

## **Whose effectors, yours or mine? Identification, Interpretation and Motor Simulation in Narrative Fiction.**

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There has been a great deal of discussion about the concept of identification in the philosophical literature on empathy and narrative identification (Carroll, 1991). On the one hand, identification seems to be a critical aspect of our folk understanding of what it is to engage with a narrative fiction. On the other hand, for a range of reasons, our engagement with narrative fictions seems quite distinct from our folk concept of identification. In particular, our responses to the events depicted in narrative contexts are not consistent with the depicted experiences of characters. Simulation theory has been proposed as a means to resolve this putative inconsistency (Goldman, 2006). Simulation theory suggests that we understand aspects of a narrative from a first person perspective, but that doing so does not necessarily involve projecting ourselves into, or identifying with the phenomenal aspects of, the experiences of characters. Although promising as a strategy, simulation theory runs into the same type of problem as identification: our psychological perspective when we engage with narrative fictions seems quite different from the 1<sup>st</sup> person perspectives of characters. In what follows I would like to pick up on an idea first proposed in Seeley (2010). Recent research demonstrates that motor simulation plays a critical role in our ability to understand actions in ordinary contexts and that the role of motor simulation in action understanding generalizes to narrative understanding in both literary and pictorial contexts. Motor simulations are effector specific, they involve the activation of discrete areas of premotor cortex which code for the movement of discrete muscle groups involved in planning and preparation for specific actions (Witt & Proffitt, 2008). These processes facilitate directing attention and orienting our bodies to task specific features in the environment. In third person contexts we use these same processes to direct attention and track the movements of others. However, we do not so much put ourselves in their shoes as we put ourselves in their effectors. We simulate only those aspects of their anticipated movements necessary to the information demands of the current task. Objections to simulation theory rest on the observation that the information available from the global perspective of narrative consumers is broader, and in some cases inconsistent with the information available from the local perspectives of characters. If we simulate the experience of a character in this context we will miss some of the global information. However, if we simulate only the effector specific information necessary to understand the actions and motivation of characters these problems do not arise. In what follows we propose an effector specific model for a simulation theory of narrative understanding and discuss its implications for philosophical discussions of empathy and identification in narrative contexts.

### Bibliography:

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