

RECONSIDERING AUTHORIAL INTENTION – PERSPECTIVES FROM CONTINENTAL
AND ANALYTIC TRADITION

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Abstract:

Paul Ricoeur's narrative and critical hermeneutics provides the conceptual resources to accommodate Barthes' and similar critiques of subjectivity while positing a revised form of authorial intention similar to the "postulated author" of Alexander Nehamas and the "creative process" of Richard Wollheim. Though influenced by Barthian critiques, all three thinkers retain a notion of authorial intent*one distinct from the intentions of the historical author*necessary for the understanding of meaning in the philosophy of literature. Yet, the implications of this allow us to reverse the Ricoeurian insight of understanding human action as a text, and show how human action provides clarification on authorial intention. Using Ricoeur and Nehamas, I would like to revisit the issue of authorial intention in order to show the insights this offers for hermeneutics and philosophy of literature. If authorial intention is properly reestablished as distinct from the intentions of the historical writer, we can turn to a minimalistic version of the analytic philosophy of action based on Ricoeur and Carlos Moya to provide a useful heuristic conceptual framework to look at both authorial and 'readerly' intention.

In employing the philosophy of action, this conceptual framework will be used instrumentally in aid of interpreting the text and providing further analysis and conceptual clarity to the notion of authorial intention. Further, analyzing 'writerly' and 'readerly' intention as action*communicative action*sidesteps the philosophical issue of the 'artistic process' which had absorbed the attention of aesthetics since Plato, without sidestepping the issues of authorial intention and readerly intention.¹ I will argue that in using variants of the philosophy of action, we can ignore psychological issues and instead focus on the broader issues of meaning-expression at the heart of both readerly and writerly intention. I will then demonstrate this heuristic framework using Hölderlin's epic poetry and Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*.

Key words: authorial intention, Ricoeur, Nehamas, action, Donald Davidson, literature, Holderlin.

In interpreting a text we must come to understand an action, and so we must understand an agent and therefore other actions and other agents as well and what they took for granted, what they meant, believed, and what they wanted."

Alexander Nehamas The Postulated Author

The reader himself is to find the motives underlying the questions, and in doing so he participates in producing meaning."

Wolfgang Iser The Act of Reading

In the wake of Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" and related critiques of subjectivity and authorial intention,¹ critics such as Alexander Nehamas and Richard Wollheim have challenged Barthes' dismissal of authorial intention, arguing that a revised form of authorial intention based on a "postulated author" or "creative process" can save authorial intention while acknowledging certain Barthian' insights.² Paul Ricoeur, in his narrative and critical hermeneutics, arrives at similar conclusions, arguing for a critical rather than naïve understanding of authorial intention.³ Using Wollheim,

¹ Roland Barthes "Death of an Author" in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

² Alexander Nehamas, "The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as a Regulative Ideal" *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 133–49 reprinted pgs 262–272. Richard Wollheim, "Criticism as Retrieval" *Art and its Objects* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) reprinted 255–261.

³ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* [henceforth HHS] edited and trans. John B. Thompson (Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Interpreta-*

Ricoeur and Nehamas, I would like to revisit the issue of authorial intention in order to show the insights this offers for hermeneutics and the philosophy of literature. If authorial intention is properly reestablished as distinct from the intentions of the historical writer as these authors suggest, then we can turn to another area of philosophy for further clarification on the notion of authorial intention. To this end, I will turn to a sketch of the analytic philosophy of action based upon Paul Ricoeur and Carlos Moya to provide a useful heuristic conceptual framework to look at both authorial and 'readerly' intention. These authors' conceptions of action share more than a passing resemblance with much of Jurgen Habermas' work on communicative action and the phenomenological tradition of meaning and intentionality, which I am happy to incorporate.

In employing the philosophy of action, this conceptual framework will be used *instrumentally* in aid of interpreting the text and providing further analysis and conceptual clarity to the notion of authorial intention. Further, analyzing 'writerly' and 'readerly' intention as *action*—communicative action—sidesteps the philosophical issue of the 'artistic process' which has long preoccupied aesthetics, without sidestepping the issues of authorial intention and readerly intention.⁴ I will argue that in using variants of the philosophy of action, we can ignore psychological issues (in which Wollheim's view gets caught) and instead focus on the broader issues of meaning-expression at the heart of both readerly and writerly intention.

I will then briefly employ this heuristic framework to Frederick Hölderlin's epic poetry, specifically "Bread and Wine" and the Patmos Hymn, Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*, and Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?*⁵ Applying this conceptual scheme to such diverse works will reflect its suitable breadth as well as conceptual depth in discussing authorial or 'writerly' in-

tion in literature broadly construed. Finally, I will attempt to provide a rough sketch to the concept and understanding of readerly intention that I have already hinted at above.

Death and Resurrection of an Author:

In "Death of the Author," Roland Barthes, drawing on insights from structuralism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, argues that the intention of the author becomes triply subverted by the free play of signs (structuralism), economic structures (Marxism) and the vicissitudes of desire (psychoanalysis). Therefore, the privileged place of the author as the center of meaning in a text is an illusion: Authorial intention neither exhausts, nor even adequately captures, the possibilities inherent in a text.⁶

If authorial intention is understood as the psychologically conscious act, or the 'intended' action of the historical author, then Barthes's critique is fully justified. For as Barthes explains, the locutionary act or 'content' of what the author intends is also accompanied by an illocutionary force implied in that act, as well as the perlocutionary force of performing that act; ie. actually writing the text. All three, the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts are subverted or altered by the language we use, the society we live in, and unconscious elements within us. Yet, if we understand authorial intention in a more expansive and nuanced way, as Nehamas and Wollheim argue, then we might possibly retain the notion of authorial intention.

While Nehamas recognizes that authorial intention is neither the sole source nor justification of meaning of a text, he reminds us that the act of reading or interpreting a text presupposes 'postulating' an author:

To interpret a text is to consider it as its author's production. Literary texts are produced by agents and must be understood as such. This seems to me self-evident; even deconstructive criticism generally accepts it, though it insists that the choice of agent is conventional and arbitrary. And

tion Theory Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

⁴ For the remainder of this piece, I use 'writerly' intention and the 'postulated' author's intentions interchangeably.

⁵ I realize that in analyzing *What is Literature?* and possibly even *Writing of the Disaster* that I might be extending beyond philosophy of literature into general hermeneutics. Yet, each work, especially the second, straddles the divides between 'prose' and 'poetry' as well as literature and non-fiction.

⁶ Barthes, "Death of the Author" in *The Rustle of Language* trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 49–55.

since texts are products of expressive actions, understanding them is inseparably tied to understanding their agents. But just as the author is not identical with a text's fictional narrator, so he is also distinct from its historical writer. The author is postulated as the agent whose actions account for the text's features; he is a character, a hypothesis which is accepted provisionally, guides interpretation, and is in turn modified in its light. The author, unlike the writer, is not a text's efficient cause but, so to speak, its formal cause, manifested in thought not identical with it.⁷

The "text's features" or structure occurs as a result of the organizing 'intention' of the author; an author distinct from both the narrator of the work and the historical writer. We can only understand the text by understanding it as the result of an agent who structures the text as an expressive action. Nehamas also suggests that even if we have the wrong, or unknown, writer we still might have the right author.⁸ This 'postulated author' is a construct, but a helpful and necessary construct, that guides interpretation but is not foundational in the sense of unrevisable. The postulated author is not the efficient but formal cause of the work; the author is the source of the unity of the whole.⁹ And it is for this reason that we 'postulate' an author. Without some form of authorial intention, though one distinct from any flesh-and-blood writer, we

lack a focus for meaning. Nehamas is content to allow a methodological pluralism, such as psychoanalytic, Marxist, and structuralist interpretations, if this is "compatible with a monism of content."¹⁰ The monism Nehamas posits is a regulative ideal identifying the meaning of a "text with whatever is specified by that text's ideal interpretation... Meaning therefore depends on an author's intentions even if a writer is not aware of it."¹¹

Richard Wollheim argues along similar lines. The process of criticism [read interpretation or reading] "is retrieval. The task of criticism is the reconstruction of the creative process, where the creative process must in turn be thought of as something not stopping short of, but terminating on, the work of art itself."¹² Properly speaking there is no creative process without the work or text. Wollheim reflects Blanchot and Heidegger's idea that there is no artist without the work of art.¹³ Further, the creative process is not meant to imply the specific psychological activities of genius that so interested past aesthetic theories such as Kant's. We are not to confuse artistic intention with the creative process, or "the meaning of the work of art and the meaning of the artist."¹⁴ The two are distinct and this reflects Wollheim's, at least implicit, acknowledgement of Barthian critiques. Wollheim adds that the creative process "is a more inclusive phenomenon than the artist's intentions, and in two ways."¹⁵ First, it includes 'various vicissitudes' to which artist's intentions are subject to including changing one's mind, providence, or luck. Secondly, it includes background beliefs, conventions, customs, and all the influences on language and consciousness which psychoanalytic, structural, and Marxist critiques remind us.

⁷ Nehamas 267, emphasis added.

⁸ Note, this in no way directly contradicts any sense of the autonomy of the text that Barthes posits (it might indirectly but not directly). The text is autonomous in the sense that it becomes divorced from any real writer and that the 'codes' it contains become internal to it, structuring the text in different ways. But it is not autonomous in a 'free play' of interpretations possible to it. It is constrained and guided by the authorial intention 'postulated' to it.

⁹ This is why later I will reject (efficient) causal accounts of action. Compare this to Wollheim's often psychological emphasis on the "creative process" and Wolfgang Iser's view that "consistency building...depends on the reader and not the work" or the author (Iser 18). Iser's focus on the phenomenology of reading is a helpful reminder of the productive role of reading but it risks lapsing into the Kantian fallacy of placing intelligibility and structure solely on the side of the (reading) subject. Cf. Iser, *The Act of Reading* (John Hopkins U. Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Nehamas, 268.

¹¹ Nehamas 267–268, emphasis added.

¹² Wollheim 255.

¹³ Cf. Martin Heidegger *On the Way to Language* (New York: HarperOne, 1982) and Maurice Blanchot *The Space of Literature* trans. by Ann Smock (University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

¹⁴ Wollheim 259. Wollheim reminds us further that "reconstruction of the creative process is not recording the artist's intentions." (260). The first (reconstruction) requires respecting artist's intentionality, the latter requires knowing it. The second problem is the problem of earlier Schliermachian hermeneutics, the first is coming to grips with the creative process, the writing process by way retrieval.

¹⁵ Wollheim 259.

Yet, where Wollheim's model differs from Nehamas' is also where it is weakest. Despite attempts to distinguish the "creative process" from the writer's intentions, Wollheim still wants to discuss the "creative process" in psychological terms. So while he can acknowledge the subversive effects to the author's intention that enter into the creative process, he wishes to incorporate these purely psychologically and thereby retains a much stronger connection between the real flesh-and-blood writer and the creative process. Nehamas, meanwhile, clearly removes any psychological connection between the real and postulated author, allowing temporal or pragmatic constraints that the 'real' author might place on the text while focusing on logical and conceptual connections that link the meaning of the text to its postulated author.¹⁶

The difference between the 'postulated' author of Nehamas (and Wollheim) and 19th century hermeneutics' focus on authorial intention is the purpose of each. While Dilthey and Schleiermacher wanted to know the fact of the author's intention *as fact*, Nehamas' 'postulated' author is *in the service of the reader*. We, as readers and critics, 'postulate' an author so that we may read and understand better. The postulated author, alongside the structures of the text, provides us a center or "intentional organization" to our interpretation of the text and is a source of unity of the "field of experience" to which that text corresponds.¹⁷ The way I would like to understand the 'postulated author', or the Action of Writing, is as the *nexus of meaning*. The "wandering viewpoint" of the reader that Iser discusses in *The Act of Reading* helps capture this point, but certain elements that locate that viewpoint belong on the side of the 'writer', at least as 'postulated',

¹⁶ Wollheim and Nehamas are only to representatives of a rehabilitated approach at authorial intention. Iser in *The Act of Reading* expresses familiarity with a virtual author, using it to coin his own term, the implied reader. He also draws attention to the use of an "implied author" in Wayne C. Booth *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1963).

¹⁷ The term "intentional organization" comes from unpublished lectures notes from a course on Philosophy and Literature by Jennifer Gosetti; (hopefully) to be expounded upon in more detail in her *The Ecstatic Quotidian: Phenomenological Sightings in Modern Art and Literature* (Penn State University Press, 2007). This "center" addresses the worries of Nehamas and Wollheim against Barthian critiques that in the wake of the death of an author, any and all interpretations are valid. There is no guardrail or guideline to critique 'faulty' interpretations.

to guide the act of reading. While the reader's viewpoint is what is wandering, the nexus of meaning that is captured in this wandering corresponds to the meaning-intending act of the postulated author.¹⁸

Reading Ricoeur: From Action to Text

Ricoeur uses the polysemy of texts to help understand and explain human action: "As the logic of text-interpretation suggests, there is a *specific plurivocity* belonging to the meaning of human action. Human action, too, is a limited field of possible constructions."¹⁹ As the above quote suggests, Ricoeur follows Nehamas and Wollheim at least in limiting the field of possible constructions or interpretations. The Text is not an unlimited play of possibilities; it is constrained in its interpretations. Some interpretations are better than others. Similarly, human action can be explained and understood via a number of interpretations, but some (and perhaps one) *meaning* of that act is the best. Ricoeur's insight here parallels Nehamas' idea that authorial intention is a limit concept that guides our interpretation but never, or rarely, is reached.

However, since Ricoeur's insights, there have been several advancements and refinements in the understanding of the philosophy of action. I want to employ these insights in action theory to help understand and explain the "text" of literature. If Ricoeur is right that textual interpretation and human action are analogous, then there should be no problem using a theory of human action to explain the text of literature. If there is any disjunct, or if the analogy only holds for the most part, then we can simply use it as a heuristic as I have already implied.²⁰

Ricoeur talks about how human actions may be "*construed*" in different ways,²¹ just as a text may be interpreted or construed in different ways. But some "construals" are better than others, and similarly, some interpretations or readings are better

¹⁸ Iser, 108-126.

¹⁹ Ricoeur, HHS, 213.

²⁰ Whether the analogy or connection holds in a 'strong' or simply heuristic sense, the point of postulating an author and construing the meaning of action is always for the understanding of the agent looking for intelligibility or meaning. Thus, either way, the reason for postulating an author is in the service of the reader or interpreter.

²¹ Ricoeur, HHS, 213.

than others. And how is one way we understand one interpretation, i.e. the *meaning* of the text, better than another? In much the same way we understand a construal of human action as better than another; by appealing to the intentions of the agent and their pre-requisites: Here, we can turn to a philosophy of action inspired by Ricoeur and Moya that understands the antecedents of intentions in terms of choices, desires, and beliefs that *motivate* intentions.

Action in Aid of Intention:²²

Most contemporary theories of action, following Donald Davidson, associate the structural or psychological pre-requisites of action and intention-formation in terms of desire and belief correlates.²³ In their widest and most charitable form, desires include all motivation or “motivation-encompassing attitudes” while the belief component consists of cognitively definable truth-falsity values of the acting agent, broadly construed.²⁴ I am happy to follow this conceptual schema with two caveats. First, even in terms of the real, psychological person, desires and beliefs are not enough to causally account for the forming of intentions let alone actions.²⁵ What is additionally

²² The philosophy of action is not to be confused with speech-act theory. Speech-act theory, though useful to both action-theory and literature is only one species of action. Speech-act theory encounters problems when exploring non-utilitarian or “poetic” uses of language which do not properly fit the model of speech-acts, leading J.L Austin to consider poetic and literary language “parasitic” to ordinary language. Understanding literary acts as action, broadly construed avoids these as well as other contentious issues.

²³ Cf. Donald Davidson. *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁴ Cf. Alfred Mele *Motivation and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) for an account of species of desire and motivation-encompassing attitudes.

²⁵ This is why I am reluctant to follow the dominant strand in action theory attempting to explain action causally in terms of psychological determinants, and instead follow Ricoeur and Moya in a different direction. For the most promising of recent causal accounts Cf. Alfred Mele, *Motivation and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Michael Bratman, “Two Faces of Intention,” *The Philosophical Review* 93.3 (Jul 1984): 375-405. I think a second reason we can reject or at least remain agnostic on causal/teleological theories of action for our purposes is the fact that we are ‘postulating’ an author and ‘postulating’ intentions; therefore, any causal

needed is a ‘decision’ or choice to endorse these desire/belief correlates. Thus, in the remainder of this piece I use the generic term “motivate” to express the role belief/desires have on the formation of intentions. More importantly for our purposes, by focusing on the non-psychological ‘postulated’ author, the desire/belief components may be necessary constraints on the intentions of the author but are hardly completely *determinative* of the intention of the postulated author. Secondly, our focus on action in aid of the text is not to be solely focused on beliefs and desires, partly because of the first proviso, and partly because there are other important structural components of action than merely the belief/desire pre-requisites.

Yet, beliefs and desires perform an important constraining role to meaning or interpretation of the text in ways hinted at in Nehamas’ example concerning the use of Freudian psychoanalytic theory for interpreting *Oedipus Rex* and *The Metamorphosis*:

If the Oedipal conflict is as basic to behavior as Freud thought, then the historical Sophocles, unaware of it as he may have been, could have considered it an issue...We must not, by contrast, accept a view of *The Metamorphosis* which holds that hours on the clock correspond to years in Gregor’s life...Kafka could not have known this highly technical, and highly doubtful, theory of development.²⁶

Just as the Oedipus complex might be an underlying, unconscious ‘desire’ component in almost any postulated intention, the dubious ‘belief’ component of understanding contentious developmental aspects of the same theory, such as the fact that hours metaphorically represent years, should be outright rejected. As Freudian theory had yet to be expounded, we cannot accept that the beliefs of the postulated (or even real) author can ‘motivate’ the intention to express this symbolically through the use of time metaphors for development, even if we

explanation seems bizarre if not unnecessary. There is no psychological entity to postulate these causal accounts. What we are looking for is a heuristic or conceptual connection; and in this, remain agnostic on whether action is explained causally or teleologically. Thus, for the remainder of this piece I use ‘motivate’ to express the role belief/desires have on the formation of intentions.

²⁶ Nehamas, 268.

can accept that a universal, unconscious desire may have prompted Sophocles to write *Oedipus Rex*. Therefore, while desires may not be conscious to be 'motivational' in forming intentions, there are limits to the belief-ascriptions we can attribute to a 'postulated author' that are constrained by the possible beliefs the historical author may have held as the Kafka example suggests.

The structural components of action I want to focus upon are Carlos Moya's definitions of action, intention and intention-formation. The fundamental question to any philosophy of action is what makes something an action rather than a mere happening. (We could ask the same question of literature: what makes something a text rather than a mere collection of words and letters). Many accounts try to explain this in terms of 'basic' actions that are the atomistic building blocks of more complex actions. Moya goes another route and argues that what makes something an action is that it is meaningful or meaning-giving.²⁷ Meaningful action "involves commitments."²⁸ What these commitments entail is the forming of an intention and committing oneself to "make that content true, that is, to act in that specific way."²⁹ A word of caution is in order. The way Moya and other action theorists use intention is more specific than the phenomenological tradition's understanding of mental acts as always directed toward an object. "Intentions," writes Moya, "are not mere desires, aims, plans or rules; they are commitments to act so as to match their content."³⁰ Intentions are a specific action-guided and action-prompting form of intentionality. For instance, when I signal to make a turn on my bicycle, this involves a commitment to make a turn and this commitment is not a happening but is something that "has to be *done* by an agent."³¹ I commit to the intention of signaling.

²⁷ The way Moya speaks of something as "meaningful" is similar in many ways to the transcendental conditions Habermas speaks of in his theory of communicative action. Cf. Jürgen Habermas *A Theory of Communicative Action* Vol 1 and 2 (Beacon Press, 1985).

²⁸ Moya 46.

²⁹ Here we can see parallels with the Husserlian phenomenological tradition of empty and fulfilling intentions. The way Moya speaks of intention, however, is more a plan or normative guide to the goal one sets, even implicitly.

³⁰ Moya, 58.

³¹ Moya, 47.

Commitments and the goal of fulfilling my intentions do not exhaust what action entails. These actions, as meaningful, are communicable to other meaning-intending beings. This is especially true in terms of literary action. All actions are holistic and are imbedded in various sedimented levels of meaning. What is paradigmatic about literary acts is their 'imbeddedness' in a world even while transcending that world, and their ability to communicate this dual aspect.

The communicativity at the center of literature has also been explored by Wolfgang Iser in *The Act of Reading*. Iser, drawing on speech-act theory, argues that "the structure conditioning the reception of the work...[is] primarily [seen] as one of communication."³² This "structure of communication" is inherent in the activity of discourse, of the speech-acts of speaking and writing. Every speech-act can be pragmatically judged in terms of its success or failure at communication. But, "these factors also pertain to the reading of fiction, which is a *linguistic action* in the sense that it involves an understanding of the text, or of what the text seeks to convey by establishing a relationship between text and reader."³³ The potential problem with Iser's account—why the present focus turns elsewhere—is Iser's focus on the action or activity solely on the side of the reader. This leads to a potentially distorted picture in which the reader imposes meaning on the written work much like Kant's transcendental ego imposes unity on a senseless manifold. Instead, the focus is on the overall communicative act initiated by the 'postulated author', mediated through the text, and actively synthesized by the reader. *This* is the *literary* act; it is not simply the activity of productive syntheses between reader and text. For this reason, although often paralleling my approach, Iser's interests in a phenomenology of reading neglects the aspects of authorial intention to which we draw attention. Insofar as Iser consistently draws us towards the activity and the communicativity of reading and literature in general, and in his use of speech-act theory and its communicative element, he points us from the act of reading back to the act of writing.

Ricoeur also reminds us that all literary acts—

³² Iser, 178.

³³ Iser, 53-54, emphasis added.

regardless of however mediated –always are acts or instances of discourse: They always involve “someone saying something to someone about something.”³⁴ Structurally speaking, this involves (1) an active subject (I saying), (2) a ‘passive’ recipient, (3) something said, (4) being predicated about something else. Not only is this always structurally the case, it also is always presupposed or pre-figured in the act of reading. When we postulate an author, we postulate the intention of the author *necessarily* involving a mediated ‘saying’ (since it is writing rather than speech), to an audience, with some level of intelligible or determinable content, about something, the ‘World’ opened up by the text.

Ricoeur draws on the Heideggerian notion of the ‘world’ of the text as the “*ensemble of references opened up by every kind of text*, descriptive, or poetic, that I have read, understood, and loved.”³⁵ This ‘world’ interposes the perspective of the text guided by authorial intent into the pre-existing space of the reading subject to be the “something” to which any text or any piece of discourse depicts. Even the most austere text provides some level of “worlding” simply due to its use of language and the ability to convey and uncover. Yet it is only in more ‘poetic’ works that the world of the text becomes differentiated from the world of the reader.³⁶

Action in Action:

The application of writing as action to the texts of Hölderlin, Blanchot, and Sartre is only meant to be a preliminary sketch. My aim is not an exhaustive textual interpretation; I hardly have the space to do so. However, what I want to emphasize is the potential depth *and* breadth this understanding of text as action can accommodate. Here, recall Adorno’s *Parataxis* speech as an attempt to use a

methodic tool (in his case, a form/content distinction) to aid understanding, or to further *meaning* in the text. While Heidegger reawakened our attention to the philosophic importance of Hölderlin’s poetry, it is Adorno’s *Parataxis* that reminds us that some meanings might only be possible through the use of certain aesthetic conceptions. Similarly, I suggest that thinking of writing as action, in the way I have described, can contribute to the meaning of our text. With this in mind we can turn to Hölderlin, Blanchot and Sartre as diverse examples.

As suggested earlier, one way we can see the belief/desire correlates of authorial intention is as constraints on the types of interpretations or readings of any given text. Therefore, we cannot attribute an improbable belief of psychoanalytic human development to Kafka when it is absurd that he might have held that belief. Similarly, desire correlates, whether conscious or unconscious, can provide guardrails or constraints on plausible interpretations. Yet, belief/desire correlates can also provide ‘motivations’ for the intentions of the postulated author,³⁷ and these belief/desires are not as tied to the historical author as they would be if they were merely constraints on interpretations. For instance, in Hölderlin’s poetry, both the insights of Adorno’s interpretation and Heidegger’s reading are partially right. What Heidegger notes as the focus on Being in Hölderlin can be expressed, perhaps contrary to Heidegger’s own formulations, in the confused ‘beliefs’ motivating the work. The fact that they are confused beliefs justifies to some degree Heidegger’s understanding of the poet as an empty vessel through which language speaks.³⁸ Heidegger recognizes, and seizes upon, Hölderlin’s true beliefs. Hölderlin shows Heidegger a way to a future clearing of Being. This ‘content’ to his po-

³⁴ Cf. Paul Ricoeur “Language as Discourse” in *Interpretation Theory*. Ricoeur also draws repeatedly from speech-act theory; therefore it is no surprise the connections between his work and Iser’s. Again, it is merely the focus of each that is fundamentally different.

³⁵ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 37. Italics added.

³⁶ Ricoeur calls this the “displacement” or “distanciation” of the reader; something that is perhaps most evident in science fiction or fantasy novels. Cf. *Interpretation Theory* and J.R. Tolkien “On Fairy-Stories” in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Del Rey, 1986).

³⁷ Two different factors speak in favor of ‘motivating’ intentions rather than necessitating or causing intentions. (1) On the model of action I am recommending, to form an intention also involves deciding or choosing to endorse belief/desire correlates; in the present use of ‘postulated’ writerly intention I simply leave out any awkward attempt at explaining the ‘decision’ or ‘choice’ of a virtual persona. (2) As this model is decidedly unpsychological and rather conceptual, the ‘motivations’ I speak of, i.e. desires and beliefs ‘motivating’ a intention are necessary rather than sufficient conditions for whatever postulated intention forms.

³⁸ Perhaps this is an Adorno inspired caricature of Heidegger’s neglect of the poet. Still, there is some justification.

etry the poet himself does not fully understand but through Heidegger it is made articulate. So the question Hölderlin asks in "Bread and Wine," Why are they silent, too, the theatres ancient and hallowed?/Why not now does the dance celebrate, consecrate joy?"³⁹ Heidegger recognizes as Hölderlin's lament of the flight of the gods. The gods mingle with the "word as it was once word."⁴⁰ Further, Heidegger elaborates on Hölderlin's sacrifice or destruction of subjective intention: "But so much/Goes on, yet nothing succeeds: we are like heartless shadows,"⁴¹ The lines of the poem reach to connect each other in a Kantian unity of apperception, yet "nothing succeeds" and the we who synthesizes are like "heartless shadows." There is the appearance of subjectivity but it is only a shadow, a shadow which conceals its lack of a heart or center. It is language and not the recollections of the poet, which enters center stage with Hölderlin's work. This emphasis on language is what Heidegger recognizes as the 'prophetic' aspects of Hölderlin's poetry.

However, Heidegger missteps when he thinks that this is the only value of the poet, or the only value to Hölderlin's poetry. Adorno's emphasis on the parataxical scars dominating the work suggest a vibrant tension and dynamic energy which Heidegger's authoritative interpretation threatens to conceal. The parataxical arrangement of "constitutive dissociation" set up by "dispensing with predicative assertion,"⁴² is an 'authorial intention' guided by a 'belief' that it is the form of language which relishes in the tension between synthesizing logic and an "aconceptual synthesis" found in poetic works.⁴³ Yet it is also guided by the primordial desire to play, to communicate an urge to break free from the constraints of language, subjectivity, and the world; leading Adorno to seize on this desire, this energy, as the negative dialectic which brings to bear the fundamental tensions of the world and society, something possible because the poet's fi-

delity and passivity bring the poetic work to autonomy. Where do we see this prevailing desire and the belief (guiding the designs of many poets) of 'ordered form' in the service of the work? Adorno points us towards Hölderlin's Patmos Hymn: "She cared for the seer, beloved of God, / Who in his blessed youth had / Accompanied / The Almighty's son, never leaving his side, for / The storm-bearer loved the simplicity."⁴⁴ The religious language of ancient Greece is juxtaposed to the stark contrast of Christian religious imagery. Seer, God, Almighty's son, and storm-bearer. Back and forth the lines revert, refusing to be tamed. It is the freedom of language, defying synthesis all the while leading to a higher, aconceptual synthesis that underlies the meaning of the whole through the contrastive dissonance of the parts. Yet, accompanying the locutionary 'meaning' of the poem is the illocutionary implications of the text as well as the perlocutionary effects of speaking or reading the poem, just as Hölderlin's "Accompanied" splits up the two halves of the poem while at the same time joining them together into an uneasy whole of meaning. It is this commitment which makes the aconceptual synthesis Adorno speak of as something *constitutive* of the pact between author and reader rather than something 'posited' by either alone.

Turning to Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*, we encounter a 'confused' or 'mixed' intention of a postulated author. Whatever the historical Blanchot's real intentions in crafting the text, *The Writing of the Disaster* comes across as a mixture of a powerful, moving, and insightful act of communication while at the same time disavowing the possibility of conveying or communicating its intention. The 'desire' underlying the text is a strongly performative impulse to convey that it cannot convey; to communicate the incommunicable. Lines like "thus I kill myself opposing them, I remain alive despite them" and "to keep a secret—to refrain from saying some particular thing—presupposes that one could say it," lament the inability to communicate, all while still communicating *something*, communicating—to some degree—the uncommunicable.⁴⁵ The entire form of the work conveys the desire to express the disjointedness, the loss of subjectivity of "the disaster." Lines end

³⁹ Frederick Hölderlin "Bread and Wine" cited in Heidegger *On the Way to Language* 139.

⁴⁰ Heidegger *On the Way to Language* 139.

⁴¹ "Bread and Wine" stanza 9. The bereft aspect to subjectivity is much more prevalent in other Hymns, including the Patmos Hymn which Adorno discusses in more detail. Yet it is never far from Hölderlin's work.

⁴² Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). 132.

⁴³ Adorno, 130.

⁴⁴ Adorno, 134 (citing Frederick Hölderlin *Werke* 2 p 175 Sieburth p. 93).

⁴⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 82, 137

unanswered and unfinished. Paragraph fails to follow paragraph but repeats earlier themes, only to jump to new and fragmented ideas. The entire image is a sense of horror, of loss, that is unforgivable and unforgettable yet is in the process of being forgotten *because* it is being remembered falsely and tritely. This is combined with the belief of the ‘postulated author’ (the postulated Blanchot?) that one cannot communicate coupled with the belief that only by some act of communication, however fragmented, is remembering the disaster possible. Only of *writing* of the disaster can we acknowledge without obliterating it. Both the beliefs and desires are confused: The ‘author’ doubts the ability to communicate while firmly *believing* it to be the only way to remember authentically. Simultaneously, the profound desire to express, to reveal, to uncover is commingled with the desire to reverence, preserve, and ‘let be.’ What can come out of such confusion is the mixed intention: sometimes showing, sometimes hiding, something that expresses reverence while simultaneously reveling in the quotidian. It is what makes the work so difficult yet so profound.

Finally, I would like to turn to a much less literary example, Sartre’s *What is Literature?* As might be intuitive, the postulated intention of non-fiction is often much more straightforward than the modern novel or poem.⁴⁶ Looking at *What is Literature?* we see the postulated intentions coinciding for the most part with the historical Sartre. We say “for the most part” because the trust involved in the ‘pact’ between ‘writer’ and reader invoked in the text clashes with the model of interpersonal recognition, of Hegelian Master/slave dialectic and the *pour-soi* and *en-soi* struggle of human relations, which underlies much of the historical Sartre’s motivated beliefs. This is partly explained in terms of the commitments involved in literary actions. The ‘pact’ between reader and ‘writer’ involves performative commitments of each to recognize the necessary participation of the other. In *What is Literature?* there is an appeal to a relationship that does not consist of a polarizing domination of one

consciousness over another but a mutual involvement in the play of ‘aesthetic joy’ and the activity of freedom.

Yet, the desire and belief correlates in this text are much more straightforward than the two previous works. The belief motivating the text is the same belief expressed and conveyed to the reader: Literature has the power to change or transform the world. And the first instance of this is in reading the text which suggests this. The postulated author writes *believing* that the work presented will change the reader, and in changing the reader will begin to change the world. Similarly, the desire motivating the work is the desire to correct an imperfect world, or as Iser suggests, is “the imaginary correction of deficient realities.”⁴⁷ Yet, while the desire motivating the text is to transform the world, the text itself restricts and constrains this desire when the postulated author’s belief suggests that this is done by mirroring reality. Mirroring reality is not enough; something Iser understands: “the repertoire reproduces the familiar, but strips it of its current validity.”⁴⁸ The desire to transform the world permeating *What is Literature?* confronts the belief that reflecting or mirroring reality is enough, and in the intermingling a powerful yet unfulfilling intention is formed. The text reminds us of the capabilities of literature to transform the world, but fails to acknowledge correctly how this all comes about. The reader is left with the fervor and enthusiasm of ‘following its instructions’ only to realize the instructions are inadequate in themselves.

In the three examples, I have often shifted the focus of the level of the belief/desire correlates in each text. Are they to be understood as the overall ‘motivations’ for the general intention motivating the entirety of the text, or are they to be more specific components motivating specific parts of the whole? The immediate answer is both. Although, in stating both it assumes we can separate the two apart. The ‘postulated intention’ of the text as a whole is a synthesis of the intentions of its parts, yet this synthesis is not an aggregating act suggesting we simply add the interpretation of ‘moments’ of the text to equal the whole. Instead, the synthesis of partial intentions (and their belief/desire correlates) continually revises our understanding of the

⁴⁶ I say ‘often’ because works such as political tracts and religious pamphlets might present an exception, where the expressed content of the work is being ‘motivated’ by a often disguised desire to convert and indoctrinate based less on its professed validity and more on rhetorical flourish.

⁴⁷ Iser, 74.

⁴⁸ Iser 74.

whole, just as the whole revises our understanding of the parts.

Finally, it is important to recall the meaningfulness and communicability of all actions, especially literary actions. In each work, I assumed some desire of the author to express, even if as in the case of *The Writing of the Disaster*, this desire is coupled with a competing desire not to communicate. Even the most 'modern' or 'postmodern' literature must retain some desire to communicate or it ceases to be literature, and this is something that contemporary discussions' de-emphasis on subjectivity and the activities of writing and reading neglect.

Readerly Intention: A Sketch

Before turning to a discussion of readerly intention, one might object that the whole enterprise is a nonstarter. For, if as I suggested earlier, we postulate an authorial intention and authorial action in the *service of the reader*, we might ask why and for *whom* we should postulate readerly action and readerly intentions? In whose service is it to understand the role of the reader? It seems like the whole purpose for postulating an author; i.e. to have a center of meaning to guide and help shape our interpretation breaks down. For in discussing readerly intention we are no longer, strictly speaking, interpreting texts at all. Here, I suggest that it is he or she who reflects on reading, on the study of reading and literature itself who benefits from this readerly intention. Only in this second-order reflection, on the act of reading as an analysis in and of itself, do we find that in which we seek to interpret. As the framework of authorial intention allows us to generalize from one text to another in its breadth, now, we can generalize from the reading of any text to the act of reading itself via an analysis of readerly intention.

If I have at least provided a provisional answer defending an analysis of readerly intention, we can now turn again to our model of action to provide our sketch. In turning to the model of action, I am not prejudicing or rejecting phenomenological accounts of reading, such as those sketched by Sartre and Dufrenne, and completed in detail by Wolfgang Iser.⁴⁹ Instead, phenomenological accounts of

reading can supplement, and in many ways, expand upon the account of readerly intention presented here. For the phenomenology of reading includes the whole experience of reading in all its passivity and activity. My focus here is on the activity, the *action* of reading, and what 'motivates' and guides that action. In some ways, this will vary by the individual reader. Yet in a way dissimilar to writing, there is a much more unified account to be had. As Ricoeur remarks, a "specific kind of oneness is implied in the act of reading."⁵⁰ This can partly be captured in general belief/desire correlates. All readers, regardless of how critical the reading is, must address the text with at least some degree of what Ricoeur calls a 'first naivety' in order to see the text as text and understand its meaning. They must believe that the text has meaning, is trying to communicate meaning, and is to some degree, honest. Even the most ardent atheist must approach a religious text *as* a religious text to fully understand its meaning. She might then go on to interpret it as myth, but if the interpretation is originally solely as myth then the critical reader has in some way *misread* the text.⁵¹ Similarly and much less contentiously, to approach a text at all any reader must have the desire to read, and to appropriate the meaning of the text.

Yet, there are other levels of 'readerly intention' that action can account for. Like all actions, reading involves commitments. Commitments to follow the rules, guardrails, or directions of the text, as well as the type of commitment Sartre captures in the notion of a "pact" between the 'writer'

says trans. by Steven Ungar (Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Press, 1988) and Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* trans. by Ed. Casey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 212. One might argue that writing too has its own "onesidedness" just Sartre mentions that a writer cannot be a writer and reader at the same time, since the "imaginative expectations" of the reader must be radically open. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre *What is Literature*. If you write a text, in some way that excludes the possibility of you having a 'naïve' readerly intention necessary for the productive acts of readerly synthesis.

⁵¹ Iser makes a similar point. As opposed to the open 'naïvete' of belief of readerly intention, "The alternative is to adopt a critical attitude toward the viewpoint, but then one is no longer assembling the meaning that was intended to influence the historical public—instead one is showing up the strategy through which this intention was to be realized." (Iser, 152).

⁴⁹ Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre *What is Literature and other Es-*

and reader or reader and text. There are also the specific commitments in the “intention” of the reader that demand fulfillment. All reading requires meaning. If there is no meaning, then the act of reading cannot occur. Just as the action of signaling a turn requires some bodily movement, either flipping the turn signal or motioning with my hand to ‘signal’ the turn; so too does reading require some ‘movement.’ But in the act of reading this is exemplified in the synthesizing activities of consciousness.

Prior to these synthesizing activities is the formation of the readerly intention itself. The reader has to “take and read” as Augustine so famously reminds us of in the *Confessions*. As I pointed out earlier, this presupposes certain belief and desire correlates. The readerly intention is perhaps the most ignored aspect of the writing-text-reading relationship, and properly so. For if the reader reflects on this intention while reading they are no longer reading at all. But the readerly intention is the counterpart of the ‘writerly’ intention. Both occur in the ‘pact’ between writer and reader; and it is only in the overall relationship between writer-text-reader that meaning and the work itself is constituted. Without a reader, writing is useless. Without a writer, we cannot even conceive of a reader. Yet without a text, there is only communication as dialogue, and not literature.

Conclusion:

Following Nehamas and Wollheim, I have questioned the extent we are to follow the “Death of the Author” and the reduction of authorial intention. While Barthes raises criticisms against the conventional model of meaning as derived from the historical author’s proposed intentions, this fails to eliminate the need for authorial intention in aid of the interpreting reader. Nehamas’ “postulated author” and Wollheim’s “creative process” provide a way to discuss meaning as guided by a hypothetical or postulated author without confusing this heuristic or interpretive device with the historical author of the text. Further, this return to authorial intention allows us to turn to a separate philosophical discipline. The study of action in terms of intention, desires, and beliefs provides a second heuristic device to deepen interpretive meaning. The philosophy of action reminds us that all actions—

literary actions foremost among them—are communicative acts that involve commitments of the agent to fulfill or satisfy the intentions guiding those actions. This can be further conceptualized in terms of beliefs and desires ‘motivating’ the formation of authorial (writerly) and readerly intention. Through this lens, I have provided a brief sketch of three diverse literary works and shown how the analysis of text *as* action provides deeper insights in meaning. Finally, I have then turned this heuristic guide to focus on the readerly intention in ways that complement any phenomenology of reading while focusing on other conceptual elements ‘motivating’ our acts of reading.

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