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INTENSION

The aim of this chapter is to answer the question: What are texts? It aims to do so by proposing a definition of texts that provides an intensional analysis of the notion of textuality. The definition of texts is the cornerstone of any theory of textuality, for such a definition not only elucidates the notion of textuality itself, but also helps to clarify other philosophical questions that pertain to it. The definition I propose will help indicate, moreover, the way to resolve some of the issues raised in the Introduction. In particular, it will point a way to the solution of the problems arising from the incompatible ways in which we think about texts. Thus, we will uncover the reasons why texts are referred to in terms of predicates that imply that they are, for example, both physical and nonphysical entities and show that such predications do not imply an incompatibility in the nature of texts or an inconsistency in the way we think about them.

Finding an appropriate definition of texts is by no means easy both because of the complex and peculiar nature of texts and because of the many different conceptions of texts that have been proposed, particularly in recent years.[1] Two ways of proceeding suggest themselves: One is to present a definition at the outset and follow it with an analysis of its meaning and implications; the other is to begin by discussing the problems that proposing a definition involves, examining various possibilities along the way, until an acceptable definition is reached. The main advantage of the first procedure is clarity —because it gives the favored definition upfront, it provides a signpost to guide subsequent discussion. Its main disadvantages are two: First, it hides the problematic nature of the procedure whereby the definition has been reached, giving the mistaken impression that it is the result of some fundamental and clear intuition; and, second, it suggests that the definition is to be taken dogmatically as precise and unmodifiable.

The advantage of the second procedure is that, in contrast with the first procedure, it accurately reproduces the difficult, complicated, and at times confusing process whereby the definition has been reached, thus presenting the issue in its true problematic character. Moreover, precisely because of the difficulties it makes evident in the process of formulating the definition, it

leaves the distinct impression that the result is not to be considered final. Its main disadvantage is the lack of clarity that results, for the path eventually leading to the definition can be tortuous, cumbersome, and confusing.

I have chosen the first procedure both for the sake of clarity and because it makes it possible to sidestep the discussions of the many views of textuality that have been proposed. Thus, the discussion can be pointed, analytic, and clear, avoiding historical entanglements and difficult questions of exegesis that could not be resolved just in passing. To avoid the negative consequences of this procedure, however, it must be kept in mind that the development of a definition of texts is a complicated and problematic issue which the discussion in this chapter does not aim to reproduce, and that the definition itself must be taken as provisional and thus modifiable. Moreover, it is not only in the rest of the chapter, but also in the rest of the book, that its full understanding and implications are developed.

Let me begin, then, by providing the definition of texts whose viability and implications will be explored subsequently:

> A text is a group of entities, used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey some specific meaning to an audience.

The elements of this definition are the group of entities used as signs, the signs, the selection and arrangement of those signs, the intention, the context, the author, the audience, and the specific meaning that is intended to be conveyed. The author and the audience will be discussed in part in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, because of the epistemic character of some of the issues that can be raised in connection with them, and in part in the volume devoted to metaphysics.[2] This chapter concentrates on the remaining six elements. The discussion of all these takes place in Section I. Section II of the chapter deals with the conventional nature of texts and their epistemic character. The chapter concludes with a summary.

I. Elements in the Definition of Texts

As noted, apart from the author and the audience, the elements present in the definition of texts are the entities that constitute the signs of which a text is composed, the signs themselves, the specific meanings texts are intended to convey, the intention, the selection and arrangement of the signs, and the context. I deal with these in the order given.

A. Entities that Constitute Texts (ECTs)

A proper understanding of textuality requires that we distinguish texts from the entities used as the signs that compose texts.[3] This is important because, as we

shall see later, the distinction between texts and the entities that constitute them may account for the seemingly incompatible predicates that are often predicated of texts. Hence, this distinction may solve some of the problems concerning texts raised in the Introduction.

As noted earlier, I have proposed that texts be conceived as groups of entities, used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey some specific meaning to an audience. But the signs that make up texts are themselves constituted by entities. This is not different than the case of a horse that is constituted not only by its head, body, and legs, but also by the parts that constitute its head, body, and legs, such as the eyes, the belly, the hoofs, and so on. Consider the text, "No smoking is permitted here." In one sense it may be taken to be composed of several signs such as the words of which it is composed, the punctuation—in this case the period at the end which marks the end of the sentence—and so on. But in another sense the text is constituted, at least in part, by the lines, points, ink marks, and such, which constitute the signs that compose the text.

The distinction between the entities that constitute a sign and the sign may be illustrated with an example. Consider the case of a circle drawn on the sand. The circle is by itself nothing but a circle. But if the circle is used to convey meaning it becomes a sign, and all sorts of things may be communicated through it. It could be intended as a letter, or a secret symbol that should trigger a particular action by some of those who observe it, and so on. In these cases, the circle taken by itself is a mere object of perception, but the circle used as a letter or a secret signal is something else. The identity conditions for the circle and the identity conditions for the circle considered as a letter, say, are quite different. Of course, the relationship between the two is quite close, ontologically speaking. If the circle is destroyed, the letter is destroyed, and if the letter is destroyed the circle is destroyed. Indeed, if one were to ask how many things one sees when looking at the circle and the letter, it would be incorrect to answer that one sees two things. Yet, that does not mean that the circle is the letter and the letter is the circle. This relationship is in some ways like that of the animal and the rational individual in a rational animal. In a rational animal, if the rational individual is destroyed, the animal is destroyed; if the animal is destroyed, the rational individual is destroyed; and the animal and the rational individual are not two numerically distinct things. But to be a rational individual and to be an animal are two different things, for it is possible that there can be animals that are not rational and rational individuals that are not animals.

For the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to the entities that are used as signs as entities that constitute the signs and I shall refer to the signs as being constituted by these entities. Thus, in the earlier example, the circle drawn on the sand constitutes the letter that results from using it in certain ways. Now, because texts are composed of signs, the entities that constitute those signs may also be

said to constitute the texts composed of those signs.

The character of the entities that constitute texts and signs may vary a great deal. In written texts they are visual as the example provided earlier illustrates, but they can also be sounds emitted orally that are perceived through hearing. Still, in other cases they may be mental images rather than physical entities, and thus subject to imagination rather than perception. When I form a mental picture of the text "No smoking is allowed here," for example, the text or the signs of which it is composed are not constituted by external objects of perceptions. The text and its signs are constituted by images not present to the eye.

It is important to distinguish texts from the entities that constitute them, for their respective functions and features are quite different. Indeed, the identity conditions for a text and for the entities that constitute it are quite different, and as we shall see later keeping these two categories separate prevents a number of the confusions frequently found in the literature.

The differences between the identity conditions of texts and the identity conditions of the entities that constitute them depend on the nature of the entities in question on one side and on the nature of texts on the other. The conditions of textuality were stipulated in the definition given earlier, its certerpiece being that they are entities with meaning. But the identity conditions of the entities that constitute texts considered apart from their function as texts may vary a great deal, depending on the entities in question, for these entities have meaning only if they are used as texts. Indeed, as we saw earlier, some of those entities may be physical, whereas others may be mental. In no case, however, do those conditions include all the conditions identified in the definition of texts, unless they are used as texts.

One point that needs to be kept in mind is that, because the entities that constitute texts are complex, not all features of those entities are semantically significant, that is, not all of them are used to convey meaning. In a written text, for example, constituted by lines and figures of a certain color, the color may be semantically irrelevant—for the meaning of the text it may not matter whether it is red, blue, or any other color for that matter. Not all features and parts of the entities that are used as texts need be semantically significant. Strictly speaking, only the entities or features of entities that function semantically should be considered constitutive of a text.

In all this we can see the beginning of the solution to some of the problems raised in the Introduction. There we saw, for example, that incompatible predicates are frequently predicated of texts, suggesting that they are, say, physical and nonphysical. But now there is a way out, for when incompatible predicates are predicated of a text it may be that the predicates in question are not being predicated of the same thing. A physical description may apply to the entities that constitute a text, whereas a nonphysical one may apply to the meaning of the text. I may ask a student, for example, to hand me a text and then remark that what she

has handed to me is logically incoherent. In this case what I mean is for the student to hand me a physical object and that the views expressed by that object when used as a text are logically incoherent. The same confusion may result from taking semantically nonsignificant features of an object, some of whose features are semantically significant and thus constitutive of the text, as constitutive of the text.

Let me finish, then, by saying that from now on I shall understand texts and signs as entities used to convey meaning and thus distinguishable from those entities considered apart from meaning.[4] The entities that constitute texts and signs considered apart from the meaning that turns them into texts and signs will be referred to as ECTs, short for "entities that constitute texts (or signs)."

B. Signs

I have identified texts with groups of entities used as signs that fulfill various conditions. That texts are composed of signs implies that texts are complex. Indeed, the etymology of the word 'text' suggests that they are always complex and, therefore, composed of more than one thing. 'Text' comes from the Latin *textus*, which means texture, tissue, structure and, in relation to language, construction, combination, and connection. *Textus* comes in turn from the verb *texo*, which means to weave, compose. Finally, the English term is related to such other terms as 'textile' and 'texture,' all of which have the connotation of some sort of composition and complexity.

Because texts are closely related to signs and composed of them, one might be led to believe that texts are fundamentally signs and differ from them only in degree of complexity. Yet, the fact is that texts and signs differ in many ways and therefore we should distinguish between them.[5] Indeed, the failure to distinguish between texts and signs may be the source of adscribing features of the former to the latter, and vice versa, creating confusions about both and leading to various errors. I shall return briefly to this point after I introduce the distinction between texts and signs, although the implications of a failure to observe it will become clear only later in the book, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5.

Several ways to establish the distinction suggest themselves. Based on what has been said, a most obvious way of distinguishing the two is to argue that texts are somehow complex composites, whereas signs are not. Let us call this the *Complex-Composite View*.

The Complex-Composite View is easily assailed, for most signs are not simple. Words, for example, are always complex, being composed of letters, shapes and so on. Indeed, even periods, when they are only dots, have a certain shape and width in addition to other features, without which they would not be considered significant, and thus would have to be considered composites of those features. Of course, one can always conceive a certain color as a sign. Say that red means danger. In cases like this it may be possible to argue that we have simple signs, for a color does not appear to be complex.[6] But the existence of simple signs

is not sufficient to establish a distinction between signs and texts, because most signs are complex. To say that signs, in contrast with texts, can be simple, whereas texts cannot, does not tell us enough about texts and signs, and therefore, it does not sufficiently elucidate textuality.

A second possibility is to argue that the composition essential to texts is a composition of signs and not just any type of composition. Let us call this the *Complex-Composite-of-Signs View*. This position rests on a distinction between two types of composition. One is a composition in which the components are signs; the other is a composition in which the components are entities that are not themselves signs. The sentence 'My cat eats only Fancy Feast cat food,' is composed of signs and thus it is an example of the first type of composition. By contrast, the letter 'M' in the word 'My' is an example of the second type of composition for it is composed of four lines that are not themselves signs. Now, according to this view, texts are not composites just in the second sense, but, more important, also in the first sense; namely, they are always and necessarily composed of signs. This distinguishes them from signs, for signs may be composites only in the second sense. In this way, even though 'M' is a sign standing for the letter M, 'M' is not a text, because it is composed only of elements, namely four lines, which are not signs themselves.

Although this way of distinguishing texts from signs appears at first to be quite sensible, upon closer scrutiny it becomes clear that it will not do. Two reasons may be given for this failure: one from the side of texts, and another from the side of signs. The first, which turns out to be questionable, argues that, although generally texts may be composed of signs, it is possible to have texts that are composed of things that are not signs. This is the case of 'P,' which stands for the order to print in my word processing program. Indeed, when one looks around, one finds many such examples. Therefore, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, so the argument goes, to maintain that texts are always composed of signs.

This reason, taken from the side of texts, may be questioned on the basis of ordinary use, for the ordinary use of 'text' seems to confirm the view that texts are always composed of signs. We speak of signs that are not themselves composed of signs, but we do not call them "texts." The term 'text' is generally reserved for compositions of signs. This may be illustrated by the very example given earlier, 'P,' for computer commands are referred to as "signs" but not as "texts."[7]

The reason from the side of signs, why texts cannot be distinguished from signs merely on the basis that the first are composed of signs and the second are not, is that signs are frequently composed of signs themselves. So is the case of most words in English. The word 'cat,' for example, is composed of three signs, 'c,' 'a,' and 't,' and few would argue that in virtue of that it is a text and not a sign.[8]

Although the first reason given against the Complex-Composite-of-Signs View may be doubted, the second reason is sufficient by itself to undermine the view. One could still try to save it by weakening it, however. Instead of claiming

that signs are never composed of signs, one could argue that what distinguishes texts from signs is that texts are always and necessarily composed of more than one sign, whereas signs may be composed of no more than one sign. Thus, we may have signs such as the letter 'M' that consists in only one sign and whose components are not themselves signs. But there are other signs, such as 'cat,' that are composites of signs. This version of the view may be called the *Modified-Complex-Composite-of-Signs View.*

But even this modified position is not satisfactory. Although it does provide a way of distinguishing some signs from texts and vice versa, it is not helpful in distinguishing others. According to it, such things as 'M' and 'P' are signs and not texts. And we also know that such things as 'My' is a sign, but we cannot determine whether it is also a text and whether there are texts that are not signs. In short, complexity of composition in the sense understood earlier is not sufficient to distinguish texts from signs, even if it appears to be a necessary condition of textuality. We must look, therefore, for another candidate to establish the distinction.

One such candidate that readily suggests itself is complexity of meaning. Is complexity of meaning a necessary or sufficient condition of textuality, and does it also distinguish texts from signs? Can it be argued that texts have complex meanings whereas signs do not, and therefore, that such complexity of meaning distinguishes between the two? This position, which may be called the *Complex-Meaning View,* seems to receive some support, first, from the etymology of the term 'text.' As we saw earlier, the etymology of 'text' seems to imply a certain degree of complexity and composition that could be easily transferred to the meaning. Second, there is some support from experience, for most texts seem to convey complex meanings whereas signs do not; indeed, the complexity of the meanings of texts is generally reflected in turn by their own complexity. This degree of complexity is lacking in signs; signs tend to express simple meanings that are generally accessible and not difficult to grasp. Texts, by contrast, are more intricate complexes whose import is not so clear and that require attention and a certain conceptual sophistication and analysis.

Yet, one can easily find objections to this line of reasoning, first, from the side of signs and, second, from the side of texts. Beginning with an objection from the side of signs, there are cases where relatively simple signs are used to convey complex meanings, and so the question arises as to whether the signs used in this way are texts or not. Consider the case of the word 'fire' uttered in a crowded theater.[9] The reaction of the audience gives us a clue as to the complexity of its meaning. In one situation, for example, those present in the theater try to get out, whereas in other situations they laugh. In both cases a complex meaning seems to have been communicated. The first might be something like this: "There is a fire in the theater and we should all leave because otherwise we might perish." The second would be even more complex than that, for it appeals to the audience's

sense of humor and humor depends on complex understanding. So, what do we make of words like 'fire' when used in situations such as the one described? Are they merely signs or are they also texts?

This question could be answered in two ways. One may wish to argue that when signs with relatively simple meanings are used to express complex meanings, the context in which they are used supplies the complexity missing in the meaning of the sign. The utterance of 'fire' in a crowded theater elicits a certain response from the audience because the context provides the complexity of meaning missing in the utterance. The point, then, is that in some cases signs with relatively simple meanings can function as texts because of the context in which they are used; the context provides the complexity of the meaning which they appear to lack.

The second answer is that often what appear to be signs with relatively simple meanings turn out to be more complex upon analysis. In the case we have been discussing, for example, the way the word 'fire' is uttered has much to do with what it means. If shouted in a certain way, it means a warning, but said in another way it may mean something quite different. Hence, just as an exclamation mark placed next to a written word is part of the text of which the word is also a part, so the intonation of the voice in an oral text is to be considered part of the text, thus providing a complexity that may at first go unnoticed.

Even if the objection from the side of signs fails, other objections from the side of texts can be formulated against the Complex-Meaning View. One may argue that there are texts whose meaning is relatively simple and signs whose meaning is relatively complex. For example, the text 'The cat spilled the milk' seems to have a relatively simple meaning. Indeed, its meaning seems much more simple than the meaning of the sign 'essence.' Can it really be argued, then, that what distinguishes texts and signs is complexity of meaning? Perhaps one could insist, but it is doubtful that the issue can be brought to closure. The reason is that complexity of meaning is too vague a notion to serve to demarcate clearly between texts and signs. A more precise and clearcut criterion is required.

The way I propose to distinguish between texts and signs is by noting that, in texts, meaning is in part the result of the meaning of the signs of which the texts are composed and the arrangement in which they are placed, whereas in signs this is not so, even in cases where the sign is composed of other signs.[10] Thus, the meaning of the text, 'My cat eats only Fancy Feast cat food,' is in part the result of the meanings of 'My,' 'cat,' 'eats,' etc., and of the way in which those signs are put together. By contrast, the meaning of a sign, such as 'cat' is not in any way the result of the meaning of the signs of which it is composed, 'c,' 'a,' and 't,' and their arrangement. The meaning of 'cat' has nothing to do with the meaning of 'c,' whose meaning is the letter c, for example. Of course, the existence of the sign 'cat' depends on the existence and meaning of the letters of which it is composed, namely, 'c,' 'a,' and 't,' but that is not the same

as saying that the meaning of 'cat' results from the meaning of 'c,' 'a,' and 't.'

Prima facie, then, this way of distinguishing signs and texts appears effective, because it allows us to know whether something is a sign or a text and prevent any overlap between the categories. If something is a sign, it cannot be a text and vice versa. I call this view the *Causal View*.

This way of distinguishing signs and texts is not devoid of difficulties, however.[11] For example, it appears that some signs are composed of other signs whose meaning is at least in part the result of the meaning of the signs of which they are composed and of the arrangement of those signs. One such case is 'No smoking,' where its meaning clearly has to do with the meaning of 'No,' 'smoking,' and their arrangement.

This and similar counterexamples, however, do not undermine the view, for they arise from an ambiguity in the use of the term 'sign' in ordinary English discourse. Indeed, this term is used for a variety of things, but I am interested only in the two meanings with which it is used that undermine the Causal View. In one way, call it S^1, 'sign' is used to mean one or more entities, which may or may not be signs themselves, and whose meaning, if the entities are signs, is not the result of the meaning of those signs and their arrangement. This is the sense in which a sign has been understood in the preceding. In another way, call it S^2, 'sign' is used to mean a publicly displayed notice which can be a sign in sense S^1 or can be a text. The 'No smoking' notice posted in the classroom where I teach on Thursdays is a sign in sense S^2, although it is a text and thus not a sign in sense S^1. It is not a sign in sense S^1 because its meaning is in part the result of the meaning of the signs of which it is composed and of the arrangement of those signs. Thus it turns out that the examples given do not count as counterexamples to the Causal View.

Still, some problematic cases remain that may challenge the suggested way of distinguishing between texts and signs. Consider, for example, the earlier mentioned case of 'fire' shouted in a crowded theater or written with an exclamation mark next to it. Could it not be argued that the meaning of the shouted word, or of the written word, is not the result of the meaning of the signs of which they are composed and thus that they are not texts? After all, the meaning of 'Fire!' has nothing to do with the meaning of 'f,' 'i,' 'r,' 'e,' and '!.' What has been written is a word composed of four letters next to an exclamation mark and the meaning of the word is not the result of the meanings of the letters and exclamation mark of which the word is composed. And if this is so, the Causal View is undermined, for 'Fire!' appears to be a text and yet it cannot be distinguished from a sign.

This reading of the example, however, is not the only one possible. Another reading is possible that makes room for the textuality of 'Fire!' without undermining its distinction from a sign. 'Fire!' is composed of two signs, 'Fire' and '!,' and the meaning of 'Fire!' is in fact the result of the meanings of 'Fire' and '!.' 'Fire,' of course, is not a text, even though it is composed of signs, because its meaning is not the result of the meaning of the signs of which it is composed. But 'Fire!'

is a text, for its meaning is the result, at least in part, of the two signs of which it is composed and of their arrangement.

A final problematic example needs to be considered. It is the case of words composed of other words, such as 'mailman,' whose meanings appear to be the result of the meanings of the signs which compose them. The meaning of 'mailman' appears to be the result of the meaning of 'mail' and 'man,' just as the meaning of 'Fire!' appears to be traceable to the meaning of 'Fire' and '!.' Thus, it would seem that words composed of other words meet the criterion of both texts and signs.

Upon reflection, however, the difficulty with this kind of word disappears, for it becomes clear that their meanings are not in part the result, as is the case of texts, of the meanings of the words that compose them. The reason is that the words which compose them do not function semantically and thus cannot be considered to be signs. It may be true that originally, when the word 'mailman,' say, developed, it was a shorthand version of 'the man who delivers the mail' and thus that perhaps at that point its components, 'mail' and 'man,' may have been put together into the sign 'mailman' precisely because they had meanings which added up to the meaning of 'mailman.' But once the two words were put together into the word 'mailman,' the word became a sign whose meaning is "mailman" but whose parts have no independent meanings in the sign which contribute to the meaning of 'mailman.' Such signs as 'mailman' function as simple signs with meanings which are independent of the meanings of the signs that compose them.

Three points support this conclusion. First, often those who use signs such as these have no knowledge of the meanings of the signs that compose them. Second, with time many of these signs change so that the signs which originally composed them become so different that only experts can tell they were once signs with meanings related to the meanings of the signs they compose. Third, the signs that compose such composite signs are not chosen by authors and arranged by them to convey the meanings of the composite signs to audiences in certain contexts.[12] These three points indicate that the meanings of signs such as 'mailman' are not the result, even in part, of the meanings of the signs that compose them and, therefore, that they are signs and not texts.

The Causal View allows us, then, to distinguish between texts and signs. Of course, there may still be other contestable cases, but those would have to be examined and argued on a case by case basis as has been done with the case of 'Fire!.' I should also add that the position presented here concerning the distinction between texts and signs is not essential to many of the views I defend in the rest of this book. For many of them, it is quite immaterial, first, whether the meanings of texts are in part traceable to the meanings of the signs of which they are composed and to the arrangement of those signs, and second, how texts differ from signs. Nevertheless, the position described has several important implications for some of my views, as will become evident later. For the present

let me indicate just a couple of these implications.

First among these is that the identity conditions of signs and texts are different. The meaning of a sign is not the result of the meanings of the entities of which the sign is constituted. But the meaning of texts is in part the result of the meanings of the signs of which they are composed. This changes things considerably. Whereas the meaning of signs depends directly on the use made of the entities that constitute the sign considered as one, the meaning of texts depends in part on the established meanings of the signs of which they are composed and the arrangement of those signs. This has important implications for the understanding and interpretation of texts, as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5. It entails, among other things, that a text imposes certain limitations on both its author and its audience with respect to understanding and interpretation that are lacking in the case of signs. A text takes for granted much that is not taken for granted by a sign, thus limiting the interpretative freedom of authors and audiences.

Also important is that the context of signs is generally a text, for signs are most often used as signs within texts.[13] There are cases, of course, in which texts are not the context of signs. As mentioned earlier, 'P,' which is used as the command to print in my word processing system, can be used by itself and not as part of a text. And the same can be said about pointing, when this act is not accompanied by any other sign or text. In these cases, the sign's context is not a text. But most often in our experience the contexts of signs are texts, whereas the situation is different in the case of texts. For many texts, their contexts are not texts. Indeed, the context of texts can vary enormously, thus influencing the understanding of texts in ways in which the understanding of signs is seldom, if ever, influenced, for in most cases such contexts influence signs only through the texts that they compose.

Finally, the discussion of the distinction between texts and signs has allowed me to explore the ambiguity in the use of 'sign' in ordinary English discourse mentioned earlier and to make clear the sense I shall give the term in this book. It is important to keep in mind that when I speak of signs I do not have in mind the sense of public notices discussed earlier, that is not S^2, but rather S^1. Likewise, when I speak of texts, I have in mind groups of signs whose meanings are in part the result of the meanings of the signs that compose the group and their arrangement. Note, of course, that the meaning of a text depends on other factors as well, which I shall discuss later, and that there are other conditions of textuality as indicated in the definition given at the beginning of this chapter.

I should also mention that, as we shall see later at greater length and as should be already obvious from what has been said so far, by 'sign' I do not mean only letters or words belonging to certain alphabets and languages. Anything that is both part of a text and has meaning or contributes to the establishment of the meaning of the text is a sign. Punctuation, emphases, spaces (or silences), headings, underlinings, and so on may be considered signs.

Finally, let me indicate that the fact that texts are composed of signs does not preclude texts from being composed of other texts. Indeed, a long text, such as a novel, may be composed of shorter texts, such as chapters, paragraphs, sentences, and so on.[14] But that does not undermine the fact that it is itself composed of signs, for each of the texts of which it is composed is itself composed of signs.

C. Specific Meaning

Another element in the definition of a text given earlier is specific meaning. I shall, however, begin by discussing meaning before I turn to its specificity.

From the definition of a text I gave earlier and what has been said concerning ECTs, it follows that, although having some meaning is a necessary condition of textuality, texts are not to be identified with the meanings they are intended to convey.[15] The nature of meaning has received substantial attention in contemporary philosophy. To consider it in any satisfactory manner would require the kind of analysis that would take us far from the subject matter of the present investigation. Fortunately, we do not need to dwell on the intricacies of contemporary semantic theory to establish the distinction between a text and its meaning. (I shall have something more to say about meaning in Chapter 4.) For present purposes, the discussion that follows should suffice. Let me begin with some examples.

Written texts are some of the most, if not the most, obvious cases of texts with which we are acquainted, and so they should serve us well as examples. The sentences written on this page or displayed on the screen of my word processor, this chapter of the book, and the book itself, are all examples of written texts. Consider the following:

1. $2 + 2 = 4$
2. $2 + 2 = 4$
3.   Two and two make four.
4.   Two plus two equals four.
5.   Dos y dos son cuatro.

Examples 1–5 should help us see the distinction between texts and their meaning, for in them we have five texts and only one meaning. Texts 1 and 2 are the same, but all the rest are quite different. Here, 1 and 2 are rendered in the language of mathematics; 3 and 4 are in English; and 5 is in Spanish. But, as noted, they all mean the same thing.[16] The distinction between a text and its meaning, then, can be supported by the fact that different texts can have the same meaning. Consider written text 1. This written text is constituted by the semantically significant marks which are actually made on the paper; the text is the actual picture given there, composed of ink marks drawn and arranged in a certain way to convey some specific meaning. But the meaning of that text is something that is neither material nor composed of marks made by ink on that particular page. Indeed, the meaning of texts 1–5 is the same. Thus, sameness of meaning cannot

be a sufficient condition of being the same text; if it were so, 1–5 would be the same text, which is not the case.

So far I have been arguing that texts are not to be identified with their meanings. But that does not entail the opposite, namely, that texts are to be conceived as completely independent of their meanings and, thus, that they should be identified with their ECTs. If that were the case, then there would be no difference between a mere object, even when that object is the product of human activity and design, and a text. Yet, the distinction between the two is not difficult to illustrate extensionally. A tool, for example, which is the product of human activity and design, is not a text, because it is not produced and intended by an author to convey some specific meaning to an audience. A hammer is an object intended to be used to build other objects, but it is not intended to convey meaning. Like a hammer, a text is the product of human activity and intention, but it has a semantic function that a hammer, qua hammer, does not have. Texts are products of human action made for specific ends, but not all products of human action made for specific ends are texts. It is a mistake, therefore, to consider texts as being in any way independent of the meanings they are intended to convey.

A text is a group of entities used to convey meaning, but precisely because of that, a text is not to be identified either with the entities that constitute it apart from the meaning, what I call *ECTs*, or with the meaning alone to the exclusion of those entities.

Some philosophers like to identify the meaning of a text with its reference.[17] This referential view of meaning appears to work well when one is dealing with signs such as proper names, for it does indeed make sense to say that the meaning of 'Socrates' is Socrates. And something similar could be said about definite descriptions, such as 'the teacher of Plato,' whose meaning is supposedly Socrates.[18] It is more difficult to maintain that the meanings of abstract nouns such as 'goodness,' constitute the reference of those nouns, because it is not at all clear that abstract nouns have any reference. Of course, there have been philosophers who have argued that they have.[19] But such a view is very controversial and plagued with difficulties. And the same could be said concerning the reference of texts in which all terms are universal, such as 'Water boils at 100° C.'[20]

Moreover, it is also not evident that the meanings of texts, particularly long and complex texts, can be accounted for in terms of reference, for what would be the reference of the text of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*? The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire? The Roman Empire? A particular set of events through which the Roman Empire passed? Gibbon's view of the history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire? Obviously, the answer is not clear. And the case of the texts of fictional works, such as Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, pose special problems, because the characters dealt with in these texts never existed. None of these difficulties, however, have deterred

proponents of this view from defending it, for they have found ways to get around these problems, although not to the satisfaction of their critics.

Finally, there are cases where two different signs or texts have the same reference but different meaning. Consider the expressions 'animal capable of reasoning' and 'featherless biped.' Assuming that everyone who is an animal capable of reasoning is also a featherless biped, and vice versa, the reference of these expressions is the same, but still their meanings are quite different. Thus it makes no sense to say that meaning is always the same as reference.[21]

To avoid the problems faced by the referential view, some philosophers propose an ideational theory of textual meaning that understands meaning as the idea or ideas a text expresses.[22] Thus the meaning of 1 earlier is the idea that two plus two equals four. But again there are difficulties with this theory. Some of these difficulties are related to the view (held by some supporters of this position) that ideas are independent of the mind, whereas others have to do with the experience that the use of texts is seldom, if ever, preceded by a clear set of ideas in the mind of the author or user. These difficulties concern the status of ideas. For, on the one hand, if ideas are independent of the mind, as Plato thought they were, their ontological status creates all sorts of problems and the view amounts to a referential position of sorts that applies only to abstract nouns. And, on the other hand, if ideas are not independent of the mind, it would seem to be necessary for them to exist in the mind clearly and distinctly prior to the existence of the texts of which they are the meanings.[23] But this does not in fact seem to be the case; authors and users of texts do not always have in their minds clear and distinct ideas before they compose or use the texts of which such ideas are supposed to be the meaning. So, where do ideas exist?

Another difficulty of the ideational view has to do with the fact that it makes no sense that the meaning of 'cat,' for example, be 'the idea of cat,' for the idea of cat is something quite unlike a cat. If I am asked to define 'cat' I will say something like "feline with fur, etc." But if I am asked to define 'idea of cat' I might say something like "mental notion about a feline with fur and so on."[24] The meaning of 'cat' cannot, therefore, be the idea of cat; it has to be cat, because the idea of cat is the meaning of 'the idea of cat.'

Finally, there is also the question of such texts as biographies, that deal with individual persons. The application of the ideational view of meaning to them would seem to imply that when we understand texts that describe individuals what we understand are ideas about the individuals rather than the individuals themselves and that does not seem appropriate. As in the case of the referential theory, supporters of this position have suggested various ways of getting around this and the other difficulties mentioned, but their critics remain unconvinced.[25]

These and other difficulties with both referential and ideational theories of meaning lead some philosophers to speak of meaning as "use." In this sense, meaning is conceived as the role that a text plays within a cultural context. This

approach, which may be characterized as "functional," can be best illustrated by reference to the notion of an illocutionary act.[26] What an illocutionary act is may be gathered from an example. When I say to Peter, "Peter, open the door," I utter a sentence. The act of *uttering* the sentence is called locutionary. Apart from my act of uttering the sentence, the act may produce certain effects, such as *getting Peter to open the door*, which is also an act I perform. This is called the *perlocutionary act*. Finally, I also perform another act; namely, that of *ordering* Peter to open the door. This last act is called *illocutionary*. Note that not all illocutionary acts are acts of ordering, of course. Illocutionary acts vary a great deal and comprise such acts as stating, questioning, apologizing, and so on.

For our purposes, what is important to note is that textual meaning may be expressed in terms of the notion of an illocutionary act as follows: The meaning of X is that in virtue of which one who performs a locutionary act also performs a certain illocutionary act.[27] This understanding of meaning concerns primarily oral texts, but for our purposes it could be expanded to any type of text, including written ones. In that case, the locutionary act would not consist in the act of uttering but in the acts of writing, printing, and so on.[28]

In spite of various advantages, the functional theory of meaning also faces difficulties. Indeed, as is the case with the referential theory, it seems to work best for short and somewhat simple texts. It would be difficult to think of the illocutionary act or acts that take place upon the locution of the text of, say, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. But again, it is also clear that in some cases this theory seems to be the one that works best, as with performatives such as 'I apologize.'[29]

For our purposes it is particularly important that none of the three views of meaning presented implies that the meaning of a text is to be identified with the text. In the case of the referential theory, the meaning is in fact the things or states of affairs that we understand when we are said to understand the text; in the ideational view, it is the ideas expressed by the text; and in the functional view it is that in virtue of which locutionary acts bring about certain illocutionary acts. Thus, for the purpose of distinguishing between a text and its meaning all three theories are equally effective.

All the same, it may be pertinent to ask whether we need or are going to adopt one of these theories of meaning to the exclusion of the others. As noted earlier, what I propose at this point is to adopt a theory of the meaning of texts concordant with all three theories just discussed, but that avoids the difficulties each of them faces. Three points need to be made clear. The first is that this theory is not presented as a theory of meaning as such, but only as a theory of *textual* meaning; it is therefore not intended to cover all cases of meaning. Second, this view is not to be taken as an alternative to the views discussed, but as a working formulation that will help us proceed without having to choose and defend one of the theories of meaning discussed previously to the exclusion of the others. If this investigation were concerned with meaning primarily, such a procedure would be

inadequate. But our object of inquiry is not meaning but texts, and this allows us to leave open the question of what meaning is ultimately, provided our working hypothesis about meaning covers the most obvious cases and is neutral enough not to raise serious objections from the three views of meaning mentioned.

The view I propose to adopt holds that the meaning of a text is what is understood when a text produces understanding. This does not entail, as already noted, that all that texts produce or are intended to produce is understanding. As we shall see later, the texts of works that are artistic, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, produce and are intended to produce in audiences much more than understanding. The view I present here entails only that for something to be a text it must be able to produce, or be intended to produce, understanding, not that this is all it produces.[30] Nor does this view entail that only texts produce understanding; all sorts of other things may also produce understanding, but that is of no concern to us here.

Note, moreover, that the three theories of meaning mentioned earlier could be accommodated by this view. Indeed, one may hold the meaning of a text to be both what is understood when a text produces understanding and also that to which the text refers, and, moreover, that a text is understood precisely because its meaning is that to which the text refers. The meaning of 'Socrates is a philosopher,' namely, the philosopher Socrates, is both what is understood when the text is said to be understood and also Socrates, the philosopher. Likewise, one may hold the meaning of a text to be what is understood when a text produces understanding and also that the meaning of the text consists of ideas; indeed, one may hold that "the idea the whole is greater than the parts," is what we understand when we are said to understand that the whole is greater than the parts. Finally, one may hold that the meaning of a text is both what is understood when a text produces understanding and also that in virtue of which it produces an illocutionary act, because for a text to have meaning is in fact to be able to produce an illocutionary act. Hence, the meaning of 'Paul, open the door' is what Paul and the utterer of the sentence understand when they understand that Paul is to open the door and thus what makes the illocutionary act of ordering Paul to open the door effective.

Meaning, conceived in the way I have proposed here, should be distinguished from significance.[31] The verbs 'to mean' and 'to signify' are frequently interchanged in ordinary language, so that what X means is also what X signifies. But when one speaks about "the significance of X," a broader concept is usually at play. Significance involves relevance, importance, and consequence. The significance of a text has to do with the relevance, importance, and consequences of it, and this relevance, importance, and consequences, although in part affected by and resulting from its meaning, may be related to factors other than the meaning of the text. For example, a text may be significant because it was available at a particularly propitious juncture in history which made possible for it to play a key role in subsequent events. Significance, then, is a relational notion that involves

a text and its meaning on one side and other events, texts, phenomena, and so on, on the other. Of course, as will become clear shortly, the meaning of texts also depends on their context and thus may be considered relational. But the elements in the relation in question are different, for in the case of significance the text's meaning is one of the relata that determine the significance of a text. Significance, moreover, is a broader and less determinate notion, whereas meaning, as conceived here, is a more restricted notion, referring only to what is understood when one is said to have understood a text.

Note, again, that I do not need, nor wish, to hold that the only function of texts is to produce understanding, nor that their only meaning is what is understood when they produce understanding. Texts may, and often do, do other things than produce understanding, as is clear from the example just given concerning the illocutionary act of ordering. And a text may have more than textual meaning. For something to be a text, however and this is my point, it must be able to produce, or be intended to produce, understanding.[32] My thesis may be formulated in two parts: (1) the meaning of a text pertains to the understanding, and (2) a text is always intended to convey some meaning in addition to whatever else it may be intended to do. Admittedly, both of these parts of the thesis may be challenged, but they are not without support. Indeed, if what we are talking about are philosophical texts, I imagine a good number of philosophers would agree their meaning is cognitive and their purpose is to make someone understand such meaning.

The case with nonphilosophical texts, however, does not seem as straight-forward. Many of the nonphilosophical texts we encounter do not seem to produce, or be intended to produce, understanding, but rather to direct action or elicit some kind of emotion. One could say, indeed, that at least part of the purpose of so-called poetic texts is to create a mood or produce an emotion in the audience. Moreover, commands and the like are meant either to prevent or produce an action. In either case texts function as causes of certain events (emotions, actions, inactions) that are not causes of understanding.[33]

Still another case should be considered, namely; the case of texts used simply to vent emotion or give pleasure to those who use them. The logical positivist view developed earlier in this century was indeed that many ethical texts have no meaning if by meaning something cognitive is understood.[34] Texts such as 'Killing is wrong' do not mean anything; they simply vent the emotion of those who produce them and who, in this case, "disapprove" of the action of killing. This view was later extended to religious language, so that statements such as 'God is good' were considered to express nothing more than certain emotions or attitudes on the part of those who use them. More recently it has become fashionable among some postmodernists to argue that texts have nothing to do with the understanding of cognitive material, but have as their primary function the experience of, say, pleasure or release in those who produce them. Along these lines we find authors arguing that texts neither need nor are intended for audiences.[35]

I do not wish to dispute that the purpose of texts is manifold and that in many cases their primary function is to cause or prevent actions or emotions in someone other than the authors or users or to vent the feelings of and give pleasure to their authors or users rather than to produce understanding.[36] The primary purpose of the 'No smoking' text posted above the blackboard in the classroom where I teach on Thursdays is not to inform me that smoking is not permitted in the room, but to prevent anyone in the room from smoking. Likewise, in the case of performative texts, such as 'I apologize,' the primary function of the text is not to produce understanding but to perform a certain act—in the example given, the act of apologizing. The same could be said about certain poetic texts, whose reading produces the sort of aesthetic experience that goes well beyond understanding. Indeed, I am even willing to accept that the production of some texts may be intended primarily, or even solely, for the experience of an emotional release in their authors. This is not as frequent as the other phenomena, but there are cases of writers, particularly poets, who feel an internal compulsion to write and others who use their writing to reconcile themselves to adverse circumstances. A lover who lost her beloved might cope with the situation by writing a poem, for example.

All this seems quite sensible. However, I do not think it is correct to argue that texts can have purposes other than understanding, and achieve the results established by those purposes, without in fact producing understanding, for in order for texts to cause or prevent action and emotions, for example, it is necessary that they first be understood to some degree.[37] Those who argue against the view that texts are intended to produce understanding frequently confuse the primary purpose of the author with the meaning of the text. Because they see that the primary purpose of an author is to produce certain actions or emotions, they conclude that the text through which the author tries to do so conveys no cognitive meaning.[38] Thus, they argue, 'No smoking' and 'I apologize' convey no cognitive meaning because the function of the first as determined by the author is to prevent an action and of the second to carry out an action. This confusion is emphasized, unfortunately, by the fact that the term 'meaning' in English is frequently interchanged with 'intention' and its synonyms, so that "to mean something" is "to intend something."[39] Under these circumstances, it is easy to see that if the meaning of a text, in the sense of what it is "intended to do," is to cause, prevent, or carry out an action, for example, its meaning cannot be what is understood. But that is because 'meaning' is used *only* in the sense of purpose. However, if meaning is understood both as purpose and as what is understood, then there is no difficulty for a text to be meant to carry out an action in the sense of having that purpose and at the same time for its meaning to be an object of understanding. (More on intention, meaning, and understanding in Chapter 4.)

If one looks at the examples provided, it becomes clear that, for those texts to cause, prevent, or carry out actions, they must be understood. Thus the convey-

ance of meaning is a necessary condition of fulfilling their intended primary function. Take 'I apologize.' The utterance of this text is effective only when the audience for which it is intended understands it. I can go red in the face repeating my apologies in Spanish to an audience that knows no Spanish, and will not achieve my goal.[40] The same applies to texts whose primary function is to direct or prevent action and to cause or vent emotions. In all cases, some meaning is expressed and understood that, in turn, triggers the intended effect. Even when someone is clearly using language to vent emotion, we frequently say that we "understand" them, which means both that we think we have grasped correctly what the person has said and are aware of the emotion being vented. (We may also mean that we see the reasons why the person is doing what he or she is doing or even that we agree or sympathize with her.) The primary aim of authors when they produce texts, then, does not have to be to produce understanding, but producing understanding is a prerequisite of effectively fulfilling any other aim that is to be carried out through the use of texts.

The fact that the meaning of a text pertains to the understanding is particularly evident in the case of long and complicated texts. Whereas some short texts may appear to be primarily performative in nature or meant to vent emotion rather than convey cognitive meaning, in cases of long and complex texts such functions become less obvious. Even in the case of poems, which are often cited as the epitome of texts whose function is other than to produce understanding, it is difficult, when they are long, to deny that they have a cognitive meaning. But even with short texts, we can always ask whether they have been understood. For example, when I say, "Open the door," it is clear that the primary and intended function of this text is to order someone to open the door and, thus, to perform that particular illocutionary act of ordering someone to open the door so that the door be opened. But once I have performed the illocutionary act, I can always ask of the person to whom I gave the order whether she has understood me, say if she did not act quickly to open the door or did not act at all. This implies that, although the primary and intended function of my utterance may be the performance of the illocutionary act of ordering, or even the perlocutionary act of having the door opened, the production of understanding is also involved; indeed, it is a requirement of the illocutionary act effectively causing the action it is intended to cause. For in order for the perlocutionary act to take place as a result of the locutionary and illocutionary acts, the person who responds to the illocutionary act has to be aware of the locutionary act, of the illocutionary force of that act, or put differently, of the illocutionary act, grasping the meaning of the text. An act of understanding, then, mediates between the locutionary act and an effective perlocutionary act. The cause of the effective perlocutionary act is the locutionary act through the act of understanding the locutionary act's meaning on the part of the audience. I cannot get Peter to open the door unless he hears and understands me.

What has been said underlines the point made earlier about the distinction

between a text and its meaning, but it does not explain exactly how meaning is related to texts. For the moment I need only to say that the confusion of a text with its meaning has serious philosophical implications. Indeed, the identification of a text with its meaning has led some postmodernists to the extraordinary conclusion that there are no texts, only meanings.[41] This conclusion in turn leads to a kind of subjective relativism in which meanings are not anchored on any objective grounds, giving free reign to interpretative license. These excesses are prevented, however, if texts are not confused with meanings.

Second, I would like to note explicitly a consequence of the way I conceive understanding, namely, that what we understand when we are said to understand a text is not, strictly speaking, the ECTs that constitute the text, but their collective meaning. The understanding of a text is the mental act whereby we grasp the meaning of a text. What we understand when we understand a text, then, is the meaning of the text; that is, the meaning conveyed by the group of signs arranged in a certain way and so on. This becomes obvious when we consider the text constituted by the marks written on this page. What the reader qua reader understands when she is said to understand the text constituted by those marks is the meaning of the marks. If what one understood were the marks themselves, one would understand that the marks are marks, they have a certain shape, they are physical, composed of a certain type of ink, and so on. But that is not what is meant by "understanding a text." True, those marks have a causal relation to the understanding insofar as, without seeing the marks and understanding what they are and their relation to a certain meaning, there would be no act of understanding *their* meaning. But it is the meaning of the marks that is ultimately at stake. In Aristotelian jargon one would say that the meaning is the formal cause of understanding a text whereas the marks, that is, the ECTs, are the material cause. Whether we adopt Aristotle's terminology or not is irrelevant for my purpose. What I wish to make clear is that a consequence of my view of meaning is that meaning is what is understood when one is said to understand a text; meaning plays the same role as the object known in the process of knowledge.

We have established that texts have meanings, that the meaning of a text is not to be identified with the text, and that the meaning of a text is what is understood when the text is understood. But in the definition of texts presented above, the expression used was "specific meaning," so we must ask what specific meaning is. To say that a meaning is specific and not general indicates that there are limits to it. But those limits are not established by the author in all cases. I shall leave the discussion of how they are established and questions related to the exact meaning and understanding of texts and their relations to authors and audiences for Chapter 4. I shall, however, say something about intention here to prevent misunderstandings at a later stage of the argument.