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In the Mood for Paradox? Das Verhältnis von Fiktion, Stimmung und Welterschließung aus mentalistischer und phänomenologischer Perspektive

It is widely acknowledged that responses to fiction can be divided into two categories: emotions or moods. Research on the paradox of fiction, however, solely focused on emotional responses to fiction. This paper analyses the different potentials of the mood concept with regard to the paradox of fiction: its potential to avoid the paradox on the one hand and its potential to rise a new paradox of fiction, a paradox of fiction for moods, on the other. To this end, the paper distinguishes two different meanings of the everyday concept of mood and two different paradigms in the research on moods.

The mood concept can designate not only affective states of an individual ($moods_1$), but elusive, nuanced atmospheres of objects, places or situations ($moods_2$). The mentalistic paradigm, widespread in psychology and analytic philosophy, generally assumes that moods are mental states with a certain quality of feeling (and physical symptoms). $Moods_2$ are regarded by such approaches, if they discuss them, as a secondary phenomenon based on subjective perception. In contrast, the phenomenological paradigm focuses on $moods_2$ and, if it accommodates $moods_1$ as well, often postulates a characteristic connection between the two: $moods_1$ reveal extra-individual atmospheres ($moods_2$) that are assumed to exist in some ontologically robust sense. Therefore, $moods_1$ can be said to have a world-disclosing function within the phenomenological paradigm.

Researchers in the mentalistic paradigm deal, among other issues, with the difference of emotions and $moods_1$. One way in which $moods_1$ differ from emotions is that they lack an intentional object and it is for that reason that the concept of $mood_1$, at first glance, seems to offer a solution to the paradox of fiction. The paradox of fiction presumes that we have emotions with regard to fictional objects. If it were possible to redescribe the alleged emotions as more subtle $mood_1$ responses without clear intentional objects, this would undermine a central premise of the paradox and dissolve it. However, such a redescription seems not equally plausible for all cases discussed in the debate (e. g. the green slime case). Therefore, $moods_1$ can only be one element of a more subtle ›phenomenology‹ of affective reactions towards fiction and the »paradox avoiding potential« of the mood concept is limited.

The paradox creating potential of the mood concept emerges if one takes into account the outlined complex semantics of the concept »mood« and the postulated world-disclosing function of $moods_1$. It seems possible to construct a new paradox, the paradox of fiction for moods: (a) Only real entities or representations of real entities can evoke $moods_1$ with world-disclosing function (because this $mood_1$ evocation is actually immersion in an atmosphere). (b) Many entities in fictions are not real. (c) Nevertheless, fictions can evoke $moods_1$ with world-disclosing functions (e. g. with regard to places, situations) in the recipient.

The paper argues that the outlined paradox can be dissolved by pointing out that the expression »$moods_1$ with world-disclosing function« in sentence (a) means something different than in (c). While the expression in (a) relates to the idea of grasping an atmosphere ($mood_2$) that somehow

is »in the world«, it means acquiring a non-propositional form of knowledge, namely knowledge of what-it-is-like to be in a certain situation, in (c). The idea that it is possible to acquire knowledge of what-it-is-like by means of fiction has often been postulated in the research literature, but rarely been spelled out in greater detail. The paper argues that such an acquisition can occur, among other possibilities, on the basis of $mood_1$ evocation, but that the conditions for the acquisition of knowledge of what-it-is-like by means of fiction are more demanding than under usual circumstances: A recipient of fiction can reasonably be said to acquire knowledge of what-it-is-like to be in a certain situation if the fictional representation evokes a $mood_1$ which is characteristic of a situation S and the recipient understands this $mood_1$ as an affective reaction to a situation of the type S. Please note that $moods_2$ play no explanatory role in the second interpretation of »world-disclosing function«.

Since assumption (a) and assumption (c) concern different world-disclosing functions or, in other words, different mechanisms of world-disclosure, there is no paradox. Although $moods_1$ evoked by fictional representations (with some limitations pointed out in section 4) do not possess a world-disclosing function in the sense the phenomenological tradition postulated, it is possible to ascribe these $moods_1$ a world-disclosing function, even within a non-phenomenological framework: They allow the recipient the acquisition of a knowledge of what-it-is-like to be in a certain situation or in a certain place.

Ultimately, for the paradox of fiction for moods seems to hold what could be said about the classical paradox of fiction as well: Even if the paradox ultimately dissolves, its analysis can be instructive for related research fields like the debate on knowledge from fiction which takes moods rarely into account until now.

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