representative—I want to be apprehended as a financially trustworthy person, someone who will be eager and able to pay off his debts. I do what I do in order to be seen in a certain way by my vis-a-vis, with my choice of dress I try to manipulate his or her beliefs and attitudes.

In this case, the word manipulation, with its negative connotations, seems particularly apt, because of the element of deception involved in my action. While the success of a "communicative" act, as we will see, depends on my intentions being disclosed to the "audience", the desired effect of the Applicant's action depends on the intention being hidden—were my audience to know the motives behind my temporary adoption of a different dress code, the effect would vanish, or even be reversed.

The possibility of such deception depends on an important phenomenon, that I will dub the *meaning-function ambiguity*. My act of wearing clothes has, apart from any manipulatory purposes, a purely functional motivation. I wear clothes to cover my body, and the semiotic intention, the meaning, attaches to the function as something extra. Now, as the function in itself is sufficient motivation for my act, I need not openly avow my manipulatory intention.[5] The function acts, as Barthes would say, as an *alibi* for the semiotic intention.

Note also, that here we have not only something that might be called a message, something the agent wants a receiver to pick up as the result of his action, but also a *carrier* or *vehicle* of the intended meaning. The Applicant's action involves *displaying* something, the dress, from

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the concept that Grice's notion can most reasonably be taken to explicate.

[4] The term is from Roland Barthes, as is the general spirit, though not the details, of the example.

[5] It may, perhaps be objected that the function motivates my wearing clothes, but not my wearing this particular set of clothes. But what I want my adversary to think is that the clothes I wear is my unmarked choice, the "natural" thing for me to wear—I want him or her to take my dress as a natural, not as an intended, sign of my economic status and my social habits.

which he wants his audience to infer to something else, a certain financial status.[6] In fact, any human action may, through a process that I will call "semantization", take on an extra symbolic dimension. While my primary intention in chopping wood is, usually, to produce firewood, I may also do it in order to manifest that I do it—perhaps with the further intention of demonstrating that I fulfill my share of household responsibilities, or to show off my manual labor skills. The behavior that serves the function of getting firewood is simultaneously displayed in an act of manipulation—the woodchopper intends his behavior not only to *be* a case of chopping wood, but also to be *seen-as* such. In many cases of conventional and cooperative actions this semiotic dimension is essential to the primary act being successfully performed—the consequences that should attach to it, by convention and/or by the subsequent actions of other agents, can only take place if it is made clear that the act *has* been performed.[7]

2.2   The Photo

In "Meaning", Paul Grice compares a photograph and a drawing, with the same pictorial content, to clarify the contrast between "natural" and "non-natural" meaning.[8] In both cases we are to imagine the picture showing a "Mr. Y. displaying undue familiarity to Mrs. X." The actions whose meaning we are asked to contemplate is showing the photo and the drawing, respectively, to Mr. X, with the intention of getting him to believe that "there is something between Mr. Y and Mrs. X." Only in the case of the drawing, says Grice, can this count as non-naturally meaning something.

> What is the difference between the two cases? Surely that in the case of [the photograph] Mr. X's recognition of my intention to make him believe that there is something between Mr. Y and Mrs. X is (more or less) irrelevant to the production of this effect by the photograph. Mr. X would be led by the photograph at least to suspect Mrs. X even if, instead of showing it to him, I had left it in his room by accident; and I (the photograph shower) would not be unaware of this. But it will make a difference to the effect of [the drawing] on Mr. X whether or not he takes me to be intending to inform him (make him believe something) about Mrs. X, and not to be just doodling or trying to produce a work of art. (Grice 1989, 218)

I will come back to Grice's notion of non-natural meaning, below, but for the moment I am only interested in the photographic side of the contrast. Clearly, we have here another case of manipulation, in the defined sense—an act of displaying something to Mr. X with the

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[6]As we will see, there may be manipulation without display, however.

[7]This is why the form of of many conventional actions is ritualized, and also why there are in many cases special agencies with the task of deciding whether the action has been performed, in cases of doubt.

[8]Grice (1989 [1948, 1957])

intention of influencing his intentional state, viz., getting him to believe something. The main difference between the Applicant and the Photo, is that in the latter case there is no deception involved—the intended effect does not depend on the manipulatory intention being *hidden* from the audience, it is just *independent* of it.[9]

The structure of this example, of course, is not odd or peripheral—it is the typical structure of a very important form of manipulation, namely the giving of *evidence*. In contradistinction to *telling* someone something and expecting him to take my word for it, which is the archetypal case of gricean meaning$_{NN}$, in supplying evidence I display the facts and expect him to draw his own conclusions.[10] (Of course, one common way of "displaying" the facts, is to *tell* my audience what they are, and so an act of full gricean "communication" may be the *means* for accomplishing an act of "manipulation". This is a form of "chaining" of significations—I will discuss chaining below.)

2.3 Film Music

Motion films supply a multitude of examples of manipulatory techniques, often differing in informative ways from those we have already considered. Consider the use of music to affect the viewers mood—to frighten, to startle, to soothe. Clearly this is a means of manipulation, in the indicated sense: something intended to affect the intentional states of someone.[11] How does it differ from the Applicant and the Photo?

One salient difference is that there seems to be no *display* involved, or at least not in the same sense. The audience is, of course, expected to *hear* the music, but they are not expected to *attend* to it. And not even in the weakest sense is the intended effect intended to be reached by any form of *inference*, from features of what is heard to something else. The effect is, so to speak, intended to be more direct; the music is a *means* for accomplishing the effect, but it is not a *signifier*. The same thing goes for many other cinematographic effects, for example

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[9]Independent in principle, that is. In practice there may be some complications. If the audience suspects the sender of a bias, consciousness of the senders intentions may weaken the effect of the evidence presented. If the audience, on the other hand, has trust in the sender, consciousness of the senders intentions may strengthen the effect.

[10]The Applicant, in a way, works by the same mechanism—I intend my audience to take my dress as evidence of my financial status—but the evidence is "fabricated". One might be tempted to say that I lie, and use the functional alibi to escape from blame. Note however that I need not be lying in the sense that I try to make my addressee believe something that I, the sender, believe to be false—I may very well be the person I want to be taken to be. In that case, my dishonesty will consist only in trying to make my addressee arrive at a true conclusion by way of false reasoning.

[11]If you are inclined not to think of moods as intentional states, you may think the example less clear. I will bypass those worries, for the moment—they can be answered either by arguing for the intentional status of moods, or by slightly changing the example.

cutting techniques. "Accelerating cuts" may be used to impart a sense of acceleration and breakneck speed to the events portrayed, but, again, the transference from features of the film to features of the action is not one of inference.

What about the importance of the manipulatory intention being hidden or revealed? The tricks of movie making are no secret to many spectators, but that does not stop them from working their magic—or does it? It seems as if the achievement of the intended effect is to some extent impaired by too vivid a consciousness of the intention to produce the effect, and of the means employed. What makes a "turkey" into a turkey is not only that it is generally bad, but that it constantly reminds the spectator of what it is trying to accomplish, and thereby of its failure to do so.

3   Communication

There is a lot more to be said about manipulation, and I will soon come back to it, but first I want to introduce another concept, for which I henceforth reserve the term "communication". Most of what is interesting about manipulation comes out best when it is considered in contrast to communication. As already hinted, I will lean heavily, for this notion, on Paul Grice's ideas about non-natural meaning. Grice has extended and modified his account on many occasions, to fend off or accommodate various criticisms. I will come back to one of his later and more elaborate versions of it in a moment, but I will first use the simpler original idea to indicate the place of Grice's conception in the hierarchy of intentional orders. Grice means to capture a notion of someone meaning something by uttering something which is prominently involved in ordinary linguistic communication. He argues extensively that, in this context, it is not enough for the utterer to intend to influence the audience in a certain way, the utterer must also intend the audience to grasp that intention and *thereby* to be influenced in the intended way. In Grice's own words

"U meant something by uttering x" is true iff, for some audience A, U uttered x intending:

(1) A to produce a particular response r

(2) A to think (recognize) that U intends (1)

(3) A to fulfill (1) on the basis of his fulfillment of (2).[12]

As I said, Grice's original analysis has been subjected to a number of counterexamples and criticisms, that have caused him to modify it in various ways. I will look at one such modification, inspired by John Searle's example of the false German officer. Searle wants us to imagine an American soldier being caught by Italians during the war in North Africa. In the

[12]Grice (1989, 92)

hope of making his captors think that he is a German officer, the American utters the only German sentence he remembers from school: "Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen." Running through the clauses of Grice's definition we seem to be led to the conclusion that the American not only means something by his utterance, but that he actually means that he is a German officer.[13] That conclusion is obviously absurd, thinks Searle, and he suggest modifying the definition by a clause demanding that the utterance x shall be of a kind conventionally used to elicit responses of the type r. This suggestion is not approved by Grice, of course, as it seems to reduce to nil his aspiration to use, at a later stage, the notion of utterer's meaning to analyze what conventional meaning is. But he acknowledges the need to make explicit the features of the utterance by means of which A is intended to identify the intended response. The resulting definition is considerably longer than the one given earlier, but I shall give it in full, because it provides a number of handles for comparisons I want to make with regard to manipulation:

Range of variables:

A: audiences

f: features of utterance

r: responses

c: modes of correlation (such as iconic, associative, conventional)

$(\exists A)(\exists f)(\exists r)(\exists c) : U$ uttered x intending

(1) A to think x possesses f

(2) A to think U intends (1)

(3) A to think of f as correlated in way c with the type to which r belongs

(4) A to think U intends (3)

(5) A to think on the basis of the fulfillment of (1) and (3) that U intends A to produce r

(6) A on the basis of fulfillment of (5), to produce r

(7) A to think U intends (6)[14]

I will not go into how Grice thinks this analysis takes care of Searle's counterexample, but I will give a number of comments on the analysis, before I go on to suggest some variations of it, to cover the different types of manipulation.

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[13]As it stands, the definition only says what is is to mean something in general, but Grice's intention is that meaning different things shall be distinguished by differences in the response R. In Searle's case the intended response is that the audience shall come to believe that the utterer is a German officer.

[14]Grice (1989, 103-4)

a) What is it to "utter" something? In the context of spoken language it is natural to think of uttering as producing: U produces an utterance with the help of his vocal apparatus, for the benefit of his audience. But outside the context of speech this is too restricted, and I will continue to use the notion of "display" instead—to display something is to make it accessible to someone, but not necessarily by producing it. This is needed not only to cover cases like the Applicant, where non-semiotic material is pressed into semiotic service, but many cases of more ordinary communication as well—much of modern mass communication is effected by means of "readymades" of different kinds: pictures, music, words and personalities that are reused again and again, for different purposes.

b) In passing, I want to note the slot being reserved, in the definition, for different "modes of correlation" between features of what is displayed and the response. Grice gives a few examples of such modes, but in fact there is room for a rich variety, which to a large extent crosses the present division of meanings, in terms of intentional level. I have discussed this in some detail elsewhere, and will not go systematically into it here.[15]

c) What does it mean that A shall do or think something "on the basis" of various conditions being fulfilled? For Grice, this has to do with *reasons*—the various beliefs intended to be induced by the utterance shall be reasons for A to produce the response, not "mere" causes. As we will see, the same reading will fit a family of manipulations, while other types of manipulation seem to demand a causal reading of the corresponding clauses.

3.1   Rational vs. causal manipulation

What makes Grice's notion of meaning into a species of communication, in the present sense, is contained in the clauses (2), (4), (5) and (6), each demanding that A shall recognize some of U's intentions. What happens if we simply remove these clauses, that refer to the audience's intended grasp of the utterer's intentions, and modify the rest accordingly? We get a species of manipulation instead—I will call it "rational manipulation", to be distinguished from "causal manipulation", which will be introduced later. With the same range of variables and the same quantification as above, U's act of displaying x is a case of *rational manipulation* if and only if

U displayed x intending

(1) A to think x possesses f

(2) A to think of f as correlated in way c with the type to which r belongs

(3) A on the basis of fulfillment of (1) and (2), to produce r.

This seems to fit both the Applicant and the Photo like a glove. The Applicant displays his dress to his audience, intending that the audience shall recognize it as belonging to a

[15]Cf. Carlshamre (2003).

certain kind, that he shall recognize this kind as habitually correlated with a certain kind of financial and social status of its bearer, and on the basis of this come to believe that the Applicant possesses this kind of status. Someone displays the Photo to Mr. X, intending him to recognize is as a photo of Mrs. X and another man in a certain situation, further intending him to think of this sort of situation as being connected to the existence of a certain sort of relationship between the parties involved, and thereby coming to believe that Mrs. X and Mr. Y stand in a relationship of that sort.

What about the phenomena of deception and alibi, that we discussed in relation to the Applicant? Clearly, a case of rational manipulation is deceptive if U does not himself believe that x *has* f and that *f is correlated by means of c to r*, or (in case r is a belief) if he believes r to be false. But can it be deceptive in other ways? Yes, it can. U may believe in his message and its premises, intend A to believe in it, too, but at the same time realizing that if A saw U's act as a display conveying a message he might *less* inclined believe it. So U uses the structure of the alias to conceal the nature of his action as a manipulation. For example, The Applicant may really have the status he wants to be seen as having, but still not want his audience to see his choice of dress as a manipulatory display, thinking that this would undermine his (truthful) message.

Our third example of manipulation, Film Music, seems to be of an altogether different sort. In rational manipulation everything happens *modulo* A:s intentionality—A is to *think* that x has f, *think* that f and r are connected in a certain way, and by *inference* come to produce r. In the case of Film Music everything takes place *modulo* reality. The music is intended to *really possess* certain features, that shall *really give rise* to a certain response in A. U's effecting of x is a case of *causal manipulation* if and only if

> U effected x intending
>
> (1) x to possess f
>
> (2) f to be causally correlated with the type to which r belongs
>
> (3) A because of the fulfillment of (1) and (2) to produce r.

"Effect" is meant be more general than "display", to be read on the lines of "bringing x to bear" on A, without necessarily intending that A shall note or attend to x.

4   Art as communication, manipulation and action

I have spent some time developing a terminological and conceptual apparatus. I now want to put that apparatus to work, in order to give some hints that it may be useful for understanding something. My examples will have to do with meaning and function in art—and by art I do

not primarily mean High Art, the latest thing, but ordinary art-like things like novels, films, pictures that many people "consume" as part of their daily life. I also want to say something about the relation between the understanding that scholars seek of art, and the enjoyment that ordinary readers, spectators and listeners expect to get out of it. What I have to say will not be lengthy and detailed, but sketchy and general.

4.1 Art as willed manipulation

The first thing I want to say about the place of art in my scheme of things, is that most of the action takes place on the level of *manipulation*. As we will see, and as is perhaps obvious, there is a lot of (intransitive) action and full-blown communication involved as well—but the really important stuff, the *raison d'être* of it all, is manipulation. Having said that, I hasten to add that not any old manipulation will do, and that now, if not before, we must eradicate any remaining trace of a negative charge in the term "manipulation". Art is *willed* manipulation—willed by the "patient" undergoing it. We read books, go to the movies or to exhibitions in order to be manipulated. We may know some of the tricks that will be played upon us, while we are ignorant of others, but we try to do our part in making the magic work—we try to be in the mood, turn out the lights on disturbances, and so forth.

Some of that manipulation is *rational* manipulation. Objects, situations, trains of events are displayed to us, in order that we shall we shall *reason* from them, go from parts to wholes, from the particular to the general, or the reverse, go from cause to effect or from effect to cause, go from fact to value, and find the *sense moral*. These are the things that we talk about in the café afterwards, and these are the things that "interpretations" are generally about. But art would not be such a popular thing if that was all there was to it. We read books and go to the movies to laugh and cry, to be happy or angry, to feel the suspense, to be aroused, to be scared and then to relax again. And much of the manipulation that does this to us goes on behind our backs, it is *causal* manipulation—the artist skillfully using her knowledge of which buttons to push.

4.2 Impact and understanding

If we start investigating art from the perspective of communication, we may come to take it for granted that the primary goal of the agent producing a work of art is to be *understood*. But if instead we start from the more general perspective of action and manipulation we see that this is not generally true, and indeed that the primary goal of the audience is not to understand either.

In the case of a simple first order action like chopping wood, it is easy to distinguish the *impact* of the action on the piece of wood, from the *understanding* an observer may have of the

action. To understand the action is to know its purpose, from the perspective of the agent, but the purpose of the action is not to be understood. To understand is what the *observer* does, not what the "object" or the "patient", does. The woodchopper attacks the wood with certain intentions in mind, he wants to have a certain *impact* on the wood—but he doesn't expect the wood to be aware of these intentions. In the same way we must, for a given type of manipulation distinguish the *impact*—whether the *intended* impact, the *real* impact, or the *requested* impact—of the action from the patient's *understanding* of the act. In general, understanding is not part of the intended impact, nor a means for it. Sometimes, as in deceitful manipulation, with the structure of the alibi, it may be part of the agents intention that the patient shall *not* understand his act. In other cases, understanding is a neutral extra, not having much influence on the impact either way—the consumer of a horror story is usually aware of the intention to scare him, but that awareness plays no part in producing the fear. And, of course, if the real impact does not match the intended impact, that is not misunderstanding, on the part of the audience, but failure on the part of the artist.

One way to see the distinction between impact and understanding is to note a limitation on the commonplace analogy between the viewing of pictures and movies, on the one hand, and the reading of texts, on the other hand. Think, for example, of the often invoked need for a raising of the "literacy" of the audience with regard to visual media. In fact, the function of "literacy" in the case of viewing is totally different from the case of reading. In the case of a text, knowing how to read is necessary in order pick up the basic message of the text—the intended impact presupposes the literacy of the audience. In the case of a picture, "literacy", as it is usually conceived, is rather a means of defense against the impact of the picture—understanding the intentions and the devices of picture-making is supposed to give you, the audience, more control over how picture affects you. "Reading" the picture is not to decipher its intended message, it is to disclose what you were not meant to understand.

4.3   Chaining

The examples, and the general drift of the discussion, may indicate that manipulation is primarily a mode of non-verbal signification. As such it may seem unlikely to throw much light on literature, the verbal art. This suspicion could be dispelled in two ways. One way would be to demonstrate that much verbal signification is in fact not communication, in the full gricean sense—that can be argued, I think, but I will not go into it here. The other way would be to argue that much of the meaning of literature is in fact non-verbal—and I will offer some brief pointers in that direction.

The key to understanding how this can be the case is the notion of *chaining*. By chaining I understand the phenomenon that the display for one act of meaning something may be accomplished by another signifying act. A simple example is ordinary quotation, where you

report somebody else's word, thereby giving access to the original speakers display of them, but chaining is, in fact, an all-pervasive phenomenon, involved in every linguistic event. What is it to write something? Here's a sketch:

> I scratch some marks, to have them counted-as letters of the Latin alphabet, to have them counted-as an English word, to have that word counted-as expressing a certain concept, thereby to be taken as referring to a certain object, as part of expressing a certain proposition, as part of performing a certain speech act: e.g., *stating* that p, in order that someone should believe that p, with the further intention that he or she should conclude that r from that p (by means of correlation c) ...

Just as we bypass the details of Gavrilo Princip's bending of his finger, when describing his action as a killing of the Arch-Duke, we may bypass the phrasing of an author when saying that he indicated the character of a personality by means of a significant episode. And just like Princip could have effected the killing by other means, and might not even have used a gun, the director of the corresponding film may use the same episode for the same purpose, without uttering a word.

My suggestion, then, is that the layer of signification generally most relevant to reading and interpreting literature lies beyond the verbal level—what is displayed is a train of situations and events, and the readers task is to make something out of them.

4.4   Interpretation: reading and claim

It is often taken for granted that intention-based theories of meaning, for example of the gricean kind, are opposed to theories that emphasize socially shared codes, conventions and languages. But the opposition is spurious. In a full account of meaning and interpretation, considerations of convention and intention are supplementary rather than opposed. The sender must rely on some means to get his intentions across to the addressee, and in a large class of cases the means will involve a readiness on the part of the addressee to apply a relevant code to a signifier, to what the sender displays. On the other hand, application of a particular code, to what may be taken as a signifier, always requires a motivation, and in many cases the motivation is supplied by the intentions of the sender. It would be impossible to understand this sentence without recourse to the semantics of English, but it is my intention to write in English that motivates the application of that semantics. The code determines the relevant content for the signifier, but the intention determines the relevant code.[16]

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[16]There are deeper levels to be fathomed, of course, with regard to the possible connections between intentions, intentionality and language. To the extent, at least, to which it is true that we think in particular languages, it seems that the relevant language not only supplies a content to the publicly displayed signifier, but also to the supporting intention itself. That is, however, the theme for another day.

In defiance of the idea that interpretation involves the intentions of the author, it is often pointed out that one may read a text without knowing anything beyond the text itself about what the author was trying to achieve. One possible reply, of course, would be that any hypothesis about what a text means *is* an hypothesis about the author's intentions—irrespective of the amount and the kind of evidence on which it is based. To this, again, it may be retorted that one may also read in explicit opposition to what one takes to be the author's intended meaning. This possibility is hard to deny, and ruling it out on normative grounds still leaves the question about what it is that such a counter-reading does.

It seems that each side to this dispute has a valid point to defend. As often in similar cases, one would expect to find an overlooked distinction at the heart of the matter. I want to argue that an "interpretation" generally combines two components: a *reading* and a *claim*, on behalf of that reading.[17]

Readings first. Building on the gricean type of analysis employed above, we may think of a text, in a very generalized sense, as an object comprising a set of *features* that give rise to a set of *responses* in a "reader" via various *modes of correlation*. The structure of features and responses will, more often than not, be multi-leveled, leading to *chains* of features and responses. For example, a collection of *visual* features will be taken as indicating a sequence of *graphemes* in some alphabet, the graphemes will be taken as comprising a sequence of *words*, the words will be assigned *meaning* and *reference*, some of the meaningful expressions constructed in this way will be taken as *metaphors* for yet other contents, a *story* will be imagined, which will in turn be taken as an *example* of a more general phenomenon, or as an *allegory* or a *parable*, and so forth.

Metaphorically, we may think of each text as an hypertext: as a collection of links, leading to other links or to "terminals". A reading is an assignment of values to the links, a claim is an assertion concerning the status of a reading. Or, we may think of the activity of reading as a recursive procedure, which at each stage "first" identifies possible links and modes of correlation in a given text-object, either the initial text or something given through an earlier stage of the reading, and "then" assigns values to the links, producing a new text-object for the next reading stage, until all the chains have terminated.[18]

What about claims, then? I said that a claim is an assertion about the status of a reading, but what does that mean? The key observation is that readings, as defined, are not in themselves subject to cognitive evaluation: in particular, they are not *true* or *false*, *correct* or *incorrect*. When I say of an interpretation that it is correct or incorrect, plausible or implausible, I cannot be taken as referring only to a reading, but to an associated claim, for example the claim that

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[17]I also discuss the distinction between reading and claim in (Carlshamre 2003, 120-5).

[18]The horror quotes around "first" and "next" are meant to indicate that there is no implication of a temporal order, but only of a certain logical dependency.

this is the reading (or a reading) that the author intended.

The generalized gricean approach I have taken to signification, in itself introduces a tension between two different types of claim. When taking something to be a sign, whether of a manipulative or a communicative variety, I take it that there exists an intended reading of it, and I may claim of a certain reading that I put forward, that it *is* that intended reading. But the notion of a sign also contains the idea of a mode of correlation by means of which the audience is supposed to travel from features of the sign to the target. Now, it may well be that the audience, using its own background assumptions, although departing from the intended features and traveling via the intended mode of correlation will arrive at an unintended target. For example, the speaker may have a less than perfect grasp of the language he intends to speak, and so happen to say something that according to the rules of that language means something other than what he intended to say, and this may, in turn, be obvious to the audience—as in Davidson's "nice derangement of epitaphs". In this case, the audience will generate two different readings, claiming one to be the intended reading and the other to fit the intended mode of correlation. Clearly, both claims may be true, and there is no point in arguing about which reading is "really" correct.

In ordinary linguistic communication, the intended reading always takes precedence, in cases of conflict. The whole point of such interactions, from the perspectives of both interlocutors, revolves around revealing/finding out what the sender intends. Institutionalized language, in this context, is only a tool to make communication possible, and when it gets in the way it is readily abandoned.[19]

In Saussure's terms, linguistic expressions, in their basic use, are "arbitrary" signs; they serve no other interesting purpose than to express thoughts. Other modes of correlation are less arbitrary, and gives rise to "motivated" signs. Consider the Photo: the person displaying the photo intends Mr. X to believe that it is caused by a situation of intimacy between his wife and Mr. Y, and that this situation is, in turn, part of an undue relationship between the two. Mr. X may well understand the sender's intention, and in this sense grasp the intended message, while at the same time denying the reality of one or both of the relevant correlations. He may, for example, believe the picture to be the result of the sender's evil machinations in Photoshop, or the intimate situation to be part of a theatrical performance. In this case, the intended meaning will, clearly, not take precedence: Mr. X will stick to the reading that he takes to be "really" induced by the mode of correlation.[20]

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[19]There are, of course, other uses of language where the situation is different. There are literary practices, for example, that involve experimenting with linguistic forms without precise preconceived ideas about what is to be expressed. Extreme cases are, perhaps, the "automatic writing" cherished by surrealists, or the, locally infamous, Swedish book of poetry *Camera obscura* from 1949—reportedly made by pulling words at random from a hat.

[20]I.e., Mr. X will not, as his response, produce the belief which the sender intends, but will stick to the

For other cases of motivated significations, conflicts between intended and "real" readings may produce more balanced situations.[21] An allegorical reading of a story, for example, may be independently interesting without being intended, and without subduing another, intended, allegory.

So, a reading may be associated with a claim to match the sender's intended reading, or with a claim to match the reality of the mode of correlation—or both, of course, when a sender is taken to be both sincere and successful. But these are not the only sorts of claim that can be, and are, made for readings. In reception studies, for example, readings are presented with the claim that they match readings produced by specific audiences. I cannot write the history of neo-Confucianism without indicating how certain passages from the *Analects* were read by leading philosophers of the day, like the Cheng brothers or Wang Yang-ming. It may be possible and necessary to elaborate such readings in great detail, with reference to subtle features of the text, without claiming them to match neither Confucius's intentions nor any reality of the modes of correlation, but only that they correspond to how later philosophers read them—philosophers who, to be sure, may themselves have claimed their readings to be in harmony both with Confucius's intentions and with the things themselves.

There are many ways to sort claims into more abstract categories, of course, but the following three groups seem to to me to be of special importance, from a methodological point of view:

a) *Truth claims*. Most of the claims used as examples above are truth claims: they claim that a proposed reading corresponds to some independent reality—the author's intentions, the reading of some specified audience, the reality of an indicated mode of correlation. As such they can be cognitively evaluated: the claim itself is true or false. Among the truth claims I include *falsity claims*, claims to the effect that a certain reading does *not* match some specified reality (that this is *not* what the author intended, etc.); and I also include *plausibility claims*, when these are taken as guarded truth claims, i.e., as claims that it is plausible or probable to some degree that a certain reading is true or false to some independent reality.[22]

b) *Value claims*. Readings may not only be more or less true or correct, in relation to some external truth-maker, they may also be interesting, elegant, make "good sense", be funny or boring, and so forth. Claims that readings exhibit such values, to some degree, or that certain readings score better or worse than other readings in such evaluative dimensions—that they "make better sense" or are more interesting, as the case may be—I will call value claims.

beliefs he takes to be warranted by the sign itself.

[21] A "real" reading is a reading where the reader takes the mode of correlation *modulo* reality, rather than *modulo* the sender's intentions.

[22] Joseph Margolis has suggested that interpretations shall be evaluated for plausibility, rather than truth, in a sense where "plausible" does not mean "plausibly true". If I understand him correctly, such claims to plausibility *sui generis* will fall into my third group below.

Such claims can, of course, be conjoined with truth claims of various kind, either as mere additions or as parts of arguments for other claims: if you think highly of a certain author, the fact that a certain reading of her work makes better sense than another can make it more plausible to attribute it to her as the intended reading; or conversely, one may be reluctant to ascribe a very sophisticated reading of a passage to an author whom one takes to be incapable of comprehending or coming up with it.

c) *Possibility claims*. A reading may be presented without any associated truth or value claim, nothing more being asserted of it than that it is a *possible* reading. At its most abstract this would be tantamount to a zero claim: the mere presentation of a reading demonstrates that it is, in a sense, possible. In more interesting cases it is not abstract possibility which is asserted, but possibility meeting certain, explicit or presupposed, constraints. Relevant constraints may include, for example, consistency, coherence, inherent plausibility,[23] freedom from anachronism in relation to the situation in which the text-object was produced, respect for the conventions of a specific language or genre, etc. Just like value claims, possibility claims (and impossibility claims) may be raised on their own, but also as parts of a larger argumentation. As a preliminary to discussing the claim that a certain reading actually matches the author's intention, one may need to get it into the race by showing it to meet certain *sine qua non* constraints on readings that he or she may possibly have had in mind; as a preliminary to an argument that a certain reading is the *best* reading of a certain kind, one may have to show that it meets the general constraints for being of that kind.[24]

I introduced the notions of reading and claim as two, usually not clearly distinguished, components in what is generally called an interpretation. In line with this, there are two groups of questions to be answered in connection with any proposed interpretation.

First: What reading is proposed? If it is incompletely specified: how can it be elaborated? What is taken as the text-object and what features of it are taken as significant, according to what modes of correlation? How does the reading of specific features and elements relate to the reading of the whole?

Second: What claims are made on behalf of that reading? How can they be justified?[25] When it comes to aesthetic readings, the associated claims are often implicit and sometimes

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[23] If a reading assigns assertions about reality to the text-object, these assertions may, of course, be evaluated for their truth or falsity. The plausibility of a reading in this dimension is its "inherent plausibility", to be distinguished from its plausibility as a reading in relation to some truth-claim.

[24] Jerrold Levinson (1999) distinguishes between "determinative interpretations" and "explorative interpretations". These categories bear an obvious resemblance to my "truth claims" and "possibility claims", respectively. Levinson, however, does not note the various parameters that allow for many distinctions within each class, making the labels into determinables rather than determinates.

[25] Just as readings and claims are not often distinguished, in discussions about interpretations, one usually does not distinguish the *elaboration* of readings from the *justification* of claims. Cf. Carlshamre (2003, 121-2)

ambiguous or unclear. Particularly graphic examples are often supplied by psychoanalytic interpretations. While it may be entirely clear how such an interpretation reads (certain elements of) a story, for example, taking certain actions ascribed to certain fictional characters as signs of unresolved conflicts or repressed motives on the part of the characters—it may be left entirely unclear what is claimed for that reading. Is it claimed to be in line with the author's intentions, conscious or unconscious, as the case may be? Or is it based on features singled out as significant by psychoanalytic theory, taken as true, connected to the indicated targets by generalizations of that theory? Or is it claimed to be in line with some conscious or unconscious reading by some specified or unspecified audience?[26]

Given that claims are often tacitly presupposed, rather than explicitly stated and defended—how can they be recovered? The most natural suggestion is to look at the arguments adduced and accepted for or against an interpretation: the claim should be reconstructed so as to make these arguments relevant to the highest possible degree. I think that the debate about intentionalism in literary theory should be taken in this spirit: as concerning the rational reconstruction of the claims implicit in ordinary literary criticism. For example, if biographical evidence about the author, extraneous to the text, is taken as relevant for judging the merits of a suggested interpretation, this points to the relevant claim being in line with "actual intentionalism". On the other hand, if such evidence is deliberately shunned, it indicates some other type of claim. "Hypothetical intentionalism" would be the hypothesis that the claims relevant to ordinary critical discussion is not a truth claim, as actual intentionalists would have it, but a combination of a possibility claim and a value claim: one is looking for *best* reading compatible with the constraints of being *possibly* intended by the author.

There is, of course, no guarantee that actual debates over interpretations are in all cases coherent, in the sense that it would be possible, in each case, to specify one claim to which all presented arguments are relevant. For example, in a large-scale attempt to chart different types of interpretation, Göran Hermerén (Hermerén 1984) seems to come to the conclusion that validity of aesthetic interpretation is *sui generis*, being a sort of weighted sum of arguments relevant to different questions. More clarity, though, could surely be had by discussing separate things separately, and making claims explicit, whenever doubts may arise.

4.5   Reading: act and structure

Earlier, I stressed the importance of distinguishing, with regard to audiences, between impact and understanding. In this connection, I pointed to the tendency to draw an overly intellectualistic picture of the reactions of audiences to signifying objects, like films, books and

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[26]This, I suppose, is the most charitable way to take, e.g., Bruno Bettelheim's readings of fairy tales: as explications of readings that form part of the unconscious impact that the tales have had on its audience over the centuries.

pictures, ignoring, e.g., emotional and visceral elements of those reactions that may constitute an important part of the impact (both intended, requested and real) without being the object of any understanding. How does the notion of impact relate to the concept of a reading, outlined in the previous section?

To answer that question, I need to discuss the relation between readings, in the sense previously introduced, and acts of reading: I need to explain what it is to read (verb) according to a reading (noun). A reading (noun), as defined, is an abstract structure: an assignment of signifying features, modes of correlation and responses to a text-object. As such that structure may be indicated in several ways: it may, e.g., be explicitly described or it may be implicit in an act of reading.[27]

To actually read something, on the other hand, is to *live* the relevant responses, guided by the relevant features, according to the relevant modes of correlation: the reader actually produces a series of beliefs, imaginings, contemplations, feelings etc. prompted by features of the text-object. In the normal course of things, the act (or an act) of reading comes first; the reading-structure may then be (partly) extracted in the form of a description or a paraphrase, if the need should arise. But the order may also be reversed: an abstract reading may be specified for a text-object, for example in a scholarly article, which is only later, or maybe never, realized in anyone's actual reading experience.[28]

With these distinctions in hand, we are in the position to say something about different types of conflict and incompatibility between interpretations. The simplest case is where we have conflicting *claims* with regard to the same reading, one denying what the other asserts: that a certain reading was intended by the author, for example, or that it is in line with a certain linguistic usage.

Can readings themselves be incompatible? Yes, they can: two readings may be mutually *exclusive* in the sense that they cannot be realized in the same act of reading. An instructive comparison (or, in fact, an example) is supplied by ambiguous pictures, like the duck-rabbit. As the duck-rabbit proves, there is nothing contradictory in a picture *being* a duck-picture and a rabbit-picture at the same time. But the picture cannot be *seen* as a duck-picture and as a rabbit-picture at the same time: the two readings perceptually exclude one another.

Not all different readings of the same text-object must be exclusive, however. One reading may, in at least two different ways, form *part* of another reading. First, one reading may be an *elaboration* of another: it may be more detailed, taking more features into account, while preserving both the details and the general structure of the less elaborate version. Second, one

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[27] Or it may be given by a paraphrase, by another text-object sharing some, but not all, of the same semiotic properties. I will not go into the notion of a paraphrase here, however.

[28] Margaretha Rossholm-Lagerlöf (2003) discusses the relation between scholarly interpretations of an artwork and the scholar's subjective encounter with the work. In my terminology that discussion is, mostly, about the relation between abstracted reading-structures and the acts of reading upon which they are based.

reading may be *based on* another reading: the signifying features of the supervening reading are made available through the targets of the supporting reading. An allegorical reading of a story, for example, is based on "earlier" readings of a text-object on various levels to establish the story itself.[29]

Now, how does the exclusiveness of readings interact with the incompatibility of claims? Clearly, there is no problem with exclusive readings associated with different claims. It may easily be true, for example, that an author intended a certain reading of a text; while a certain historical audience in fact reads it in a second way, exclusive of the intended reading; while, perhaps, certain linguistic and aesthetic conventions plausibly would lead to a third reading, exclusive of both the second and the first. This would not even warrant us to talk of "ambiguity". Ambiguity, in a normal sense, is the case where exclusive readings are correctly correlated with the same type of claim. If a sender intends a text to be read in both, or either one, of two exclusive ways, it is sender ambiguous. If the same system of linguistic conventions allows two different readings of the same text-object, it is conventionally ambiguous, etc.

I have argued that what is usually known as an interpretation should ideally be factored into a reading and a claim. I have also argued that readings may be realized in acts of reading. What about claims? Are they also implicitly present in acts of reading? Though the question may be partly terminological, I would argue that they are not. An act of reading does not have to embody any claim at all. When I read a book, watch a film, see a picture, it is perfectly possible that I just flow along with the reading, live the responses, without any awareness, however implicit, of what would make it correct, justified or valuable to read in that way. Indeed, as a matter of phenomenological fact, one might even go further and point out that we are often only dimly aware of a reading *as* a reading at all: the signifier effaces itself in favor of the signification.

That said, it is also true that acts of reading may be sensitive to various sorts of explicit or presupposed claims and ambitions. If it is pointed out to me that my reading is not in line with some standard that I would accept, I may want to adjust it accordingly.[30] Still, I think it more appropriate to say, even in such cases, that the claim or the ambition are not *part* of the

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[29]In some way, it seems that supervening readings push supporting readings to the background; this is a special case of the phenomenological fact that signifiers generally are out of focus, not attended to, as one reads them for their significance. This is not the same thing, however, as exclusion—and the phenomenon is probably less pervasive in the case of works of art, due to their "repleteness", in Nelson Goodman's sense (Goodman 1976, 230)

[30]That I *want* to adjust it does not always guarantee, however, that I also succeed in that ambition. I do not always have full control over how I read, and a certain reading may impose itself so strongly on me that it is difficult or impossible to block it out or change it, although I may be convinced that it is wrong, according to a standard that I wish to follow.

act of reading, but are situated on a meta-level with regard to that act, that they are *about* the act rather than part of it.

That acts of readings are in themselves claimless, nicely explains another source of resistance to the various forms of intentionalism in interpretation theory: namely, that in the act of reading there is usually no focus on, or even awareness of, the subjectivity of the author. That this is so, however, does not rule out that presentation of a reading for evaluation, argument and discussion always involves making some claim with regard to it, and that there may be reason to think that the relevant claim in many cases is, or should be, intentionalistic.

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