

PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS  
AND THE MEANING OF AUTHORIAL INTENTION

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AND THE MEANING OF AUTHORIAL INTENTION

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a hermeneutical investigation of the significance of the concept of authorial intention in relation to the ontological structure of the literary work of art. I argue that tensions arising from the way in which mainstream philosophical hermeneutics--represented here by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur--has sought to construe the role of an author's intention in relation to the world of meaning to which a literary work of art has the potential to give rise tend to obscure the ontological significance of the relationship between meaning and intention. I contend that if we are to understand the ontological significance of this relationship we must begin by articulating a hermeneutic ontology in terms of intentionality.

Chapter One begins with some preliminary considerations concerning some of the peculiar characteristics of the work of art that distinguish it from other products of human making. I then take up in detail the way in which Gadamer has sought to construe the ontological structure of the work of art within the context of his philosophical hermeneutics. Chapter Two examines Gadamer's analysis of the inseparability of interpretation from the moments in which the literary work of art is created and constituted. Through

a critical examination of the way in which Gadamer articulates the interpretive dimension of artistic creation I suggest that Gadamer's understanding of the ontological structure of the work of art leaves little room for making sense of the essential moment of agency which is, I maintain, inseparable from artistic creation. In Chapter Three I begin with an analysis of the way Paul Ricoeur has attempted to articulate the relationship between artistic creation and the interpretive possibilities to which the work of art has the potential to give rise. I suggest that Ricoeur's emphasis on the moment of *agency* involved in writing offers us some insight into a way we might recuperate the concept of authorial intention within the context of hermeneutic ontology. Pursuing a line of inquiry that Ricoeur's analysis vaguely intimates, I suggest that understanding the meaning of authorial intention must begin with an ontological analysis of intentionality.

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In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have perceived in himself. And the recognition by the reader in his own self of what the book says is the proof of its veracity. ... In order to read with understanding many readers require to read in their own particular fashion, and the author must not be indignant to this; on the contrary, he must leave the reader all possible liberty, saying to him: "Look for yourself, and try whether you see best with this lens or that one or this other one."

-- Marcel Proust,  
Remembrance of Things Past

## Introduction

One of the problems with attempts to understand the role of authorial intention with respect to the literary work of art is that discussion often focuses upon the extent to which what the author intended his/her work to mean can be used as a criterion of validity against which we might gauge the correctness of interpretations. E. D. Hirsch, for one, has written extensively on this subject. In two works, Validity in Interpretation<sup>1</sup> and The Aims of Interpretation,<sup>2</sup> Hirsch attacks what he sees to be a subjectivist turn in the hermeneutical debate, represented primarily by Gadamer, but also by all who follow what G. B. Madison refers to as "the phenomenological current in hermeneutics."<sup>3</sup> Hirsch defends instead what Madison characterizes as "a thoroughgoing realism in matters of interpretation."<sup>4</sup> Presupposed by Hirsch's view is the notion that meaning (the object of

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<sup>1</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Validity in Interpretation (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr., The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> G. B. Madison, "A Critique of Hirsch's **Validity**," The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Madison 3.

interpretation) is something which can be transferred, or transmitted, intact, from the writer to the reader through the vehicle afforded by written language and the text; that meaning is, ultimately, something objective, and can be rendered, or grasped, with varying degrees of completeness by a writer or a reader. Interpretation, the task of the reader, is to reconstruct "the meaning" that the author intended to communicate in and through his/her text. Hirsch writes: "Meanings that are actualized by the reader are, of course, the reader's meanings--generated by him." The "aim of interpretation" is for the reader to make the meanings which he generates "congruent" with the meanings intended by the author.<sup>5</sup> The central problem of hermeneutics, as Hirsch sees it, is that "the great diversity of interpretations compels us to recognize that the letter must be an imperfect representation of meaning."<sup>6</sup> "We, not our texts, are the makers of meanings we understand, a text being only an occasion for meaning, in itself an ambiguous form devoid of the consciousness where meaning abides."<sup>7</sup> As a solution to the "hermeneutical problem" of "the meaning" of a text, he offers this: "We ought therefore to respect original meaning as the best meaning, the most legitimate norm for interpretation."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hirsch, The Aims of Interpretation, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, The Aims of Interpretation, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Hirsch, The Aims of Interpretation, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Hirsch, The Aims of Interpretation, 78.

The presupposition that underlies this discussion is that the nature of authorial "intention" is clear: it is simply that which the author "meant" to communicate. If the author happens to be alive, the assumption seems to be, we need only ask him what he meant, and we will then know what his books mean.

These are the kinds of ideas to which the notion of "authorial intention" tends to give rise. For the "objectivist" brand of hermeneut, like Hirsch, the concept of authorial intention signifies the positive possibility of establishing a methodological norm by which to evaluate the correctness of interpretations, the final and definitive word as to what a text means.

But is this really all there is to be said about the meaning of, for example, a literary work of art? Does not the work of art tend to mean more than the author intended it to mean? And if this is so, must we not then say that the meaning of the literary work of art surpasses what the author intended to mean? More fundamentally, how ought we to understand the notions of "meaning" and "intention" and what is their peculiar relationship?

For the phenomenologically-oriented hermeneuts--like Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Madison--not only is the idea of a "valid" interpretation without sense, but because the author stands in the same relation to his text as all other

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readers--that is, as an interpreter--what the author intended to mean in and through his work can in no way be understood to privilege one interpretation over any other. But more than this, given the fact that our formulations of our own intentions are interpretations themselves, there cannot even be a definitive word on the artistic intentions that generated the work in the first place. For this reason, the possibilities of meanings to which a literary work may give rise are said to be "detached" from the "intention" by which the work was brought into being. Surrounding the whole notion of authorial intention, it is suggested, is an air of psychologism which seeks to identify the meaning of a text with the consciousness, or mental states, of the author.

But is there anything more to be said about the relation between the world of meaning which a literary work of art opens up and the creative intention through which the work is brought into being? Is not the author, in some sense, an agent responsible for the constellation of meanings to which his/her work may point? To what extent does the author's intention to create a meaningful work contribute to the meanings realized when the work is encountered and taken up as an interpretive task by a reader? Does the notion of authorial intention have meaning within the context of an ontological analysis of the literary work of art at all? It is these questions which will be the principal concern of this thesis. In order to

address them in a fruitful way what is needed, I suggest, is a phenomenological and ontological understanding of the concepts of "authorial intention" and "meaning" themselves. This can only be achieved, I maintain, by articulating these concepts within an ontological analysis of the notion of intentionality. It is my principal aim in this thesis, therefore, to inquire into the meaning of "authorial intention" and the meaning of "meaning" itself. My project will be to attempt to "de-psychologize" the notion of authorial intention by "ontologizing" intentionality. This investigation begins with a hermeneutical ontological analysis of the work of art.

In Chapter One, I begin by looking at certain aspects of the work of art which distinguish it from other products of human artifice. Through this analysis the work of art is revealed to be a product fundamentally different than other products of human agency. I argue that while the work of art must somehow be constituted as a determinate aesthetic object, we can identify it neither with the subjective experience of a particular interpreter, nor with the material objects in which some aesthetic experiences have their locus. A consideration of the performance arts--music, dance, theatre, for example--with which it seems impossible to identify a material object, suggests that perhaps it is more appropriate to construe the mode of being of the work of art in terms of events. Gadamer's analysis of the mode of

being of the work of art in terms of the concept of play brings the event character of the aesthetic object into high relief. For Gadamer, the work of art shares its mode of being with play in that the work exists in the representational structure that manifests itself before an audience which takes on the interpretation of the work as a task. The work of art achieves fruition only in the event of presentation in which it is constituted as an aesthetic object by an interpreter. In so far as the work of art finds completion only in an interpretive moment that is "beyond" the "work" of the artist, Gadamer argues, we might more appropriately characterize the work of art as a "creation." It is the fact that the work of art is "created" while other products are merely "made" that fundamentally distinguishes the work of art from other products of human agency. The remainder of the first chapter involves an articulation of what is implied in the notion of "creation" and how this aspect of the ontological structure of the work of art gives rise to the problem of authorial intention within the context of Gadamer's hermeneutical aesthetics.

In Chapter Two, I turn to Gadamer's analysis of interpretation in relation to the two moments involved in the creation of the literary work of art: composition and interpretation. Here the problem of articulating the relation between the intentions of the author and the meaning of his/her creation become particularly acute for the Gadamerian model. While Gadamer rightly stresses that an

interpretive dimension is inseparable from the composition of a literary work of art--indeed the composition of all works of art--the extent to which the artist is also an agent, with an intention to express something in and through his/her creative activity, is not pursued. Because Gadamer understands interpretation more as something that happens to an interpreter than as something an interpreter does, and because he wants to suggest that composition, like reading, is fundamentally interpretive, there is little room in his model for understanding how the intentions of the artist might contribute to the meanings to which the work may point. I suggest instead that it is the tension within creative composition--between interpretative moment which leads the artist in a particular direction of meaning, and the "intended" moment in which the artist works to express that direction--that drives artistic creation. In order to pursue this line it is necessary to leave Gadamer behind at this point and look at the way in which Ricoeur construes the creative work of the author in terms of *activity*.

In Chapter Three, I begin by examining the way Ricoeur has articulated the relationship between the production of a text and the possible meanings to which a text has the potential to give rise. For Ricoeur, textual production and the reader/writer relationship should be understood in terms of the model provided by discourse. Discourse, for Ricoeur, is an activity in and through which is fulfilled the intention to communicate meaning. In discourse one

endeavours to make oneself understood by one's interlocutor. The writing/reading relation represents a special case of the dialogical relation because the activity of the writer and the activity of the reader--which together constitute the discourse event--are sundered into two distinct moments which, though often separated by great temporal and cultural distances, are mediated by the material inscription of language afforded by a text. The interpretive activity of the reader makes possible the actualization of meaning and the completion of the discourse event. In reading a text, one does not merely come to understand what the author intended to mean, rather one experiences the world of meaning that the text brings to language.<sup>9</sup>

Pursuing some of the implications of Ricoeur's analysis of authorial intention and discourse as activity, I then argue that the meaning of authorial intention can only be understood properly within the context of an ontological analysis of intentionality. Through this analysis I will show that we cannot, in the final analysis, divorce the world of meaning to which the literary work of art has the potential to point from the intentional structures in and through which it is brought into being by the creative activity of the author. I will argue that the concepts of "meaning" and "intention" must be understood in terms of

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<sup>9</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, Vol. 1, Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 78-79.

structures of intentionality. "Intentionality" must cease to be construed as a psychological or an epistemological concept, and instead be articulated as an *ontological* one. However, in order to justify these claims it is instructive to begin by taking a critical look at the way in which the work of art is understood in hermeneutic ontology. Let us turn then to Gadamer.

**CHAPTER 1:**  
**Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics and the**  
**Ontological Structure of the Work of Art**

I

In order to make sense of the way in which works of art speak to us, and can be understood as "clearings" in which meaning and truth can be revealed, Gadamer has sought to elucidate the ontological structure of the work of art through phenomenological reflection on the nature of our experience when we encounter art. For Gadamer, the work of art is ontologically inseparable from the process in and through which it is constituted in interpretation. In this chapter, I begin by examining Gadamer's hermeneutical-ontological analysis of works of art in general. After that, since my primary concern is attempting to understand the role that authorial intention plays in the constitution of the literary work of art, I will focus particular attention upon certain aspects of the ontological structure of literary art. By making explicit Gadamer's interpretation of the ontological structure of the literary work of art from within the context of philosophical hermeneutics, it will be possible to delve more deeply into the question of authorial intention, of human intentionality in general, and finally of the way in which the intentional structure of human

experience, of human *being*, is constitutive of meaning and experience.

It is one of the basic tenets of philosophical hermeneutics that that which is intelligible, that which has the potential to be understood, involves interpretation. Understanding is inseparable from interpretation, it is argued, for there can be no understanding which is not mediated by historicity, culture, tradition, in and through language. That all understanding is a kind of interpretive mediation among these structures is an unavoidable fact of human finitude. Understanding as interpretation always involves situating, or contextualizing, our experience in relation to cultural and linguistic tradition. Within this interpretive structure lies the possibility of any and all understanding. That we are always already situated in a language and a tradition (a world) signifies the positive possibility of all understanding. It is only as contextualized in relation to our world and our past understanding that our experience has the potential to be meaningful and significant for us. All understanding is, therefore, a process of interpretive contextualization.

Implicit in this characterization of the basic structure of all understanding is the insight that the idea of a final or definitive interpretation is meaningless because the cultural contexts which condition the possibility of all interpretation are not static, but are

constantly evolving. This, as we shall see, has profound implications for the whole question of the role of authorial intention within the complex intentional structure that constitutes the literary work of art. There is no getting outside of culture, tradition, and language, all of which inform the interpretive possibilities of our world. These structures fore-ground all interpretation. Accordingly Gadamer suggests that a final definitive interpretation is not something at which one might ultimately arrive, rather we should think of interpretation in the following way. "In its original meaning, interpretation implies pointing in a particular direction. It is important to note that all interpretation points in a direction rather than to some final endpoint in the sense that it points to an open realm that can be filled in a variety of ways."<sup>1</sup> Since interpretation is inseparable from the concept of the work of art, it will be part of my task to make clear the significance of this, the fundamental structure of human understanding, as interpretation, in relation to the mode of being of the work of art.

## II

In our encounter with works of art, indeed in all experience, there is the possibility of understanding, of

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<sup>1</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays, translated by Nicholas Walker, edited with an introduction by Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 68.

meaning, and of the disclosure of truth. But what kind of meaning and truth is it that art reveals, and how does it do so?<sup>2</sup> The way in which the work of art speaks to us seems to be such that what it discloses to us could not be expressed in its full richness conceptually. As Gadamer observes: "Art is only encountered in a form that resists pure conceptualization. ...[W]e typically encounter art as a unique manifestation of truth whose particularity cannot be surpassed."<sup>3</sup> There is something about the way in which art speaks to us which is unique, such that nothing else would suffice to communicate to us with the same degree of richness what the work of art manages to communicate. Our lives are altered and enriched as a result of our encounters with certain works of art. In order to begin to understand how the work of art effects this, we need first to try to make sense of the kinds of things that works of art are.

One of the first things that strikes us when we reflect upon works of art is that, in so far as artworks are always things of human making, they seem to share some aspects of their being with other products of human making. A work of art is a kind of product, Gadamer maintains, but it is a product of a kind fundamentally different from other

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<sup>2</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, 2nd revised edition, translation and revision by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays (1986), 37.

products. The being of the work of art has significant differences from the pieces of equipment to which we usually refer as "products." In the first place, the being of a work of art does not lie in instrumentality. What it is is not to be found in the fulfillment of purposes external to the work itself. The work of art is not brought into being for a "purpose," in order to fulfill some function, in the same sense in which equipmental products are. As Gadamer writes: "It is not an item of equipment determined by its utility, as all such items or products of human work are."<sup>4</sup> Unlike a hammer, for example, the purpose of which can be found in the usefulness of the hammer in relation to certain projects we might take up, the "purpose" of a work of art is not a function of its use value; nor is it a function of the extent to which it is contributive to the completion of projects external to itself. Similarly, we do not commonly refer to items of equipment, such as hammers, as "works." Herein lies one important aspect of the uniqueness and irreplaceability of the work of art. Gadamer observes: "When we acquire a household appliance, we do not call an article of this kind a work, for such articles can be produced indefinitely. Since they are conceived in terms of a specific function, they are in principle replaceable. The work of art, on the other hand, is irreplaceable."<sup>5</sup> Works of

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<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Play of Art," The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays (1986), 126.

<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 35.

art, although partly, we shall want to say, products of human making, are irreplaceable because the essence of the work of art does not lie in a purpose which could be fulfilled by something else, but in its potential to reveal meaning and disclose truth in way which is truly original. In this works of art are fundamentally different from the instruments and utensils which we normally think of as products.

Like other products, however, the work of art is "intended," we should then say, in so far as it is something that is made, but it is not "intended" in the sense that its being can be identified with what is "intended" by its maker in the same way as articles of equipment like the hammer can be. That is to say that the being of the work of art is by no means exhausted by the conscious "intention" with which the artist sets to work. Unlike the work of art, we do not normally ask what a piece of equipment like the hammer "means," but we ask what it is useful for. This seems to suggest that the reason for the hammer's being is not something intrinsic to itself, while the reason for the artwork's being is. Saying in exactly what sense the work of art can be understood as "intended" is a complex problem, and is, indeed, the central concern of this study as a whole.

Closely related to the problem of artistic "intention" is the work of art's resistance to being "used" in any instrumental way. To take a simple example, while one may

"use" a copy of James Joyce's Ulysses to prop up a coffee table with a broken leg, it is a material object--a stack of seven hundred and eighty or so pages bound together, a particular copy of the book entitled Ulysses that may lend itself to this function and not Ulysses the novel, the literary work of art. This distinction is crucial. For one thing, if we sought to identify the work of art with the book, we would have to grant that there are as many novels as there are books.<sup>6</sup> But this is not at all the way we think about works of art, nor is it consistent with the way in which we comport ourselves to them. We think it essential to the work of art that it is unique, that it manifests itself in an unrepeatable way, and that it could not simply be reproduced as equipmental products are. Generally, we are inclined to think that there is only one Ulysses, whereas there are many copies of the book entitled Ulysses and many hammers.

Although there is certainly a sense in which many forms of art are tied to material objects, as is the literary work of art to the book, this dimension of some forms of artwork does not constitute the work of art and indeed tends to obscure the most significant aspects of its being as art. The identity of the work art as a hermeneutic object, an object of interpretation, cannot lie solely in, for example,

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<sup>6</sup> Jeff Mitscherling, "Play and Participation in the Work of Art", unpublished ms, 10. These arguments are developed in detail by Roman Ingarden in The Literary Work of Art, Part I, "Preliminary questions".

the sculpture formed by the sculptor, the text written by the author, the material objects which might be understood as the loci of these kinds of artistic experience. Indeed in the case of music and performance arts, the idea that we might identify the work of art with a particular material object at all becomes even more problematic and questionable. A little reflection on these sorts of art works seems to suggest that their mode of being might be understood more appropriately in terms of events. One can readily acknowledge how the performance arts--music, dance, theatre, for example--might best be understood as events, for they exist as items of aesthetic interest only in their being performed. Clearly, the symphony is not the pages of lines and dots which comprise its score; and in the case of the dance there seems to be no material object with which one might be tempted to identify the work of art. But, nonetheless, we still consider these to be works of art, and in so far as they are works of art, they seem to possess some kind of determinate self-identity. Even in the case of improvisational pieces, as Gadamer says, there is a kind of "hermeneutic self-identity" in the sheer appearance of these works in so far as our encounters with them can be valued as aesthetic experiences and evaluated.<sup>7</sup> As Gadamer remarks, the work ... "finds its characteristic fulfillment when our gaze dwells upon the appearance itself."<sup>8</sup> The word

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<sup>7</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 25.

<sup>8</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 13.

"performance" carries with it this idea, in the sense that that which is performed is "consummated" or "accomplished" in being performed. In their performance before an audience, these works of art come to fruition in the sense that it is in the event of performance that they achieve their self-identity as works: "The identity of the work is not guaranteed by any classic or formalist criteria, but is secured by the way in which we take the construction of the work upon ourselves as a task."<sup>9</sup> That we, as an audience must take the construction of the work upon ourselves as a "task," points to another sense in which we might understand the work of art as something "intended."

These aspects of the nature of works of performance art provide us with a clue to understanding the essential characteristics of all works of art and the nature of aesthetic experience in general. It is necessary, however, to try to suggest in what the identity of a work of art consists if not the material objects which some forms of art involve. Such self-identity is an essential characteristic of the work of art which we must seek to elucidate if we are to understand how it is that works of art have meaning for us.

In seeking to understand in what the identity of the work of art consists, we should also want to avoid what might be characterized as a "subjectivist" approach. For

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<sup>9</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 28.

just as we would not want to claim that there are as many novels as there are copies of a book, we must not identify the novel, the work of art, wholly with the particular aesthetic experience of an individual. If we did, we would have to say that there are as many distinct novels as there are readers of that novel. That we can evaluate a novel and compare our experiences, our interpretations, of it with others implies that the work of art cannot be identified with the particular experiences to which it gives rise. Although the literary work of art is inseparable from its reading, or its "being read," the suggestion that we might identify the work of art with the subjective experience of its viewers, listeners, or readers is not at all consistent with the way in which we experience the work of art. When we encounter a work of art, we experience it as something which draws us into it, and at the same time, *transcends* us. The mode of being of the work of art is somehow such that it enriches and enlarges the interpretive possibilities of our world. This is why it is often claimed that the nature of artistic experience is such that it does not leave one who has it unchanged. Indeed, as Gadamer writes: "... the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience [Erfahrung] that changes the person who experiences it."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 102. Gadamer's remarks here are interesting in that he seems to be suggesting that the work of art is something that exists independently of the one who takes it up as an interpretive task. That the work of art has its "true being in the fact that it becomes an experience" seems to suggest that some aspect of the

Finally, to anticipate somewhat what we will develop in detail below, characteristic of the work of art is that it always means more than the artist could possibly have intended. In this sense it is possible to speak of the meaning and significance of a work of art being freed from the intention of the artist through whose work it was brought into being. One reason why the work of art must always mean more than the author could have possibly intended lies in the fact that the work of art is only actualized before an audience which encounters it as an interpretive task. In this sense also, the work of art is unlike other "products" of human making in that it cannot be confronted as an independently existing object. The work of art is constituted, it is "actualized," in and through its interpretations. The work of art transcends itself as a product as it emerges as an object of contemplation only in and through the experience of viewer, listener, or reader. Gadamer writes:

[T]he work of art is not itself simply as a product ... it is something that has emerged in an unrepeatable way and has manifested itself in a unique fashion. It seems to me, therefore, that it would be more accurate to call it a creation (*Gebilde*) than a work. For the word *Gebilde* implies that the manifestation in question has in a strange way transcended the process in which it originated, or has relegated that process to the periphery. It has set forth its own appearance as a self-sufficient creation.<sup>11</sup>

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being of the work of art must be understood to exist independently of the aesthetic experience in which it is constituted.

<sup>11</sup> Gadamer, "The Play of Art," 126.

We should take note as well, that the translation of the German word, *Gebilde*, as "creation" does not capture the full sense of Gadamer's term. The word *Gebilde* can also be translated as "structure," suggesting that we might think of the work of art as coming to fruition on different levels, or perhaps as forming a complex which we cannot grasp all at once, as it were.<sup>12</sup> Gadamer points out elsewhere that the prefix *ge*, in German, means "a gathering." He draws our attention to *Gebirge*, which we would translate into English as "mountain range," which means literally "a gathering of mountains."<sup>13</sup> This too would support the claim that the work of art is something formed through a process of concrescence, a kind of gathering of meaning and significance. Further, if we consider a close etymological cousin of *Gebilde*, the adjective *gebildet*, a term we might use to describe a person whom we thought well-educated, or cultured, the meaning of *Gebilde* resonates on another level. Namely, as something which is formed, or comes to formation, through a "gathering" of experience, as we think of the cultured individual having done.

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<sup>12</sup> Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall translate the German word **Gebilde** as "structure" in the second revised English translation of Truth and Method. See, for example, p. 110. Further, Jeff Mitscherling in, "Play and Participation in the Work of Art", elaborates on this point and draws attention to the technical sense that the term **Gebilde** has in the phenomenological aesthetics of Roman Ingarden.

<sup>13</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 33, see fn.45.

It is precisely because of these characteristics of artworks that the question of the place of the intention of the artist among the complexes of meaning to which the work of art gives rise becomes particularly complex. Let us now see how Gadamer construes the interpretative processes through which the work of art comes to fruition as an aesthetic object.

### III

Central to Gadamer's understanding of the work of art is the concept of play. The term Gadamer uses is *Spiel*, which, as well as "play," can also mean "game." Mitscherling points out: "This double meaning of *Spiel* is crucial for Gadamer's analysis, for he maintains that the work of art is similar to a game, which exists only when it is being played."<sup>14</sup> Understanding the way in which Gadamer construes the ontological structure of the work of art requires that we keep both of these senses of *Spiel* in mind. In the first place, implicit in the concept of *Spiel* is the idea that the work of art has the character of an event or a happening. The work of art is never merely something that is--rather, its being is in its becoming. This can be seen most clearly in what Gadamer refers to as the "transitory arts"--i.e., performance arts, such as music and dance--which must in some sense be "constituted" each time they are presented to

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<sup>14</sup> Mitscherling, "Play and Participation in the Work of Art," 7.

an audience. But this is, as we shall see, a fundamental characteristic of all works of art. The concept of *Spiel* thus brings into high relief the event character of all works of art. Similarly, the concept of *Spiel* suggests that, just as in all games there are both structuring rules and "freedom" of movement, there are at once in the work of art both free-play and structure. It is through the "playful" tension between these two moments that the work of art emerges as a unique creation each time it is encountered anew. In order to understand the way in which Gadamer construes the ontological structure of the work of art, therefore, it is necessary that we take up with him in detail an analysis of the mode of being of "art as play."

In "The Play of Art" Gadamer observes: "Play is an elementary phenomenon that pervades the whole of the animal world and, as is obvious, it determines man as a natural being as well."<sup>15</sup> We speak not only of human play, which ranges from games with a minimum of intentionally structural elements to those with extremely complex systems of rules, but of animal play as well. Play seems to be a function natural and necessary to all living things. It connotes free movement and interaction which is not tied to any goal in particular, but to the pure expression of an over-abundance of movement and of life itself. Gadamer suggests that we tend to misunderstand the nature of our own existence if we

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<sup>15</sup> Gadamer, "The Play of Art", 123.

think of ourselves only as self-conscious rational animals. There is something natural, instinctual, free, and impulsive in all play. It is interesting to consider in this regard as well that in genuine play one must to some extent lose oneself as a self-possessed, self-conscious agent. That is to say, there seems to be a moment of self-forgetfulness in which rational self-consciousness is suspended as one abandons oneself to the pure movements of the game.

When we reflect upon the way in which we commonly think about play, play first of all seems to stand in a peculiar relation to the notion of seriousness. When we speak of play we seek to describe a kind of space in which the seriousness of our purposeful activity has been suspended. We tend to contrast play with our serious, goal-oriented behaviour because when we play it is for the sake of game itself and not the accomplishment of purposes external to our purely playful activity and to the game at hand. But, Gadamer points out, there is also an element of seriousness inseparable from genuine play. Namely, that the player must give himself over seriously to the game. This element of seriousness is such, however, that it cannot be "intended" by the player. If it were, uninhibited freedom of movement could not manifest itself. This "unintended seriousness" is inseparable from play. "Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play. Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness

in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play."<sup>16</sup> We must say, therefore, that it is a fundamental characteristic of all play that it involves intention in the following way: "... the common element in play ... [is] the fact that it is *intended as something*, even if it is not something conceptual, useful, or purposive, but only the pure autonomous regulation of movement."<sup>17</sup>

Already, among these preliminary remarks, we are beginning to see some indication of the way in which the concept of play might be tied to the absence of instrumentality, of purposeful activity, of conscious intention, in the mode of being of the work of art for Gadamer. But this is all somewhat vague so far. Aside from its seemingly dialectical relation to seriousness, what is it that characterizes play itself?

We use the word play to describe not only the way in which human beings and animals play, but also in expressions like "the play of light on water" or "the play of colours in a sunset, or a painting."<sup>18</sup> In what seem to be metaphorical uses, we seek to draw attention to the apparent freedom of movement that the appearance before us manifests. There is no question of seriousness or intention in play of this kind--nor any subjects who could be identified as "players"

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<sup>16</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 102.

<sup>17</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 24.

<sup>18</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 22; See also Truth and Method, 103.

who might have intentions for that matter--but simply the pure appearance of cycles of movement in themselves. We draw attention to these uses of the word play for, as Gadamer remarks, it is often by attending to the seemingly metaphorical uses of a term that the genuine sense of the "literal" meaning presents itself to us clearly. Gadamer writes, "In each case what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is equally appropriate to speak of the play of light and the play of children because in both cases what we seek to draw attention to is the movement itself and not what it is that plays. Furthermore, unlike purposive activities which find consummation in their fulfillment of purpose, the being of play is such that when the pure appearance of movement ceases, play ceases too. Thus we should say that the movement of genuine play is not tied to any goal nor to that which plays. Gadamer remarks, "The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is the game that is played--it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it."<sup>20</sup> The mode of being of play in all its forms, therefore, is a kind of emergent relation which manifests itself in an event that Gadamer characterizes as "pure appearance."

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<sup>19</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 103.

That Gadamer characterizes the mode of being of play as "pure appearance" has some interesting implications for our inquiry into the mode of being of the work of art and its ontological inseparability from the experiential moment in and through which it is concretized. It is necessary that for an appearance to be what it is, it must appear before a subject, it must be observed. An appearance that appears to no one is no appearance at all. It follows from Gadamer's notion of play as pure appearance that play must always present itself for someone. The play of light on water, for example, only manifests itself, only appears, and is, therefore, only play, when it manifests itself for an observer. This means that the observer before whom play appears must be, in some way for Gadamer, essential to the mode of being of play. If one does not take part in the play itself, but simply watches, one is drawn into the play which manifests itself before one. The observer must to some extent be a participant in play. Even in cases in which, for example, a child plays by herself at bouncing a ball, the child is both at once, player caught up in the movement of the game, and on-looker; but, to be sure, as on-looker, similarly caught up in the pure movement which presents itself before her in the game. Essential to the notion of play is that it must be played before someone, and that the observer play along with the game. One does not encounter play as an "observer," therefore, in the same way in which one encounters other objects as an observer. One cannot

merely "observe" play, but as an observer one becomes "engaged" in play.

But we must be careful here, however, for this need not imply that all play is intended to be what it is for an audience. This is one feature which distinguishes the play in art from "mere" play. Genuine play is for itself, and when, as we see in the case of professional sport, the focus start to shift from the game to the production of pure spectacle, the game is in danger of losing its "playful" character.<sup>21</sup> The reason for this is that intentions external to play itself--the desire to make the game into a spectacle or a show--interfere with what would otherwise be the free "movement" of the game. Freedom from intentions external to the game at hand is necessary for genuine play to manifest itself.

In the case of the work of art, however, which shares with play the mode of being of pure appearance, inseparable from the artistic creation, from the emergence of the work of art as a unified structure, is, according to Gadamer, that it is "intended" for an audience. Play in itself does not intend anything. The mode of play involved in the work of art differs from "mere" play in that it always intends to mean something for someone--something beyond itself. Because the work of art intends to mean something, we can characterize the mode of being of its appearance as

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<sup>21</sup> See Gadamer, Truth and Method, 109.

"intentional." Although Gadamer does not speak of the work of art explicitly in this way, this is not at all incompatible with the idea that the work of art has its mode of being in play. Indeed it will be necessary to construe the mode of being of the work of art in these terms if we are to later recuperate hermeneutic ontology with respect to the aesthetic object. The notion of "intentionality" emphasizes the "directedness" which is essential to the way in which the work of art "means." In so far as the work of art can be said to mean something, its determinate identity lies in the fact that it presents itself as an intentional object. But as we shall see in more detail below, it does not intend for us to dwell upon it alone, but to represent its appearing, and to direct our understanding beyond its appearance in such a way that truth beyond itself is disclosed. Thus the mode of being of the work of art is not merely "presentational" but can be characterized more appropriately as "re-presentational." All art--not merely the plastic arts, which sometimes portray people or landscapes with varying degrees of verisimilitude--has a representational dimension. Gadamer writes: "Only because play is always presentation is human play able to make representation the task of the game. ... All presentation is potentially a representation for someone. That this possibility is intended is the characteristic feature of art

as play."<sup>22</sup> Even the artist who will exhibit his work before no one, is at once both artist and audience. With this observation about the nature of play and the work of art as appearance we see revealed another thread that entangles ontologically the mode of being of the work of art with artistic experience for Gadamer: that there can be in the final analysis no radical separation between the work of art and the experiential/interpretive process through which it is actualized.

That the mode of being of play can be described in terms of "pure appearance" draws our attention to other aspects of the being of the work of art as well. It has been suggested that play transcends the players who play the game, for it is precisely the play that determines them as players: "The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players."<sup>23</sup> Play has its own essence independent and transcendent of those who play. There is in Gadamer's notion of play, what Anthony Kerby describes as, "... a subjection of the player to the game being played. What is being played, the game, transcends the individual players and is precisely what determines them as players."<sup>24</sup> It is not, therefore, something that is simply reducible to the

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<sup>22</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 108.

<sup>23</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony Paul Kerby, "Gadamer's Concrete Universal," Man and World 24, 1991, 51.

consciousness of the subjects who engage in it. Nor does it exist merely in the minds of the subjects who are at play. Our consideration of the use of the word in expressions like "the play of light on water" revealed that there need not be any subjectivity at all for play to manifest itself as a cycle of free movement not tied to any goal. As Gadamer writes: "Play--indeed play proper--exists when the thematic horizon is not limited by any being-for-itself of subjectivity, and where there are no subjects who are behaving 'playfully'."<sup>25</sup>

... [P]lay is not to be understood as something a person does. As far as language is concerned, the actual subject of play is obviously not the subjectivity of an individual who, among other things, also plays but is instead the play itself. But we are so accustomed to relating phenomena such as playing to the sphere of subjectivity and the ways *it acts* that we remain closed to these indications from the spirit of language.<sup>26</sup>

Just as we can locate the mode of being of play neither among the particular conditions of the game that is played, nor among the subjectivities of the players, similarly, as I tried to suggest above, we can locate the mode of being of the work of art neither in a material object, nor purely in the subjective experience of the viewer, listener, or reader. The essence of play is to be found in the event in

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<sup>25</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 102.

<sup>26</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 104.

which playfulness manifests itself; the "subject" of play must therefore be, in so far as it is the play itself which defines the players and not the other way around, play itself. Similarly we can say of art: "The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself."<sup>27</sup> Just as in play, one must give oneself over to the game, so too in the case of the experience of art.

The analysis of the mode of being of play and the similarities between play and the experience of the work of art tend to confirm some of my initial claims; most significantly, perhaps, that we do not approach the work of art in the same way in which we approach other objects of human making. There is no question of taking up a novel or a sonata in the same way in which one takes up a fork or a shovel. Clearly we do not comport ourselves toward the work of art as we do toward other sorts of objects of human artifice. What is more, in Gadamer's notion of play, we see that the subjectivity of the players is suspended in a unique sort of happening in which it is almost more appropriate to speak of the players being played by the movement of the game, rather than playing the game. The player, thus, has a seemingly passive role in play in which his actions are directed by the free unfolding of the game.

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<sup>27</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 102.

In the play in which the work of art is realized, for Gadamer, the artist too is as much "player," is as much "played by his creation," as is the audience. This passivity of the player in relation to the game, or the artist in relation to the artistic creation, is, I will try to suggest, a weak feature of Gadamer's analysis. If we want to recuperate hermeneutic ontology with respect to the ontological structure of the work of art, and understand the meaning of authorial intention within this structure, we must inject the player/artist with more responsibility and render him/her a proper *agent*.

The question of intention in and of play takes a strange turn at this point in Gadamer's analysis, for as we have said, the proper subject of play is not the player, but the play itself. In genuine play, the subjectivity of the player is curiously suspended. In play, it is the pure manifestation of the game that has ontological priority. In the case of the experience of art, the problem is the same if the work of art shares in the mode of being of play. Is there a way in which the intentions of the artist or the intentional stance of one who interprets the work can be understood as contributive to the constitution of the work of art?

What is peculiar about human play, and what gives us a clue to understanding the ontological structure of the work of art, is that, in the case of games, play can be *intentionally structured*. We see evidence of consciously

intended structure to a much lesser degree by comparison in animal play, and none at all as play manifests itself among nonliving forms and objects. This is not to say that these forms of play are without structure, nor is it to say necessarily that they are not in some sense intended. They are intended, they exist as intentional objects, in so far as they are taken up by a viewer. Gadamer writes: "the specifically human quality in our play is the self-discipline and order that we impose on our movements when playing, as if particular purposes were involved--just like a child, for example, who counts how often he can bounce a ball on the ground before losing control of it."<sup>28</sup> There is a kind of nonpurposive rationality to the phenomenon of human play. We see here more clearly the essential moment of seriousness within the context of play wherein the human player must take up the game and the rules that constitute its structure in earnest. *Shall we say, perhaps, that the play itself intends this structure?* This is what Gadamer seems to be arguing. Perhaps this can give us a clue to the way in which it is possible for art to disclose meaning for us through the structured forms in which it is created and manifested in the artistic experience. In any case, neither the intention of the artist nor the intention of the experiencer who engages the artistic creation can be understood to

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<sup>28</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 23.

contribute to the constitution of the work of art in any simple way.

So far we have seen that the mode of being of play, for Gadamer, might best be described as pure appearance, for it was suggested that it is not possible to identify the phenomenon of play either with the subjective experience of the players, or simply with the proscriptive rules which structure the movements of human play. Play is, simply, the manifestation of cycles of movement generating the appearance of structure. What makes the structure of play an important theme for our investigation is that it is in structure that the potential for the experience of meaning lies. Structure is essential to understanding in any form, because it is the structure of experience that conditions its interpretive possibilities. With structure comes the possibility of meaning, comes the possibility of the work of art coming to presentation as an intentional object for an audience. The possibility of understanding what the players of a game with which we are unfamiliar are up to, for example, is conditioned by our ability to discern a logical structure in the movements of the game before us. We ask ourselves: "What task are the players trying to accomplish?" or "What is the objective of this game?" In and through this apparent structure, we "read" or interpret significant intentions which are internal to the game itself. These significant intentions lie embedded in the structure of the

game as possibilities that may or may not be taken up.<sup>29</sup> We attempt to situate what we see before us in relation to structures which are familiar to us. We attempt to recognize something familiar in the unfamiliar. When we feel we have it right, we say that we understand the game, and that the movements of the players make sense. Indeed it is in the notion of structure, Gadamer maintains, that the conditions of the possibility of all understanding and communication are to be sought.<sup>30</sup> In the play in which the work of art manifests itself, it is through the structure that this process unfolds within itself that the work means something for us. Let us now attend more closely to certain aspects of the structure of the work of art and examine how this structure is related to, or should perhaps be understood as a manifestation of, that which art as play itself intends. Earlier, I indicated that, for Gadamer, all art must be understood as having a "representational" dimension. By attending to the notion of structure with regard to forms of human play, it will be possible to begin to shed some light on the significance of this claim.

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<sup>29</sup> Aref Nayad has identified this feature of the game as "embedded design." See "Interpretation as the Engagement of Operational Artifacts: Operational Hermeneutics," diss., University of Guelph, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> See Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 23.

## IV

We have said that part of what characterizes the form of play that manifests itself in art is that, unlike mere play, it is intended for an audience. We may extend to all works of art what Gadamer says of the religious rite and the theatrical play: "Their being is not exhausted by the fact that they present themselves, for at the same time they point beyond themselves to the audience which participates by watching. ... The directedness proper to all representation comes to the fore here and is constitutive of the being of art."<sup>31</sup> It is in the engagement of the audience that the work of art comes to fruition, for it is as a representation that the work of art is intended. Again, what Gadamer says of the representational structure of the theatrical play is applicable to all works art:

The players play their roles as in any game, and thus the play is represented, *but the play itself is the whole, comprising players and spectators*. In fact it is experienced properly by, and presents itself (as it is 'meant') to, one who is not acting in the play but watching it. In him the game is raised, as it were, to its ideality.<sup>32</sup>

These remarks, too, have interesting implications for our central theme concerning the role of authorial intention in the constitution of the literary work of art. For if it is the case that the mode of play in and through which the

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<sup>31</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 108-09.

<sup>32</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 109 (Italics mine).

work of art is created and realized only achieves completion when it is encountered by an audience, where shall we locate the author of the literary work of art among the "players" of the game? For what is suggested is that the creation of the work of art surpasses the work of the artist, and is taken up, completed, and fulfilled only in the experience of an audience. The creation of art, therefore, "... is not something we can imagine being deliberately made by someone .... There is a leap between the planning and the executing on the one hand and the successful achievement on the other."<sup>33</sup> The work, then, transcends that which the author intends and, to the extent that it does so, the author stands in the same relation to his work as does every other reader. The creation of the work of art does not find fulfillment, is not fully constituted as a hermeneutic object, until it is encountered as something to be interpreted by an audience. Only in so far as it is interpretively situated in relation to the world of an audience can the work of art "mean." The interpretive moment, realized in the encounter with an audience, is inseparable from the mode of being of the work of art. In it the work of art is "actualized" in the sense that what the work has the potential to mean, to be, achieves presentation. Authorial intention cannot be understood in any way as privileging one interpretation of the work over

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<sup>33</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 33.

any other, therefore, because of the very fact that the creation of the work of art transcends its artist in this way.

The representational element of the game structures the movement of the play of art. But the kind of representation intended in art must not be thought of simply as the attempt to render forms "accurately," nor to achieve a certain degree of verisimilitude in copying an "original" form. Rather, what art intends to represent is the very essence of that which it portrays; it seeks to disclose a truth which tends normally to hide itself in that which it portrays. The Latin cognate of the word "portray" is revealing here: *protrahere*, literally, "to draw forth" indicates what the representational aspect of the play of art seeks to achieve. The play of art tends to draw out the truth that is concealed in our ordinary everyday experience of our world and ourselves through representing these things to us in a new way. This is effected by the essential tension between free play and structuring intention in and through which the work of art is actualized. We might think of the structure which emerges from this tension as conditioning the possibilities of meaning to which the work of art gives rise. But this is not to imply that the moment of free play in the work of art is a space in which intended structure merely permits different possibilities of meaning to arise. Rather in the portrayal of the work of art it is the free

unfolding of experience which generates the moment of intended structure of the artistic experience and the self-identity of the work of art as an intentional object.

What is achieved is what might be characterized as a unique form of "highlighting." Our attention is drawn to and drawn in by the work of art. Heidegger, in "The Origin of the Work of Art", draws attention to the Greek notion of *aletheia*, "unconcealedness," to characterize the "truth" in artistic experience and to emphasize its phenomenal dimension. Truth must be understood, first and foremost, as a happening: the interplay of concealing and revealing of meaning in experience, of Being itself. For Heidegger and for Gadamer too, "concealment" is inseparable from human understanding, for it belongs to human finitude. There is no truth except in relation to that which remains concealed. This double movement of concealing and revealing describes the fundamental structure of the play which manifests itself in the concretization of the work of art. Heidegger writes: "The work of art opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this deconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the work of art, the truth of what is has set itself to work."<sup>34</sup> For Gadamer this crucial insight has far-reaching implications for making sense of the way in which art has power to disclose

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, in Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger, edited by Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 668.

truth: "This philosophical insight which sets limits to any idealism claiming a total recovery of meaning, implies that there is more to the work of art than a meaning that is experienced only in an indeterminate way."<sup>35</sup> The beauty of the work of art effects this by drawing our attention to that which the work of art discloses and casting, as it were, a light upon it. Other aspects of that which is familiar remain concealed in order that what is disclosed can shine (*scheinen* = to appear). Gadamer writes: "In being presented in play, what is emerges. It produces and brings to light what is constantly hidden and withdrawn."<sup>36</sup>

Let us now see how the structure of the play of art as the intention to represent effects the happening of truth in this way. The analysis of the concepts of symbol and mimesis reveals more clearly the mode of being of the work of art, its representational character, and its power to disclose truth. If we begin by examining the way in which Gadamer construes the symbolic dimension of art, we can see how it is that the representational moment of art can best be understood in terms of mimesis.

I have suggested above that one of the characteristics of the work of art, or of the meaningful experience to which it gives rise, is that it manifests itself in a form that

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<sup>35</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 34.

<sup>36</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 112.

defies conceptualization. The meaning of the work of art cannot be confronted and "grasped" in this way. Gadamer maintains that here the concept of the symbol can be our guide. He writes: "I propose that the symbolic in general, and especially the symbolic in art, rests upon an intricate interplay of showing and concealing."<sup>37</sup> Let us see how, for Gadamer, "the symbolic" affects this.

"In the case of the symbol, ... and for our experience of the symbolic in general, the particular represents itself as a fragment of being that promises to complete and make whole whatever corresponds to it."<sup>38</sup> That the experience of art is significant for us indicates that the work of art must function to some extent as the bearer of meaning. But we must qualify this remark by saying that although the experience of art--which for Gadamer, it will be recalled, is inseparable from the *work* of art--is always meaningful, the way in which this is accomplished in the work of art is unique. It is unique in the sense that nothing else could communicate, nothing else could mean, what the work of art does. The particularity of the work of art cannot be surpassed. We can bring out more clearly the unique way in which the symbol and the symbolic in art "mean" by contrasting the symbol to the sign.

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<sup>37</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 33.

<sup>38</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 32.

In Being and Time, Heidegger writes: "[S]igns, in the first instance, are themselves items of equipment whose specific character as equipment consists in *showing* or *indicating*. ... Indicating can be defined as a 'kind' of referring."<sup>39</sup> The instrumentality of the sign does not necessarily lie in the fact that some signs are made for indicating certain things. Signs often are, but they need not be, products of human making. Rather the instrumentality of the sign in its essential function of indicating lies in the fact that something is established, or accepted, as a sign. Thus we speak of certain meteorological phenomena as signs in so far as they are accepted as indicators of future weather patterns, as, for example, a farmer might take a south wind as a sign of rain.<sup>40</sup> The proper function of the sign is to indicate to us something which is not immediately present in such a way that we do not dwell on the sign itself. In general it is the proper function of a sign to draw attention to itself in such a way as to make itself inconspicuous as an object of contemplation by making explicit that which is not present but to which the sign points. It should do in such a way that what it points to, and what it points to alone, comes to mind. One need only think of a certain highway sign, for example, which is placed conspicuously in order to indicate a curve in the

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 111.

<sup>40</sup> See Heidegger, Being and Time, 111.

road ahead. The highway sign does not invite our gaze but instead directs our attention and understanding away from itself toward that which is not present but which may be fast approaching. The essence of the sign, therefore, is to point toward something else in such a way that its meaning coincides with that to which it refers. In this way, the sign can be said to point toward that which is not present. Gadamer writes: "For a sign is nothing but what its function requires; and that is to point away from itself."<sup>41</sup> The kind of representation at work in the symbol and the symbolic in art is different.

The symbol, and the symbolic in art, do not merely indicate or point toward something else, as does the sign. Instead, the symbol compels us to linger over it, and dwell on the symbol itself. In a strange way the symbol does not indicate anything that is not at the same time present in the symbol itself. The symbol and the symbolic aspect of the work of art represent, but unlike the sign, they do not do so by indicating, but do so instead in and through their own appearance. In their appearing, they make present something that is not. It is interesting to notice as well that in its symbolic dimension we see another aspect of the relation between the mode of being of art and that of play--that is, that the symbolic allows meaning to present itself in the pure appearance of the symbol. The crucifix, for example,

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<sup>41</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 152.

for those for whom this symbol has meaning, makes present a whole worldview by taking the place of that which it represents. A tradition, a structure of values, and the bonds that unite a community, are immediately present in the symbol of the crucifix. The symbol of the crucifix is revered in itself because that which it represents is immediately present in it. This is why the crucifix, like all religious symbols, does not merely point toward the holy, but rather *is* holy. As Gadamer writes: "The representational function of a symbol is not merely to point to something that is not present. *Instead the symbol manifests the presence of something that is really present.*"<sup>42</sup> This is the way in which the work of art can be said to re-present. But in what sense can we say that what the work of art represents is actually present in the work of art? I shall return to this in a moment, but first it is necessary to make some qualifying remarks about the relation between symbol and art.

Although we must affirm a symbolic dimension in all works of art, the work of art differs in an important respect from the symbol. Not all symbols are works of art, and the symbolic does not exhaust the being of the work of art. As with a sign, in order for the symbol to represent it must be instituted, for only in its institution is the significance given to the symbol to represent what it does.

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<sup>42</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 153 (italics mine).

Many symbols also function as signs, both making something present in themselves and at the same time pointing beyond themselves toward something else that is not immediately present in them.

Unlike the symbol, however, the work of art does not owe its meaning to an act of institution. According to Gadamer, the symbol in representing does not add anything to that which it represents; and this is the crucial distinction between the mere symbol and the work of art for him. It is worthwhile to quote Gadamer at length on this point:

Through their mere existence and manifesting of themselves, symbols function as substitutes; but of themselves, they say nothing about what they symbolize. One must be familiar with them in the same way one must be familiar with a sign, if one is to understand what they refer to. Hence they do not mean an increase of being for what is represented. It is true that making itself present in symbols belongs to the being of what is represented. But its own being is not further determined by the fact that the symbols exist and are shown. It does not exist any *more* fully when they exist. They merely take its place.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 154. It is not clear why Gadamer suggests that that which symbols represent "does not exist any more fully when they [the symbols] exist." This does not at all seem consistent with his general position. If we accept--as Gadamer seems to--that the "being" of the world is coextensive with the "meaning" of the world, then any increase in meaning, would mean an increase in being. It seems that a symbol, since symbols function by representing (and must be understood to bear the meaning of that which they represent), must constitute an increase in the being of that which it symbolizes. Therefore, that which is symbolized must be understood to exist "**more** fully" in virtue of the symbol that represents it.

It is precisely in this respect that the mode of being of the work of art differs from the merely symbolic, according to Gadamer. In making that which it re-presents present to experience, the work of art changes forever the way in which we experience that which is represented. As Gadamer writes: "the work of art does not simply refer to something, because what it refers to is actually there. We could say that the work of art signifies an increase in being."<sup>44</sup> After seeing the painting by Van Gough, and creatively participating in the constitution of the work, one never sees irises in quite the same way again. The work of art has made the iris mean something different and something more than it did to us before the aesthetic experience. Our world has become larger, there has been an increase in meaning, an increase in the being of the world. The aesthetic experience overwhelms in this way, such that it does not leave one who has had it unchanged.<sup>45</sup>

When we encounter the work of art we experience recognition in the genuine sense of seeing, of understanding, that which is familiar in a new way. Thus that which is familiar takes on new levels of significance when we recognize it in and through the aesthetic experience. This dimension is inseparable from the totality of the experience

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<sup>44</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 25.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of this aspect of the aesthetic experience see Gadamer, "Hermeneutics and Aesthetics," in Philosophical Hermeneutics, translated and edited by David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

of the work of art. The work of art discloses something to us and through our participation in its creation which normally remains concealed from us in our everyday comportment toward that which the work of art represents. Thus it is perhaps more appropriate to say that the work of art does not refer beyond itself to something else, but rather the meaning toward which it points surpasses, or transcends the particularity of the experience in and through which the work of art is concretized.

For Gadamer, that which the work of art represents is not something wholly beyond the work of art itself, but through the creative experience which is constitutive of it we see familiar aspects of our world and ourselves in a new light. But that Gadamer makes no clear distinction between the work of art itself and the work of art *qua* object of aesthetic experience at this point gives rise to profound confusion with respect to the whole meaning of the concept of artistic intention within his hermeneutic ontology. On this point his position seems dangerously close to falling prey to the charge of subjectivism--or perhaps what is little better here, an idealistic "intersubjectivism"--with respect to the meaning-intention of the work of art. For if we can make no clear distinction between the work of art itself and particular interpretations of it, the whole question of artistic intention, the whole question of the extent to which the artist can be understood to contribute

to the constellation of possible meanings to which his artistic creation gives rise, is without sense. The meaning to which the work of art points, this analysis seems to imply, is wholly a function of the interpretive moment of artistic creation. If we are to make sense of the concept of artistic intention within the context of hermeneutic ontology--indeed, if we are to make sense of the whole notion of *agency*--it is essential that we clearly distinguish between these two senses in which we can speak of "the work of art." In the chapters that follow, I will attempt to rescue hermeneutic ontology by focusing upon the way in which the artist--in particular, the author of the literary work of art--can be construed as an agent of artistic creation, and what this means within the context of a hermeneutic ontology art.

Returning to and working from Gadamer's account of the symbolic dimension of the work of art, let me now try to characterize the mode of representation in and through which this is effected in the play of art. Gadamer holds that if we want to understand the mode of representation that is at play in the work of art, the mode of representation by which an increase in being is effected in and through the aesthetic experience, we must look to the concept of mimesis.

Mimesis, *imitation*, as the mode of representation at play in the experience of the work of art, is inseparable

from the notion of recognition, as I suggested above. For imitation fails if that which imitation represents is not recognized. Thus a cognitive dimension is inseparable from imitation. What is intended is a representation in which only that which is represented, and not that which represents, is experienced. In other words, we are not to "see through" the imitation that is representing, but rather to see what is represented as present in the imitation before us. Put another way, in mimetic representation the being of that which represents is eclipsed by the being of that which the appearance of representation manifests. Clearly, as I have already suggested, the kind of representation that is implied in the notion of mimesis should not be conceived in terms of a relation between original and copy. It is not as though any other copy of the same "original" would mean what the mimetic representation does. "Rather it implies that something is represented in such a way that it is actually there in sensuous abundance."<sup>46</sup> What we see represented in the work of art is not a reproduction of aspects of ourselves and our world as they appear to us in our everyday experience, but something else which normally remains concealed from us in that experience. What we experience and what invites our attention in the experience of a work of art is, Gadamer writes, "how true it is--i.e., to what extent one knows and

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<sup>46</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 36.

recognizes something and oneself."<sup>47</sup> In the moment of recognition what was merely familiar is seen in a new way, and we understand more about it than we did before. We also thereby come to understand more about ourselves, because the work of art, in so far as it is concretized in experience, demands that we take a stand in relation to the truth that the work of art presents--that is, it demands interpretation, and this interpretation presents to me the framework of my understanding itself. It is only in contextualizing the work of art in relation to our own world that the work of art has the potential to mean something for us, to speak to us, and in so doing, enlarge our world. In recognition we grasp that which is represented because it is illuminated in such a way that it is freed from contingencies which normally condition its appearance for us. We grasp what is represented in its essence, we will want to say.

What the notion of mimesis implies is that what is represented is not merely something reproduced or copied, but something brought forth more authentically in the truth of its being. What is represented in this way need not even "resemble," in the sense of achieving an accurate copy, or a reproduction, of the "original" object as it normally appears. As Gadamer writes: "However different from our everyday experience it may be, this creation presents itself

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<sup>47</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 114.

as a pledge of order. The symbolic representation accomplished in art does not have to depend directly on what is already given, ... what is represented ... calls us to dwell upon it and give our assent in an act of recognition."<sup>48</sup> What is brought forth in the play of art is that which lies concealed from us among our everyday concerns and the way in which we have become habituated to comport ourselves toward ourselves and our world. We recognize in the artistic creation in which we participate something strange in that which is familiar. Something new is revealed in artistic representation; a genuine "creation" takes place, something new is brought forth into the light of being. There is "creation" in the genuine sense setting itself to work in art. Further, whatever comes to speak to us through artistic representation could not come to be "there" for us in any other way.<sup>49</sup> This, too, speaks to the essential uniqueness of the work of art. What we experience is a unique manifestation of truth whose particularity cannot be surpassed or captured by conceptualization, precisely because the particularity of the work of art makes the universal appear in a new and unique way. Nothing else could articulate for us our world and ourselves in just this way. The universal is surpassed and, at the same time,

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<sup>48</sup> Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 36.

<sup>49</sup> See Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 36.

enriched by that which the particularity of the artistic experience brings forth concretely.

**Chapter 2:**  
**Composition and Interpretation:**  
**The Limits of the Gadamerian Approach**

I

I have sought so far to bring out in this discussion of Gadamer's analysis of the ontological structure of the work of art that if we are to make sense of the nature of works of art and the experiences we have when we encounter them, we must cease to think of works of art as material objects and instead attempt to understand their ontological structure in terms of events. Analysis of the concept of play shows the work of art to be an event of interpretation in which occurs the emergence of a representational structure. "Representation is, [Gadamer writes,] at any rate, a universal ontological structural element of the aesthetic, an event of being--not an experiential event that occurs at the moment of artistic creation and is merely repeated each time in the mind of the viewer."<sup>1</sup> Although we cannot identify the work of art with any particular subjective experience of it, the emergence of the work of art as an aesthetic object is inseparable from the particular moments of interpretation in which it is contextually situated in relation to the world of the

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<sup>1</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 159.

audience. In so far as this structure achieves fruition in virtue of the interpretive activity of an audience, we can characterize its mode of being as "intentional." The work of art forms a unified structure as an intentional object: it exists as a structural totality inseparable from the interpretive activity by which it is constituted as an object of consciousness.

In the moment of artistic presentation, understood in this way, the work of art mediates, but at the same time encompasses and transcends, the moments of particularity and universality in that which it represents in much the same way as Hegel saw the moments of particularity and universality "sublated" (*aufgehoben*) in the individual.<sup>2</sup> The moment of universality is concretized in the particularity of the individual work of art. Our understanding of the concept is enriched with new levels of meaning as a result of that which the work of art re-presents. With the emergence of new meaning, the being of the world of the interpreter is enlarged. This is what Gadamer means when he tells us that the work of art signifies an increase in being, not only of that which it represents mimetically, but also of the self-understanding of the one through whom this is affected.

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Paul Kerby and Jeff Mitscherling have taken up this theme in two insightful discussions of the "Hegelian elements" in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and aesthetics. See: Anthony Paul Kerby, "Gadamer's Concrete Universal," cited above at fn. 25; Jeff Mitscherling, "Hegelian elements in Gadamer's notions of application and play," *Man and World*, 25, 1992. pp. 61-67.

More central to the theme with which we are concerned here is that, just as in play, it is the work of art itself and not merely the intentions of the "players" which transform pure movement into structure. It seems that neither the conscious intention of the artist nor the "subjective" experience of the experiencer/interpreter can be identified as the "agent of creation" in the constitution of the work. The problem of identifying the significant intentional attitude by which the artistic creation is put to work in the context of Gadamer's analysis follows from the fact that in the event through which the work of art comes into being, any radical separation that we might suppose to exist between work, audience, and artist is suspended and transcended by the presence of the work itself. Again, the work of art comes to fruition only in the interpretive processes which find completion in an experience which transforms the way in which we see ourselves and our world. The artist and artistic creation are, therefore, only two elements, or "moments," belonging to the whole complex process by which the work comes into being as a unified structure (*Gebilde*).

## II

That the work of art can be characterized in this way has some interesting implications for the whole question of the place of artistic intention within the complex ontological structure of the work of art. For if we are to understand

the work of art as a kind of happening that transcends the work of the artist, how shall we characterize the significance of the contribution of the "work" of the artist in the total "creation" or "structure" of the work of art? Let us look more closely now at the interpretive dimension of the ontological structure of the literary work of art in order to see in more detail the way in which the creation of the work of art as an intentional object is effected. A good place to start is with Gadamer's understanding of the dynamics by which the work of art comes to be constituted as an intentional object.

Gadamer observes, there is "a tension between the practice of the artist and that of the interpreter."<sup>3</sup> This tension seems to manifest itself less explicitly in works of art whose event-character is unambiguous--for example, the performance arts, dance, improvisational jazz pieces, etc.--whose mode of presentation is such that we are not likely to suppose that the work is intended to embody a single univocal meaning. In the case of the literary work of art, however, whose locus is a material object, a text, not only is the event character of the work not immediately discernible, but because the work of art is "formed" in and out of language, intentional words, it seems as though the unambiguous communication of meaning is not only possible, but also intended by the artist. Language and our

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<sup>3</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 66.

understanding of it are so closely entangled that it seems as though it is impossible to separate the representational dimension of the literary work of art from the text which conditions its possibility. "Here there does not seem to be any presentation that could claim an ontological valence of its own. Reading is a purely interior mental process. It seems to exhibit complete detachment from the occasional and contingent--by contrast to public reading and performance, for example."<sup>4</sup> Does this mean that the novel does not conform to the general model of the ontological structure of the work of art we have been developing? Does the fact that reading a novel is usually something that one does silently, that reading is, as Gadamer puts it, "a purely interior mental process," mean that the presentational dimension, which we argued was essential to the work of art, is absent from the literary work of art? Recitation, reading aloud, is obviously a kind of presentation; and it is Gadamer's view that we cannot really make a sharp distinction between recitation and silent reading:

Reading with understanding is always a kind of reproduction, performance, and interpretation. Emphasis, rhythmic ordering, and the like are part of wholly silent reading too. Meaning and the understanding of it are so closely connected with the corporeality of language that understanding always involves an inner speaking as well.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 160.

If this is so then the literary work of art has its mode of presentation in being read. It exists as an aesthetic object in the event of reading, as does the painting in being viewed, and the piece of music in being performed for and heard by an audience. The mode of being of the literary work of art, as aesthetic object, therefore, conforms to the model we have been developing of the general ontological structure of the work of art.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of the performance arts, and the plastic arts as well, the unity of the work as an aesthetic object lies in the unity of the event of presentation. In the case of the literary work of art, because the written word fixes so completely the intentional meaning of the linguistic event, the presentation of the work need not occur on a single occasion. It is possible to put aside a novel and return to it later in a way that has no analogy in the performance or plastic arts.<sup>7</sup> One does not normally begin to view a painting, leave the painting aside, and return to it at a later time in the same way one does with a novel. These works do not lend themselves to this sort of presentation. Reading, however, is so closely tied to the unity of the text that it is possible actualize the literary work of art

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<sup>6</sup> I must stress that we are concerned in the case of the literary work of art with reading as the mode of reproduction and presentation, how the literary work of art makes its appearance, and not with the particular experiences of the reading subject.

<sup>7</sup> See Gadamer, Truth and Method, 162.

as a unified hermeneutic object across a series of discrete occasions.

This phenomenon is closely related to the fact that the process by which the novel is constituted as an aesthetic object is divided into the two separate moments of writing and reading. The unity of the literary work of art--actualized in and through reading--precisely because it is so closely tied to the corporeality of the text, seems to be detached from the creative process by which it has been brought into being. This characteristic the literary work of art shares with the plastic arts in that the event of presentation is inseparable from and conditioned by the material object in which it has its locus. Just as our experience of a statue is dependent upon and conditioned by the form in marble present before us, so too is our experience of the literary work of art conditioned by the text we read. The task of presentation, of reproduction, of actualizing the literary work of art, seems to be wholly that of the reader. The moments of writing and reading, of artistic creation and interpretive (re-)constitution, seem to be separated and mediated by the text. How shall we construe the relationship between the activity of creation and the activity of interpretation? Or put another way, how are we to understand the relationship between the intentional structure of the event of creation and the intentional structure of the experience/interpretation of

the literary work of art if the two events are separated and mediated in this way?

What, then, is the nature of the relationship between the creative activity of the artist, his attempt to create a meaningful work, and the interpretive activity of a reader? One of the most striking things, and one to which we have already alluded, is that both take place in language.<sup>8</sup> We have also claimed that it is one of the fundamental characteristics of the works of art--because their mode of presentation involves a complex interplay of revealing and concealing, because what they mean is given to us in a way that is always ambiguous--that they demand interpretation. Let us recall the way in which Gadamer characterizes interpretation:

[Interpretation] is certainly not the same as conceptual explanation. It is much more like understanding or explicating something. And yet there is more to interpretation than this. In its original meaning, interpretation implies pointing in a particular direction. It is important to note that all interpretation points in a direction rather than to some final endpoint, in the sense that it points toward an open realm that can be filled in a variety of ways.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to notice what this implies: interpretation is called for only when that which we encounter has a

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<sup>8</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 67.

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 68.

multiplicity of possible meanings. As Gadamer says explicitly: "We have only to interpret something when its meaning is not clearly laid down or when it is ambiguous."<sup>10</sup> This is why Gadamer aptly characterizes interpretation as "pointing in a particular direction" rather than divining a determinate meaning which merely lies concealed in ambiguity. Interpretation is not a matter of "seeing through" the ambiguity, of seeing through a multiplicity of false meanings to the true one. Rather it is a matter of understanding the direction in which this multiplicity of possible meanings may point. Interpretation is not so much a matter of overcoming ambiguity as it is an attempt to make the possibilities of meaning toward which something points present themselves in a more perspicuous way.

The characterization of interpretation as a kind of pointing, of indicating a general direction of meaning, helps to clarify certain aspects of the way in which I am attempting to interpret Gadamer's analysis of the ontological structure of the work of art. It brings together explicitly with interpretation another theme which I have been developing, so far, somewhat independently: namely, the notion of intentional structure. If, as I have been suggesting, the mode of being of the work of art is intentional--i.e., it exists as an aesthetic object only in so far as it is intentionally objectivated in and through

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<sup>10</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 68.

the interpretive encounter with an audience--then it becomes clearer how interpretation is constitutive of the work of art. Interpretation constitutes the work of art as an intentional object by orienting consciousness in the direction of meaning which the work of art has the potential to open up. Interpretation itself, thus, can be characterized as "intentional" in so far as it is something that must be taken up as a project by one who encounters the work. Interpretation and intentional objectivation, then, can be understood as two moments of the same process in and through which the work of art is constituted.

But we must be cautious here, for although we can characterize Gadamer's construal of the basic structure of interpretation as intentional, just as we said of play, genuine interpretation cannot be "intended" in the usual sense of the word. As Gadamer suggests, in interpretation something is "intimated" but not "intended."<sup>11</sup> Interpretation ceases to be genuine interpretation when it no longer freely follows the subject matter in the direction toward which it points, but instead attempts to assume the lead in this process. What occurs when someone approaches something that demands interpretation, like a text, with preconceived notions about what the text is going to mean, is that one manages not only to close oneself off from the possible directions in which the text might genuinely point,

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<sup>11</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 71.

but also to construct, from what the text both conceals and reveals, interpretations which do not do justice to the subject matter. It might be more appropriate to characterize interpretation in Gadamer's sense, therefore, as a way of being open to the direction in which the multiplicity of possible meanings of the subject matter point us. All genuine interpretation is like play in that it is the *subject matter* at hand which intends the structure of the interpretation and *not* the interpreter who engages in the interpretation of that subject matter. This is what Gadamer seems to be suggesting when he remarks: "Interpretation seems to be a genuine *determination of existence* rather than an activity or an intention."<sup>12</sup>

This speaks to the way in which the interpreter encounters the work of art, but it also brings to the fore the question of the extent to which the creative activity of the artist contributes to the constitution of the intentional structure in and through which the work of conditions "an open realm [of possible meaning] that can be filled in a variety of ways." The process in and through which the work of art is constituted is, according to Gadamer's analysis, much more aptly characterized as a kind of "happening," as something that achieves intentional structure *in* an interpretation, rather than an activity, as

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<sup>12</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 71 (*italics mine*).

something intentionally structured *by* an interpreter. The intended structure of the work of art must then come from elsewhere. But there seems to be some ambiguity in the way in which Gadamer seeks to construe the process of interpretation. His analysis of interpretation shows it to be a process through which the interpreter is led by the subject matter in the direction toward which the multiplicity of meanings point. If, as Gadamer seems to argue, the work of art ideally should guide the moment of interpretation in which it is realized as an intentional object, how does the work of the artist contribute to the way in which this structure manifests itself? For is there not also an interpretive dimension to the composition of the literary work as well? Let us see how this complicates the picture.

In the case of the literary work of art the tension between the two moments of creation and interpretation is heightened by the very nature of the material in and out of which the artist creates. Written language is at once the most spiritual of artistic materials, and at the same time the most corporeal. As Gadamer writes: "The written word, and what partakes of it--literature--is the intelligibility of mind transferred to the most alien medium."<sup>13</sup> In our encounter with written language, in reading a text, it is as though we are able to breathe life into a remnant of a mind

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<sup>13</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 163.

and a world that not only is not immediately present, but may also be of the distant past. In reading we make the text speak to us, or, as Gadamer puts it, we partake of "the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity."<sup>14</sup> In reading we actualize a discourse which the written word has fixed. In reading we realize the literary work of art as an event of presentation. But that the written word allows what seems to be the fixation of meaning itself in the text presents some interesting questions as to the multiplicity of meanings to which a literary work of art may give rise. Essential to literary art, Gadamer maintains, is a tension between image and concept, between the multiplicity of meanings toward which linguistic constructions in the work can point and the seemingly clear expression of a meaning that the intentional word has the potential to afford. What Gadamer says of poetry applies equally well to all literary artworks:

The ambiguous meaning of poetry is bound up with the unambiguous meaning of the intentional word. It is the particular position of language in relation to the other materials of artistic form--stone, colour, sound, and even bodily movements in dance--that allows this tension and mutual interference.<sup>15</sup>

What the writer "shapes" when creating is language itself. Gadamer maintains that the elements from which language is

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<sup>14</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 69.

"constructed" are "pure signs," selected and rejected in virtue of the way in which they lend themselves to pointing toward the direction in which the artist means.<sup>16</sup> The pure signs out of which language is formed (or perhaps, more appropriately, into which we divide living language) have their appropriate mode of being as intentional structures. Words point away from themselves toward possibilities of meaning which their usage intends. Gadamer writes: "Words are not simply complexes of sound, but meaning-gestures that point away from themselves as gestures do."<sup>17</sup> But at the same time, not unlike the symbol, they bear their meaning in themselves. Only because the word means something for us already can it be "intentionally" juxtaposed to other words in the emerging complexes of meaning that may point beyond themselves. In this structure lies the possibility of articulating experience in a new way, and also the possibility of intentional language meaning more than its speaker or writer intends. It is for this reason that we must say that the task of the artist is fundamentally one of interpretation as well. As Gadamer writes: "interpretation is already part of all composition."<sup>18</sup> Literary composition involves intentionally structuring language so that it may point in a particular direction. This does not mean,

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<sup>16</sup> See Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 69.

<sup>17</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 69.

<sup>18</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 70.

however, that what the work of art means is reducible to that which the work of the artist intends. It shows only that interpretation is inseparable from the creative activity which gives rise to literary art. Both the artist and the interpreter, says Gadamer, "pursue a meaning that points toward an open realm. ... [The poet's] own self-conception or conscious intention is guided by many different possibilities of reflective self-understanding and is quite different from what he actually accomplishes if the poem is a success."<sup>19</sup>

The nature of the interpretation involved in the creation of the literary work of art, however, seems to differ in an important way from the interpretation that "happens" when one reads a text. Entangled with the interpretive aspects of literary creation is a mode of being which can only be characterized as *intended*. For what is artistic creation if not the attempt to fulfill an intention to mean something? Though the literary work of art cannot be reduced to the "mere" intention of meaning, Gadamer acknowledges that "this presence still contains an intentional element that points to an indeterminate dimension of possible fulfillments."<sup>20</sup> In what sense, then, can we understand what the artist is up to as "intended?" This question I will take up in detail in the next chapter,

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<sup>19</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 72.

<sup>20</sup> Gadamer, "Composition and Interpretation," 70.

but before doing so, I must offer one more observation about the way in which Gadamer construes the interpretive dimension of artistic creation in the literary work of art.

As I have already indicated, implicit in Gadamer's notion of composition there seems to be a fundamental tension at work. Unlike the apparent tension we identified between the activity of the artist and that of the interpreter, it is one within the very structure of artistic creation itself. Perhaps this tension is one that we should not seek to resolve, but instead, endeavour to understand. Perhaps within this tension lies the positive possibility of making sense, not only of the way in which the literary work of art means, but also of understanding the way in which the work of the artist contributes to what the work of art means. Perhaps it is this tension, the tension between leading and being led in the process of composition/interpretation, that drives the work of art to surpass itself as something made, to become a creation. It is like the tension of a bow that has been drawn far back in order to shoot an arrow. But it is not a target, a goal, "an endpoint," at which this arrow is cast; rather, it is the direction and distance, the flight itself, that make all the difference. It is this tension out of which generate interpretive possibilities by which the work of art has the potential, in and through surpassing the creative efficacy of the artist, to bring new being into our world of meaning. Let us not try to unbend the bow, then, but instead to

understand the ontological structure of the way in which this double movement in artistic creativity "potentializes" a world of meaning by drawing it back.

In Gadamer's analysis of the ontological structure of the literary work of art, I have tried to argue, a tension exists not only between the work of the author and the work of the interpreter, but also--because artistic creation is inseparable from interpretation--within the very structure of the creative activity of the artist itself. I have suggested, however, that this tension is not one that we should seek to overcome--rather within it lies the key to understanding the way in which the work of the artist contributes to the meaning of the work of art concretized in the interpretive encounter with an audience. In Gadamer's analysis the focus is, as I have attempted to show, primarily upon the interpretive dimension of the creative process; the intentional aspects are only hinted at. In order to understand the role that the work of the artist plays in structuring an artistic creation, and thus come to understand better the ontological structure of the literary work of art as a whole, it is necessary that we attend to the intentional dimension of artistic creation. In order to do this, I propose now to leave Gadamer and take up this discussion with Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur, too, adopts a hermeneutical approach to understanding the ontological structure of the literary work of art and the role of

authorial intention within this structure. Ricoeur, however, focuses more attention on the extent to which the work of the author can be construed in terms of *action*. By looking at Ricoeur's treatment of the intentional dimension of artistic creation, and identifying and elaborating some of its implications, I hope to suggest that we can make sense of the notion of authorial intention and the ontological structure of the literary work of art only by recognizing the ontological significance of human intentionality in general.

### Chapter 3:

#### From Ricoeur's Analysis of Authorial Intention Toward an Ontology of Intentionality

##### I

Within the context of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics the problem of the relationship between authorial intention and the literary work of art is a complex one informed by his reflections upon the problems of metaphor, interpretation, the nature of meaning, and textuality. In this chapter I will first attempt to make sense of the role of authorial intention within the framework of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. This will be largely an expository project. But through this exposition, I hope also to show that the problem of authorial intention must ultimately come to bear upon the ontological status of the literary work and the experience of the reader. This second part of my project will be a speculative one, and it will involve, interestingly enough, an interpretation of Ricoeur's work that he probably did not intend. In this regard, I want to attempt to interpret some of the possible ontological implications of Ricoeur's notion of the relationship between authorial intention and the constellations of possible meanings to which a literary work of art may give rise. By making explicit the structure of

this relationship, certain aspects of the intentional structure of human experience will present themselves.

Through this analysis, I want to suggest that, contrary to the way in which the notion of intentionality has been understood traditionally (primarily in the works of Brentano and Husserl)--as a description of the relationship between consciousness and the objects of consciousness--a critical evaluation of Ricoeur's understanding of authorial intention points toward an ontology of human experience in terms of intentionality. This approach to understanding the nature of human experience is not new. Indeed the roots of this kind of approach to cognition can be found in Aristotle's *de Anima*. There he writes: "The thinking part of the soul must be, while impassable, capable of receiving the form of an object; that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the object."<sup>1</sup> This text is enigmatic to say the least; however, within the context of the ontology of intentionality I attempt to develop in the fourth part of this chapter, I believe that it will be possible to suggest a way in which we might interpret this insight.

Intentionality, according to this interpretation, must be construed as a mode of being, as a distinct ontological category, which applies to the way in which all experience involves a relation in which the experiencer, in some sense,

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, de Anima III 4.429a17-19.

*becomes* that which is sensed, or thought, or understood. I want to claim that in so doing, that which we call the experiencer, the subject, must be understood as an "intentional subject." The particular content of a mode of intentional being shall be referred to as an "intentional object." It is especially important that we not attempt to understand intentional subject, and the complementary concept of intentional object, in terms of "structures" of consciousness. Intentional being must be understood as a category ontologically independent from consciousness itself, and thus ontologically independent from understanding. It is only in a particular mode of intentional being that we can speak of consciousness or understanding at all, for it is only in a particular mode of intentional being that consciousness is constituted in and through bodily experience. "Experience" can no longer apply merely to experience which is apprehended intelligibly in a mode of conscious being. Instead, within the context of the ontology of experience which I will propose, "experience" must apply to any relation involving a living entity in the world. Experience, similarly, is always intentional and, thus, always involves meaning. "Conscious experience" and understanding, therefore, will be understood as only two among many possible modes of intentional being.

It is necessary to examine the peculiar nature of texts and textual production that make the relationship between the meaning-intention of the author and the meaning interpreted and experienced by the reader--in and through the act of reading--a problematic one. An appropriate place to begin is with an understanding of what, for Ricoeur, philosophical hermeneutics takes as its central concern.

Ricoeur writes: "hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts."<sup>2</sup> For Ricoeur the notion of textuality is not confined strictly to written documents. Human beings live within worlds of meaning and language which, structurally speaking, are constituted in the manner of texts; they are text analogues. Concerning the nature of understanding, following Dilthey, philosophical hermeneutics maintains that understanding must cease to appear as an epistemological concept construed as a simple *mode of knowing*. Understanding must be seen as an *ontological* concept. Understanding and interpretation are not simply things that human beings do--these practices are what human beings *are*. They are, Ricoeur writes, "a *way of being* and a way of relating beings to being."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Ricoeur maintains that understanding and interpretation always are, as ways of

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, ed. & trans. John B. Thompson (Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," 44.

being, mediated by systems of signs and meanings, language. Within the context of this hermeneutic ontology, therefore, reality is held to be fundamentally linguistic; thus Gadamer's famous dictum: "Being that can be understood is language." In very general terms, philosophical hermeneutics is, simply, "an attempt to formulate a general theory of understanding in all of its various modes."<sup>4</sup> It is always maintained, however, and this point needs stressing, that all understanding, and thus all experience--since understanding is for hermeneutics the ontological way that human beings are in the world--is mediated by language. In Ricoeur's words: "it is *language* that is the primary condition of all human experience."<sup>5</sup> For it is only as mediated by language that experience is intelligible. This presupposition, that language is the primary condition of all human experience, I will challenge indirectly in the fourth part of this chapter, by drawing out some of the implications of Ricoeur's understanding of the notion of authorial intention.

Since texts and textual interpretation are the central concern of hermeneutics it is not surprising that the

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<sup>4</sup> G. B. Madison, "Hermeneutical Liberalism," unpublished ms; presented at Gemeinschaft und Gerechtigkeit. Kongress der Frankfurter Akademie der Künste und Wissenschaft, Frankfurt am Main, May 28-31, 1992, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," Philosophy in France Today, Alan Montefiore, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 191.

question of authorial intention might occupy a prominent place within its purview. In order to situate authorial intention within Ricoeur's hermeneutics, it is necessary to begin by addressing two questions: first, What is a text? and second, What is it about the production of texts that distinguishes them from other products of human agency in such a way that the question of intention becomes particularly problematic? At the outset of this discussion I would like to recall the distinction I made in chapter one between "the text," on the one hand and the literary work of art, the aesthetic object on the other. The literary work of art must not be identified with the text which conditions its possibility. The unique work of art which we experience as the aesthetic object is something different. It is an intentional object actualized in and through the act of reading the text. As George Grabowicz explains in his introduction to Roman Ingarden's The Literary Work of Art: "In itself, that is apart from its concretizations, the literary work is a schematic formation existing in a characteristic state of potentiality; its aesthetically valuable and metaphysical qualities are not fully developed but are merely 'held in readiness'."<sup>6</sup> It is in relation to the author's contribution to the creation of the literary

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<sup>6</sup> George G. Grabowicz, "Translator's Introduction," to Roman Ingarden, The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature, translated, with an introduction by George G. Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), lix.

work of art as a "schematic formation" and how this schematic formation conditions the constitution of an intentional object that the question of authorial intention will come to bear upon the conditions of an ontology of experience. But first we must examine Ricoeur's construal of the relationship between the text and the meaning-intention of the author who endeavours to communicate in and through the creation of the text.

A text, for Ricoeur, is quite simply any discourse fixed by writing; and so, "according to this definition, fixation by writing is constitutive of the text itself."<sup>7</sup> The question then becomes, What is discourse, and what are the implications of its "fixation"?

The general concept of discourse, borrowed from the field of linguistics, applies to any attempt to communicate by means of signs. It is the counterpart to the concept of language-system, or linguistic code, which denotes the complex of signs and rules of application that embody the formal totality of a particular language. Discourse might be best characterized as *the practical dimension of linguistic communication*. Thus, we can understand the concept of discourse to encompass all attempts, either spoken or written, to communicate with others. Whereas "language-

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<sup>7</sup> Ricoeur, "What is a Text?: Explanation and Understanding," Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 145.

system" refers to the totality of formal structures that make up a language, "discourse" is language-as-event or, more simply, "linguistic usage."<sup>8</sup>

In order to elaborate the idea of discourse as activity/event, Ricoeur outlines four features of discourse that separate it conceptually from the static atemporality of the language-system. We shall now look at these aspects of discourse-as-action/event, attending especially to the way in which each applies differently to spoken and written discourse. In so doing it will be possible to bring into high relief the particular problems that surround the ontological structure of discourse fixed by writing.

### **The First Feature of Discourse**

Whereas a language-system is a formal structure abstracted from the praxis of discourse events, and thus constitutes an atemporal system of conceptual relations, "discourse is always realized temporally and in the present."<sup>9</sup> In spoken discourse, discourse is realized in the relational event that emerges between speaker and hearer in conversation. In written discourse, the event situation is complicated by the fact that the relation between the interlocutors is sundered into two events, namely, the event

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<sup>8</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: meaningful action considered as a text," Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 198.

<sup>9</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 198.

of writing and the event of reading. The relation between these events must therefore be mediated by a third thing which can transcend and conjoin the fleeting character of each. It is precisely because discourse has the character of a fleeting event that we should want to attempt to preserve it, to fix it, by means of inscription. It is in discourse as writing that this fixation is effected. But what is it that writing is supposed to fix? Ricoeur writes:

What in effect does writing fix? Not the event of speaking, but the 'said' of speaking, where we understand by the 'said' of speaking that intentional exteriorisation constitutive of the aim of discourse thanks to which the *sagen*--the saying--wants to become *Aus-sage*--the enunciation, the enunciated. In short, what we write, what we inscribe is the *noema* of the speaking. It is the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event.<sup>10</sup>

For Ricoeur, what the "said" of written discourse is (and does) encompasses other levels of influence upon the reader than simply those elicited by the propositional (noematic) content of the sentences of which the written work is composed. Engaging in discourse, whether speaking, writing, or reading, is, for Ricoeur, activity. As such, it constitutes an intentional mode of being whereby the speaker or writer endeavours to get something across to her listener or reader. In other words, the reader or writer always has an "aim," a motive, an intent. Language actualized in

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<sup>10</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 199.

discourse always does more than simply convey neutral "facts".<sup>11</sup>

For Ricoeur, following the speech-act theory of Austin and Searle, the act of speaking, or writing, effects the listener or reader in and through a hierarchy of identifiable acts which are distributed on three levels: the propositional act, "the act *of* saying;" the illocutionary act or force, or that which one does *in* saying; and finally, the perlocutionary act, or that which one does "*by* saying."<sup>12</sup> If we consider the sentence as a moment of discourse, the propositional act refers to the content of the sentence; it is only by virtue of this content that the sentence can be identified and reidentified as the same. The illocutionary act, or force, refers to that which the sentence accomplishes. This is effected by the propositional content, by the form of the sentence, and, sometimes, by the use of

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<sup>11</sup> Aref Nayed has pointed out to me that Ricoeur strays from the orthodox Gadamerian analysis of discourse, or conversation, as primarily "event," or a "happening," when he introduces the concept of activity. According to this tradition (Gadamer), the participants in a conversation get swept along in the event of discourse which, once begun, takes on a life of its own. A conversation, so understood, seems almost to be drawn along by a Hegelian-like **Geist**, and the conversational partners must just hang on for the ride, the destination (and purpose) of which remains unknown. By introducing the concept of "activity" into the analysis of discourse as "event," perhaps Ricoeur is trying to bring together two things (two traditions) which may not be compatible: discourse as "happening," and discourse as "activity." Later I hope to show through a proposed prolegomenon to an ontology of intentionality that Ricoeur is on the right track in his attempt to deviate from the Gadamerian analysis of discourse in terms of "event" in favour of one which focuses upon agency. (See part IV.)

<sup>12</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 199.

illocutionary verbs, such as "to promise." In the act of promising, for example, I do more than simply convey a neutral message. I also make a commitment to my listeners or readers to be true to my word, to fulfill that which the content of my message conveys. The illocutionary act thus describes the purpose of the act of discourse which may or may not be something different from its explicit propositional content.<sup>13</sup> Ricoeur describes the perlocutionary act as, "precisely what is the least discourse in discourse. It is the discourse as stimulus. It acts, not by my interlocutor's recognition of my intention, but sort of energetically, by direct influence upon the emotions and affective dispositions."<sup>14</sup> It is the perlocutionary force which is furthest removed from the explicit intention of the speaker or writer in discourse. But, at the same time, we shall want to say, the perlocutionary force of an instance of discourse is inseparable from the way in which an act of discourse is intentionally structured as a meaningful totality. Indeed, to paraphrase Heidegger, the perlocutionary dimension of an event of discourse is that which is ontological "closest" to the intentional structures in and through which meaning is generated.

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<sup>13</sup> See John R. Searle, EXPRESSION AND MEANING: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 200.

Each of these levels of subordinate acts contributes to the meaning of the utterance for the listener or reader in a descending order of significance Ricoeur maintains. What the meaning of an act of discourse is, therefore, is not confined to the contextual significance of the relations among the signs which make up the language-system mediating the speaker's or writer's utterance as "intentional exteriorisation." The word "meaning," accordingly, is given "a very large acceptation which covers all the aspects and levels of the intentional exteriorisation that makes the inscription of discourse possible."<sup>15</sup> We might want to define "meaning" in an even broader sense in terms of *the degree to which the work can elicit a change in the intentional orientation of the listener or reader.*<sup>16</sup> The extent to which the written work can preserve the scope of the meaning-intention

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<sup>15</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 200. It is interesting to note here that Ricoeur offers us a definition of "meaning" which need not necessarily be confined to "linguistic meaning."

<sup>16</sup> Here, I propose a definition of meaning which I think is consistent with the spirit of Ricoeur's, but which differs in three respects. First, I think it is more inclusive than Ricoeur's, covering a much wider range of relations among living beings and their environment. Second, I attempt to focus meaning on what I will show is the more inclusive, and ontologically basic, notion of "intentionality," rather than on "intention," by using the metaphorical phrase "intentional orientation." By using the word "orientation" I endeavour to stress the "directionality" of intentionality toward the objects of experience. "Intention" will be shown to be, according to this analysis, a particular mode--understood, similarly, in terms of "directionality"--of being in the world. Finally, the alternative definition of meaning that I propose avoids the unfortunate, misleading, and characteristically modern metaphor which Ricoeur employs of "exteriorisation." "Exteriorisation" implies that mental experience, consciousness, is somehow something "inside" as opposed to the body, world, text, and other (interlocutor), which are "outside."

(so understood) of the writer, and so affect the reader, has to do with the first aspect of the problem of authorial intention with respect to the ontological status of the literary work.

### **The Second Feature of Discourse**

Whereas discourse as event must always have a subject who intends to communicate and from whom the act of communication proceeds, in a language-system the question of a subject does not arise. Discourse is thus "self-referential" in the sense that "discourse refers back to its speaker by means of a system of complex indicators such as the personal pronouns."<sup>17</sup>

In the case of spoken discourse, the place of the subject is usually obvious: it is the person with whom we are engaged in conversation. Concerning the intention of the speaking subject, Ricoeur writes: "The subjective intention of the speaking subject and the meaning of the discourse overlap each other in such a way that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means and what his discourse means."<sup>18</sup> In the relative immediacy of the event of discourse, realized in the reciprocal acts of speaking and hearing, the meaning of that which is expressed is not

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<sup>17</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 198.

<sup>18</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 200.

distanced from the speaker's intentional exteriorisation of that which she seeks to communicate. Indeed, the subjectivity of the speaker in the act of speaking is, we shall want to say, constituted by, is more or less identical with, this intention as the speaker's mode of being. Charles Taylor has suggested that in participating in discourse with others we are engaged in a common action the purpose of which is to come to some kind of understanding with our interlocutors. Coming to an understanding with others in this way is irreducible to the monological "mind-states" of each of the participants singly.<sup>19</sup> The situation is no more complex when it is the explicit intention of the speaker to deceive her listeners by lying. In cases in which it is the intention of the author to deceive, the intention of the speaker is embodied in the act of speaking-as-deception, rather than speaking-as-communication, as it is when the speaker is endeavouring to be veracious.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of written discourse, the situation is complicated precisely by the fact that the author is not present to the text in any obvious way. The question "Who is speaking?" (or more specifically, "Who is writing?") points to a central problem of authorial intention. Ricoeur

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Charles Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," Liberalism and the Moral Life, Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 161.

<sup>20</sup> The way in which we express ourselves is to some extent telling with respect to intentional orientation and our state of being. When one is endeavouring to express her earnestness, she says, "I am being truthful," rather than, "What I say is the truth."

maintains: "With written discourse, the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide."<sup>21</sup> (This view is one I will challenge in the fourth part of this chapter.) For Ricoeur, the fixation of discourse in writing effects a distancing of the meaning-intention of the author from the possibilities of meaning that can potentially be disclosed in and through the reading of the text by another; particularly when the situation of the other is distanced temporally, culturally, or socially from the lived situation of the context in which the author is writing. In this regard, we can speak of the meaning of the text as transcending the meaning intended by the author in that the text always has the potential to escape the finite lived horizon of the author and mean more than the author could possibly have intended. But, this being so, do we want to say that that which the author intended has *no* place in our analysis of the literary work, and thus no bearing upon the ontological status of the literary work of art to which her written text gives rise? This is a second aspect of the problem of authorial intention.

### **The Third Feature of Discourse**

Whereas within a language-system signs refer only to other signs within the system and, as Peirce recognized, the definition of any sign within a system is always another

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<sup>21</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 200.

sign, discourse is always about something other than the discourse itself. Unlike a formal language-system, Ricoeur writes, "it refers to a world which it claims to describe, to express, to represent."<sup>22</sup> In the speech-event, the world to which Ricoeur refers, the world of the lived experience of the participants, is immediately present to the discourse. It is the common world that the participants of the discourse share and the world to which their discourse refers. As does the question of subjectivity, so too does the question of the reference of the text present us with a complicated problem. This problem becomes particularly acute when the world of the author and the world of the reader (the conditions of their subjectivity) are separated by great cultural or temporal distances. What will constitute the reference of written discourse if the world of its production and the world in which it is read are dissimilar? A more pressing concern is whether or not it is ever possible to bridge the gap of subjectivity that separates the author and the reader even when they share similar temporal and cultural worlds. Does the meaning-intention of the author have any bearing on the reference of the text, the world of meaning which the text has the potential to open up?

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<sup>22</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 198.

### The Fourth Feature of Discourse

Whereas we might characterize the language-system as comprising the formal conditions which make communication possible, it is as an event of discourse that all communication takes place. As Ricoeur writes: "In this sense, discourse alone has not only a world, but another, another person, an interlocutor to whom it is addressed."<sup>23</sup> In discourse as speech, again, this relationship is not a particularly problematic one. Just as in the case of the subjectivity of the speech event, the other to whom the speech is addressed must always be immediately present to the situation. This is not so in the case of written discourse. Although we must affirm that in so far as it is a mode of discourse a written work is always addressed to a world of potential readers, written discourse is not addressed to a definite other--to a second person--in the way that the spoken discourse of conversation is. A written text is addressed to an unknown reader, and potentially to anyone who knows how to read.<sup>24</sup> The relationship that the reader enters into with a text involves another aspect of the problem of understanding the extent to which what the author intends to communicate--in and through the production of a text--is constitutive of the aesthetic object that is

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<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 198.

<sup>24</sup> Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 202.

concretized as *Gebilde* in the act of reading a literary work of art.

By examining in detail these four aspects of the praxis of discourse, Ricoeur has sought to make explicit the peculiar nature of written discourse. It should be clear from this that we cannot simply understand the writing-reading event relation as a special case of the speaking-hearing event relation. The separation between the events of writing and reading, which together constitute discourse, introduce a moment of distance between writer and reader that renders any attempt to understand the ontological status of the meaning of written discourse extremely problematic. As Ricoeur remarks: "What happens in writing is the detachment of meaning from the event."<sup>25</sup> This effects, Ricoeur maintains, a disconnection of what the text means from what the author meant.

So far our emphasis has been on the "writing" side of the relation of discourse and the factors which condition an act of "intentional exteriorisation" of a meaning-intention by the writer. Let us now shift our focus to the other side of the writing-reading event relation: the practice of reading. The relation between the meaning of the text and the reader is no less complex than the relation between the

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<sup>25</sup> Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 25.

meaning-intention of the writer and the text. An analysis of the way in which Ricoeur interprets the act of reading will lead us toward an understanding of authorial intention within the context of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and offer a us place from which to make some provisional claims toward a reinterpretation of the ontological structure of the literary work of art.

### III

It is from the analysis of the paradigm textual reading that Ricoeur envisages the universality of hermeneutic ontology. All understanding, and therefore all experience, involves some form of interpretation which is analogous in its operations to that which occurs when one reads and understands a text. Accordingly, one of the central concerns of hermeneutics is how the material inscription of discourse conditions the way in which meaning, as a mode of self-understanding, makes its appearance in and through the praxis of reading a text.

Earlier, when we were examining the features that distinguish discourse from language-systems, we said that while an abstract language-system is without a subject, discourse, being an activity, always has a subject. In fact, we saw that discourse must always have at least two subjectivities: the speaker or writer whose intention it is to communicate in and through the act of speaking or writing, and a hearer or reader (an interlocutor) to whom

the discourse is addressed. Discourse, so understood, is always an intersubjective affair--it is a communicative engagement between or among subjectivities. In written discourse, we suggested, the situation is complicated because the intersubjective event of discourse is interrupted and mediated by the material fixation of discourse in the form of the text. It is the condition of material fixation that explodes the world of possible addressees of the text, for unlike speech, which is addressed to the particular person immediately present before us, the written work is potentially addressed to anyone who knows how to read. "Because discourse is now linked to a material support, it becomes more spiritual in the sense that it is liberated from the narrowness of the face-to-face situation."<sup>26</sup> In and through material fixation the text achieves a measure of "semantic autonomy" from the psychological intention of its author. Clearly for Ricoeur, then, it cannot be the purpose of reading to understand what the author intended in this sense. But let us see if we cannot make some sense of the place of the author in relation to the meaning of a text within the context of Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

It has been one of the central concerns of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, influenced by Romantic hermeneutics and the work of Dilthey, to attempt a radical revision of the

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<sup>26</sup> Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, 29.

traditionally dichotomous relation between the two basic attitudes it is possible to assume in relation to an object of investigation: explanation or understanding. Dilthey maintained that, methodologically speaking, the natural sciences and the human sciences are fundamentally different in that the former are concerned with explaining the world of natural phenomena and the latter are concerned with understanding human motivations, relations and, perhaps most importantly, human historicity. Basically, writes Ricoeur, "It is the difference between the status of natural things and [things of] the mind that dictates the difference of status between explanation and understanding."<sup>27</sup> Opposing these two attitudes, Ricoeur argues, is disastrous to any attempt to disclose what is common to all understanding, because reflection upon the ontological conditions of human understanding suggests a dialectical movement between these two "*attitudes*." It is in the interpretive act of reading that we can best see this dialectic at work.

In order to show that the interpretive project of reading a text involves a reciprocal relation between explanation and understanding, we must first oppose the two movements before reconciling them again in a more fruitful way. Accordingly, Ricoeur suggests there are two general ways in which we can approach the reading of a text.

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<sup>27</sup> Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," 49.

On the one hand, we attempt to suspend the text's reference to the world opened up by the text in attending to the conceptual relations internal to the text itself which constitute its structure: this is the explanatory attitude. The explanatory attitude is concerned with the implicit "sense" of the text taken as a coherent structure of relations. Structural analysis of this kind focuses upon the arrangement of the elements of a text, the paradigmatic relations among characters and actions, thematic analysis, plot development, etc., and is undertaken "as if" the text could be treated as a logically coherent whole closed in upon itself.<sup>28</sup> This kind of analysis, whether undertaken explicitly or not, is essential to the process whereby we come to an understanding with a text; for it is only through its structure, so construed, that a text can "speak" to us, that a text can mean.

But such analysis cannot be undertaken in a vacuum; and structural analysis alone cannot bring us to the meaning of the text. So, we must endeavour to lift this suspense and attempt to understand the text in the context of our present situation. Ricoeur writes:

It is this second attitude which is the real aim of reading. For this attitude reveals the true nature of the suspense which intercepts the movement of the text towards meaning. The other attitude would not even be possible were it not first apparent that the text, as writing, awaits and calls for a reading. If reading is

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<sup>28</sup> See Ricoeur, "What is a Text?," 160.

possible, it is indeed because the text is not closed in upon itself, but opens out onto other things. To read is, on any hypothesis, to conjoin a new discourse to the discourse of the text.<sup>29</sup>

It is in reading along the lines of this second attitude that the event character of discourse is re-actualized. The possible meanings of the text, unfolding in and through the act of reading, the reader must endeavour to situate in relation to her own self-understanding, which is inseparable from her concrete lived situation, the world of her lived experience. In the process of being so actualized in a new moment of discourse, the text "finds a surrounding and an audience; it resumes the referential movement--intercepted and suspended--towards a world and toward subjects."<sup>30</sup> It is this attitude which concerns the "reference" of the text to something beyond itself, to the realm of experience which the text has the potential to open up, and which has the potential to transcend the concrete lived situation of its original author and audience.

But this reference is, we shall want to say, always mediated by the sense of the text which presents itself in the explanatory attitude. The explanatory attitude, thus, concerns all the rhetorical techniques and devices at work in the text; and the interpretive attitude is concerned with what beyond the text the text is about. While the

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<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur, "What is a Text?," 158.

<sup>30</sup> Ricoeur, "What is a Text?," 159.

explanatory attitude is concerned with how the text communicates its message to us, the interpretive attitude is concerned with what the text means for us. Both attitudes are, for Ricoeur, inseparably conjoined in interpretation as a way of being.

I suggested above that in and through the reading of the text, the reader accomplishes a re-actualization of the referential function of discourse--text and reader instigate a new event of discourse--as the reader endeavours to situate what the text says in relation to the horizon of her own self-understanding. In so doing, Ricoeur maintains, the referential function of the text becomes conjoined to the self-understanding of the reader. In connection with this, Ricoeur introduces the concept of "appropriation." For it is only by interpreting the text within the situational horizon which forms and informs her own self-understanding that the text can become what it otherwise only has the potential to be for the reader. For Ricoeur, the concept of appropriation emphasizes the dimension of the event of reading whereby the subjectivity of the reader and the possible way of being opened up by the text become one: "the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-understanding of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ricoeur, "What is a Text?," 158.

A new constellation of possible meanings and worlds emerges at the moment of tension between the world of the reader and the world that unfolds before the text. What is communicated in this moment of tension is beyond the sense of the work, the world that it projects, the world that constitutes its horizon. We might conceive of the sense of the work as a kind of framework that admits of and conditions some interpretations while prohibiting others. If authorial intention contributes anything to the meaning that ultimately emerges in and through the interpretive act of reading, it is, for Ricoeur, the extent to which the structure of the text points potential readers toward new possibilities (new worlds) of understanding. For it is not the meaning behind the text that we seek to recover in the act of reading; rather it is the possibilities of new worlds of understanding disclosed in front of the text which the reader creates by providing novel fulfillment to the referential function. As Ricoeur puts it:

What is it that is to be understood--and consequently appropriated--in a text? Not the intention of the author, which is supposed to be hidden behind the text; not the historical situation common to the author and his original readers; not the expectations or feelings of those original readers ... What has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as *the direction of thought opened up by the text*.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, 92 (italics mine).

The referential turn realized in the act of reading is what completes the event. It is the world of the reader which must provide a horizon, a concrete situation, a context within which the textual meaning can emerge. It is the sense of the work that effects the way in which this world unfolds: "What the reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but, through its sense, its reference, that is, the experience that it brings to language and, in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the face of this experience."<sup>33</sup> For Ricoeur, therefore, the hermeneutical concern in understanding how this world of meaning unfolds is not a question of restoring the author's intention behind the text, but of making explicit the movement by which the text unfolds a world in front of itself.<sup>34</sup> What Ricoeur's analysis does not suggest, however, is that a successful reading will see to it that the direction of this movement is precisely the direction of the author's thought (intention).

#### IV

Such is Ricoeur's analysis of the role played by the author in the creation of the intentional object of the literary

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<sup>33</sup> Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, Vol. 1, Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 78-79.

<sup>34</sup> Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, Vol. 1, 81.

work of art. I now want to pursue some of the implications of Ricoeur's analysis of the significance of authorial intention in relation to the more general question of intentionality and human experience. In particular, it seems that Ricoeur's interpretation of the writing-reading relation as a mode of discourse and his analysis of discourse as a mode of *action* (an intentional mode of being) offer some interesting clues. Taking Ricoeur's work as a starting-point, I want to begin this section by making some provisional claims toward an ontological analysis of intentionality. In the context of this proposed ontology, I want then to attempt to resituate the place of authorial intention with respect to the creative constitution of the literary work as an intentional object. What we say about the intentional constitution of the literary work will have implications for all intentional objects which form and inform human experience.

Although there has been, in the history of reflection upon the intentionality of human consciousness, a tendency to differentiate and separate the concept of "intentionality" from that of "intention," or "motivation," understood as the "directedness" of human agency, I want to suggest that the two are, in fact, inseparable aspects of the ontological situation of human being in the world. Both words have their root in the Latin verb *intendere*, meaning to stretch out toward, or to aim at. Traditionally in philosophical discourse, the two concepts of

"intentionality" and "intention" have been held to be distinct, and each has been applied, as a kind of technical term, to a particular sphere of concern. "Intention" and "intent" are used to refer to the purpose, or aim, which an agent endeavours to fulfill through her actions in the world. "Intentionality," in contrast, has been used to describe the "directedness" of consciousness toward the object of experience. Since it is held that consciousness is always consciousness "of something," the term "intentionality" is descriptive of the basic structure of consciousness. "Intentionality," similarly, is very broadly applied to the way in which consciousness constitutes the objects of consciousness, and thus constitutes conscious experience. Thus we can say that "intention" is applied to the "directionality" of the subject as agent in the world, and "intentional" is applied to the "directionality" of consciousness toward objects of experience. That is to say, "intention" is applied to directionality of consciousness in the physical realm, and "intentionality" is applied to the directionality of consciousness in the mental realm. The separation of these two conceptual categories, I want to suggest, like so many others in modern philosophical discourse, presupposes a problematic bifurcation of reality into two distinct realms: the physical and the mental; or more specifically in this case, the respective spheres of mind and body. Just as it is impossible to make sense of the nature of "human being" in terms of "mind" and "body," so

too is it impossible to understand the relationship between the creative intention of the artist, and the literary work of art conceived as an intentional object when such a distinction is presupposed. I want to suggest that the conceptual distinction between intention and intentionality does not point to any ontological, or "real," distinction, but instead merely emphasizes different aspects of our experience, and sometimes one and the same experience. Before saying more about this, it is necessary that I elaborate some of the implications that seem to follow from the ontological analysis of intentionality with respect to human experience.

"Intentional" is, I want to claim as Heidegger has of understanding, the fundamental way in which human beings *are*. Human being *is* "intentional being." Intentional being is the ontological fact of our being in the world; one which we share, unlike understanding, with all living things.<sup>35</sup> But what does it mean to claim that living things are intentional beings? I suggested above that intentionality could be (and has been typically) understood in general

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<sup>35</sup> Part of the value of the ontological analysis of intentionality that I am proposing is that we can extend the meaning of experience beyond the realm of linguisticity and understanding. Understanding ceases to appear as ontologically primary, and instead assumes a more modest role as a particular mode of intentional being. Further, it also follows from an ontological analysis of intentionality that "human being" ceases to be ontologically distinct, with respect to its intentionality, from other living beings. Accordingly, "intentional being" is not something peculiarly human, ontologically speaking, but rather is an ontological category of description applicable to living being. The implications of this, however, cannot be pursued in detail here.

terms as descriptive of the structure of consciousness in relation to the objects of experience. But if, indeed, intentionality is an ontological concept, perhaps it is more appropriate to say that intentionality describes the general way that living being "orients" itself in and toward its environment on a preconscious level. Let me elaborate on this.

All living things are, in some sense, "oriented" in relation to things which they encounter in their environment, where "oriented" is to be understood as the way in which particular encounters are felt to have some degree of "value" for a particular organism. In other words, it is characteristic of living beings that they are "interested" in regions of their environment, or that things encountered have some degree of "meaning" for them. The "value" that a particular encounter is felt to have affects the way in which the living thing takes a stand in relation to that encounter or reacts to it. The "experience" of an encounter with things in the environment is constituted by this relational value. Experience and the import of experience are, even at this fundamental preconscious level, coextensive--experience is intentional. In saying this, I want to give the term "experience" a wider acceptation than it has had in the discourse surrounding much of philosophical hermeneutics, one which includes all intentional relations among living beings and their environment. Similarly, the content of experience, so

understood, can be said to have "meaning" to the extent that it affects the relational complex of values which give rise to or make possible a change in the intentional "orientation" of the experiencer. It follows that all experience, to some degree, affects the intentional way in which a living being *is* in its environment or world: all experience is "meaningful." In very general terms this is what is meant by saying that an organism stands in a "directional" relation to its environment; and accordingly we can speak of this "directionality" in terms of "intentional orientation."

Given these very general claims about the way in which intentionality might be understood ontologically, as the way in which living beings *are* in their environments, it is possible to make some preliminary remarks about how we might attempt to reinterpret the notion of "intention."

If we consider for a moment what is implied in the way in which I have attempted to construe the basic structure of intentionality, it is clear that a living being, in so far as it is an intentional being, experiences its environment, or in a particular region of its environment, according to, or within the context of, a complex structure of relational values. Preconsciously, this structure is bodily, we must say, because, while we can speak of a particular intentional being's relations to its environment, we must not lose sight of the fact that, in so far as it is a physical entity, it is part of more inclusive totalities; that is to say, it is

part of an environment. It occupies a place, and it has a relational value within the context of its environment as an organic whole. The individual organism is a living locus of intentional orientation.

We might best understand the modes of orientation which this intentional structure tends to generate in terms of *habit*, where "habit" refers to the ways in which the organism orients itself in and reacts to familiar regions of its environment. In other words, "habit" is descriptive of a way of being which is the expressive manifestation of familiar patterns of intentional comportment. The way in which the organism is intentionally oriented within the environment of which it is a part affects the way in which it experiences and reacts to regions of its environment and other organisms. Reaction is, accordingly, conditioned by this intentional structure. If we conceptually analyze "reactions" in terms of the intentional structure of values which condition them, we can speak of the "motivations" which generate reactions. All aspects of an organism's engagement with its environment must be said to be "motivated" in this basic sense. The organism never simply is, in the value-neutral way in which an inanimate object is, but always is, we must say, "up to something." In the case of living beings--intentional beings--to be is to be up to something, to be in the process of generating dynamic value structures, in the process of getting something accomplished, even if only in a most rudimentary sense.

In the case of human beings the intentional structure of experience is much more complex, and so too are the possibilities of experience, understood in terms of possible modes of intentional comportment. The reason for this is that unlike most, if not all, other living beings, human being can objectivate its own intentional being. In other words, a human being (as subject) can, with varying degrees of adequacy, take a stand in relation to itself as an intentional being. In becoming an intentional object for itself--a mode of intentional being that can only be achieved through the mediating experience of a world and of other reflexive intentional beings--human being has the potential to become aware of itself as a way of being. The intentional orientation in this mode of intentional being is toward adequate self-formulation; the content, the intentional object, is itself.

The ability to achieve an awareness of itself, in this sense, qualitatively changes the character of an intentional being. Possibilities of experience and motivation are no longer conditioned to the same degree strictly by the experiences which precede them and the general intentional orientation of the organism (facticity and habit). In attending to its own intentional being in this way, human being opens up for itself a world of possible ways of being which may transcend its mere facticity and habitual modes of intentional orientation. It can realize for itself new ways of being through an ongoing process of formulating its own

intentional orientation toward itself and its world. What is more, through the mediation of signs and symbols--language--even more possibilities of intentional orientation conspire to weave a complex and ever-changing fabric of reflexive intentional orientation. It is these more complex orders of intentional orientation that we are engaged in while contributing to the constitution of the literary work of art emerging as we read certain texts. The the work of art *qua* aesthetic object is wholly an intentional structure.

Ontologically, therefore, we must think of intentionality in terms of a continuum which is fundamentally preconscious and bodily (or, more generally, "living"), but which takes on a qualitatively different character as it becomes increasingly reflexive. The degree of reflexivity conditions the possibility of the intentional being taking its own intentional orientation as an object. In so doing, the nature of conscious or intentional activity also changes qualitatively. As the degree of reflexivity increases so too does the adequacy with which the living being can project itself toward its future possibilities. The activities of the individual, which are the concrete expression of various manifestations of intentional orientation that are, for the most part, habitual, can potentially be transcended in novel and creative ways in this reflexive intentional mode. The intentional object which is the attempt explicitly to formulate this intentional orientation is an "intention," the complete

motivation of which, however, cannot even in principle be made intelligible (be intentionally objectivated) because it ultimately has its source in our prelinguistic, preconscious bodily ("living") being in and of an environment or a world (the contexts which one "in-habits"). It is in and through this reflexive orientation of intentional being that a conscious being endeavours to affect the world of its experience. Action, then, is the expressive embodiment of a mode of intentional being, and the attempt to make intelligible this mode of intentional being is what we refer to as an "intention." Intention is, as an intentional objectivation, an interpretation of a complex and sedimented motivational structure which even the agent him/herself can sometimes fail to formulate accurately, and can never fully formulate adequately. Having said all this, let us see what sense we can now make of the relationship between the author's creative intention and the intentional object of the literary work of art.

Earlier, we saw that for Ricoeur one of the basic characteristics of discourse is that it is a form of activity. It is always performed with a purpose, or aim, which we characterized in general terms as the intention to get something across to, to make oneself understood by, someone else. Discourse is communicative activity, where what one seeks to communicate is a particular meaning-intention. I suggested above that we might understand

meaning in terms of the extent to which an experience (there, specifically, the experience of reading a text) can elicit a change in the intentional orientation of an intentional subject (a reader). In written discourse this situation was shown to be complicated by the fact that, with the material inscription of discourse as a text, the meaning-intention of the author and the meaning of the text for readers cease to coincide. This points to the problem of authorial intention. Let me now attempt to situate this problem within the context of the preceding ontological analysis of intentionality and experience.

What is realized in and through the act of reading is not the text as text, it will be recalled, but something different: it is the literary work *qua* aesthetic object, an *intentional* object. In the activity of reading a text the literary work is concretized. But in what does this concretization consist? How is this intentional object constituted?

Above I suggested that what intentional being consists in is a complex structure of relational values in and toward an environment and, in the case of human being, a world. These relational values were described in terms of intentional orientations. To read is to interpret, and all interpretation, according to the analysis I am proposing, involves situating experience according to one's familiar habituated structures of intentional orientation. Novel experiences (no pun intended) are what they are only as they

are contextualized within a pre-existing intentional structure of relational values. A novel experience, thus appropriated, gives rise to new values which are not merely added onto the pre-existing structures. Any experience, even if only to a negligible degree, necessarily changes the configuration of the structure as a whole. It is in this way that new modes of intentional orientation, new meanings, and new ways of being creatively emerge.

When one is reading a text, it is first of all the inscribed signs of language (words and sentences) which bring about reactions; which is to say, give rise to changes in the reader's intentional orientation. But this dimension of the experience of reading, merely of reading the written word, is not in itself interpretive in the sense of situating new experience in relation to the context of habitual patterns of intentional orientation. Familiar words and concepts, and familiar arrangements of them, are themselves modes of intentional orientation that were once interpreted but which are becoming increasingly sedimented and habitual all the time. In hearing or reading these patterns of words or arrangements of concepts one can be understood as engaging in a dynamic interplay in and among certain habitually oriented ways of being in and toward the world. Words and concepts are signs which elicit habitual modes of intentional orientation. The communicative power of language as an intersubjective way of being among others lies in the fact that the experience of hearing a familiar

language, or of seeing it inscribed, gives rise to similar habituations of intentional orientation in different individuals. If this were not the case, communication and mutual understanding would be impossible. It is through the inscription of discourse in written language, understood in terms of a complex intersubjective structure of intentional habituations, that the author endeavours to communicate through the text.

The real interpretive dimension of the act of reading, however, comes about as the text leads the reader by means of the familiar toward new possibilities of experience. One of the most common ways in which this is accomplished is through metaphor. Novel arrangements of habitual patterns of language give rise to tensions among patterns familiar to the reader and those which the text embodies and toward which it points. At these moments of tension new modes of intentional orientation emerge between the habitual intentional orientation of the reader and the experience which interpretation generates. As the literary work--as aesthetic object--is actualized in the process of reading the text, a coherent and interrelated structure of intentional valuations--"meanings"--emerges. To the extent that this structure of meanings, so understood, can be identified and understood as a reasonably coherent whole, it constitutes the intentional objectivation, a structure which we refer to as the literary work.

At last, we are in a position to propose an alternative to Ricoeur's construal of the role played by the author in the creation of a literary work. What the text accomplishes by way of disclosing new modes of intentional orientation to its readers is clearly not something which happens in an unconditioned way. The particular intentional object which is actualized in the reading of a text is created by neither the author nor the reader alone. But although we must acknowledge that the reader, in actualizing the literary work, contributes to the concretization of the particular intentional object through interpretation, which is always creative, it is the author through whom the intentional object is first actualized and it is the author who fashions an artifact (the text) which captures and fixes potential patterns of intentional orientation from which "the work" can be reconstituted.<sup>36</sup> Through the vehicle of the text, through the language which, as a way of being, elicits and conditions habitual modes of intentional orientation from its speakers and readers, the author inscribes a complex texture of modes of intentional orientation in a medium which preserves them in *potentiality*. If what I have argued about the nature of intention and intentionality with respect to human experience gives food for thought, it would seem that we cannot, in the final analysis, divorce the intention of the author--understood in terms of structures

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<sup>36</sup> Nayed refers to these patterns as the "embedded design" of the text.

of intentional orientation--from the intentional object of the literary work of art. The literary work of art makes its appearance as none other than the concrete expressive embodiment of the author's intention conceived in a dynamic way as a complex web of modes of intentional orientation and possibilities of meaning.

And at last, as well, we are in a position to articulate the meaning of Aristotle's enigmatic claim that: "The thinking part of the soul must be, while impassable, capable of receiving the form of an object: that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the object." Within the context of the ontological analysis of intentionality which I have proposed, "intentional" describes the fundamental mode of being of all living things. I have argued that "meaning" should be understood in terms of the way in which an organism's encounter with a region of its environment, or, peculiar to humans beings, a person's encounter with the things which constitute his world, elicits changes in the intentional orientation of the "experiencer." If we accept that the "being of the world" is coextensive with the "meaning of the world," meaning that what *is* is that which has, in principle, meaning for us, then it is possible to understand "being" in terms of the complex structure of intentional orientations in and out of which a meaningful world is at once generated and "given." The "objects" of experience

achieve their determinateness as "objects" through the structuring processes of intentional subjectivity and cultural-linguistic intersubjectivity. Since it is always possible to express meaning in another way--that is to say, since it is possible for different occasions of experience to generate similar modes of intentional orientation--then what happens in the process which we describe as "cognition" is that the cognizer experiences a change in intentional orientation corresponding to the meaning that the object of cognition has for him. In other words, the cognizer, as intentional subject, *is* identical in character with the object--for the object *is* what it means--without being the object. The cognizer only intends it.

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