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The Varieties of Interpretation. A View from Semiotics[1]

Göran Sonesson

"The individual speech act (in the strict sense of 'individual') is a *contradictio in adjecto*"
Voločinov 1986

As any other taxonomy, that of interpretation is relative to our understanding of the original concept which we are about to divide (which is not to say that it is automatically generated by it); and our understanding of the original concept depends largely on the general theoretical framework within which we place ourselves. This is no doubt a trivial observation; but when you find yourself in a company (as the present author did) in which you are the only one not sharing certain assumptions, you will become acutely aware of it. The present essay constitutes an attempt to present the semiotical stance and its consequences for the taxonomy of interpretation; its aim is to show that the issues opposing semiotics to the kind of interpretation theory holding sway in countries dominated by Anglo-Saxon philosophy are not those which they are usually presumed to be; and also to offer some arguments for the advantage of the semiotic approach.

In order to explain the position taken by semiotics I will erect a straw-man, which I will call "contextualism";[2] as will be seen, it corresponds to *some passages* which can be found in authors representing "pragmatics" in the most general sense of the term (including speech act theory, but also the more subjective brand of hermeneutics, as well as the conception of the Bakhtin circle); or, more exactly, it corresponds to *some possible interpretations* of certain passages of a number of the canonical texts associated with the above-mentioned theoretical conceptions (notably texts by Grice, Searle, Sperber & Wilson and the Bakhtin circle). In fact, as there are several possible interpretations of these passages, there will be different versions of contextualism, as we will see in the following.

All semioticians are, I submit, committed to the view that any explanation of an act of interpretation should account not only for the content but also for the expression involved in the process, as well as for the general connection (which is not necessarily a convention) joining expression to content. In section two, I will argue that this follows from the most general facts of the semiotic meaning model. I will then go on to suggest that a semiotic taxonomy of interpretation should be concerned with the different nature of expression and content, and of the link between them.

As opposed to semiotics, then, *strong contextualism* would argue that at least some meanings cannot be traced back to any expressions, connected in a general way with contents, but emerge in some way which cannot be further explained from the unique characters of the context. This seems to be the view taken by many scholars in the aesthetical sciences who are involved with the study of concrete works of art[3], and it is explicitly proclaimed in some passages written by the Bakhtin circle. *Weak contextualism,* on the other hand, would be the view that it is, for some reason, not interesting to delve further into contextual meaning in order to reduce it to general relationships of meaning. It is conceivable that this is the view taken in some parts of speech act analysis and other brands of Anglo-Saxon pragmatics. Paradoxically, other parts of the latter work may really be semiotical on my account.[4]

Given a semiotical framework, different types of interpretation can be explained in terms of different systems of meaning, which may be parallel, inclusive, or overlapping. These systems should not necessarily be understood in the structuralist sense, as a set of units and the rules for their combination, or a "code": to avoid such a suggestion, terms such as *schemes of interpretation*, or *systems or relevancies* (Schütz 1967; 1970; Gurwitsch 1957) may be preferable; in any case, I am not concerned to reinstate the "code model", which Sperber & Wilson (1996) identify with semiotics. What opposes semiotics to contextualism is not the presence of convention. It is, in the first version of contextualism, the presence of generality and recoverability of meaning, and, in the second version, the interest of going after generality and recoverability. What is at stake, in Berkeley's classical terms (as quoted in the introduction by Anders Pettersson), is not the conventionality of meaning: it is its public character.

1.1. Some Relevant Versions of Interpretation

The act which is known as interpretation is certainly heterogeneous, as far as its object, its goal, its scope, and several other properties are concerned; and so are, of course, the corresponding results (Hermerén 1984; Schusterman 1984); but this should not preclude us from seeing that there is also a basic unity underlying this variety. Here I will use the term interpretation in a way which is rather unfamiliar to scholars in the aesthetical sciences: it will designate every act setting the task of recovering a meaning. This meaning may or may not be a sign. I will start by admitting that there are two kinds of interpretation: interpreting something *as being* something (else); and interpreting something as *standing for* something else (cf. Sonesson 1989a: 94ff). But the latter may be seen as an ordered pair of two items of the former. To see something as being something is to assign it to a category or, better (since it implies an inner organisation), to a system or *scheme.* To interpret something as standing for something else is to assign it to a scheme the units of which are connected to the units of another scheme. The first variety may be called *categorical interpretation;* the second one we will call *semiotical interpretation.*

We will suppose that, as soon as there is a meaning, or something which could be taken as a meaning, there is a corresponding act of interpretation. It should be obvious that interpretation, as the term is used here, is much more general in import than in the usage of most literary critics and other interpreters of works of art. The latter mostly seem to be involved with cases in which interpretations becomes problematic, in which the trajectory from expression to content is not straightforward, but rather has to overturn obstacles to reach its goal.[5] But there does not seem to be any absolute limit between problematic and straightforward tasks of interpretation. I will also suppose that some tasks of interpretation which are problematic and/or complex do not involve art, and vice versa. Indeed, in my view, all interpretation takes its point of departure in the ongoing practice of the everyday world, and never stops being continuous with that very practice: there is thus no special kind of interpretation in the aesthetic sciences.[6] This is also why I do not believe interpretation by "qualified" interpreters such as literary critics and art critics, or even historians of literature or art, to be different in principle from that made by laymen; it only supposes a longer and more self-reflective scrutiny, or so it is to be hoped.[7]

There is another difference in kinds and procedures of interpretation which is fundamental from a semiotical point of view: the act of interpretation may consist in applying rules and regularities to the understanding of one text, as is normally the case in the aesthetic sciences, or it may consist in the interpretation of several texts in order to extract the rules and regularities which make it possible to understand them, which is was happens in semiotics in the strict sense. The latter case is of course analogous to going from "speech" to the language system. This distinction should not be confused with another one, which is similar in some respects, between interpreting the text for its own sake, which is common in the aesthetic sciences, or in order to find out something about something which is "beyond" it (e.g. the author), which is what is done in biography, biblical hermeneutics, the history of mentalities, and so on.[8]

Both these distinctions involve the difference between *an object of interpretation* and an *object which is interpreted*, i.e. between that for the sake of which the interpretation is made, and that to which the interpretative operations are applied. To put it in other terms, the object of interpretation it that which we want to understand, the objective of the act of interpretation; the object interpreted is that which serves as material for the same operation. In the case of the aesthetic sciences, as they have been understood from Russian formalism over New Criticism to French structuralism, object of interpretation and object interpreted coincide; in semiotics proper, we go from one or several particulars to something general, a system which is supposed to be behind the texts, but which is still embodied in them. This means that, in semiotics, the object of interpretation is different from the object interpreted but is included in it: the former is what is common to the latter. In the second case, the practice of the aesthetic sciences is opposed to another procedure in which the object interpreted is heterogeneous to the object of interpretation, whether the latter is a particular (a person as in biography) or something general (a world view as in the history of mentalities). In the most common case of this procedure, we read a book to understand the personality of its author. This latter kind of division between object of interpretation and object interpreted has of course often been applied also by scholars in the aesthetic sciences..

I will use the term *auto-interpretation* to refer to the procedure in which the object of interpretation and the object interpreted coincide; on the other

hand, when that which we want to understand is different from that from which we derive our material of understanding, I will talk about *allo-interpretation*. The latter is *homogeneous* when we go beyond it to some rules and regularities which is shares with a number of other objects; it is *heterogeneous* when we go to something of another nature with which it is connected in some more extrinsic way (from a text to its author, etc.). In the following I will ignore homogeneous *allo-interpretation*, which is rarely used in the aesthetical sciences, but I will have reasons to return to heterogeneous *allo-interpretation*.

All types of interpretation considered so far are cases in which a third person, an interpreter *I*, intervenes in the act of communication by means of which a sender *S* conveys a message to a receiver *R* (where the interpreter *I* may be identical to *S* and/or *R*); more exactly, he cuts through the process by means of which *S* offers an artefact to the perception of *R*, who turns it into a perceptual object, determining the relationship between artefact and object. In this sense, interpretation is geared to the *recovery* of past meanings. But there is also another sense of interpretation, in which the meaning of the original act of communication is not, or is not exclusively, at stake. In those cases, interpretation does not cut through the act of communication, but is itself a second act of communication which presupposes the first one to a greater or lesser degree. It does not refer to the artefact as its regulatory idea, but is instead concerned to use it for its own purposes. In so doing, it may very well start out from an act of interpretation in the first sense, or it may neglect it altogether; its business is in any case elsewhere.

To put it bluntly, it is interpretation geared to future uses. It could be seen as a kind of co-creation or *discovery*. Obvious cases of the latter are the interpretation of a musical score or a drama text by musicians and actors, respectively, a ballet as imagined by a choreographer or a dancer, the constructor's view of the architect's blue-print, and so on.; but the amount of co-creation also seems to be greater than that of recovery when Foucault writes about Velázquez' "Las Meninas" or Jones interprets Hamlet; indeed, the interpretations which Vitez and Mnouchkine make of "Tartuffe" (as discussed by Heed in this volume) seem to be co-creations on both accounts.(cf. Sonesson 1994a; Eco 1992; et al. 1992). However fascinating this subject, we will have to ignore it in the following.

1.2. Beyond the "Code Model" in Semiotics

It may certainly seem strange to oppose semiotics and pragmatics. One of the two well-known pioneers of semiotics, Charles Sanders Peirce, called his own philosophical stance pragmatism (and later pragmaticism). And even the term pragmatics itself originated as a subdivision of semiotics (the others being syntax and semantics), proposed by Morris with reference to what he understood to be the dimensions of the Peircean sign. The point is not whether Morris understood Peirce correctly. The problem really begins when Morris's tripartition is taken oven by Carnap: the third part becomes what Bar-Hillel has characterised as "the pragmatic waste-basket", the place where you put problems you cannot or will not resolve. In spite of the seminal work of Grice and Searle and their followers, pragmatics still largely retains the character of a "waste-basket". In order to get rid of this overflowing waste-basket, however, we may have to tolerate a little more disorder on the desktop.[9]

While Bar-Hillel may have been preoccupied by the lack of formalisation, what worries me is the absence of explanatory power: "pragmatic" approaches often leaves as a complete mystery how meaning is conveyed.[10] Semiotics, on the other hand, is about *how* something means, over and above *what* something means. So while it may be better to speak about the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions of a meaningful event, instead of three different sciences (as suggested by Eco 1992:283ff), analysis will only be complete when the pragmatic dimension has been resolved into the semantics of another semiotic system. Thus we can give all semiotic systems their due, without unduly privileging verbal language; and we will be able to explain the *how* of meaning, not just its presence.

In the present essay, I will take *contextualism* (which thus stands for some ways of taking some passages in texts about "pragmatics") to be the idea that meaning is not the result of some general standard of interpretation, but is produced in a context, understood as some peculiar co-ordinates of time and space, and resulting from the specific intentions an individual brings to such a context.[11] Semiotics, then, is the opposite idea, according to which there is always some kind of regularity which accounts for the possibility of meaning being conveyed, and intentions are only part of the content present in certain types of signs. The claim for the semiotical character of the present model rest

on its being derived from the basic concept of the sign. In the present context, it is of no avail whether we follow the Peircean or the Saussurean tradition: indeed, we are concerned with such basic properties of the sign that we could even refer to proto-semiotic work antedating both Peirce and Saussure.[12]

A sign, then, in my sense, consists of an expression and a content, which form a unity of inter-defining terms, and it is linked to a (potential) referent in the outside world. The trouble is that, as far as I have been able to discover, all semiotical traditions take the terms "expression" and "content" as givens. For the moment, I am not concerned with *how* we recognise some particular object as being an expression or a content; that, on the contrary, is a problem addressed by most traditions, inside and outside of semiotics. What I want to clarify is *what we mean* when we say something *is* an expression or a content. Elsewhere, I have tried to define these terms, with extensive help from Husserl and Landgrebe, on one hand, and Piaget, and the other (cf. Sonesson 1989a: 49ff; 193ff). In this view, the expression is that which is *directly given* without being *thematic,* while the content is *indirectly given* and *thematic.*[13] Normally, expression and content are *discontinuous,* both in the sense of being felt to represent different *categories,* and in the sense of the one not going over into the other *in space or time.*

This accounts for what, following cognitive psychology, we will call the *prototype* of the sign: the central instance of the category. But as some of these criteria fail to apply, we continuously go on to meanings which are less signs, or not signs at all. As we know from genetic psychology (cf. Sonesson 1992a), such as transition happens in the development of the child, even though it may never have happened in ontogeny (as claimed by Sperber & Wilson 1996: 53, 258). A particularly interesting case here is the *symptom model* of the sign, which may be relevant to perception, and to some extent also to pictures, in which the complete series of expressions is identical to the content: thus, it may be said that, to the common man (but not the physician), an illness is nothing else than the full series of symptoms one experiences. The interpretation according to such a model is largely based on probabilities (cf. Sonesson 1989: 17f; 1992a). The domain of interpretation is thus wider than the prototypical sign.

So far it may seem that at least the prototypical sign concords with what Sperber & Wilson call "the code model"; but this model clearly supposes the connection between expression and content to be a convention, which is something which there is no reason to accept.[14] In the following, I will allow the standards of interpretation to be based on iconic and indexical links, as well as symbolic ones; and, contrary to what Sperber & Wilson imply, I think most semioticians would do the same today. In this respect, I certainly side with the Peircean tradition, rather than the Saussurean one, at least as the latter was interpreted by the French Structuralists and their contemporaries, such as Eco, in the seventies.[15] But it should not be forgotten that there is a venerable semiotic tradition, before Peirce and Saussure, for distinguishing different kinds of "grounds" making something into a sign (cf. Deely 1982; Manetti 1993).

In this sense, meaning is as likely to be based on habits or observed regularities as on explicit rules. But whether it is founded on rules or regularities, meaning must always be publicly accessible to a community of users. Strong contextualism would clearly deny this. Weak contextualism may simple find it uninteresting. The semiotic point of view is that no interpretation is complete if is has not accounted for the generic and public strategies by which meaning is recovered.[16]

1.3. Against the Fourth Gricean Strand

Given this general concept of the sign, an act of interpretation can be seen as process in which something (an expression) is taken as evidence for the presence of something else (a content and, beyond that, a referent). In the case of verbal language, it is easy to think of some kind of "originary" situation, in which a speaker produces sign after sign, until the evidence for his meaning is complete, as manifested by the hearer. This whole sequence of signs then seems to give rise to a single act of interpretation. In some cases, common in the arts, the sequence of signs is completed before reception takes place, so that any further sign required will be part of another act of interpretation. In non-verbal semiotic systems, it is more difficult to establish an originary act of communication. Thus, in the case of visual communication, one may think of the case in which somebody make ever new or revised sketches of the street system, until his interlocutor understands how he is going to reach the house of the draughtsman.

But this is a marginal situation: the normal case, in visual communication, rather seems to be the foreclosed series.

Two observations are in order: meaning is here, if not defined by, at least essentially dependant on, being seen from *the point of view of the hearer* or, more generally, the addressee. In other words, meaning can only exist to the extent that it is made accessible to somebody. This is a conception which is implied by the Peircean sign model, and more generally by Peirce's idea that everything is addressed to another subject (cf. Colapietro 1989); it is also clearly built into the Prague school model of communication (see Sonesson 1992: 100ff). Grice (1989: 352f) has objected to such a characterisation, on the ground that hearer's meaning would have to refer to speaker's meaning. It is a basic assumption of semiotics, as it is conceived here, that both speaker's meaning and hearer's meaning are relative to the meaning of the signs. I do not intend to turn Grice's dictum on its head: "hearer's meaning" is only important because it shows that there must be something which the speaker and the hearer have in common.

A speaker may very well mean something in the sense of having an opinion; but he can only mean something in the sense of conveying a meaning, if there is somebody to which this meaning is conveyed (at least potentially). And it can only be conveyed if it in some way shared between speaker and hearer, that is, is part of a common scheme of interpretation. It is true, of course, that we all know, "semioticians included" (as Sperber & Wilson 1996: 24 put it) that the speaker's intentions are, in general, what we want to know about. But it is not only the case, as Peirce tells us (quoted in Colapietro 1989: 105) that "it is much safer to define all mental characters as far as possible in terms of their outward manifestation"; in communication, it is the very business of the mental characters to become outwardly manifested. In fact, we can only know about these intentions to the extent that they have acquired an outside manifestation.

The second observation is that, in characterising the sign from the point of view of the addressee, we have described something which sounds very much like *inference.* Within the semiotic tradition, signs have often been seen as inferences (cf. Manetti 1993),[17] Peirce, of course, distinguished three types, induction, deduction, and, most notably, abduction. We can even enlist the

support of Grice (1989:349ff), who suggests that the two meaning concepts he describes may share the property of being consequences. On the other hand, Sperber & Wilson (1996: 13) claim all kinds of ills will come out of confusing signs and inferences; and yet their own later characterisation of "non-demonstrative inference" (1996: 65ff) seems to blur the distinction. In the case of the symptom model, which we described above, such a distinction cannot be maintained: indeed, it is probably because they fail to note the peculiarities of the linguistic situation of communication which we mentioned above, that Sperber & Wilson wants to maintain the distinctions between the "code" and the inferences.

Thus far, we have been able to side with Grice, but now we must part company with him. The common sense dogma which is at the heart of pragmatics as a current of thinking is formulated by Grice (1989: 340) as the second part of his *fourth strand:* "what words means is a matter of what people mean by them". In one sense this is trivially true: in all communication, as was suggested above, the addressee is directed to the intentions of the addresser. But there is no way for the addressee to reach these intentions other than by means of some kind of sign which conveys them, either in the shape of the object of interpretation, or some other object interpreted for the sake of the first object (in the sense in which we distinguished *auto-interpretation* and *allo-interpretation* above). In this case, *strong contextualism* would amount to a Humpty Dumpty view of meaning. *Weak contextualism* would simply imply that what people think, to the exclusion of their way of conveying it, is the subject matter worthy of study. Semiotics is the view that *it is* important to understand how meaning is conveyed.

From the point of view of a semiotic theory of interpretation, then, it is interesting to know in what way we are able to reach an interpretation; and this may give rise to another typology of interpretation which cuts cross the one suggested at the beginning of the essay. There seems to be two types of examples adduced by pragmatists against "semantic" meaning: first, we will consider the context as a mere addition of meanings, and then go on to the case in which it appears to cancel out a pre-given meaning. In the first case, I shall talk about *additive interpretation,* in the second case about *revisionary interpretation.*[18]

2.1. The Context as Another Text

An extreme case of strong contextualism seems to be embodied in some writings of the Bakhtin circle. One example offered by Voločinov (1983a:10ff; cf. 1986) involves two persons sitting together in the room in silence, whereupon one of them utters the single word "Well", without receiving any answer from the other;[19]. Taken in isolation, Voločinov claims, this utterance is completely void and meaningless. Even if we add that the intonation of the word was indignantly reproachful, but softened with a touch of humour, we are not much advanced. In order to interpret the utterance, we have to acquire knowledge about the spatial purview common to both speakers, as well as of their common knowledge and understanding of the circumstances, and their evaluation of those circumstances. In this case, it so happens that they are seated in front of a window, and that when looking out of it they discover that it is snowing. They both know that it is May, which, in Russia, means that they are in their right to expect spring to begin. Finally, they are both longing for the beginning of spring and they are sick and tired of winter. Given these circumstances, Voločinov maintains, the meaning of the utterance becomes completely clear.[20]

Voločinov 's claim is that there is nothing constant in such a situation apart from the expression plane of the word (excluding even the intonation and other paralinguistic features). The same expression has "totally different meanings" (1983b:126). The idea of there being an system of normatively identical language forms which the individual consciousness finds ready-made results from linguistics having mostly studied dead languages. For the speaker a linguistic form is important not as a stable and self-identical signal, but as an ever changeable and flexible sign (1983c:35, 42).

There are many reasons for which one may want to object to this description, but what is most important is, that, in these anecdotes, meaning is still of the order of generality, i.e. it involves constant elements which can be repeated, or "iterated", tokens which must be referred to a type. Consider the case of the spatial purview: the point here is precisely that what can be seen by both parties to the conversation is the same. Of course, it is impossible for two persons to see exactly the same environment, even in a purely physical sense, as Bakhtin (1990), along with Husserl and Schütz (1964; 1967), has forcefully demonstrated. But there is a sense in which they may be said to see the same-

for-the-purpose-of-the-conversation, and it is precisely this which explains that Voločinov is able to render this element in his description of the situation. The identical argument applies to the "common knowledge" and the "common evaluation" involved in the situation. There is something which is repeated from the first to the second participant in the conversation, and it is precisely this which is repeated a third time by Voločinov interpreting the situation. Context is not some mystical communion between speaker and listener: it consists of iterable elements stemming from other semiotic systems than language.

What has been said so far about the examples given by the Bakhtin circle also apply to those of Grice and his followers. In once case, Grice (1989: 93ff) goes to his regular tobacconist (from whom he also purchases other goods) for a pack of his regular brand of cigarettes, and instead of saying anything, he puts down the sum of 43 cents, which is the price of the pack, on the counter. The tobacconist understands want Grice wants and hands him the pack. In this case, Grice claims, he has meant something ("non-naturally", I suppose), which he had not in case he had put down the money on the counter only to demonstrate that he was in possession of the sum necessary for buying the pack. This example obviously supposes that none of the other goods which Grice is in the habit of buying from his tobacconist have the cost of 43 cents. It is possible, of course, that Grice has already bought something else having this price, but then it has not been one of those things he *habitually* buys. So, in this example, the gesture of putting down a particular sum on the counter only means something because there is a regular connection, known to Grice and the tobacconist, between the sum and the pack of cigarettes. It so happens that the relation between the sum and the product is conventionally assigned; but what makes the connection meaningful here is the observation of a regularity in the behaviour of Grice.[21]

Next, consider an example from Sperber & Wilson (1996: 55). When Peter opens the door to their apartment, Mary stops and sniffs ostensibly. Following her example, Peter notices that there is a smell of gas. What Mary does, according to Sperber & Wilson, can be paraphrased as "There is a smell of gas". On another occasion, Mary and Peter have just arrived at the seaside. Mary opens the window overlooking the sea and sniffs ostensibly. In this case, Sperber & Wilson maintains, there is no one particular thing which Mary may be said to

mean. In fact, however, I think it is reasonable to say that Mary does the same thing on both occasions: by exaggerating the movements associated with smelling, she manages to frame off the movement, so that it appears as an iconic sign of what is would otherwise be. This gesture means "There is a smell worthy of notice". No doubt the kinds of things we expect to smell at our doorstep and from a hotel room overlooking the beach are appreciably different. It could actually be argued that both stories correspond to type situations, which we have all experienced many times, if not in life so at least at the cinema, so that we will immediately know what kinds of smells are being referred to.

Contrary to Voločinov, neither Grice nor Sperber & Wilson explicitly deny that constant elements are present in these situations, although there is a hint of the latter in the story about Mary's double sniffing exercise. In this sense, Grice and Sperber & Wilson, unlike the Bakhtin circle, give expression to *weak contextualism.* They are simply not interested in these constant elements. But this may not be the whole story. The whole point of telling these anecdotes is to demonstrate that there exists some kind of meaning which is "non-semantic" in a sense which never becomes very clear. Taking a semiotic point of view, it is difficult to see that anything of the kind has been demonstrated. Rather, we are faced with cases in which iterable elements derived form different schemes of interpretation are brought to bear on each other. Meaning is derived from the interaction of these elements. For each scheme of interpretation producing a text there are others schemes whose texts masquerade as the context of the former. This is what I have called an *additive* kind of interpretation.

2.2. The Uses of Community

Stanley Fish (1980), who seems to be an extreme "contextualists", has argued that all meaning attributed to the text really comes out of the individual contexts: the perceived stability of the text is a result of the stability of the interpretative strategies current in a particular interpretative community. A similar conception, with less stability involved, is illustrated by Rorty's reading of *Foucault's Pendulum* by Eco (in Eco et al. 1992: 89ff). Here, however, it seems that the context contains the system: the interpretative strategies could be identical to the language system, i.e. to some generic standard of interpretation, which, of course, is never valid but for a community of interpreters. In the tradition of semiotics, meaning has never been supposed to be in the text, as a

material object; in Saussurean terms, it is in the text as it is seen from the point of view of the speakers of the language.[22] What sometimes gets spirited away also in semiotics, however, is the community of interpreters.

Grice (1989: 102f) tells us about using a French phrase which "in fact" means something quite different to convey the offer "Help yourself to a piece of case", when talking with a little girl, because, when listening to the girl taking her French lessons, he has noticed that she thinks the phrase has this meaning. I would agree with Grice that the fact that this phrase means something quite different in the semiotic system known as the French language does not prevent him from using it to mean that the girl should eat some more cake. However, this is so, as Grice himself notes, because he is making use of a regularity in the behaviour of the girl which he has observed. And it can be said that Grice and the little girl (and probably some others, such as the person trying to teach the girl French) form a little community, within which the phrase really has this particular meaning. The fact that Grice (and the French teacher) is also a member of a community, known as the speakers of French, is not relevant. In this particular community, the phrase will function as an unanalysed chunk, which cannot be further divided into units, just as some simple semiotic systems discussed by, for instance, Hjelmslev and Prieto.[23]

This is why the Bakhtin circle has a point, when they note the impossibility of there being any meaning for the solitary subject. Curiously, when criticising both "abstract objectivism" and "individualistic subjectivism", Voločinov (1983a: 7ff; 1983c:32ff) fails to note that the third alternative which he is defending must still be a kind of objectivism, although perhaps not an "abstract" one: there must be something which is common to a least two subjects for there to be a "communality of evaluations" or even a "supporting chorus". If there is to be a state of heteroglossia, as Bakhtin claims in his later work, there cannot be a lack of rules, but, on the contrary, there must be several rule systems, some of which overlap in the same subjects, just as would Fish's interpretative communities.

We could therefore understand an interpretative community as a group within which there is what has been called a state of "mutual knowledge" (e.g. Schiffer 1972), or perhaps only "mutual assumptions" (Pettersson 1990: 52ff) or, even weaker, "mutual manifestness" (Sperber & Wilson 1996: 15ff, 38ff): that is, within this community, each member does not only entertain the idea that *p*, but

also entertains the idea that others entertain this idea, that others entertain this latter idea, and so on indefinitely.[24] However, this is in no way peculiar to the situation of communication, by conventions, and otherwise. The very same idea was suggested earlier on by Alfred Schütz (1964; 1967) while describing the perceptual world, in which we do not only tend to think that others see the same thing as we do (with correction for perspective), but also that they take us to assume the same thing, on so on. This is actually true of the whole domain of what Schütz calls "the world taken for granted", and which Husserl earlier called "the Lifeworld", in which, he said, things have "typical ways of behaving" which we all know about. This is also what justifies that kind of common-sense reasoning which Peirce called "abduction" (cf. Sonesson 1989: 30ff). Conventions are only a small part of that which is "mutually known".[25]

2.3. The Context as a Rewriting of the Text

So far, we have discussed the way in which contexts may be seen as a combination of texts collaborating on the production of meaning, for the interpretation of which we do not really need any new type of interpretation at all. But there are also cases in which the context must be seen as some kind of "rewriting" of an original text, that is, cases in which the addition of the context results in a reading which is different, and even the opposite of, the one presented by the text in isolation. This is what I called *revisionary interpretation* above. Typical examples of this are irony and parody, on one hand, and metaphors and other rhetorical figures on the other.[26]

Grice (1989: 53f) is probably quite right in arguing that there is no particular ironic intonation. In fact there is no reason for awaiting the result of an experimental investigation, as Grice suggests, for this will not explain the presence of irony in writing, nor in non-verbal semiotic systems; and if the presence of irony in, for instance, pictures and music, may be doubted, the closely similar phenomenon of parody is certainly present. But to show that there is no signs of irony, comparable to the quotations marks, is not to propose a solution: it is to state a problem. For the speaker may have the intention to be ironic, and even have the intention that the hearer shall grasp this intention; but nothing will be accomplished if no mutually known sign for these intentions can be produced. From a semiotical point of view, the interesting task is to discover the principles making such revisionary interpretations possible.

I remember reading, as a child, Montesquieu's discourse on slavery, taking the words quite seriously. Perhaps there were some subtle nuances of the text which, at the time, I failed to capture: but, in any case, it is fairly certain that if I had known his other texts, and the texts of others associated with the same movement (as did his contemporaries), I would have understood right away, that this was not a possible meaning of a text written by this author. Here the label "Montesquieu" functions as a principle of classification, as Foucault (1969) defines the concept of author. The author's name makes us expect a coherence between this text and others bearing the same label. In this case, it makes sense to talk about an entirely different type of interpretation, because, to derive it, we must transform all Montesquieu's works into objects to be interpreted, and the meaning attributed to the object of interpretation is thereby converted into the opposite of what is was before.

In other cases, the second "voice" seems to be conveyed by factors internal to the work. Thus, some of the paintings by representatives of the Italian Transavantgarde are very similar to Paris salon paintings from the end of the last century, but when closely scrutinised, the global manner of painting suggests they should be taken as stylisations or parodies.[27] These cases are similar to the other main type of "non-serious" communication, rhetorical figures, which also seems to be denounced by some kind of internal contradiction in the text. Elsewhere, I have tried to show that at least visual "metaphors" convey their meaning according to a few rather straight-forward principles, depending on *indexicality* (presence of some parts or members of sets which are not expected, and/or absence of such which are expected); *iconicity* (more or less similarity than expected between the components of the picture, going from identity over mere alterity to contradiction); *fictionality* (more or less reality than is expected) and *category membership* (contradiction within categories of construction, social function, and circulation, or as far as their expected correlation is concerned; cf. Sonesson 1996; 1999). The question remains how we discover that, in some cases, such contradictions have to be resolved in the sense of rhetoric, as saying something different from what the signs convey at the literal level, and in other cases in the sense of irony or parody, as retaining the original meaning, but in square quotes.

The fact is, of course, that we often do not know. The commercial pictures incorporated into Warhol's work are, in most cases, not taken to be used "seriously", simply because of the art context in which they appear, or rather, in which they first appeared; but it is not clear whether they parody commercial use, or whether they say something different. Mats Ek's variations on well-know ballets like "Carmen" and "Giselle" are seen to be "non-serious" in part because they exaggerate the coded steps of classical ballets, and in part because they place classical technique in the context of a multitude of others voices, apart from those of classic ballet and of Ek himself. But is Ek holding these techniques up to ridicule, or is he trying to convey another meaning? In the versions of "Tartuffe" created by Mnouchkine and Vitez, on the other hand, there is a high degree of consistency in the modifications brought to the traditional way of presenting the piece, which seems to indicate rather clearly that the directors are not interested in parodying Molière, but rather try to go beyond the literal meaning of the signs to an alternative meaning.[28] But even when the contradiction which suggests that the literal meaning ought to be cancelled out is internal, the decision whether the resulting configuration should be understood as irony or as something more resembling a metaphor may well require the use of external evidence (in the Tartuffe case, at least knowledge about traditional stage productions).

There are cases in which the necessity of having recourse to external information is more immediately evident. Some Italian Transavangarde paintings could conceivably be so similar to real 19th century Paris salon paintings that only the knowledge about the date of the creation of the former would give us access to their meaning. In the case of some of the more extreme cases of Sherrie Levine's "appropriations" it is only the knowledge that she has made copies of the works "appropriated" that makes us judge them differently from the original works; this is true, notably, of those "appropriations" where she has simply made a photograph of some well-known photographer's work. Fortunately, she always takes care to tell us so in the titles. In these cases, *revisionary interpretation* only becomes possible as *heterogeneous allo-interpretation.*

Maurice Pialat's film "Van Gogh", seems, to a certain extent, to be a rather traditional costume movie: not only the clothing, but the houses and the environment in general, correspond to the ones we would expect to see at the time of van Gogh.[29] However, the French spoken by the actors is replete with

contemporary slang expressions; also the behaviour patterns of the characters, their relations to each other, the kind of things they say (the servant girl stating, when first entering van Gogh's room, "I am 13 years old", as if she had been doing a lot of reading in present-day newspapers) seem to be those of our time, rather than those of the period in which van Gogh lived, although these aspects may be more difficult to analyse than the linguistic factors. Thus, we are faced with two discourses anterior to that of Pialat: one which signifies the time of van Gogh (costumes, buildings, etc.), and one which signifies our own time (manner of speaking, behaviour patterns, etc.). How, then, are we to reconstruct the third voice, that of Pialat, which supposedly comments on the other two?[30]

One conclusion would be that we have here what is often called a "turkey": a film in which we are not supposed to note the discrepancy between parts, but unfortunately we do. As a comparison, there is a by now famous turkey on the Dracula theme, "Plan 9 from Outer Space", in which Dracula was first played by a small, old man, whose face was well-known to many people (Bella Lugosi), who then had to be exchanged for a tall, younger one, who all the times holds his arm before his face to impede us from seeing the difference.[31] The other possible interpretation, however, is that the opposition of the two discourses is quite calculated (in Pialat's picture, not the Dracula movie) and that we are meant to understand something in particular from this opposition. It is not clear that there is anything in the film itself which permits us to choose between the two interpretations. So we are faced with the question of what was intended.

It could be said that, if Pialat is not able to convey his intentions in his film, so much the worse for him. But this is not how we ordinarily would react. Instead, since Pialat is a "good" film director, we will ascribe to him those intentions which are most favourable for his case. Here, it seems that our interpretation must begin from the attribution of the label "work of art" to the Pialat film.[32] Thus, *semiotic interpretation* in this case is dependant upon a precedent *categorical interpretation.* This is not necessarily a superficial reaction: it forces us to scrutinise the object extensively, until we come up with a plausible interpretation which is compatible with the high opinion we have of the artist. The act of interpretation may be useful for the interpreter (for his pleasure if not for his understanding), even if the artist did not in actual fact

merit all this labour. Indeed, it may even allow him to understand, not the artist, but his work, better than the artist himself.

3.1. Intentiona as Part of the Meaning

The only reason that I will discuss interpretations involving intentions here, is that they are often separately treated in other theories of interpretations, or more commonly, all interpretations are reduced to being of that kind. In the present taxonomy, however, interpretations involving intentions is not a proper category: they may be *auto-interpretations* or *allo-interpretations;* and they may be *additive* or *revisionary.*

In order to interpret an utterance, Bakhtin (1986:76f) suggests, we need to know, not only the speech genre, but also "the speaker's speech plan and speech will", but it is never clear how this plan is conveyed, if not through the speech or the genre. Searle (1969) defended the speech act approach by claiming that, if we found shapes resembling letters in the sand, we would not consider them to mean anything, to the extent that they have not been produced by a speech act. If, for example, we find them in the middle of a desert, where nobody can be expected have passed before us for a very long time, we would have to conclude that these forms are not letters, but have been produced by a natural phenomenon, such as the wind. It would seem that, in this instance, there is not only no evidence for intentions, but, on the contrary, counter-evidence for the possibility of intentions (or rather the presence of people having them). But this argument is clearly wrong. If we really found shapes *sufficiently similar* to letters in a deserted place, we would have to conclude that the place is not so deserted as we believed. This is actually what has been done many times, for instance when abandoned Mayan cities were found in the jungle. Or, alternatively, we would have to postulate the intervention of God, little green men, or some other kind of supernatural forces. Even the latter alternative is more reasonable than the one suggested by Searle (cf. Sonesson 1979:289f). At least on one interpretation, a similar conception also underlies the elaborate hierarchies of intention to intend, suggested by Grice, Strawson, Searle, Schiffer and many others, for which then ever new counter-examples are proposed.

Reading this with a semiotic mind-set, one would naturally think that intention is here taken to be part of the expression plane of the sign, which sounds preposterous. That is, according to this conception, to understand that an

expression *E* means *C*, it is not sufficient to recognise that *E*, according to a system of interpretation, stands for *C*, but it is necessary to grasp that there is somebody *S*, who has the intention *I*, to signify *C* (or C^1 , etc.) when using E, and so on. Such an interpretation would be a variety of *strong contextualism,* since it supposes intentions to be conveyed directly from speaker to hearer in some mysterious way. But perhaps we should take at least the speech act approach to suggest only that the way in which intentions, which are part of the content, are conveyed is not interesting from the point of view of that theory. This would be a variety of *weak contextualism.* More positively, perhaps we should understand speech act theory to be involved with explaining what we mean when we say a particular act is intentional: the layer of intentions would then be a description of the meaning of the term "intentional act". This is of course a perfectly legitimate approach: it just doesn't address the issues which are important from the point of view of *semiotical interpretation* theory.

In semiotics, then, intention is part of the *content* of some semiotical system, such as verbal language; more precisely it is part of what Hjelmslev calls the *connotation* of the sign, i.e., a kind of meaning which follows from the speaker having chosen one expression instead of another possible one for a certain content, or one variety rather than another of the expression (cf. Sonesson 1989a:179ff). It is simply part of our conventions or habits to attribute intention to visual shapes which resemble letters, as well as to sounds which resemble phonemes.[33] On the contrary, certain others signs, such a gestures (with some exceptions) are normally taken to be non-intentional signs. It follows that intentional interpretations, in this sense, are *auto-interpretations.*

In a well-known example, Searle (1969: 44ff) tells about an American soldier having been caught by the Italians who try to give the impression of being a German officer by pronouncing the only sentence he knows in German, Goethe's line "Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen". Grice (1989: 100ff) is certainly right in suggesting that it is rather improbable the Italians would take this phrase to mean "I am an American officer"; rather, from the fact that all German words connote "German language", they would conclude that he is a speaker of German, which may lead them to the further conclusion that he is a German.[34]. To interpret something connotatively is to interpret is as *being* something, not as standing for something else, i.e. it is basically a *categorical*,

rather than a *semiotic,* interpretation: some words are interpreted as being part of the German language — and then the Italians make the assumption that the one who uses German language is a German. The case of intentions is similar: By means of connoting German, English, French, etc., all words connote human languages, i.e. membership in the class of the classes of human languages. And it so happens that things which are recognised as being members of the class of human languages are normally assumed to be produced intentionally.

To understand that an expression *E* means *C*, we only have to recognise that *E*, according to a system of interpretation, stands for (denotes) *C*; if, in addition, we recognise that *E/C* is part of (connotes) verbal language, which is a semiotic system the instances of which we, in the ordinary course of events, take to be produced by (more or less) conscious and goal-directed agents, we will think that the reason for *E* having been produced at this particular time, is that an agent *A* wants to convey to us *C,* as well as his intention to convey *C* to us, and so on.[35]

The case of pictures is less clear-cut. If we found Velázquez' "Las Meninas" in a desert, we should certainly not be in doubt about its having been made with some intention (which one – or rather which ones – is quite another question), but the same thing may not be true of a painting by Jackson Pollock or Yves Klein. But the issue goes deeper. An astronomer has suggested that some formations which can be seen on a photograph from Mars show sculptures of monkeys, and from this premise he reasonably concludes that somebody must have constructed them intentionally. The problem is, of course, that he makes this interpretation from a photograph. Earlier I have suggested that if we could verify his observation on Mars itself, we should have to agree with him (Sonesson 1989a). In fact, that depends on how far the likeness goes. As psychologists of perception have pointed out, we have a formidable ability to project likenesses onto lines and spots, in particular familiar objects, such as, most notably, faces (human faces mostly, but perhaps also those of monkeys). So pictures and other iconical signs clearly must attain a high degree of constructional complexity before we can hazard to attribute intentions to them.

It is certainly incorrect, as the discussion above would seem to imply, that semiotic systems can be distinguished into those the realisations of which are interpreted as intentional, and those that are not: rather, we should say that

different schemes of interpretation allow for intentions to be attributed *at more or less low levels of configurational structure;* and that they may require the intentionality to be assigned at *more or less remote stages of choice*.[36] In verbal language, we would normally not take obligatory grammatical concord to be something which is intended by the speaker. So there is a point in the structure of language where intentionality ceases to be attributed as a matter of course. Levinson (1983: 11) asks in what sense the one who says "Je suis malheureuse" could be said to intend to communicate that she is female. This intentionality could of course be attributed to the speaker, to the extent that she has "taken charge of" the rules of the French languages; it would be a *remote* intentionality. Such an attribution would make more sense if there were a possible choice between dialects.[37] It would also make more sense, in the case of a man using the phrase, in order to construct for himself a female personality. But these issues will become clearer when discussed in terms of visual meaning.[38]

3.2. A Case Study: The Photograph and the Drawing

As far as intentionality is concerned, a strong opposition is often made between drawings and photographs, traditionally and, more recently, both in semiotic theory and in pragmatics. Bakhtin (1990:34ff) claims, when discussing the other's contribution to our knowledge about ourselves, that a painted portrait, but not a photograph, gives us the point of view of another person on ourselves. It will be noted that, to Bakhtin, a picture, just like a literary work of art, consists in a object (a referent) and a point of view taken on it (his "intonation" or "accentuation"). This is similar to the way I once described picture depiction, as consisting of a picture and a commentary on it, only that the picture itself is now further analysed into two parts (cf. Sonesson 1994a). But Bakhtin clearly denies that a photograph can be analysed in this way: it is purely material, it is nobody's point of view.

This concords with the conception defended by Barthes (1964), who claims the relationship between signifier and signified in the photograph is "tautological": there is nothing corresponding to the historically evolving rules for mapping the perceptual world onto the pictorial surface, which characterise hand-made pictures. But Barthes is undoubtedly wrong, and so is Bakhtin for the same reason. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Sonesson 1989b 1994b), also the photograph supposes some rules for transforming perceptual appearances into

pictorial surfaces, which are of course partly built into the camera, but also in part determined by the position taken by the photographer, the adjustments he makes, and so on. The real difference consists in the *global* character of the photographic mapping rules, as opposed to the many *local* decisions on which a chirographic (hand-made) picture depends. This is like saying that each detail of the chirographic picture has its point of view, whereas only the photograph in its entirety embodies a point of view.

More recent semioticians such as Vanlier, Dubois, and Schaeffer have taken the causal, or, in semiotical parlance, *indexical,* interpretation of photograph meaning even further.[39] In their view, the photograph, unlike the chirographic picture, is an indexical, not an iconical, sign, because it is the result of some objects having been present close to the light-sensitive emulsion. The picture is thus an imprint of the objects, or, to be more precise, as Vanlier points out, of the photons coming from the objects. It is comparable to a foot-print, which is a typical index. In some ways Schaeffer may seem to be less radical than the others: he does not exclude the iconical properties of the photograph, but maintains that it may sometimes be an iconical index, and sometimes an indexical icon. In another respect, however, it is Schaeffer who takes the indexicalist conception to the extreme. He maintains that photographs, unlike chirographic pictures, have nothing essential to do with intentions. To show this he quotes the extreme case of a camera having been rigged up in front of the finishing-line, in such a way that it is automatically triggered off when the horses cross that line. The photograph is somehow produced without any intervening human agent.

To my mind, Schaeffer's argument does not show what he claims it to do. In fact, by rigging up the camera in this particular place, by directing the objective in a particular direction, and by installing some mechanism which triggers off the camera when the horses cross the finishing-line, someone has certainly given expression to a set of intentions — even if we might want to call them *remote intentions* (cf. Sonesson 1994b)[40]. Schaeffer, Vanlier, and Dubois are all wrong in reducing the photograph to an indexical sign. To begin with, the photograph is an indexical sign also for a number of things which it is not a picture of, such as the nature of the lens, the quality of lightning, etc. And in fact, it is not an index for that which it is a sign of, for it is the photons, not the

objects depicted, as Vanlier points out and then forgets, which have been in contiguity with the emulsion. More importantly, however, the indexical traits of the photograph do not function at all as do those of a foot-print.

Hoof-prints have certain iconical traits: they somehow resemble hoofs, and a donkey's hoof-prints are different from those of a horse exactly in the same way in which a donkey's hoofs and a horse's hoofs differ, that is, notably, in size. But this is only a preparatory stage in the functioning of the hoof-prints as signs. Their essential business is to tell us something like "a horse was here before", and they will only accomplish this task to the extent that they are still at the place where the horse was present at some earlier stage. This is not at all the case with photographs: not only are they not normally present at the place in which the referent was before, but their location in relation to that of the referent is not relevant for their functioning as signs. In most cases, a photograph functions equally well as such even if we have no idea where it was taken. There are of course exceptions to this: it is essential, in the case of the photograph of the finishing-line, that we should know when and where it was taken. And there are also cases (such as "spy photographs") in which it might be important to compare each figure of the photograph with each detail of a real landscape, to see if they correspond. But such uses of photographs become more and more irrelevant each day, as computer programs such as "Photoshop" makes everyone into a potential peer of Stalin's "photo-dressing" accomplishes.

In a similar vein, Grice (1989: 218) opposes the case in which he shows somebody a photograph of the latter's wife in an adulterous relation to another man, and the case in which he shows him the same situation in a drawing. It is only in the latter case that Grice would like to say that he means something, for the photograph would produce the same effect, he thinks, if the husband found it in the room by accident. Grice's argument obviously depends on his idea that an intention to communicate something must be recognised for meaning to exist; but for our purpose we may transform this into the thesis that a drawing, but not a photograph, would justify us in attributing an intention to the one producing it, while the photograph would only justify us in assigning a cause to the photograph showing the relevant scene. We must of course ignore the possibility of the picture looking like a photograph really being a document created by a graphics program. Still, it seems to me that the difference is not as clear-cut as

Grice would have it. Even if the husband found a drawing, instead of a photograph, of his wife in an adulterous situation laying around, he would most likely be worried: for there must probably have been some "cause", in the widest sense of the term, for the draughtsman choosing to illustrate the scene in question, one of which could have been his having observed it. Thus, some amount of both intention and causality is associated with our ideas about the semiotic systems "photography" and "drawing", but they are differently distributed through-out the act of communication.

Grice's example is special, because it concerns the interpretation of the situation conveyed by the sign, the referent, to the exclusion of the sign itself. So it may be worth-while to ask ourselves how we would separate the parts of intention and causality in a sign which is considered for itself, such as a work of art. In the case of an amateur photograph, the fact that many of the objects represented are cut off by the margins of the picture would normally be considered something unintentional, in fact, something caused by the limited expertise of the photographer. But in Cartier-Bresson's works, this aspect is essential for defining his peculiar style of photography "in flagrante delicto". Thus, the configurational level at which intentionality can be attributed is different in the two cases. One reason for this is that we have already interpreted Cartier-Bresson's photographs as works of art, i.e. we have made a particular *categorical interpretation*. Another reason may be the consistency with which these features are repeated from one work to another by the same photographer (but, again, that may also be true of some amateurs). Yet another reason, however, may be that Cartier-Bresson has declared his intentions by others means. And this brings us back to the issue of independently conveyed intentions, that is, the intentional interpretations which are *allo-interpretations.*

3.3. Independent Signs of Intentionality

It should be noted then that I am not claiming that intentions play no part in our interpretational procedures. My claim is rather that they are normally given as a matter of course, by the rules and regularities which are associated with certain systems of interpretation. I am not defending some latter-day version of New criticism or French structuralism, according to which there is, in Greimas' words "hors du texte point de salut". Or rather, I am defending that view only on the condition of taking a broader view of what a text is. Nor is it a question

of opposing, as Eco (1992: 29ff; et al. 1992: 25ff) suggests, *intentio operis* and *intentio auctoris:* rather than advocating "the intentions of the text", I will argue for the text of the intentions. For intentions only exist for the interpreter as they are embodied in a text.

To look for the intentions justifying a text outside this very text is of course a case of separating the object of interpretation from the object interpreted. We have called it *allo-interpretation.* In the cases mentioned above (e.g. the history of mentalities), the artwork was the object interpreted, and something else was the object of interpretation. Now we are faced with the opposite example: the artwork remains the object of interpretation, and some other text is made into the object interpreted. But this other text, which contains the intentions of the first text, must itself be interpreted; and it may very well be necessary to go looking for the intentions of this second text in some third one, and so on indefinitely.

Let us return for a moment to the case of writing, and consider the case in which shapes are recognised as being letters, but these are then not recognised as forming words. In many cases, the interpreter will see this as resulting from writing errors and simply gloss it over (even without becoming aware of it). This means that he will take the intention to be different from the one which is actually conveyed by the words, without having any independent evidence for this. The interpreter is able to do this because he follows the rules more strictly than the writer, projecting the types back to the failing tokens. But the case in which the deviations from the rules are seen as being intentional is perhaps more interesting. This is possible, it seems to me, in the case in which the deviations themselves conform to some further rule. Thus, for instance, when the local newspaper in Malmö writes in its publicity, "Haur du sit Malmö haur du sit varden", the phrase is similar to the sentence which in Swedish is written "Har du sett Malmö har du sett världen" ("If you have seen Malmö, you have seen the /whole/ world"); but this is hardly seen as an unintentional writing error, because if the letters are pronounced as written, according to Swedish rules of pronunciation, the effect is similar to the way the words are pronounced in the dialect spoken in Malmö.[41] This could be compared with a more recent publicity campaign for a new type of gambling called "Kendo", where the sentences have been written to suggest, rather less successfully, a Japanese trying to speak

Swedish. This intention is not recoverable from the writing, but must be grasped from other signs of "Japanese-ness" in the same publicity campaign (Japanese faces, ideograms, etc.). However, it might be argued that intentions are here projected from one part of the total text to another. Thus, we have an *allo-interpretation* which is also an *additive interpretation.*

There are, of course, more intricate cases. It has often been said about Modernist artworks that they derive their meaning less from the objects themselves than from the manifestos which accompany them. As a case in point, let us consider Duchamp's urinal presented as an object of art. An urinal is, of course, basically a kind of tool. When it is transferred to the art gallery, it is confronted with a set of rules of interpretation to which it offers resistance (or, more precisely, to which it offered resistance at the time of Duchamp). First of all, art objects, according to still extant conventions, are not interpreted in relation to the use to which they may be put. Instead they are interpreted according to the meaning which they possess, and this meaning is, in the visual arts, expected to be contained in their visual properties, offered up for contemplation, which they possess as unique objects, not as members of a class. In terms of what Goodman calls exemplification, then, we may say that the visual object of art points to some properties which it also has, and, more in particular, to all the properties it possesses as a unique thing in the world (Cf. Sonesson 1992:284ff). As soon as it is placed in the art gallery, the urinal also becomes subject to these rules of interpretation, but because of its intrinsic properties, it necessary resists them. In the exhibition room of the enterprise which produce toilet equipment which is sold to the municipalities for use in public toilets, the same urinal would signify the class of which it is a member, and thus there would be no problem fitting the rules to the object instantiating it. But in the art gallery, the first resistance to the interpretation is engendered by a regularity well-known to any interpreter in our society: that the urinal is not an unique object, but something which is normally produced in factories involving long series of identical products.

But this is only the beginning of the problem of interpretation offered by the urinal as an art object with reference to the rules of artistic interpretation valid at the time. Visual art was, and still is, a subdivision of objects offered up for contemplation (such as the actors on the scene but, also, in a somewhat

different way, the lecturer speaking from a rostrum); on the contrary, the urinal is a piece of furniture kept in a place which would not normally be visible to any other than those involved with using it as a tool. Like the art gallery, the public toilet is a public place: but it is public, not in the sense of universal visual accessibility, but in that of accessibility to movement (in fact in principle also limited to one sex). But of course, the toilet is not only a hidden place: it is a place which is connected with what people, at the time, would probably have no problem in describing as the "low" biological functions of man; whereas art could still be qualified as being involved with the higher business of humankind. Again, it is probably fair to claim that, at the time when Duchamp introduced the urinal into the gallery, there was much more of a consensus on what was the aim of having objects exposed in such a way as to concentrate attention on their purely visual properties: it was done in order to engender an aesthetical experience, is the relatively well-defined meaning of giving rise to pleasure at something called beauty. Whatever may be the character of the sensual properties possessed by the urinal, beauty is not something which immediately comes to mind.

The urinal thus fails to confirm most of the expectancies engendered by the rule of interpretation associated with the kind of place in which it is exposed The set of opposition between the kind of object required by the rule and some of the regularities which would, at the time, be observed to be true about urinals indicate the direction which an interpretation of this new meaning would have to take. It seems reasonable to say that Duchamp's work is in some way about these oppositions. That stills leaves plenty of room for interpretation, and it is has been occupied (cf. Gabelik 1984: 38f). Dickie suggests that the point of Duchamp's work was to show that ordinary objects were as beautiful as the sculptures by Moore and Brancusi, with which it shares a set of properties such as a smooth, shining, surface. Duchamp himself, however, claims that he was out to destroy the very sphere of art, perhaps by indicating that most art objects (or all of them) were not more worthwhile objects of contemplation than the urinal. For an intentionalist, it is obvious that Duchamp's explanation is more relevant than Dickie's. But even if Duchamp's letter had not been written many decades after the urinal was presented as a work of art, it would be problematical on two counts: first of all, like Dickie's text, it is an interpretation

of the artwork; and, in the second place, it is itself a text which must be interpreted: what, in fact, was Duchamp trying to accomplish by formulating verbally, half a century later, was he was trying to say with his urinal? In referring to Duchamp's letter, just as when following Dickie's text, we have recourse to *allo-interpretations.*

Clearly, Duchamp's letter (and perhaps also Dickie's alternative view) is part of the story of Modernist art, as are other intriguing facts of the matter, such as Duchamp's willingness to sign copies of the urinal and other "ready-mades" fabricated by Linde (cf. Linde 1986). So while it may be suggested that Duchamp's intentions are irrelevant for appreciating the work of art, to the extent that he has not made them manifest in the work itself, they are clearly relevant to an interpretation of the work as part of the story of art. In the latter case, it would seem that the object of interpretation, as distinct from the objected interpreted, is neither the work of art, nor the history of Modernism, but the artwork-as-enmeshed-in-history. It could undoubtedly be argued that a work like Duchamp's urinal is really nothing apart from its part in history.

4. Conclusion: The Turkey Paradigm of Interpretation.

I have used the term interpretation in a very wide sense: to stand for that part of the process of communication going from the message to the addressee, as opposed to the phase starting out from the sender and ending in the message. But in fact this description is tainted by a view of communication which I do not share: that meaning is an arrow going from the speaker to the hearer, from the painter to the viewer, and so on. The whole point of using the term interpretation is this wide sense is to suggest that communication always also requires an active collaboration from the addressee, that is, an act starting from the addressee and ending in the message. In this sense I talked about seeing communication from the point of view of the addressee and I pointed to precursors in Peirce and the Prague school.

Such as conception is highlighted by the aberrant case of the turkey considered above. To classify a film as a turkey is to make a *categorical interpretation,* but of a very special sort: it consists in thinking one has recovered the intentions of the film-maker while deciding to see the film against the grain of these intentions.[42] So there is a part of *allo-interpretation* here. We should expect the interpreter always to bring something of his own to the act of

interpretation. But no so much as in the case of the turkeys. This is interpretation as recovery bordering on re-creation.

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[1] Apart from the discussions in the anthology group, I have also profited from comments by the members of my own Semiotics Seminar, and from written commentaries by Anders Marner and Alfredo Castro.

[2] Armengaud (1985) uses this term as a synonym for pragmatics, but as it is defined in the following, it will only overlap in some respects with that notion.

[3] I case in point is Mitchell (1994: 419f), to whom pragmatics means a rejection of any conceivable generalisation, as in "a pragmatic, localized, heterogeneous, and improvisatory totality",

[4] I am thinking in particular of the study of implicatures due to Grice and many of his followers; Interestingly, Davies (199) takes Grice to task exactly for trying to erect a "principle-based theory".

[5] This is how Ricœur (1965:29ff) understands the interpretation of symbols; in the present volume, this conception is most explicitly represented by Torsten Pettersson (notably as definition I1).

[6] However, I will argue later that one kind of interpretation, which has consequences for the further process of interpretation, consists in interpretation something *as being* a work of art, or even a masterwork.

[7] Contrary to what is suggested by Anders Pettersson (this volume), I think that some kinds of interpretation are more common, but not the exclusive property of, professional critics; "structural analysis" is certainly not much cherished by laymen, but "causal analysis" is, as the common reading of literary biographies goes to show. I see no reason to deny that the latter is a case of interpretation, even though the common reader may have different objectives than the literary scholar.

[8] This is an aspect of what Eco (1992; et al. 1992) calls "using the text" as opposed to interpreting it, but there are in fact several useful distinctions lurking behind this one, as we will see in the following. Interpretation as co-creation also seems to overlap with what Anders Pettersson calls appreciation in this volume.

[9] In the most thorough attempt to define the limits of semantics and pragmatics I know of, Levinson (1983: 5ff) has to admit he is unable to do so. Even his half-hearted suggestion that it can be done by defining semantics as merely "truth-functional" breaks down, when he later observes (p. 122ff) that implicatures must have access to a much richer semantic interpretation.

[10] This is of course not true of the study of implicatures (cf. Levinson 1983:97ff); and it must be admitted that Sperber & Wilson (1986) sometimes go to great lengths to find the missing expression.

11 This is what I have called strong contextualism above; we will return later to weak contextualism.

[12] For the same reason, the model to be suggested is not vulnerable to the critique of the sign voiced inside semiotics, as, for instance, by Greimas and Eco: the sign, in our sense, is not necessarily static but could be seen as some kind of process; and the expression plane of the sign is not necessarily continuous and perfectly delimited.

[13] So far, this is similar to the distinction between that which is manifest and hidden, made by Carlshamre (this volume)

[14] In this sense, the opposition between intentionalists and conventionalists alluded to in the texts by Anders Pettersson (this volume) fails to account for the semiotic approach.

[15] The critique of the conventionalist bias in French structuralism was actually the main point of Sonesson 1989a

[16] This is of course not to claim that meaning is in fact always recovered.

[17] This is, literally, the conception of the stoics (cf. Manetti 1993), but today most people would undoubtedly prefer to say that the interpretation of signs is equivalent to the drawing of inferences.

[18] One may of course imagine a third case, in which the context does not change "semantic" meaning at all, but I believe this to be true only of text book examples.

[19] It seems evident to me that Voločinov is not just a pen-name for Bakhtin (for which see now also Morison & Emerson 1991), but on this particular issue the position of both men seem rather close. In other passages, both Bakhtin and Voločinov take a very different stand, closer to the one defended here (Cf. notably the "speech genres" of Bakhtin 1986).

[20] A somewhat different example is given in Voločinov 1983b:124ff.

[21] I fail to see the point of saying that, in the other instance, nothing is meant. Of course, the message that Grice wants a particular brand of cigarettes has apparently been conveyed in some other way. But there must be some factor, for instance, in the attitude of the tobacconist, which makes the showing of the money mean "I have money".

[22] While Fish's claim may be trivial unto a point, it is of course inadmissible, as Torsten Pettersson has shown (this volume), if we take him to suggest seriously that just any text can be interpreted by just any system of interpretation.

[23] In Sonesson (1997b) I have discussed a detective story, in which the interpreters must be members of two communities, the speakers of English, and the users of the Western tonal code.

[24] It is on the strength of the objections of Sperber & Wilson that Pettersson (1990) transforms "knowledge" into "assumptions", but it should be noted that the former think even this latter term is two strong. However, it seems to me that the basic idea of the "mutual knowledge" hypothesis remains untouched by these modifications.

[25] Which is why the kind of criticism formulated against Beardsley and conventionalism generally fails to attain semiotics (e.g. Pettersson 1990: 154ff).

[26] These issues, notably irony and parody, are discussed by Bakhtin and Voločinov in terms of double-voicedness. Below I sometimes use "voice" in this Bakhtinean sense. Cf. notably Bakhtin 1984.

[27] The contemporary Swedish painter Ernst Billgren seems to have a relation of the same type to Bruno Liljefors, a well-known painter of animals, who was active around the turn of the last century.

[28] As discussed by Sven Åke Heed (this volume). There also seem to be a certain amount of declared intentions, as least on the part of Vitez, which would make this case similar to those discussed in the following sections.

[29] "Van Gogh" . France 1991. 155 min, Colour.

[30] A similar case is presented by "The Picture Makers" by P. O. Enquist, notably as staged by Ingemar Bergman at the Stockholm Dramatic Theatre in 1998. Interestingly, such internal oppositions apparently remain in the Copenhagen production, but less so in the Munich production, both in 1999 (cf. the newspaper "Expressen", February 13, 1999). Another relevant case may be the recent film "Shakespeare in Love".

[31] "Plan 9 from Outer Space", USA 1958. Director: Ed Wood. Note that the category of "turkeys" depends on a decision to interpret a film in a way presumed to be the opposite that which the director intended.

[32] Judging from the two other examples given in the note above, we should perhaps even see Pialat's film as a fore-runner of a contemporary art trend.

[33] An interesting case is the click sounds of some African languages, which do not seem to be language sounds for naive speakers from the rest of the world, and perhaps not even intentional sounds, though some of them are used intentionally for other purposes in our culture (to signal to horses, for instance)

[34] In fact, it is even more probable that they would conclude that he is an American trying to give the impression of being a German; for if he only knows this one sentence in German, he is not very likely to have a good pronunciation.

[35] The present critique of the Gricean model is thus more radical than the one suggested by Sperber & Wilson (1996: 28f), according to which the recognition of A's intention to mean something is sufficient for communication to take place (the communicative intention as opposed to the informative one). There is an interesting discussion by Eco (1976: 41ff) of

different combinations of intention on the part of the addresser and attribution of intentions on the part of the addressee, which we have unfortunately no space to discuss here.

[36] Contrary to Göran Rossholm (this volume), I do not think there is any problem for Grice's theory in the fact that he, in his epilogue (Grice 1989: 339), discovers things in his own articles, which he did not intend at the time: for these discoveries depend on the "connections" between the texts, which were perhaps not intended by Grice before he put them together in his book.

[37] As there is, in the opposite sense, between the French spoken in France, in which even a female professor is a "professeur", and Canadian French, in which case she could normally be a "professeure".

[38] This should be understood in the way Ricœur (1990: 115, 189), quoting Aristotle's concept of "sunaition", talks about a person being the "co-author" of his life.

[39] I have claimed that indexicality (relation of part to whole or contiguity) cannot be reduced to causality (cf. Sonesson 1995), but this is not the view taken by the authors mentioned.

[40] This also applies to the case of a camera mounted on some vehicle sent up by a rocket to Mars, in order to take photographs of the surface. Here even the direction in which the pictures are taken at a particular moment may not be determined by any human agent at the time, but still there must have been someone who had an intention when constructing the device and sending it to Mars.

[41] Since pictures are based on a system of transformation rather than on units and their combinations, no perfect parallel can be suggested. One may think of Cubist paintings, in which the real world may be recognisable, but the "spelling errors" are seen as being intentional, because they conform to a consistent pattern.

[42] If the inconsistencies and absurdities of the film are intentional it is simply not a "turkey"