

Three Models of Fiction: The Logical, the Phenomenological, and the Anthropological (Searle, Ingarden, Gans)

Richard van Oort

Introduction

THIS ESSAY IS AN ATTEMPT to bring together as sharply as possible three otherwise disparate approaches to the theory of fiction. By fiction I mean simply the use of language to designate objects or states of affairs that do not or need not exist in the real world. The fictional sign is unverifiable in the pragmatic sense that it is not intended to lead us beyond its own performance to an extralinguistic reality, but instead insists on its separation from the worldly referent. This schematic definition is useful insofar as it goes, but the real work comes in articulating a theory that seeks to account for what is after all a peculiar kind of language-use, one furthermore that appears to be wholly specific to human beings. The purpose of this essay is to examine three major modern philosophical approaches to this question. I call these approaches the logical, the phenomenological, and the anthropological.

Despite the generality of each theory, the origin for my remarks on them is quite specific. I begin by referring to a particular problem in the logical theory of fiction: the problem of reference. In his essay "The Logical Status of Fiction,"¹ John Searle poses the question in terms of a paradox: How is it that fictional sentences can mean without referring? Why is it that we value and respond to a form of discourse that is nothing but pretense? No doubt to the professional literary critic, whose very career is defined by the hermeneutic principle that meaning is ultimately illimitable and thus not reducible to any normalizing ontology, the fact that such a question should be granted serious consideration is evidence, not of philosophical profundity, but of an extreme intellectual naïveté. But Searle's "paradox" is anything but trivial. It therefore seems wiser to suspend judgment and endeavor to understand the source of Searle's problematic by examining the assumptions from which it is made.² This is the point of the first section of my paper, which is an attempt to outline the speech-act model of fiction. By way of a convenient

shorthand, I call this model the "logical model" because of its obvious debt to the analytic revolution in philosophy initiated by Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein. Yet Searle's logical model, I argue, ends up being also an intentionalist model. That is, in order to come to grips with the paradox of fiction, Searle has to reach out for something more concrete, more specifically anthropological, than the bare "semantic rules" of language. He thus has recourse to what he calls "sincerity conditions" and "acts of pretense." But the relation between these intentional categories, on the one hand, and the semantic rules with which he begins his essay, on the other, raises further questions that the speech-act model, I think, is ill-equipped to answer.

Therefore, in order to refine and develop the relation between language and intentionality, I refer to Roman Ingarden, whose phenomenological approach explicitly poses the problem of fiction in terms of a theory of intentional objects. Ingarden's phenomenological vocabulary thus gives some additional useful tools toward the overall argument of the essay. In particular, he draws out the problematic relation between mind and language that in Searle's essay remains largely unthematized. But ultimately Ingarden too falls back on a contentious metaphysical framework in order to solve the "paradox" of fiction. To rescue his theory of fiction from descending into what he sees as the irrational realm of empirical psychology, Ingarden falls back on an unwarranted idealism when he asserts the ontological priority of ideal concepts, which he deems necessary to stabilize the anarchy that would disseminate all standards of meaning to the relativistic periphery of each individual language-user. But is such philosophical idealism necessary in order to provide a theory of intersubjectivity and fiction?

Not according to the last model I turn to in the third and final section of my argument. Eric Gans's anthropological model proposes that language, intentionality, and fiction are all coterminous with the paradox of the originary sign. There is thus no need to reduce fiction to an independent preexisting ontological reality, be it conceived along realist lines (Searle) or ultimately idealist ones (Ingarden). Representation allows us to refer to an ontologically independent reality, but the origin of representation itself can only be explained as paradoxical; hence the necessity of fiction, which points not to reality but to the constitutive scene of anthropological self-reference and self-representation. Because fiction is paradoxical, that is, because it refers only by simultaneously refusing ultimate reference, it is therefore also the surest path to anthropological self-discovery. Culture is indeed fiction, because it is only through fiction that humanity can represent itself.

Gans's anthropological model of fiction provides, I think, the most persuasive and most sophisticated, as well as the most intuitively correct,

solution to the question with which my argument begins. My essay thus has a distinctly teleological structure. I criticize the first two thinkers for weaknesses that I identify only from the point of view of the final anthropological position. This is not, however, an exercise in polemics, a sterile game of one-upmanship. Ultimately these are ideas we are dealing with, not combatants in some spectator sport. And ideas, as Ingarden rightly states, are independent of their originators. I thus purposely stress the continuity between the arguments of each thinker as they lead dialectically to the position I conclude with, a position which I prefer to identify as broadly anthropological and not specifically Gansian.

The historical claim I want to make for my argument—its relevance for us today—lies in the superior explanatory power of the heuristic of the originary hypothesis over its logical and phenomenological precursors. The lack of any real dialogue between analytic philosophers and literary critics is, I think, a symptom of the widespread (though rarely cogently expressed) sense among the latter that the logical model is fundamentally wrong. It is hardly surprising therefore that when an analytic philosopher such as Searle ventures into the domain of the literary critic and describes in the space of a few brief pages the “logical status” of those texts that the latter invests an entire interpretive career studying, that this audacious feat should be met with consternation, not to say with complete misunderstanding. At the core of this dissatisfaction with the logical model—and with Searle in particular—is, I would argue, the analytic philosopher’s highly specialized understanding of language as fundamentally propositional—as abstractly conceptual rather than concretely “scenic” or dramatic. Not surprisingly, when literary critics do pay attention to Searle’s model of fiction, which is admittedly not all that often, such attention is invariably hostile.³ But criticism cannot be wholly negative. It must lead to a systematic alternative. Searle’s work is valuable because of the admirable rigor and clarity with which he presents a particular approach to the theory of fiction. The purpose of my exposition is to reveal the assumptions behind this approach. These assumptions are, I think, generalizable beyond Searle’s case and include a certain way of thinking about representation that is characteristic of analytic philosophy in general, namely, the belief that the main function of representation is to refer to an independent reality. This is the point of introducing the second continental perspective, which in its Cartesian and Hegelian influences has not been so ruthlessly concerned with disposing of the anthropological element in its approach to representation. Phenomenology does not so insistently efface the independent generative capacity of the cogito. On the contrary, it makes this the origin for its entire theory of representation. Yet precisely because of its

commitment to the Cartesian subject, it cannot recognize the irreducibly collective origin of representation without resorting to metaphysical postulates such as ideal concepts. Only by identifying the assumptions implicit in Ingarden's phenomenology is the path cleared to an anthropological model that avoids the pitfalls of the first two.

Some may object to the approach I take as unduly "universalizing" or "normalizing," classically Hegelian rather than postclassically Derridean. I would argue, however, that it is neither Hegelian nor Derridean but concretely anthropological. It claims no a priori ontological knowledge for anything that transcends the anthropological scene of representation itself, that cannot be justified in terms of the minimal form of human self-representation which is language. But to those who would deny the constitutive vitality of this scene, there is indeed no answer, for this denies the very specifiability of the human, which is the necessary foundation for any (generative) anthropology. Ultimately, the point of such discussion is to use to the fullest advantage an anthropological inheritance that is undeniably universal—that is, language. One of the major assumptions of my argument is that the existence of such an intersubjective institution provides the source for both our own discovery and invention. As language-users we are by definition self-representational creatures, that is, beings defined by the paradox of self-reference. That fiction is also essentially paradoxical in this sense should give us some pause as to its corresponding anthropological vitality.

But in order to understand the persistence of anthropological paradox, we must first turn to a view that purports to be not paradoxical at all, but indeed quite unparadoxically logical.

I. The Logical Model

In his essay "The Logical Status of Fiction," Searle begins by observing what he calls a paradox: "how can it be both the case that words and other elements in a fictional story have their ordinary meanings and yet the rules that attach to those words and other elements and determine their meanings are not complied with: how can it be the case in 'Little Red Riding Hood' both that 'red' means red and yet that the rules correlating 'red' with red are not in force?" (LS 58).

The paradox that Searle cites arises from the fact that fictional discourse, though perfectly comprehensible, is not bound by the normal sincerity conditions of pragmatic discourse. In pragmatic discourse, the author or speaker is held accountable for his assertions; we expect them to match up to reality. Failure to do so leads to a breach of trust; the speaker of untruths is liable to be branded a liar or deceiver. In fictional

discourse, however, the opposite is the case; the author is not held accountable for the truth of his statements. On the contrary, he is free to invent characters and objects for which there are no worldly equivalents. In the case of fiction, we expect and condone the telling of such unverifiable, imaginary statements. Everyone intuitively understands this basic difference, but explaining its *logical* status, as Searle's analysis makes clear, is not intuitive at all.

Searle's argument hinges on his speech-act conception of language. In this model, language functions in the context of an overall illocutionary act. Implicit in every utterance is an attempt to do something with the words uttered. Thus an utterance counts as a promise, a request, a description, and so forth. According to Searle, although there are an infinite amount of ways to perform an illocutionary act, there are actually only a limited amount of types of illocutionary act. The project of speech-act theory is to locate and describe the basic types of illocutions in a systematic taxonomy.⁴

On the basis of such a taxonomy, Searle identifies the category of assertives. These are utterances that commit the speaker to the truth of the propositional content expressed in the assertion. Searle identifies four "quite specific semantic and pragmatic rules" (LS 62) that are all intended to enforce the fact that assertives are governed by their truth condition and that this truth is established by the correspondence between the words uttered and the reality to which these words are referred. Two of these rules are relevant to our discussion. The first, which Searle calls "the essential rule," states that "the maker of an assertion commits himself to the truth of the expressed proposition." The second, "the sincerity rule," states that "the speaker commits himself to a belief in the truth of the expressed proposition" (LS 62).

The fact that Searle appears obliged to cast the truth condition of assertives in two forms—once as an essential rule (is this the semantic rule?) and once as a sincerity rule (the pragmatic rule?)—should alert us to the problematic nature of the terrain so hurriedly passed over here. What indeed is this rule that commits the speaker to the truth of his statement? Where does it come from? Is it a vow, like the one undertaken in the courtroom by the witness before the judge and jury? In contrast, then, the author of fiction would undertake a similar vow, but this time as a declaration of his commitment to fictional utterances: "I promise to tell untruths, that is, fiction." But notice that in both cases what precedes the assertive utterance is a promise. It is the promise, not the assertion, that commits the speaker.

What this suggests is that truth, far from being an a priori semantic category, that is, a given *rule* in the precise sense Searle would give it, in fact depends on a more fundamental speech act, the promise, whose

sole raison d'être is to signal the commitment of the speaker. This intuition seems to be the point behind Searle's doubling of the essential rule with a sincerity rule. Semantics alone is insufficient; the bare presence of propositional content will not serve to commit the speaker to its truth or falsity. Motivating the utterance of an assertion is a *belief* in its propositional content, a belief that the state of affairs expressed by the proposition is indeed the case. This latter formulation is not so much a semantic formulation as a pragmatic one—ultimately, a psychological one. Assertives are expressions of the “psychological state” of the speaker, and this psychological state is one of belief (TI 12).

But this movement from logical content to intentional states, from semantics to psychology, in fact upsets the stated purpose of Searle's analysis, namely, to identify the *logical status* of fiction. For in postulating the sincerity rule, Searle makes logic—that is, semantics—dependent, not on linguistic rules, but on the psychology of the speaker's intentional states. What makes an assertion ultimately an assertion is not the propositional content at all, but the *speaker's intended belief* in the truth of the expressed proposition. Thus the paradox that Searle began with—that in fiction words do not follow the semantic rules that normally constrain discourse—is revealed not to be a paradox at all. It is not that semantic rules are not followed, but that the *sincerity condition* of pragmatic discourse is not followed. The problem of fiction is thus displaced from the realm of logics and semantics to the realm of intentionality and psychology. But does this really constitute an explanation? Or is it rather a further description of the problem, a deferral of the paradox into the domain of intentionality? For if reference depends, not on the meaning of the word, but on the intentional state of the speaker, how are we to know which intentional state to “connect” to the utterance?

This movement from linguistic meaning to speaker's meaning, from semantics to intentions, is important to see because it reflects the dependence of Searle's semantics on a theory of intentionality that can underwrite how meaning is to be used by participants in the linguistic act. On the one hand, Searle appeals to semantic rules; on the other, to pragmatic rules. Of the two designations, the former is by far the more specific, being restricted to the propositional content of the sentence and how this content refers to an extralinguistic reality. Sentence meaning is traced back to its *reference*. The sentence “The cat is on the mat” is true if the cat is indeed on the mat; meaning is judged for its correspondence to a worldly state of affairs. The paradox arises when we come across statements that have a meaning that is not verifiable, as is the case with fictional discourse. The logician wants to say that such sentences are meaningless, or, at best, parasitic on logical language. The

pragmatician is less hasty and wants to say that such sentences merely serve a different purpose from factual statements. Searle's oscillation between semantic and pragmatic rules reflects this tension. On a purely theoretical level, the semantic solution is more elegant. It allows us to understand meaning as internal to language itself without bothering to introduce all kinds of unverifiable entities such as the author's or speaker's intentions. But this elegance is only won at the cost of an exclusion of types of discourse that do not appear to fit the model. For if meaning is motivated solely by a desire for truth, fiction must indeed appear quite meaningless.

One solution—a solution Searle rejects—is to suggest that fictional discourse is not logical at all, and that therefore it cannot be judged by its truth or falsity. In this view, fictional utterances would not be subsumable under the category of assertives, but would comprise an entirely new category, the category of the literary or fictional speech act. Aside from the inelegance of having to introduce a new category, Searle dismisses this suggestion because it would mean that “words do not have their normal meanings in works of fiction” (LS 64). And if fictional words do not have their normal meanings, it would be impossible for a reader to understand them without having to learn an entirely new vocabulary, which is *prima facie* implausible.

It is important to note that this objection to the concept of a literary speech act is generated by a particular and very specific understanding of meaning as the correlation between a sentence's propositional content and a nonlinguistic worldly state of affairs. Once meaning is regarded as fundamentally a matter of the *relation between a proposition and the world*, then of course one cannot introduce a separate speech act which does not at once partake of this structure. When Searle talks of semantic rules, he is thus referring to the basic (ontological) assumption that linguistic meaning is ultimately guaranteed by its reference to a preexisting and independent reality. Language can do many things for us, but in the final analysis linguistic meaning is dependent, not merely upon language-users, but upon the fact that there exists an independent world to which it can refer. It is only on the basis of this preexisting reality that we can relate propositions *about* the world *to* the world. One might observe that underlying Searle's essential semantic rule is a metasemantic ontological principle: language-use is only possible insofar it is grounded in a nonlinguistic reality that can function as its ultimate referent.

Once meaning is established as founded fundamentally on worldly reference, on the correspondence between the propositional content and the world, or as Searle puts it as “rules correlating words (or sentences) to the world” (LS 66), elaborate additional scaffolding is

needed in order to reflect the noncorrespondence that exists between fictional discourse and reality. Hence Searle invokes “a set of extralinguistic, nonsemantic conventions that break the connection between words and worlds” (LS 66). Superimposed on the *semantic rules* of reference are *pragmatic conventions* that suspend these preexisting and (therefore) more fundamental rules. The fictional text is possible because there exist “conventions which suspend the normal operation of the rules relating illocutionary acts to the world” (LS 67). These conventions are not semantic rules; they are not internal to language itself, but are imposed externally on the preexisting semantic rules.

The question then arises of the source for these extralinguistic conventions. Searle flatly rejects the notion that we can distinguish fiction from nonfiction by textual means alone: “utterance acts in fiction are indistinguishable from the utterance acts of serious discourse” (LS 68). One cannot identify fiction by pointing to any of the traditional literary genres, or indeed to any formalist-aesthetic category. Searle (rightly I think) rejects any formalist definition of literature. But the question remains of how we are to identify these “horizontal conventions” that suspend the “vertical rules” relating words to the world. How do we know we are in the presence of fiction? We know, Searle says, because we participate in a mutual game of pretense with the author, a sort of language game in Wittgenstein’s sense. We know that the author is only pretending, not because his utterance signals its fictionality, but because the author *intends* his utterance as fictional and we understand and accept this intention. This is what distinguishes fiction from lying; the author is a participant in a language game that involves a set of conventions that “enables the author to go through the motion of making statements which he knows to be not true even though he has no intention to deceive” (LS 67). There are thus two steps to the argument: first, an appeal to the author, and second, an appeal to conventions. What counts as fiction is what the author intends as fiction. But this alone is not enough to produce a fictional utterance. To intend an utterance as fictional is only possible because there exist conventions—a sort of implicit contract between speaker and hearer—enabling “the speaker to use words with their literal meanings without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by those meanings” (LS 66–67).

To sum up Searle’s argument: What began its career as a semantic paradox—How does fiction avoid reference without simultaneously avoiding meaning?—finds its resolution in a twofold argument concerning the intentionality of the author and the presence of “extralinguistic, nonsemantic conventions” (LS 66). Fiction is not a paradox because we

know that the author of the fictional utterance is only pretending to utter illocutionary acts, and we know this pretense is possible because there exists a set of conventions that suspends the semantic rules of reference that normally determine the meaning of sentences.

It is perhaps easy to criticize this view. What is less easy is to provide a viable and consistent alternative that avoids any unwarranted idealism. For the commitment Searle makes—a commitment hard to deny without affirming some version of idealism—is to a form of ontological realism; linguistic meaning is ultimately a matter of reference, and the most basic form of reference is between the word and a world that exists independently of the word. One might define this model as a realist model of meaning. Insofar as fiction is a part of this reality, that is, insofar as fiction uses language whose very semantic structure is dependent upon the prior existence of an extralinguistic reality, it cannot abandon this ontology without implying that it is in fact transcendent with respect to reality. But to transcend this basic ontology is to abdicate the very structure of reality itself. It is to make language radically independent of reality, perhaps even to make reality dependent on language. But if language is indeed thus able to create worlds unanswerable to the structure of reality, what enables this remarkable feat? What is the source for our intuition that language is not a mere mimetic doubling of the world, but in fact a radical creation of a separate world, a world of the imagination that is not answerable to the fundamental ontology of natural science? To help us answer this question we need to develop Searle's notion of intentional states. But we must not make those intentional states so resolutely subordinate to a logical model of linguistic meaning. Perhaps, indeed, we should make intentionality—consciousness itself—constructive of linguistic meaning in the first place. How would such a phenomenological approach contribute to the problem with which we began?

II. The Phenomenological Model

Roman Ingarden has sought to tackle these basic questions from the perspective of phenomenology.⁵ We have already noticed that a phenomenological element is not lacking in Searle's argument. Indeed his semantic model in fact depends upon a particular view about the consciousness of sincere speakers. But the origin of this sincere speaker remains tautologically dependent on the presumed originarity of the preexisting semantic framework of the logical proposition. Whether

such an assumption is a priori warranted is indeed highly questionable. For what allows us to say that the origin of language is synonymous with the origin of the proposition?

For the context of this discussion, Ingarden's approach is significant for its attempt to situate the semantic realism of the logical model within the overarching framework of a theory of consciousness, namely, phenomenology. Like Searle, Ingarden bases his theory of literature on a theory of language, and like Searle, he finds the paradigmatic unit of linguistic meaning to be the proposition, that is, the meaning content of the declarative sentence. Unlike Searle, however, Ingarden complicates the relation between the sentence and the world by introducing a third critical perspective into this basically dyadic structure: the intentional object of consciousness. This additional phenomenological element considerably changes the terms of the discussion. For what in logics is cast as a dichotomous opposition between word and world becomes resituated via the intermediary of the intentional object. It remains to be seen, however, whether this construction of the intentional object can provide the "missing link" between word and world that Searle's analysis lacks. If the intentional object is the pure product of consciousness itself does this give it, in Ingarden's terms, complete "ontic autonomy"? But then how is this ontic autonomy of the inward intentional act transposed to the ontic heteronomy of the intentional fictional art-object? This is a peculiarly phenomenological way of posing the problem of fiction. And it has much to recommend it insofar as it presents the problem in terms of the relation between, not merely word and world, but consciousness and language as well.

The question can be usefully rephrased in terms of subjectivity and objectivity. Intentional acts of consciousness are subjective and thus wholly private. Only I am aware of the objects I imagine to myself. Language, on the other hand, partakes of a world that is epistemically objective and for that very reason also intersubjective. In order to understand the intentional content of your words, I am not free to imagine a meaning derived solely from my own consciousness; I must derive a content from the words themselves. The objectivity of words ensures we will be understood. In the phenomenological model, the introduction of language provides an intentionality that transcends the merely private intentionality of the self.

Nonetheless, within the phenomenological account, committed as it is to a Cartesian view of the self, this transition from private to public remains precisely its most problematic aspect. In Ingarden this problematic surfaces in his distinction between *primary* purely intentional objects and *derived* purely intentional objects. Where the former are nonlinguistic

and thus “pure” acts of consciousness, the latter are only derivative acts of consciousness, for their intentionality is dependent upon the prior existence of the linguistic sign.

It is important to see the nature of Ingarden’s problem because it indeed forms the basis of his whole argument for the collective or intersubjective intentionality of language, as well as being the source for his fundamental disagreement with all empirico-psychological theories of language and art. Ingarden accepts the basic phenomenological tenet of the priority of the intentional object of consciousness. He opposes, however, Husserl’s notion of the transcendental ego, understanding consciousness as a subjectively existing empirical phenomenon, not as something transcendent with respect to it. Objects of consciousness are thus, for Ingarden, “primary purely intentional objects,” because they are only present to the conscious subject (*LW* 125). But with no transcendental ego to prevent his model collapsing into an empirical psychology of individual subjects, Ingarden has to find a way to epistemically objectify intentionality. Hence the motivation for introducing language as an objective basis for intersubjectivity. Language provides a peculiarly *communal* form of intentionality. Linguistic objects—that is, word and sentence meaning—are “derived purely intentional objects,” because their intentionality is mediated by the intervening linguistic signs (*LW* 125). This is how Ingarden puts it:

[B]oth isolated words and sentences possess a borrowed intentionality, one that is conferred on them by acts of consciousness. It allows the purely intentional objects to free themselves, so to speak, from immediate contact with the acts of consciousness in the process of execution and thus to acquire a relative independence from the latter. Being purely intentional, the objects “created” by the units of meaning remain both ontically heteronomous and ontically dependent, but this ontic relativity of theirs refers back directly to the intentionality immanent in the units of meaning and only indirectly to the intentionality of the acts of consciousness. (*LW* 125–26)

One can discern here a dialectic between language and consciousness, the implications of which are both far reaching and far from being clear. On the one hand, words and sentences are “derived” from private acts of consciousness; their intentionality is thus strictly speaking only “borrowed” from the primary and therefore preexisting intentionality of the conscious subject. Ingarden suggests that borrowed or linguistic intentionality is “conferred on” language by “acts of consciousness.” Nonetheless, once this “conferral” has taken place a remarkable space for reflection opens up. Primary intentionality is freed from its “immediate contact with the acts of consciousness.” It becomes in short self-

conscious, able to reflect back on itself, to acquire a “relative independence” from consciousness. The movement is from subjective consciousness to intersubjective *self*-consciousness, and this movement is facilitated by language. But the introduction of language into the argument begs a further question, for to what extent does language *merely facilitate* this movement from the inward intentional act to the outward reflection upon it? To what extent might intentionality itself be actually *constituted* by this movement from inside to outside? In which case the distinction between intentional acts that are inner and outer, pure and derivative, becomes far from clear.

What permits this extraordinary transition from pure to derived intentionality if not pure intentionality itself? In what sense then can one speak of a pure intentionality *that is not at once also* a derived intentionality? What motivates the decision by the former to confer itself *consciously* on the latter? For would not such a decision already imply the presence of a form of intentionality that was no longer simply *pure*, but already *derived* in the secondary sense Ingarden suggests? In other words, at what point does the conscious subject become precisely self-conscious? At what point does the subject become able to objectify its own subjective acts of consciousness and hold them at arm’s length in a founding moment of critical self-reflection?

Ingarden, at this stage of his argument, does not appear to recognize the radicality of his hypothesis. He thus remains content to observe that the intentional objects of the linguistic consciousness enjoy “a certain advantage over primary purely intentional objects.” But what is this advantage? According to Ingarden, the advantage gained is that the derived form of intentionality is *intersubjective*. I quote at length again:

Through this shift in their ontic relativity these objects [that is, the derived intentional objects] gain a certain advantage over primary purely intentional objects. For while the latter are “subjective” formations, in the sense that in their primariness they are directly accessible only to the *one* conscious subject who effected the act that created them, and while in their necessary belonging to concrete acts they cannot free themselves from these acts, the derived purely intentional objects, as correlates of meaning units, are “intersubjective”: they can be intended or apprehended by various conscious subjects as identically the same. This is based on the fact that words (sentences) and in particular word meanings (meaning contents of sentences) are themselves intersubjective. (LW126)

But, Ingarden continues, this “derived” intentionality and its concomitant “intersubjectivity” is won only at the cost of losing the “vividness and richness” (LW 126) of the subjective intentional act: “As soon as the

purely intentional object loses its direct contact with experience, however . . . and finds its immediate ontic support in the borrowed intentionality of a word meaning . . . it also loses both its imaginal intuitiveness and its manifold feeling and value characters" (*LW* 127). What remains of the vivid perceptual act of consciousness is a mere word whose content must be reconstructed but which can never recapture the original vivacity that motivated it in the first place. "Of the originally intended purely intentional object," Ingarden rather mournfully declares, "there remains . . . only a skeleton, a schema" (*LW* 127).

At this point in Ingarden's discussion, the concept of intersubjectivity appears almost epiphenomenal, an offshoot to the main discussion of the ontogenetic source of linguistic intentionality as it emerges from pure subjective intentionality. Immediately experienced intentionality is contrasted with mediated derived intentionality. Subjective experience becomes objectified through language. In this context, language seems to function as the vehicle by which the subject's private experiences are made publicly available for other subjects. But throughout the discussion it is presumed that the origin of intentionality is the subject's private "acts of consciousness." Language is thus a *vehicle for the communication* of the internal objects of perception. These internal intentional objects may be modified in the process—indeed in some sense this is inevitable—but this process itself, its very *operation*, can certainly not be said to constitute these intentional objects themselves.

One wonders therefore whether Ingarden himself, despite his much stated antipathy toward what he calls "psychologism," has not himself also, in the final analysis, resorted to the ontogenetic model in order to ground his notion of linguistic intentionality. No doubt Ingarden's philosophical sophistication rescues his analysis from a blatant empirical reductionism, but one nevertheless detects a tendency toward a monologic ontology of the self that is clearly in tension with his reflections on linguistic intersubjectivity and derived intentionality. It is worth noting that this lingering attachment to a primary ontology of subjective intentionality carries over into his view of aesthetics where it functions as a stabilizing force that guarantees the "polyphonic harmony" of the intentional literary art-object.

The tension between an intentionality that partakes of both an inner subjectivity and an outer objectivity, that is both pure and derived, is sharpest in Ingarden's discussion of language and intersubjectivity. For if subjective experience is the origin and ground for all representation, if, in Ingarden's words, we *confer* meaning on words by subjective intentional acts of consciousness, how is it possible that we know we are talking about the same thing? How can I be sure that your words for

your private experience match my words for my experience? This is an epistemological question on which Ingarden's phenomenological position—in its overriding commitment to the subject—appears to falter. It is not a new problem. Locke was probably the first to put the question explicitly in terms of a theory of language. Indeed what troubled Locke was precisely the arbitrary relation between the ideas of the subject and the words that subject used to make those ideas public.

What is at issue here is the foundation of language itself. To avoid the empirical reductionism of the Lockean approach, Ingarden, in the passage already referred to, asserts that language is a priori intersubjective. But the assertion here remains unargued, and it is only in the final stages of his lengthy argument about the various strata of the literary work that Ingarden returns to the question of the intersubjective basis of language in an attempt to put to rest once and for all a question that has haunted him throughout the argument: "Thus the old question crops up again: is not the psychologistic conception of the literary work right, after all?" (*LW* 357). And as Ingarden realizes, the only way to transcend the psychologistic model is to find arguments that respond affirmatively to these questions: "Are the sentences that arise from subjective operations intersubjectively identical? Do they also exist when they are not thought? What is their mode of existence and the ontic basis of their existence if they do exist?" (*LW* 358).

In order to respond to these questions, Ingarden suggests two strategies: (1) to follow Husserl in a phenomenological analysis that explains how "when two different conscious subjects apprehend a sentence, they apprehend a meaning that is *identically* the same and how they can communicate with regard to this and become quite sure that this is truly the case," and (2) to circumvent the phenomenological solution completely by finding instead a "metaphysical" (the term is Ingarden's) solution that reveals "the objective, ontically autonomous basis of existence of the literary work or of the sentences appearing in it" (*LW* 360).

Ingarden opts for the second "metaphysical" strategy, and postulates the existence of ontically autonomous ideal concepts. The ideal concept provides an independent point of reference which guarantees intersubjectivity and rescues the ontic mode of the literary work from being reduced to a mere psychologism. The literary work, Ingarden states, "exists as an ontically heteronomous formation that has the source of its existence in the intentional acts of the creating conscious subject and, simultaneously, the basis of its existence in two entirely heterogeneous objectivities: on the one hand, in *ideal* concepts and ideal qualities (essences), and, on the other hand . . . in real 'word signs.' The only thing the sentence-forming operation . . . can accomplish is . . . merely

the *actualization* of the meaning elements of corresponding ideal concepts" (LW 361). Ingarden then clarifies the connection between ideal concepts and word meaning: "A word meaning . . . is nothing other than an *actualization* of the meaning contained in corresponding ideal, ontically autonomously existing concepts" (LW 361). Ideal concepts are transcendent with respect to both meaning and the subjective operation that forms the intention behind the sentence. Thus the sentence has two ontic bases: (1) a basis in subjective operations, and (2) a basis in ideal concepts. But it is the latter that provides the objective point of reference and thus an intersubjective basis for language. Both these bases are transcendent with respect to the sentence, but of the two, the ideal concept provides the over-arching "regulative principle" (LW 361). Hence Ingarden subordinates the intentionality of the conscious subject to the ideal concept: "The intentional act of pure consciousness is not creative in the sense that it can create genuine realizations of ideal essences or ideal concepts in an object that is intentionally produced by it" (LW 362).

One can appreciate Ingarden's problem here. It is a basic problem with the Cartesian foundation of phenomenology, that is, its epistemological commitment to the first-person point of view—the subjective point of view. How does the self-guaranteeing private consciousness of the subject emerge in the public world of epistemically objective knowledge? To rescue his theory from solipsism and psychologism, Ingarden postulates an objective point of reference that transcends the sphere of private consciousness. This point of reference is the ideal concept, which in its transcendent position with respect to individual consciousness ensures the sharability of intentionality in general: "It is only with reference to the meaning content of ideal concepts that the readers of a literary work can reactualize in an identical manner the meaning content of sentences given to them by the author" (LW 364). Without ideal concepts, Ingarden concludes, it would be "impossible to achieve between two conscious subjects genuine linguistic communication" (LW 364). In other words, Ingarden's phenomenological model of subjective consciousness provides him with no "link" to make consciousness objective or sharable. The intentional object is internal to private consciousness. Language provides the way out, but only insofar as language is not also—and here Ingarden rightly opposes the psychologism of Lockean epistemology—dependent for its constitution on the inner intentional acts of consciousness. Hence Ingarden falls back on a metaphysical solution in postulating the autonomous existence of the ideal concept which can provide the objective ground for linguistic meaning to take place.

Interestingly, we have already seen this strategy at work in Searle's

analysis. To be sure, Searle's metaphysics is not so overtly idealistic; he does not postulate ideal concepts. But his semantic theory nevertheless presupposes the objectivity of a nonlinguistic reality, which guarantees the requisite objectivity of language by virtue of its capacity to match this reality. Searle thus foregoes the ideality of intentional objects altogether. What guarantees objectivity is simply reality itself. Since reality is independent of language, it is also independent of consciousness, that is to say, of language-users; it thus functions as an objective reference point that guarantees a verifiable standard of meaning.

Of the two theories, the phenomenological approach is more promising for a theory of fiction simply because of its insistence upon the necessity of the intentional object that precedes or mediates our relation to the world. Ingarden's theory, however, partakes of a strange dualism, for though, as we have seen, he insists on the necessity of ideal concepts, he nevertheless also insists, in a manner very similar to Searle's, on the "quasi-judgmental" character of fictional sentences. The motivation for this designation is in fact identical to Searle's, namely, the assumption that the logical proposition—that is, the declarative sentence—is the fundamental unit of linguistic meaning. For if declarative sentences are judged logically for their truth or falsity, fiction—which is also comprised of declarative sentences—requires a "special modification" that can explain its logical delinquency (*LW* 160–61). In this respect, Searle and Ingarden are in complete agreement. Ingarden's assessment of fiction hinges on his assessment of the logical structure of declaratives, and despite the overarching interests of the phenomenological approach, in this particular case Ingarden remains resolutely tied to a realist perspective.

It is perhaps tempting to explain the presence of this odd bifurcation within Ingarden as merely an aberrant symptom of his peculiar hybridization of logics and phenomenology. What indeed this overlap suggests is the underlying metaphysics shared by both thinkers. As Ingarden's discussion indicates, phenomenology is not necessarily antipathic to a realist or logical semantics along analytic lines. To be sure, its purview is significantly wider than the logical model which bases its whole understanding of metaphysics on a minimal model of meaning and reference. In this sense, phenomenology functions as the general theory of consciousness, to which the semantic or logical theory is merely a local ontology. But the problematic lies precisely in the emphasis one places on consciousness. Is it an ontogenetic category, and if so, is it to be approached via empirical or phenomenological analysis? Or is consciousness to be approached through a theory of meaning, that is, via language, and if so via a logics or a pragmatics of language, ontologically or operationally?

Now to speak of the intentional art-object is to invoke a phenomenological, not a semantic, category. In this sense, the artwork possesses a substantive existence, at least as a coherent intentional object of consciousness. It thus makes sense to inquire into the constitution of this intentional object, and to describe its mode of existence, whether it partakes of ideal objectivities or real objectivities and so on. This is indeed Ingarden's stated project at the outset, but his enquiry leads him into progressively more abstract questions about language. Searle, on the other hand, begins from an already rigorously conceived theory of language, without assuming the need for a phenomenological conception of consciousness. Consciousness is not the primary object of the theory of speech acts. Searle's conception of fiction is therefore considerably more parsimonious, although one should note that a phenomenological element, though not explicitly theorized, is certainly not lacking in his analysis. For ultimately Searle must appeal to the intentionality of the author in order to ground his notion of pretended discourse. And if discourse can thus be pretended, it implies that the object of language is not merely objectively out there in the world, but indeed constituted by an intending subject.

Thus for both Searle and Ingarden the problem of fiction is characterizable as a logical-semantic paradox. For Searle, fiction is a form of pretense whereby an author partakes of a language-game in which sincerity is not expected and the semantic rules of reference are suspended. Ingarden's model is more complicated because of the intervening presence of the intentional object, which in fact functions as an ideal correlate to propositional content, but ultimately it makes the same claim: fictional sentences are quasi-judgments which arrest the logical passage from (conceptual) meaning to (worldly) reality.

Nonetheless, Ingarden's phenomenological way of putting the problem is suggestive in a way not evident in Searle. For what distinguishes a full-fledged judgmental proposition from a quasi-judgmental proposition is not merely a sincerity condition, but the fact that the latter functions precisely as an *arresting*, that is, a *deferral* of the passage from linguistic content to reality, or, as Ingarden puts it, a "deferment of the claim to truth" (*LW* 163). Both kinds of proposition produce, in Ingarden's vocabulary, a "purely intentional correlate" (*LW* 163), but in the case of the judgmental proposition this correlate is further concretized as an actually existing state of affairs; thus the original purely intentional correlate is ultimately forgotten, being identified as synonymous with the ontic reality of a worldly state of affairs. But—and herein lies the advantage of the phenomenological model over the purely logical one—to forget this intentional correlate is not to render it nonexistent; on the contrary, it is precisely the fictional "quasi-judg-

ment" that seizes on the preexisting moment of the intentional correlate. Ingarden, however, can give no explanation for why such a deferral should be significant or indeed at all necessary. The best explanation he can offer is by way of some disappointingly vague and rather banal references to the literary work's "suggestive power" and "mysterious achievement" (LW172).⁶ But such an "explanation" does nothing to help us understand fiction as an anthropological reality. On the contrary, it functions rather as an apotropaic gesture, a deferral of the "paradox of fiction" into the domain of the sacred that itself lies beyond explanation.

If fiction exists as a deferral of truth, which is to say ultimately, of the empirical, then it seems necessary to inquire into the necessity for such a deferral in the first place. For Ingarden, truth is only realized when the intentional object of consciousness is vindicated by the ontic presence of an empirical referent or state of affairs. But the intentional object nevertheless preexists this ontological vindication. What the phenomenological model cannot explain, however, is the necessity for the preexisting intentional object, the function of which is to *re*-present a real object. Why indeed is it necessary that we have intentional objects? Surely not *because of* empirical reality? To understand the specificity of the intentional object of language, we cannot simply reduce it to its empirical referent. If the purpose of intentional objects were solely to measure up to reality, to partake of its selfsame structure, then there would be little point in speaking of intentionality in the first place. Intentionality would simply exist as another object-in-the-world possessing no specific difference from nonintentional empirical objects, which would rather define its proper mode of existence. But if this is not the case—and our self-conscious awareness of the difference between the intentional and the empirical is sufficient indication that it is not—then we are forced to admit that the intentional object and the worldly object partake of different orders of existence.

The argument can be put in phenomenological terms. Intentional objects exist only by virtue of a perceiving consciousness that constructs its object *as a representation*. Whether or not the intentional object refers to an actually existing object in the world, in order for the object to be an *intentional* object it exists *first* as a representation in the mind of the subject. In a fundamental sense, then, the intentional object exists precisely as a *fiction*, that is, as a representation independent of its worldly referent. This is not to deny that the sign indeed refers. The (derivative) conception of correspondence-truth captures the fact that representation is always a representation *of* something else; minimally, the (intentional) sign must refer to a referent in order to be a sign. But to make this referential relation the sole ontological condition of all

language-use is to forget the preceding construction of the intentional object, which, we remember, exists not merely as an independent subjective object of consciousness, but as a representation, that is, precisely as a deferral of the real into the domain of representation, or, as the phenomenologists like to put it, into the realm of consciousness.

What the phenomenological model fails to account for, however, is the formal origin for this prior construction of the intentional object. Intentionality—consciousness—is simply assumed as a necessary precondition for representation. But without any a priori justification—without, that is, a minimal hypothesis concerning its formal origin—the existence of consciousness becomes simply an empirical given. As Ingarden realized with increasing dismay, phenomenology thus risks becoming itself another instance of “mere” psychologism. For Ingarden, the only solution was a metaphysical one; the objectivity of consciousness was to be guaranteed by postulating ideal concepts, the existence of which was necessarily implied by the intersubjective nature of the linguistic sign. The word thus refers, not merely to an idiosyncratic individual intention, but to a transcendental concept that exists independently of all particular speakers. Intentionality, on this metaphysical view, is displaced from its former phenomenological domain in the individual mind to a transcendental realm that ensures the intersubjectivity of intentionality in general.

Ingarden believes that this postulate is justified by language. For how could language exist if not intersubjectively? And if language is indeed intersubjective, meaning must ultimately originate, not in the minds of particular individuals, but in the transindividual domain of ideal concepts. But what is the origin of this transcendental realm of ideal concepts? Ingarden refuses to answer this question because he thinks it is self-evident. The same gesture is in fact also present in Searle, in his assumption that all language-use necessarily includes semantic “rules” of reference. Both thinkers refuse to question what they conceive to be unquestionable formal necessities for the rational functioning of language: ideal concepts, on the one hand, and semantic rules of reference, on the other.

What this shared refusal indicates is the debt of both models to metaphysics. But an inquiry into the origin of consciousness need not end in a reaffirmation of traditional metaphysical ontologies, be they realist or idealist. For if it is language that brings with it a sense of the transcendental a priori, conceived either as the ideality of concepts or as a semantic realism, then the origin of consciousness—of in short an ontological semantics—must be coterminous with the origin of language. But whatever could account for the emergence of language?

In Ingarden, we already have the interesting suggestion that language

emerges as a deferral of the real, that is, as a fictionalizing of the empirical. The “verticality” of the intentional object of language emerges as a transcendence and deferral of the “horizontal” presence of the empirical object. For Ingarden, however, this process of deferral is not regarded as fundamental to the operation of language. If the sign, in order to be a sign, functions also as a negation of its referent, this act of negation is not given any functional specificity in the phenomenological model. It is epiphenomenal to the real purpose of language, which in both the phenomenological and the logical models is to intend an object independent of the sign. But to disregard the deferring structure of the linguistic sign may be a mistake. This is indeed the assumption of the next model I want to examine. This anthropological model understands the linguistic sign, not on the basis of its intended object, but on the prior process of negation that is implicit in the very use of the sign.

III. The Anthropological Model

In his work on generative anthropology, Eric Gans provides a functional account for the origin of language. The “originary hypothesis”⁷ describes a scene of mimetic conflict over an appetitive object that results in a violent crisis. The crisis is deferred only when the appropriative gestures of the individual members are aborted. This moment of hesitation constitutes the origin of language. The abortive gesture of appropriation becomes the first sign, a designation of the object instead of its mimetic appropriation. The sign emerges in the moment when the individual’s appetitive relation to the object is renounced and replaced by the negative relation to the object that is language. The aborted gesture—precisely in order to be a sign—must be understood as a negation of the worldly object. In substituting the sign for the object, violence is deferred, and a radically new form of attention toward the object is made possible. This form of attention is that of culture in general, but its specific form is already given by the minimal structure of the linguistic sign.

Since its earliest formulation in *The Origin of Language* (1981), Gans has worked to refine and minimize the structure of the originary hypothesis. “The crux of the origin of language,” Gans argues in his most recent book, “is the emergence of the vertical sign-relation from the horizontal one of animal interaction. The originary hypothesis claims that this emergence is conceivable only as an event because the communication of the new sign-relation to its users gives them a conscious, directly manipulable access to the sign as a transcendent form of representation” (*SP* 15). In an effort to further minimize the

presuppositions of the originary hypothesis, Gans proposes the more minimal “triangular” model of mimesis over his previous “naturalistic” explanations for the origin of representation, because the naturalistic model “still leaves unclear the link between renunciation of appropriation on the one hand and imaginary possession through representation on the other” (*SP* 20). By concentrating on the mimetic model alone—that is, on the derivation of the triangular form of mimesis that is language from the dual form of mimesis as simple nonlinguistic imitation—Gans attempts to show both the continuity and the radical difference between the two structures of mimesis: (animal) imitation, on the one hand, and (human) representation, on the other.

What the triangular model explains is how the agonistic version of dual mimesis—a mimetic relation that exists at the animal as well as the human level—leads to a situation of intolerable “pragmatic paradox” (*SP* 20), which is only transcended by the triangular version of mimesis that is language. Dual mimesis describes the basic relation between a subject-as-imitator and a model-mediator. In imitating your gestures, I can learn a valuable behavior, such as the techniques necessary for a successful hunt. Humans have no monopoly on this form of mimesis. Indeed imitation is the staple method for communicating valuable behaviors amongst individuals in higher animal societies. But when both subject and model seek to appropriate a single object, the contradiction latent within these gestures reaches a pragmatic paradoxical threshold that is only resolved by mimetic *designation* rather than mimetic *appropriation*.⁸ The appearance of the object is no longer simply the natural endpoint of mimetic behavior in the appropriation and obliteration of it at the purely appetitive level. It has become also the potential source of rivalrous conflict. This creates an intolerable situation of *pragmatic paradox*. The subject imitates the model-mediator, but the gesture toward the object is in direct conflict with the latter’s own gesture, who thus also becomes the model-as-obstacle. Neither the subject nor the model can naturally finish their appropriative gestures toward the appetitive object. This results in a stasis, a pragmatic double bind, in which a “mimetic crisis” unfolds.

This crisis is only deferred by the intervention of the sign, which emerges as the “vertical” solution to the intolerable “horizontal” relation between subject and object. As Gans puts it: “the sign originates as the solution to the ‘paradoxical state’ or ‘pragmatic paradox’ engendered when the mimetic relation to the other-mediator requires the impossible task of maintaining the latter as model while imitating his appropriative action toward a unique object” (*SP* 20). That is, the sign emerges when both subject and model, in aborting their appropriative gestures, become aware that they are now, not appropriating the object,

but in fact designating it. The sign allows mimesis to continue, *not* as an appropriative gesture, but precisely as a *representation-of-the-object*. From the horizontal (appetitive) relation between the subject and the object is born the vertical relation of the sign and the referent.

The sign emerges as a turning back upon itself of the mimetic gesture-toward-the-object. From the imitation of the model, the subject turns to the imitation of the object that is defined by the formal closure of the sign that intervenes between subject and object. The subject of the sign imitates not merely the action of an analogous being (the model), but the object that lies beyond the sign (the referent) which is simultaneously thematized by the sign as internal to it (the signified). The formal separation between the sign and the object is precisely what allows the subject to “imitate”—ultimately to reflect on—the object. The sign, in its separateness from the object, is itself an object. Its formal closure, its coherence as a sign separate from its referent, is what enables us to speak of a mimesis—an “imitation”—of the object at all. The object thus becomes an *intended* object, irrevocably divorced from the original appropriative gesture, which becomes now a truly arbitrary sign. Once mediated by the sign, the object exists only as an object-of-representation. Which is not to say that it does not exist at all.

This originary model allows us to shed some light on the two questions raised, but not adequately answered, by the logical and phenomenological models of fiction: namely, Searle’s question about the paradox of fictional sentences that do not refer, and Ingarden’s notion of the deferral of truth carried out by “quasi-judgmental” fictional sentences. In the originary hypothesis, language emerges as the renunciation of appetite in a situation of mimetic crisis. The sign is the vertical solution to a mimeticism that has rendered the empirical presence of a worldly (appetitive) object too problematic to remain unthematized. The sign internalizes the pragmatic paradox of the external scene. The object is no longer merely empirically present, but represented on the scene of the subject’s internal imagination. Hence the phenomenological theory of the intentional object of consciousness (Ingarden). The subject’s relation to the object is no longer dictated by horizontal appetite, but by the paradoxical verticality of the sign. Hence the fictional rejection of the referent (Searle’s paradox). The sign mediates the subject’s relation to the object as precisely an intentional phenomenological relation. Anthropologically speaking, this intentional relation is a desiring relation. Rather than merely wanting the object, the subject *desires* the object in the full human sense of the word. Desire is a product of the sign. Only insofar as the object is *mediated by the sign* is it simultaneously *desired*.

The co-contingent origin of language and desire provides us with a

suggestive reformulation of the problem of paradox. The sign is a form (but the most fundamental, minimal form) of mediation between subject and object that permits collective interaction to continue beyond the intolerable situation of mimetic conflict over an object. The central appetitive object is what draws the participants (the subject and model) together in the first place. The object centers the initial mimetic configuration of the scene. But the intervention of the sign is what enables the fundamental center-periphery structure of the scene to be remembered. The object once mediated by the sign (by the desire of the other) becomes situated on a common *scene of representation*. Language is nothing other than a reminder to the self of its participation in this collective scene. In contemplating the sign, the subject is led to the object which it desires to possess, but this desire is contingent on the sign itself; thus the subject is led back to the sign in a paradoxical oscillation that can never be resolved. The paradoxical form of the sign, its irreducibility to the referent, is the origin of the "aesthetic" paradox upon which the work of art operates.⁹ The renunciation of appetite becomes the basis for the representational scene of desire, of which literary fiction is the peculiar modern inheritor. It should therefore not surprise us that paradox should itself become formally thematized in both logical and fictional discourse: that is, as formal self-referential language in the former, and as nonreferential "imaginative" language in the latter. The sign only exists insofar as it possesses formal closure, is separate from the object. Unlike the sign, unreflective imitation does not thematize the independence of the object from the subject's (appropriative) gesture.

But once the sign emerges it too can become an object of reflection. Self-reference is the insistence on the part of the sign of its own independence from the object. The sign-referent relationship arises only out of the *negation* of a prior unthematized appetitive relation to the object. On the model of the originary negativity in which the sign-referent relation is born, the subsequent sign-sign relation is inevitable. The formal closure of the sign generates the horizontal domain of oppositional signs. Because the sign arises only as a negation of the worldly object, it is inaccurate to say, at the fundamental level, that the sign refers to the object. Failure to recognize the importance of anthropological negation and deferral is the fatal error of the purely logical model of language which is satisfied with nothing but direct word-to-world reference. Yet, to be more accurate, we should say that what the sign refers to is not the object, but the object-as-represented-by-the-sign. The paradoxicality of self-reference is a *sine qua non* of signification, of the sign's origin in the negation of a worldly-temporal relation to the object. Logical paradoxes indeed exploit this self-

referentiality. At the fundamental level, they demonstrate the necessary incompleteness of formal systems that do not take into account the paradoxical structure of thought itself. For at the basis of human thinking is the paradox by which the sign designates both its own irreducible independence from the object—its formal closure, or vertical transcendence of worldly, empirical horizontal-metonymic relations—and the independence of the object-as-represented-by-the-sign. Representation as mimesis-of-the-object is only possible in the first place because the sign, in negating its appetitively motivated relation to the object, also refers to itself, to its own internal form.

The anthropological approach to representation and language provides a suggestive model for understanding the problem of fiction with which this essay began. The negation of horizontal worldly time structured by appetite becomes the generation of vertical phenomenological time structured by the scene of representation. The originary sign detemporalizes—defers—the former appetitive scene, but in so doing, it invents/discovers the temporality of the representational scene of *desire*. Fiction—literature—is a cultural investment in this scene of desire. The sign provides an opening to fictional narrative, that is, to a form of representation that thematizes *as its content* the sign's paradoxical relation to its referent. The subject-matter of the work of art comes to us in a frame, which explicitly designates its content as formally independent of the real world, and hence as unpossessible. Of course, the art-object may be materially possessed; the object may be, for example, purchased. This economic resolution to desire is indeed the *ethical* endpoint—though not the historical (that is, anthropological) endpoint—of representation. Following the emission of the originary sign is the economic moment in which the material object is distributed on the (implicit) model of linguistic exchange. But once the sign is resolved in the appropriation of the object, desire is not satisfied, it is merely deferred, because ultimately its existence is dependent upon the prior mediation of the sign. The problem of culture, of the human, is fundamentally not the projected fulfillment of transcendental desire, which is in any case ultimately impossible, but the deferral of the resentment generated by the dispossession inevitably experienced by the impossibility of ever fulfilling this project. Transcendence in all its cultural forms is the failure to observe the paradoxical structure of the sign.

Because of its intimate relation with desire, literature reveals this paradoxical structure better than any other cultural form. Literature capitalizes on the paradoxical structure of the sign in order to prolong the experience of individual desire for represented content, for the

eternally mediated referent. The disjunction pointed to by narratologists between the time of diegetic events internal to the story (*erzählte Zeit*) and the actual duration of the narrative text itself (*Erzählzeit*) is another formulation of the fundamental paradox of the sign.¹⁰ The sign points to its object, thus generating the phenomenological temporality of human desire. Given a sign, the locutee seeks a referent. The fact that this referent need not be empirically present or indeed presentifiable indicates the futility of reducing language to an ontological theory of the sign. What the sign indeed reveals is its irreducibly *fictional* status. It is thus those texts that we privilege as literature which provide us with the clearest path to understanding the anthropological specificity of the intentional sign.

Conclusion

As the foregoing remarks suggest, the anthropological understanding of fiction makes a good deal more of paradox than does the logical model with which we began. In Searle's argument, the "paradox of fiction" is regarded as merely a superficial logical-semantic paradox, something to be resolved by an appeal to horizontal conventions that suspend the rules of reference and indicate that the speech act is only "pretending to refer." But Searle's solution is a logical one, not an anthropological one. As such it depends on the rather dubious metaphysical assumption that the scene of representation evolves as a logical proposition. But fiction is not merely an epiphenomenal logical inconsistency, it is central to the human. It is paradoxical, though not merely in the logical sense. Fiction indeed refers without *really* referring. In this sense it is self-referential—nothing but language about language; in seeking the referent we find only (other) signs. But anthropological paradox cannot ultimately be resolved by dissolving the sign into a more foundational reality, whether this reality be construed as synonymous with an empirical reality, or as the intentionality of the subject, or as some relative combination of the two. The paradoxicality of the originary sign insists on its irreducible separation from—and fictional transcendence of—an ontologically given reality. This model of the sign is a generative-anthropological model, not an ontological one. Language refers to the real only insofar as it also defers it, that is, *fictionalizes* it. Paradox and representation lie at the basis of human self-reflection.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

NOTES

1 John R. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fiction," in his *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 58–75; hereafter cited in text as LS.

2 This has, in my experience, certainly not been the preferred approach to Searle adopted by literary critics. It is, however, always more enlightening to side with the underdog when one suspects that his expulsion owes more to a collective mimeticism than to a conscientious attempt to understand the opposing viewpoint.

3 See, for example, Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York, 1990), which seems to me a fairly representative account of how literary critics respond negatively to Searle, even as they approve of the wily Austin. The great exception is of course Stanley Fish, who is a "strong" reader of Searle. Not surprisingly, however, he achieves this strong reading only by undermining Searle's ontological assumptions from the start. Thus, he extends Searle's conception of institutional facts to embrace all facts. I think this kind of leveling of fact and fiction—though dependent upon a genuine anthropological insight—is basically incoherent, at least in the form that Fish expresses it. What indeed needs to be recognized is that the origin of language is the sine qua non of all our institutions. Only once this has been understood can we inquire into the history and structure—that is, the anthropology—of these same institutions. But this is an anthropological starting point rather than a classically ontological one. For Fish's reading of Searle, see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), pp. 197–245.

4 For Searle's taxonomy, see John R. Searle, "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts," in *Expression and Meaning*, pp. 1–29; hereafter cited in text as TI.

5 See Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, tr. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston, Ill., 1973), first published in German as *Das literarische Kunstwerk* in 1931; hereafter cited in text as *LW*.

6 The relevant passage reads as follows: "Since in a literary work there are only quasi-judgmental assertive propositions of various types, they are not—as we have already established—pure affirmative propositions. Thus, by virtue of their described properties, they are capable of evoking, to a greater or lesser degree, the illusion of reality; this pure affirmative propositions cannot do. They carry with them, in other words, a suggestive power which, as we read, allows us to plunge into the simulated world and live in it as in a world peculiarly unreal and yet having the appearance of reality. This great and mysterious achievement of the literary work of art has its source primarily in the peculiar, and certainly far from thoroughly investigated, quasi-judgmental character of the assertive propositions" (Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, pp. 171–72).

One finds the same kind of disappointing and unsatisfactory vagueness in Searle's explanation of fiction. Having completed his analysis of the "logical status of fiction," Searle asks, "why bother? That is, why do we attach such importance and effort to texts which contain largely pretended speech acts?" (Searle, "The Logical Status of Fiction," p. 74). We are then given one sentence suggesting why: "Part of the answer would have to do with the crucial role, usually underestimated, that imagination plays in human life, and the equally crucial role that shared products of the imagination play in human social life" (p. 74). It is hard to see this last statement as anything less than hugely ironic. If Searle can bracket the "crucial" and much "underestimated" role of the imagination until this point in his analysis, that is, precisely until he has *completed* his discussion of fiction, one indeed wonders what sort of "crucial" social role he could possibly have in mind. How could it be anything more than a footnote to the logical model of fiction? For if it is something more than this, then surely it throws his whole analysis into question.

7 For a description of the originary hypothesis, see Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 1–28; Eric Gans, *The End of Culture* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 13–38; Eric

Gans, *Originary Thinking* (Stanford, 1993), pp. 3–9; and especially ch. 2 of his *Signs of Paradox* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 10–36, hereafter cited in text as *SP*.

8 Given this dialectic, one might well ask: “What prevents animals from reaching this threshold of mimetic crisis and transcending it via the triangular structure of linguistic mimesis?” The answer is: theoretically nothing. But the point is not to argue over the animal versus the human opposition. For this is precisely not a binary model, but a dialectical one. The real purpose of the originary hypothesis is to understand the specificity of the human. Insofar as our closest biological ancestors are the higher primates, such a specificity must arise from within the context of primate social structures. Indeed, Gans argues—plausibly, I believe—that higher animal societies regulate the conflictual structure of dual mimesis via a complex system of pecking orders. Conflict over appetitive objects is restricted through rigid attendance to these internal hierarchies. The fact that language functions in principle across all extralinguistic hierarchies suggests that for humans such internal hierarchies are no longer effective in the maintenance of communal order.

9 For a full account of the originary operation of the aesthetic, see Gans, ch. 7, “Originary Esthetics,” in *Originary Thinking*, pp. 117–31.

10 See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, tr. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, 1980), p. 33.