

INTUITION AND INTERPRETATION. SOME REMARKS ON THE ROLE OF INTUITION IN TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

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Summary: Intuition, a faculty which slips from the grasp of rationalizing discourses, is a factor commonly ignored in the process of textual interpretation, particularly by descriptive theories of literature. It seems, however, to be irrevocably inscribed into the reader's point of entry into the hermeneutic circle, at the moment when understanding does not yet reflect a fully shaped conceptualization of the text's meaning. The article presents several remarks concerning the presence of intuition in hermeneutical writings, starting with its quasi-mystical character in the philosophy of Friedrich Schleiermacher and ending with its vestigial traces subordinate to the category of understanding in Martin Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics.

Key words: intuition in interpretation, understanding, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger, hermeneutic circle.

The visionary glimpsed through intuition becomes in common discourse reduced to a value judgment: a visionary theory, philosophy, interpretation is nevertheless always named so *in retrospect*. The line which separates the visionary from the irrational is indeterminate until a certain moment in time is reached when the vision comes to pass or is beginning to come to pass and its value becomes appreciated. In other terms, it is the arrival of *real possibility* (which may become manifest either in actualization or a regret of a wasted opportunity) that defines a moment that is already temporally distanced. This is tantamount to a subversive submission of the visionary once again to the sphere of the rational. Something proves to have been visionary in the past only if it turns out to conform to the criterion of rationality of the present.

A provisional taxonomy divides perspectives on textual interpretation into ones which either significantly exemplify the temporal character of interpretation and ones which tend to depreciate it, marginalize it or ignore altogether. It would

seem at first glance that the majority of reader-oriented criticisms are beyond this problem altogether. Readings exemplified by Stanley Fish (Fish 2000) or Wolfgang Iser [Iser 1978], remain essentially open until the final word of the text is read. Always featuring to a certain extent Ingarden's idea of indeterminacy and the process of concretization [Ingarden 1973a; 1973b], they construe interpretation as a dynamic event which is shaped and reshaped continuously until the covers of the book are closed. Yet, such an impression would highly illusory, for none of those theories consider this process in isolation from extra-textual factors that constitute the interpretative context of the act of reading. None of the reader-focused theories assume a naive approach towards the interpreter as a once-and-for-all determined entity. In a certain sense, the reader *is* the context, one which is highly mutable and evolutionary. Thus interpretation extends well beyond mere temporal reading, and any retrospective activity, early describing the peculiarity of the very act of reading only, begins to refer to a glance backward at the whole text, if only spurred by a reading of another text or a re-reading of the same one. It becomes apparent that on a larger scale, there is no escape from the hermeneutic circle – only a change of proportion as to what constitutes the first, intuitive formulation of meaning.

The problem is, naturally, far more apparent in approaches that tend to place little significance on the temporality of the reading process. True, the hermeneutic circle is frequently described, as we shall see, in temporal categories, yet its temporality is almost incidental and its treatment unsatisfactory – it is the conceptual implications of a deepening understanding that are the forefront of this idea. Taking interpretation holistically rather than temporarily, hermeneutics cannot escape the awkwardness of the moment of entry into the hermeneutic circle. Indeed, the very spatial metaphor of the circle appears to make the entry point marginal, if not geometrically irrelevant issue. Hence, the featuring of the intuitive, visionary leap of faith as an integral part of all interpretation.

Let us then take a closer look at this vague, elusive and academically inconvenient concept. I propose to begin the path of inquiry at the source of the contemporary general hermeneutics – the works of F. Schleiermacher.

While it is in Immanuel Kant's writings that we should seek the first significant identifications of intuition as a cognitive faculty and a key concept in the issue of subjectivity, it is Johann Gottlieb Fichte's treatment of intuition that best foregrounds the novelty of Schleiermacher's ideas and foreshadows their future impact. Fichte's departure from Kant's ideas is marked by rejection of the existence of noumena, the things-in-themselves, and as Andrew Bowie claims "an attempt from the 1794 *Doctrine of Science* onwards to ground both knowledge and ethics in the spontaneity of the I. Fichte's philosophy wished to establish the primacy of the practical I as unconditioned '*Tathandlung*', as the 'deed-action' which was the condition of the world being intelligible rather than remaining a mere chaos of – unknowable – causally linked events" [Bowie 1998, xv].

Contrary to Fichte, Schleiermacher's idea of intuition overcomes the split between epistemology and ontology, in Bowie's words by "suggesting that it is only

by an acceptance of an inherent link of ourselves to a world which transcends *both* our cognitive and practical activity that we can really comprehend our place in the universe” [Bowie 1998, xvi].

This eschatological vision of the concept of intuition is necessarily transposed into the more modest sphere of interpretation. It is my intention to argue that a more general and more encompassing use of intuition actually permeates the entirety of Schleiermacher’s philosophy and is plainly manifest in the already mentioned notion of the hermeneutic circle and the related methodology of reading.

The hermeneutic circle features in Schleiermacher primarily in its structural, conceptual sense but its more literal, chronological dimension is also strongly suggested by the stance assumed by philosopher towards the technicalities of the process of reading. Through an examination of the both aspects and their relation to intuition, I will attempt to illustrate how intuition actually becomes the hierarchically dominant concept through uniting both facets of the hermeneutic circle.

The conceptual aspect is expressed through the first and most significant rule of interpretation which Schleiermacher makes explicit on numerous occasions throughout his writings. It marks out the most important criterion of validity of interpretation, where relational coherence and systematic unity become the methodological priority. “Every utterance or text is only to be understood in a larger context [...] the understanding of the whole is not only conditioned by that of the particular, but also, vice versa, that of the particular by that of the whole” [Schleiermacher 1998, p. 231].

What is now a classical principle of interpretation is not as logically unproblematic as its apparent neatness seems to suggest. It is essential to indicate that the internal coherence of interpretation maintained by the obedience to the rules of the circle is acquired through a mutual co-determination of the part to the whole and whole by the part of the text. This immediately endangers reading with a possibility of a self-confirming gigantic misinterpretation, since the suggested criteria for validity are mutually determinate, without an outside point of reference. This problem I mention only for the sake of completeness and wish to leave aside, as important but essentially irrelevant to the present discussion. What is relevant, however, is the implied transformation of the conceptual into chronological: the particular in the whole and the whole in the particular is essentially a meta-statement, and by this virtue is untranslatable into chronological terms. Yet, its implementation is essentially locked in and thus limited by the temporal dimension – interpretation happens, after all, in time. While the metaphor of a “deepening understanding” is certainly aesthetically pleasing, it does little to untangle the state of affairs problematized by the notion of mutual codetermination placed in temporality. The chronological, linear progression of interpretation necessitated by its temporal aspect does not fit well with the apparently clear logic of the circle. The relation described by the circle is essentially atemporal – it paradoxically implies the prior knowledge, understanding, grasp or, at least, familiarity with both elements: the whole and the particular and *then* a non-linear and convoluted progressive modification of both according to one another.

This incompatibility results in vagueness which can only be overcome by an introduction of a faculty that comes essentially from the outside of a logical and rational paradigm of classifiable thinking. Enter intuition. We read in Schleiermacher:

“The whole is provisionally to be understood as an individual of a genus, and the intuition of the genus, i.e. the formal understanding of the whole, must precede the material understanding of the particular” [Schleiermacher 1998, p. 232]. Intuition is to be clearly distinguished here from both the certainty of a complete interpretation and the various more rigorous hermeneutic procedures suggested elsewhere by Schleiermacher. It is essentially visionary in character, grasping at holistic sense of the text in relation to its fragments. Any difficulty which we might have in precise designation of its workings and qualities is due precisely to the fact that it inhabits the sphere between rational interpretation based on textual evidence and the inferences drawn from a relational analysis of the whole and the particular.

Yet, the main force of the Schleiermacherian intuition resides in the coupling of its visionary character with the atemporal but temporally significant effect. As prediction, the not-yet-affirmed cognition, it provides a vague grasp of what will in the process of interpretation constitute mutating layers of context for the turns of the hermeneutic circle. It is, however, as a faculty of the mind, non-linear and atemporal in working. As I have remarked earlier, it is also in many respects identical to Schleiermacher’s more general concept of intuition – it affirms the influence of the object upon the subject prior to any conscious and volitional action taken towards interpretation.

The overtones of the previous sentence already ring with that particular heritage of Schleiermacher that was to become probably the most influential hermeneutic theory of the 20th century – Heideggerian ontological hermeneutics. The positioning of understanding as an existential, part of an ontological essence rather than a conscious faculty of a human being, not only subverted Cartesian vision of subjectivity but also made interpretation an essential mode of being of Dasein. Understanding in Martin Heidegger’s words discloses the Being’s potential for Being by projecting it into the world in its possibilities for Being.

[...] a clearing is an openness, or space, in which things can be, a lit-upness in whose light things can manifest themselves as themselves. Less metaphorically, Heidegger conceives of this space as a space of possibilities, an indefinitely complex space of possible ways for things (including people) to be [...] The clearing is a clearing of being in the sense that what constitutes it (the light in which things can show themselves as being some way) is a totality of possibilities pertaining to the what, how and that of entities [...] Human understanding opens up the clearing. For the possible ways of being that constitute a clearing are objects of understanding. More strongly: these possible ways of being do not exist except as objects of understanding (cf. BT 117–118). Understanding clears, i.e., establishes the clearing in which things can be, for it is only as understood that the possible ways in which things can be themselves are. [Schatzki 2002, p. 181].

This clearing, a space opened reciprocally by both the being and the world, is established through what Heidegger calls the fore-structure of understanding. Its three components are fore-sight, fore-having and fore-conception. Succinctly speaking, they posit the relation between Dasein and beings in the world as one existing in a “totality of involvement.” Something which we “have in advance,” or find ourselves in, (forehaving) appears as a possibility to be addressed, even if without a formulated intention (foresight) and becomes “conceptualizable through interpretation” (fore-conception) [Heidegger 1996, p. 191]. It cannot be stressed enough that thus formulated relation is not yet a conscious or willing interpretation per se – rather, it constitutes a ground, a possibility for interpretation – as implied by the Heideggerian prefix fore- in fore-structure. As such, it is essentially unavoidable and necessitated by our relation to the world – a condition for all cognition. The question of correctness, judgment or validity is, as yet, absent from the paradigm – “the way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived can be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts with which it is opposed in its manner of Being. In either case, the interpretation has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it, either with finality or with reservation. It is grounded in something we grasp in advance – in a fore-conception” [Heidegger 1996, p. 191].

The question which we must now ask is whether understanding and its fore-structure is intuitive in nature to the same extent as Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic circle. The answer would have a direct bearing on our grasp of Heidegger’s ontology, since understanding belongs to the most primal category of the existentials. Not without importance is the fact that the presently discussed matter was treated with a comparatively large degree of vagueness by Heidegger himself and is certainly much less commented upon by his scholars as other aspects of his work. In is, in fact, strongly reminiscent of Heidegger’s later works which partially abandoned the methodological rigor of rationality in favor of a more metaphorical and poetic approach.

A glance at Heidegger’s scholarly biography would seem to suggest, however, that if intuition is somehow implied in his writings it would be through Husserlian, and, perhaps surprisingly, Kantian filter, rather than through Schleiermacher’s understanding of the word. Theodore Kisiel in his sweeping work *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* devotes a chapter to a nowadays largely forgotten influence of Emil Lask on young Heidegger, who in turn was influenced by Kant and previously mentioned Fichte. (Kisiel uses the term young Heidegger to refer to his career up to 1919, so already including several years of his post-habilitational period, followed by early, late and old, past 1950, Heidegger) [Kisiel 1995, xiii]. To quote Kisiel, “In KNS 1919 [*Kriegsnotsemester*, War Emergency Semester] lectures, Heidegger will adopt this favoured word *Hingabe* (submission, self-abandonment, devotion, dedication). Lask uses it to describe the tacit intuition of the categorial dimension and Heidegger extends it to also include more overt working intuition that the phenomenologist (not Lask) seeks” [Kisiel 1995, p. 28]. Consequently, we find

a mention of intuition in *Being and Time*, in a passage devoted to the existential of understanding: “By showing how all sight is grounded primarily in understanding [...] we have deprived pure intuition [*Anschauung*] of its priority, which corresponds noetically to the priority of the present-at-hand in traditional ontology. ‘Intuition’ and ‘thinking’ are both derivatives of understanding and already rather remote ones. Even the phenomenological ‘intuition of essences’ [*Wesensschau*] is grounded in existential understanding.” [Heidegger 1996, p. 187].

The conclusions to be drawn from the above citation are two-fold. Firstly, understanding as an ontological component is prior to any inferences whatsoever – in this way intuition and thinking are reduced to a common denominator and placed on a plateau of secondary processes that are hierarchically on the lower level. Secondly, Heidegger’s understanding subordinates both Kantian and Husserlian intuition to the existential of understanding. Kantian use of the concept implies a passive, direct and unmediated givenness of an object to the mind.

In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition. This, however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this, in turn, is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way. The capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility. Objects are therefore given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone affords us intuitions. But they are thought through the understanding, and from it arise concepts. But all thought, whether straightaway (*directe*) or through a detour (*indirecte*), must ultimately be related to intuitions, thus in our case, to sensibility, since there is no other way in which objects can be given to us. [Kant 1998, p. 155].

In other words, intuition for Kant is a mode of reception of the mind, where the causality of content lies on the part of the object, which is directly responsible for the “sensible” impression in the mind. This intuition (*Anschauung*) marks, as Heidegger points out, the primacy of an object in traditional present-at-hand ontology. On the other hand Husserlian *Wesensschau*, essence-intuitions, a derivative of the categorial intuition, refers to the act of perception, statement and ordering the surrounding world by the mind.

It would thus appear, that it is Heidegger’s intention to severely reduce the importance of intuition if not exorcise it altogether from the existential properties of *Dasein*. Let us then, drawing towards the conclusion of this text, examine the impact of this gesture upon textual hermeneutics. Heidegger’s importance to literary theory is assessed mainly through the influence that he had on Gadamer. If we were to point out a single passage in *Being and Time* that was of greatest influence on the tenets of Gadamer’s theory of interpretation, then it would probably be the following: “the concept of meaning embraces the formal existential framework of what necessarily belongs to that which an understanding interpretation articulates. Meaning is the “upon-which” of a projection in terms of which something becomes

intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception" [Heidegger 1996, p. 193].

As is well known in hermeneutic theory, Gadamer grounds the central idea of his work, the concept of prejudices, on the forestructure of Heideggerian understanding. In this way, interpretation must be and, by nature, always is grounded in the subjectivity of the interpreter – subjectivity which comes from place no other than the existential forestructure of understanding. Interpretation, described through a metaphor of the fusion of the horizons, is thus historically preconditioned by the prejudices on the part of the reader.

I believe that this is essentially the ontological hermeneutics response both to the question of intuition and the dilemma of the hermeneutic circle. Intuition, perceived as somewhat mystical and visionary in Schleiermacher's theory, originating in the object for Kant and in the subject for Husserl, becomes the result of the forestructure of understanding exemplified by the functioning of the prejudices in the hermeneutic circle.

I will conclude with two comments as to the nature of these transformations. Firstly, the visionary character of intuiting becomes simply more unconscious than mystical. It is one of the main premises of Gadamer that one's own prejudices are under normal circumstances inaccessible to the subject. This is, in fact, their whole point. Secondly, the movement of the rationalization of a vision of intuition, its confirmation or rejection that happens in retrospection is synonymous with the expository role of interpretation in Gadamer's theory. An encounter with a text may result in the exposure of prejudices, or in other words, a newly acquired self-awareness of the subject. The temporal paradox of the hermeneutic circle is untangled only insofar as one acknowledges the essentially atemporal nature of existential understanding, resultant from the thrownness of Dasein into the world. Yet, the nature of intuition still remains elusive, for, perhaps, it constitutes the very essence of the discipline.

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INTUICJA I INTERPRETACJA. UWAGI NA TEMAT ROLI INTUICJI W HERMENEUTYCE TEKSTU

Streszczenie: Intuicja, zjawisko wymykające się dyskursom racjonalności, jest w procesie interpretacji tekstu czynnikiem powszechnie ignorowanym poprzez deskryptywne teorie literatury. Jednak wydaje się ona być nieodłącznie wpisana w moment wejścia czytelnika w obrót koła hermeneutycznego, kiedy rozumienie nie odzwierciedla jeszcze w pełni ukształtowanej koncepcji znaczenia tekstu. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia kilka uwag dotyczących obecności idei intuicji w pismach hermeneutycznych, począwszy od jej quasi-mistycznego charakteru w filozofii Friedricha Schleiermachera, a skończywszy na jej śladowej obecności podporządkowanej kategorii rozumienia w ontologicznej hermeneutyce Martina Heideggera.

Słowa kluczowe: intuicja w interpretacji, rozumienie, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger, koło hermeneutyczne.