

**Bartosz Stopel**

**Aesthetic Appreciation and the Dependence Between Deep and  
Surface Interpretation  
(Abstract)**

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The article traces the relationship between what is called surface, aesthetic interpretation and deep, semantic, theory-driven interpretation of literature. The former is identified with how interpretation is typically understood in analytic philosophy of art, whereas the latter as belonging to continental literary theory, thus framing the discussion within the relevant debates that the two eminent philosophical schools engage in. Specifically, the article argues in favor of a number of claims. It discusses the notion of surface interpretation, understood as the informed practice involved in general attention to a literary work with an aim of attaining an aesthetically rewarding experience (appreciation). Surface interpretation locates a literary work in a specific art-historical context and at minimum acknowledges the author's categorial intentions pertinent to genre, general aims and representational content of the work. The article also argues against the notion that appreciation, which is supposed to be the main aim of surface interpretation, is purely perceptual (Carroll, Lamarque) and that consequently aesthetic experience does not involve affective experiences. Grounding appreciation in affective experiences (Levinson) leads me to acknowledge an important continuity between fully formed aesthetic experience and more instinctive or »effortless« ways of attending to a work, such as when one »just enjoys« the emotions afforded by, say, a horror story rather than with full aesthetic attention to the work, where the affective component dominates, but which are less structured to be properly called aesthetic within the conceptual framework I offer here. As a result, I divide the pleasures of attending to an artwork into the instinctive, hedonic ones and the properly aesthetic ones, which both constitute two basic modes of reading. The aesthetic mode is not fully separate from the hedonic one, but on the contrary, by tapping directly into the hardwired human cognitive-affective architecture, it provides a general framework and parameters for the emergence of the higher-order aesthetic mode where more prominence is given to art-historical knowledge and more attention to the design and form/content interrelation. Importantly, aesthetic mode does not operate with the absence of the hedonic one, though they can simultaneously produce different evaluations (e.g. hedonically positive, aesthetically/artistically negative). The two modes could be said to have distinct model readers with corresponding levels of competence. The hedonic reader, as opposed to the aesthetic one, would be largely oblivious to art-historical contexts and would be more selective in terms of attention to the work, relying on direct affect-triggering textual cues. Interpretive effort would be reduced, too. I also discuss my model with reference to the psycho-historical framework for the study of art appreciation as developed by Bullot and Reber which attempts to explain how art responders acquire more complex types of attention to the work, or stances, from mere exposure to the work's perceptual content to tracing causal history and integrating historical contexts into a more rounded approach to art appreciation. An important part of my argument is the indication that non-habitual pattern isolation responsible for identifying structures, interrelations between a work's elements and forming predictions about its development in the process of reading is a crucial component of aesthetic experience. Next, I move on to discuss deep interpretation, which typically is seen as miles apart from aesthetic interpretation. It is sometimes assumed that deep, semantic interpretation disregards surface interpretation, including authorial intentions and art-historical contexts and emphasizes reader's active, playful

role in generating an unconstrained swirl of connotations. Such a practice is seen either as being a source of bliss (Barthes) or as a purely intellectual pursuit attempting at enhancing the understanding of the work (Sontag). I argue against all three views and integrate deep interpretation into the model sketched so far. Seeing deep interpretation as unconstrained and purposeless (Lamarque) is an uncharitable straw man. Such a vision would render semantic interpretation unintelligible and random, but this is not the case. By looking into some examples taken from Roland Barthes' own work which is one of the foundations of modern theory-driven interpretation, I argue that despite his bombastic claims, he is unable to start his deep interpretation project without acknowledging categorial intentions and art-historical context of the work's creation. Consequently, and comparing his views to contemporary debates on work, authorship, intentions and aesthetics, his work is an attack on a rather dated understanding of these concepts. Theory-driven interpretation can be flawed or stretched, if it does not pay its dues to surface interpretation. Next, I argue that both surface and deep interpretation operate according to the principles of value-maximization (Davies) which can override author's intentions about the details of her work's meaning. Using a specific theoretical framework in deep interpretation is an extension of the non-habitual patterns isolation principle and serves to enhance the experience of the work by trying to recognize more pattern that add up to the work's complexity while remaining faithful to the work's basic contents. Taking up the semantic reading stance already entails taking up the underlying aesthetic and, more distantly, hedonic stances. In the end, theory-driven interpretation forms the third reading mode which emerges with a correspondingly more competent model reader from the partly-constraining aesthetic mode.

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