

R. Ingarden's theory of schematized profiles: A dynamic version

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Introduction

In his important work *The Literary Work of Art* Roman Ingarden investigates the borderlines between ontology, logic, philosophy of language, linguistics, and aesthetics. Among other things Ingarden presents a theory about how language presents a schematization of the perceptual experience. He tries to demonstrate how the structures of our perceptual *experience* are mapped onto language. This does not mean that certain linguistic structures correspond to structures of things in the world, but rather that they correspond to the experiential structures of perception of things in the world. The meaning of a sentence can somehow present a schematization of the profiles through which we perceive a thing or situation. In this paper I will focus on these schematized profiles.

As is well known, Ingarden operates with a theory of language that involves not only the traditional ideas of sound, meaning, and referent. He has a richer and more stratified conception. According to Ingarden, any meaningful linguistic expression contains not only an expression-form and a semantic content, but through the derived intentionality of this content also a corresponding purely intentional referent, and depending on the type of purely intentional referent a connected set of schematized profiles of the referent in question. Now, the conception that language itself constitutes a triad of sound, meaning, and some kind of “immediate” object, dependent on the linguistic meaning, is familiar to some semiotic theories of language (even though Ingarden’s intentional way of describing this triad may not be), but Ingarden’s theory about the schematized profiles seems to me to be a genuine phenomenological innovation.

For reasons I will return to, it is extremely difficult to describe this fourth component in the semiotics of language and consequently to explain Ingarden’s theory. Ingarden’s conception of the linguistic expression as containing a fourth stratum of schematized profiles has consequently been considered very controversial in theories of literature dealing explicitly with Ingarden. On the one hand we can think of Welles’s straightforward denial of any such fourth stratum and on the other hand of Iser’s critical embracement of the idea of schematized profiles as a bridge between the text and the reader experience. In the philosophy of language, the semiotics of language, as well as in linguistics there seems to have been an almost absolute ignorance of Ingarden’s theory of language, and especially of the schematized profiles. But something is happening now. Recent developments in cogni-

tive linguistics and semiotics are pointing in the same direction as Ingarden did, and with these new results it will probably become easier to understand what Ingarden meant and to explain his theory.

Profiles and the appearance of an object

As many other phenomenologists, Ingarden considers it as very important to account for the manifesting or presenting qualities of language, by which I mean the fact that we experience language as being able to show or present what is actually absent. As language users we are somehow able to spotlight the things we are talking about and make them manifest to our listeners, even when the real objects themselves are actually absent. Ingarden wants to account for this experience that specific types of propositions are able to make a display of the purely intentional things or situations, to which the propositions refer. His way into this problem is the insight that to be perceptually present is to be present from a certain perspective and correlatively to be present through a certain profile (*Ansicht*). Consequently, his main thesis is that if the propositions are to make a display of their purely intentional referents, then the propositions must contain a means to specify the sets of profiles necessary for perceptual presentation of the referents in question.

Ingarden explicitly puts aside the general question of which types of objects it is possible through linguistic means to display and thus to make ready for a perceptual apprehension by the interlocutor (Ingarden 1931, 271). He considers it a historical fact that we frequently experience this type of perceptual apprehension when reading or hearing about real things and situations. Therefore he focuses his discussion on propositions that have referents of the type *real*. Thus, his premise is that if such a purely intentional referent is to be prepared for a perceptual apprehension, then it has to conform to the structures of sensory perception and the structures of the perceptual appearance of a real thing. If the text, in other words, is to give the reader an impression of “seeing” (in the imagination) the referred-to objects, then it must somehow instantiate a structure that is relevantly similar to the structure of our perceptual experience.

Let me therefore sketch what Ingarden describes as the main features of this perceptual appearance of the real thing. I will use a favourite example of Husserl and Ingarden: A red ball. Looking at a red ball in a static position, I can change my attentional focus

from the ball to the perceptual experience of the ball. Moving my head slightly from side to side, I can become aware of the fact that my perceptual experience of the red ball is constituted by a series of “red ball-profiles”. Strictly speaking, at a given time and from a given visual perspective, I have only a sensory experience of a given profile of the ball. But nevertheless, normally I do experience the thing I see as a red ball and not as a profile. This leads to some of the conceptual problems involved in describing the perceptual experience. The main difficulty is the status of these profiles. Normally I do not pay any attention to the profiles, regardless of their constitutive importance for the appearance of the thing in question. They do not form the thematic focus of my perception but constitute that through which a thing appears to me. I see immediately – if not focused otherwise – a red ball, and although this ball can only appear to me as a red ball through its profiles, the strange thing is that if I focus my attention directly on the profiles themselves, then the object – the red ball – seems somehow to disappear.

So, the profiles have a peculiar experiential status. The red ball can only appear through a profile, most likely as a red disk. But this red disk-profile is not the ball itself. A ball is round and the profile is rather a flat, red disk. The ball has the same red colour all over and the disk-profile is rather a continuous overlapping of nuances of red. A ball can roll in all directions, a red disk cannot. Further, I experience the profiles as depending on me. I can at will change the flow of profiles, but not the ball itself – it continues to appear as itself through these willed variations. Still, this does not mean that I experience the profiles as a sole function of my will and as absolutely dependent on me. The profiles occur always as embedded in a stream of profiles and are dependent on this stream. This means that if in a stream of red disk-profiles I suddenly experience a blue disk-profile or even a red square-profile, then these two occurrences would not have the same experiential meaning, as if they had occurred respectively in a stream of blue disk-profiles and in a stream of red square-profiles. This indicates that I can only control the profiles within certain limits, in the sense that I can e.g. never make a ball appear in a rectangular profile. So, on the one hand the profiles are not objectified, they are not experienced as things, and on the other hand they are not subjective, being experienced as I-external, as not entirely depending on me.

Although there is a clear difference between an object and its profiles there seems to be certain regular or even law governed relations between them. Take for instances the continuous flow of

profiles through which I perceive a red ball. Here it counts as a law of experience that as long as I perceive a ball there will be no angle from which the ball will be appearing in a rectangular profile, and consequently appears as say a book. This goes for any objective space-forms. They are all in a law governed way bound to specific sets of profiles through which they can appear. This means that an invariant structure of profiles manifests itself by the flow of ever changing profiles. Two profiles, occurring in the same flow, are never identical with respect to their qualitative content, but they do nevertheless manifest the same inherent structure, which can make the same object appear through both of them. Thus, the appearance of the object concerned is not altered by every difference in the qualitative content of the profiles or in the way they are experienced. So, when I perceive a red ball it can at a given time t_1 be said to appear to me in the form of red disk-profile with a determinate continuous distribution of red nuances and at time t_2 to have the same form but necessarily with a slightly different distribution of red nuances. This makes it clear that there exist no law governed relation between a given perceptual appearance of an object or its properties and a specific, concrete experienced profile. Rather the law governed relation is between a given perceptual appearance of an object or its properties and a specific plurality of profiles, all manifesting the same invariant structure through which the object or property in question can appear. Or articulated the other way around: If we experience a specific plurality of profiles, then a certain object will appear. In other words, every perceptually appearing object or objective property is a priori correlated with a general schema of profiles (or sets of schemes). In this way every object or objective property determines a plurality of schematized profiles. So, Ingarden understands the following by the concept of the schematized profiles: The totality of the moments of a concrete profile's content, the presence of which constitutes the sufficient and necessary condition for the appearance of the objective property in question (ibid. 279). Schematized profiles described in this way are not experienced concretely, because if that were the case we would not be dealing with a schema for profiles, but with a concrete profile itself.

Linguistic schematization of objective appearance

Ingarden applies this concept of schematized profiles in his description of the manifesting or presenting qualities of language. If a linguistic expression refers to an object of the type *real*, that

is, to an object that can be perceived, then the object must be correlated with a plurality of schematized profiles corresponding to its objective space-form. These sets of schematized profiles are not to be regarded as a part of the reader's background knowledge and as something the reader makes use of in case he is to fantasize what he reads. Rather they are part of the semantic content, that is to say a part of the inferential web, which the text spins. Take as an example this small text: "The red ball was lying on the table. From where Husserl stood he could see something rectangular on the table." It is clearly the case that the two objects on the table, referred to in the two sentences, could not be the same, and that is exactly because they have incommensurable schematized profiles. In a case like this, it has nothing to do with whether the reader imagines the objects or not. The schematized profiles are not associated with the referred-to objects because of the reader, but are present in the text depending on the types of objects referred to.

One can perhaps say that the core of any linguistic understanding is the grasping of the semantic content that has been given an expression. Such an understanding can be described as the rethinking by the understanding subject of the thought that has been given an expression. This core experience of understanding must not be understood as the various possible ways of imagining that can and often does accompany such an understanding. "The World Trade Center was attacked". Some people will form mental images on hearing or reading this sentence, others will not. But in both cases, people will understand it. So "the possible imagistic or otherwise sensory-experience-like accompaniments of understanding" (Strawson 1994, p. 8) seems to be completely facultative. But nevertheless, often the imagination does play a big role in the reader's or hearer's experience of a text. There seem to be certain aesthetic contexts in which the understanding of the text (e.g. a narrative) involves a grasp of the possibility or impossibility of sensory-based imaginings. In this way it appears that an adequate understanding of Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* involves a grasp of the near impossibility of imagining the visual referent-situations of the long, detailed descriptions of the novel. And similarly, certain texts seem to demand of their reader that the reader understands and feels the presence and *in actu* evolution of certain actions and happenings. In such cases the linguistic expression can have such a strong manifesting quality that we almost experience to "see" what we read.

It seems that a proper understanding of a sentence in some

cases not only forces us to think in a certain way, but sometimes also to imagine in a certain way. In this case, we could perhaps speak of the imaginative comprehension as quasi-obligatory, in the sense that an adequate grasp of the structure and function of the specific text demands that the understanding subject concretises the text in certain imaginings (or at least that he recognises that the text points toward such imaginings). This in no way exclude that the reader could always refrain from forming such imaginings and focus only on the linguistic understanding. It seems therefore necessary to differentiate between two types of imaginative involvement with the purely intentional objects referred to by the text.

- (1) By help of the text sequence we can reconstruct the appearance of the described thing or situation, and step by step form an imagination of it.
- (2) In reading the text sequence we are prompted to form what seems to be a spontaneous perceptual imagination of the linguistically presented thing or situation.

This goes to indicate that a text in varied degrees can specify the schematized profiles involved. Ingarden's idea seems to be that

- (a) in the simple mentioning of an object the correlated schematized profiles will have only a pure potential status.
- (b) In a further step the potential profiles can be linguistically specified so as to prepare for a specific type of appearance, and
- (c) in a final step they can be specified so as to function as a "display-making". If this is the case we tend to form a vivid perceptual imagination of what the text presents.

So, according to Ingarden, for the linguistically referred-to objects to achieve a perceptual manifestation and for the reading or listening subject to have a concrete experience of perceiving (in the imagination) the objects in question, there must on the one hand be certain specifying linguistic factors in the text and on the other hand certain actualizing and concretizing operations performed by the subject. The correlated schematized profiles thus may be specified in such a way that they are present not as purely potential but rather as "prepared-for-appearing" or "made ready for display". But granted this, it implicates that it will never be possible solely by linguistic means to specify the profiles to such an extent that the object will appear as real and physically present. It is only possible within certain limits to control lin-

guistically this final specification performed by the reader. This linguistic “control” can be performed in two different ways: (1) By phonemic and prosodic factors of the text or (2) by semantic factors of the text. I will focus on the semantic factors.

Ingarden claims that the propositional content can and often will specify the schematized profiles through which the referent appears. There is no easy way to describe exactly how this specification is being performed. According to my earlier account the profiles are neither objective nor subjective. They are not the object of our perception, but that through which we perceive the objects, that through which they appear. This ambiguous, in-between status of the profiles must be considered and accounted for in the understanding of how language specifies the schematized profiles. If the specifications are to succeed, the profiles cannot be the theme of the sentences. This would transform the profile from being the medium by which an object appears to becoming itself an object, often with the consequent that nothing seems to appear. This means that if the schematized profiles are meant to function as “display-makers”, then the specification of the profiles cannot be achieved by an explicit mentioning or description of a specific type of profile. So the specification of profiles has in a certain sense to be implicit. The schematized profiles cannot be the intentional referent of the expression, but must be the result of the way this intentionality functions. Let us now take a closer and more concrete look on how this propositional intentionality can function.

Ingarden’s static framework

Ingarden’s answer to how this intentionality can function in a specifying way seems to follow directly from his theoretical framework, i.e. the phenomenological description of the perceptual experience or correlatively of the perceptual appearance of objects. He therefore suggests that the primary way to specify the schematized profiles is by a specification of how the intended object looks. This happens, according to Ingarden, by the type of sentence which unfolds the looks of an object. “Soaussehensverhalte”, Ingarden calls the referents of such sentences. The more the text specifies the important structures of the perceptual situation, the more it is supposed to prepare the described situation for a perceptual appearance. So in addition to describing visual qualities of the intended objects, it also has to indicate the perspective from where the objects are supposed to be perceived

and further the spatial relations between the objects themselves and between the objects and the point of view. This text sequence from *Portrait of the Artist* may serve as a good example of such a specification:

The director stood in the embrasure of the window, his back to the light, leaning an elbow on the brown crossblind, and, as he spoke and smiled, slowly dangling and looping the cord of the other blind. Stephen stood before him, followed for a moment with his eyes the waning of the long summer daylight above the roofs or the slow deft movements of the priestly fingers. The priest's face was in total shadow, but the waning daylight from behind him touched the deeply grooved temples and the curves of the skull. (p. 154)

This example from James Joyce clearly demonstrates that indications of all the relevant features of the perceptual situation prepare the described scene for a visualization of it. On the basis of such a description the reader can reconstruct a perceptual experience of the scene in the imagination. But the example also demonstrates that such a reconstruction takes some labour, and it can at times be a tedious undertaking (readers of Robbe-Grillet will grant me that). It seems to have little in common with the experience Ingarden refers to, when he says that the text forces one to imagine what one reads – the almost spontaneous experience of being witness to the scene as it evolves *in actu*. An experience he describes as being one of presence and not one of distance (Ingarden 1968, pp. 130ff.). But an experience that involves a great deal of imaginative activity and concentration is not likely to be experienced with the kind of effortlessness that characterizes our perceptions. This kind of descriptions does of course specify the relevant features of the perceptual situation and therewith prepares it for perceptual apprehension, for a “visualizing reading”, but it does not function so as to make a display of the referent-situation. What is missing?

The dynamic version

Ingarden seems to focus on the linguistic description of the perceptual characteristics of the referent-situation as a consequent of his primary interest in the static perceptual experience, the scrutinizing vision. For several reasons this choice may be an unhappy one. First of all, as many other phenomenologists have pointed to, this picture of the perception as a scrutinizing attentive perception might only be a limit situation and have only little

in common with the normal pragmatic function of perception, which does not focus on the perceptual qualities of the object, but rather on its practical aspects. Accordingly, we do not primarily see a chair as a brown and blue thing, but as something to be sat on. Second, as the example shows, the linguistic description of perceptual qualities may give instructions as to how the referent-situation should be visualized, but does not prompt the reader to visualize the scene without making a willed effort to do so.

But there are other ways of specifying the schematized profiles of the referent-situation. Ways that Ingarden seems to have overlooked, due to his theoretical framework, and that appear to be true to the experience he describes. Let me try to show this by way of a textual example:

When Camilla had entered her room, she pulled up the blind, leaned her brow against the cool pane, and hummed Elisabeth's song from "The Fairy-hill". At sunset a light breeze had begun to blow and a few tiny, white clouds, illuminated by the moon, were driven towards Camilla. For a long while she stood regarding them; she followed them from a far distance, and she sang louder and louder as they drew nearer, kept silent a few seconds while they disappeared above her, then sought others, and followed them too. With a little sigh she pulled down the blind. She walked to the dressing table, leaned her elbows against it, rested her head in her clasped hands and regarded her own picture in the mirror without really seeing it. (p. 29–30)

This sequence, taken from J.P. Jacobsen's short story *Mogens*, presents us with a different type of situation; one that more easily makes us visualize what is going on. Comparing the two different text sequences one immediately senses the dynamic nature of the latter contrasted with the more static character of the former. This seems to indicate that the more immediate perceptual apprehension of the latter text sequence has something to do with the dynamic way in which it specifies the schematized profiles.

Ingarden himself gives some indications of how to describe the way these more dynamic action sentences succeed in specifying the schematized profiles, so as to prompt the reader to visualize the referent-situation. He differentiates between four types of sentences on the basis of what types of referent-situations they project. For example, he contrasts sentences with referent-situations that involve a dynamic doing or happening with those that involve static relations (e.g. between an object and a property). The first type is described as unfolding a dynamic activity *in actu*; the second as relating one object to another in a static and dis-

tanced way. But he seems to leave it at that and does not take it further in the chapters on schematized profiles.

Let me try to describe how I understand the action sentences in the last text sequence as being capable of specifying the schematized profiles in a manner that is true to life, that is, analogue to the way the perception functions in our pragmatic real life experiences. Take the sentence “With a little sigh she pulled down the blind”. This action sentence presents us with an active body, with the unfolding of a bodily action. So, by the use of the so-called basic action-verbs, such as running, lifting, jumping, crawling, climping, we are presented with a specific bodily function and experience that is not the semantic focus of the sentence. The semantic focus of the sentence is rather the agent and her goal, e.g. in the sentence “She walked to her dressing-table”. A basic action-sentence like this explicitly mentions a specific bodily function, but focuses on the agent’s goal, on her getting to the dressing-table. This sentence in a single and unified manner expresses the agent’s intention (her wanting or intending to get to the dressing-table), her bodily motion (walking), and her perceptual focus (most likely directed toward the dressing-table). The sentence expresses the experience of a non-objectified body in action; a unified experience of the moving body and its immediate surroundings as a whole. Our direct and unmediated intimate “knowledge” with this type of basic bodily motion, as well as our knowledge of where the agent directs her attention gives us an awareness of the situation as a whole. So, we have here a direct but non-thematic acquaintance with the structures of the situation, and these structures are of an experiential embodied type. We immediately sense what it would be like to be in the same situation.

If we compare these considerations with cognitive linguistic insights of e.g. Leonard Talmy about the attentional structures in language we obtain a way of understanding how action sentences dynamically can specify schematized profiles of the referent-situation. The action sentences involve the lived bodily experiences of the agent. This gives us an immediate understanding of the situation as a whole. We know the fundamental structures of the situation and we experience it as a whole in time and space. This makes it possible for us to focus our attention on specific parts, while letting other parts slide into the background. Linguistically speaking, this means that sentences that mention only some parts of the referent-situation, while leaving other parts out, for a full comprehension still demands that we are aware of the situ-

ation as a whole. The explicit mentioning of specific parts of the referent-situation implies or entails the structure of the situation as a whole. But at the same time the explicit mentioning of specific parts gives a perspective on the situation in which only the mentioned parts are put in the foreground (“windowed”). So, in the action sentences we do not need to mention more than a few aspects of the situation in order to bring the situation as a whole into play. Through these action sentences we are presented with a dynamic situation as a whole and with the attentional focus directed at specific aspects (most often the goal or result of the action).

One could work a lot more on this way of describing the manifesting or presenting qualities of the action sentences, so as to account in more detail for how the perspective is placed within the situation. But that will be beyond the scope of this paper.

To conclude: Ingarden gives a very interesting phenomenological description of how language can manifest the actually absent. To do this the language must somehow be able to specify from what perspective the referent appears. That is, it must somehow be able to specify the schematized profiles of the referent. This specification cannot be performed by an explicit reference to a schematized profile, because this would seriously distort the function of the profiles as that, which we non-thematically “live through” and through which the objects are appearing. So, this specification must somehow take place implicitly. I have tried to point out that this specification most fully takes place by the dynamic structures of the action sentences. I think these are insights that should be more fully appreciated in the semiotics and aesthetics of language.

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