

Textual Intentionality in Art and Literature

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Abstract: Intentionality, the speculation projected by consciousness toward an object, is the starting point of any activity directed at meaning. It includes the intentionality of the sender of a text and that of the receiver, as well as the seemingly subject-less “textual intentionality” between the two. The sender’s intentionality comprises the intentions of both the artist and, more importantly, the demonstrator. Demonstration involves placing the text into a cultural category, which exercises a decisive influence on the interpretation of the receiver. In the reception of an artistic or literary text, the textual intention is a crucial link in determining the “artifacthood” and intrinsic quality of the text. In every artistic and literary text are left a large number of intentional traces that call for interpretive intentionality. The more “meaning indeterminants” are present in the text, the greater is the demand on the interpretation and thus the higher is the interpretative tension.

Keywords: intentionality, demonstration, text, textual intentionality

论文本意向性

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摘要: 意向是意义活动的出发点，它是意识面向对象发出的获义观照。意向不仅是文本发出者的意向性、文本解释者的意向性，还有处于这二者之间的文本具有的特殊的“文本意向性”。文本所体现的意向，既是艺术家的意向留下的注重痕迹，更包括展示确立的文本的文化范畴，这对于意义解释有决定性影响。在符号

文本的接受和解释中，文本体现的诸种意向性，是关键环节。文本需要靠它才能面对接收者确立艺术性。尤其当文本中有大量的意义不定点时，文本意向性对解释施加压力，形成文本的解释张力，此时的解释行为对文本的意义就有决定性作用。

关键词：意向性，展示，文本，文本意向性

DOI:10.13760/b.cnki.sam.202001001

I . Intentionality in Art and Literature

Meaning lies where consciousness meets the material world. This correlation is maintained by the intentionality projected by consciousness, which is the starting point and initiator of meaning-directed activity. No discussion of meaning can ever draw a veil over the compound nature of intentionality, which includes the intentions of both the sender and receiver. Furthermore, we have to focus on a third, and more complicated, intentionality that lies between them: the so-called textual intentionality. The text itself has neither consciousness nor intention, yet has within itself scores of intentional traces left by its sender that become objects of the receiver's intention. The conflict between the intentionality of the sender and the receiver toward those traces plays a vital role in generating the meaning of art and literature.

In terms of consciousness, the world can be divided into at least two parts: things (including substances, events and others' intentions) and their texts, represented by any medium. Of the aforementioned three types of intentionality, only the sender can deal with things directly. The receiver merely faces the texts of art and literature, which by no means present things directly but rather in an inevitably mediated form and made up of symbols. This paper does not circumvent the discussion of the intentionality in artistic and literary texts; on the contrary, in studying this field, it deals with the daunting question of "textual intentionality".

However, before proceeding with that discussion, this paper re-evaluates the role of the demonstrator's intention, which constitutes a great deal of the sender's intentionality and yet is somehow easily neglected. How does a receiver come to know that what he or she is facing belongs to a artistic or

literary text? The receiver can only be well prepared for the corresponding interpretive intentionality when the demonstration of the text displays its distinctive intentionality. Compared with that of the demonstrator, the creator's intentionality takes the inferior place.

For nearly half a century, the heated debate on how to define art and literature has focused on the status of intentionality, as one point of contention. "The dispute over Kafka's intentions" is one example that has revealed the difficulties of solving this puzzle. As Levinson, the renowned arts scholar, pointed out, "artifactualhood", aside from being embodied in texts of artistic symbols, is even more to be found in the link between texts and cultural histories. Such a link places intentionality within the works, making them into art. This is what Levinson meant by his proposal for "defining art historically": some texts are considered artworks for they are the outcome of "the making of something which is intended for regard or treatment as previous art works have been regarded or treated" (Oppy, 1992, p. 154). Here the word intended refers precisely to the textual intentionality, while which follows "as" places the text into a category. The genre of artistic and literary texts requires a receiver to establish itself as art.

Another scholar, Kolak, gave a seemingly straightforward counterexample in "Art and Intentionality": in his will, Kafka asked his friend Brod to burn his manuscripts of the novels *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloss*, thus exhibiting both a denial of artistic intentionality for these texts and an attempt to avoid the link between these works and "previous artworks". In spite of this, these works still turned out to be monuments in the history of literature. Levinson, seemingly, had good reason to refute this. What he meant was that regardless of what he thought before dying, the artistic intentionality was *in* Kafka's works—before, during, and even after writing them—and could never be erased even by his own final will. Levinson, who objected to intentionality, further contested that while Kafka undoubtedly had contradictory intentions for his novels, which intention weighed the most was still to be decided; what was certain was that his novels were truly artistic texts, and this was unaffected by anyone's intention. Consequently, the "artifactualhood" accords with the quality of the text, with no regard paid to the sender's intentions.

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It seems that the intentionality of art and literature is much more complicated than generally thought. The author's own intention is not equal to that of their texts. Initially, Kolak and Levinson disputed the intentions of Kafka himself, but in time their discussion switched to whether demonstrators or publishers can offset the author's intention with their own. If, instead of Kafka's novels, what is discussed here is the "piggy Picasso" in South Africa that recently gained widespread attention, then it would be much better understood. The "art circle" seemed to treat the works of that pig as artworks for they were sold at a 100 000 yuan each, in a case similar to that of the famous deceased orangutan artist "Congo", whose paintings were reportedly sold for 10 000 yuan (Sina, 2016).

Biologists have not yet decided whether animals have intentions to create art, but the intention of demonstrators, such as galleries and auction houses, could not be more explicit; demonstration injects the artistic intention into texts, forcing us to interpret the pig's works as if guided by the intention of "fine arts". Therefore, when facing a symbolic text, the interpreter, to a great extent, is confronting the competition and coordination of the intentions of more than one subject. In the case of Kafka, apparently, the intention of his executor Brod mattered a lot more than his own.

The concept of "art" relates somehow to artificiality in Chinese and Western languages. In Western languages, the word "art" is defined as "human skill or workmanship as opposed to nature". The Chinese character "藝" initially meant "to plant", with the "木" in the top left standing for plants, and the right part meaning to cultivate by hand: the character "術" is explained in *Shuowen Jiezi*, a Chinese wordbook analysing the form and origin of Chinese characters, as "the path in a city", or perhaps the "way" or "approach". Evidently, this concept has derived from manual skills in both Chinese and Western languages, which brings to notice the question of intentionality. In Western languages, the word "art" has retained the clear connotation of "artificial" by sharing the same word root; in Chinese, by contrast, the artificiality of art needs to be highlighted.

Artworks, as artifacts, are supposed to possess artistic intentions. The scribbles of apes or elephants, even those that are very similar to works

created by true artists, are disclaimed by many on the grounds that animals could never have the intention to create an artwork. Nonetheless, these symbolic texts are equipped with artistic intentions by being put to be displayed as artworks. Once demonstrated (such as in an auction house), they immediately gain enough cultural co-textual pressure; the force to consider them as artworks incorporates them into the artistic category. According to the already quoted definition of Levinson, they are “intended for regard or treatment as previous art works have been regarded or treated”, leaving interpreters no choice but to interpret them with the expectations for real works of art.

An unavoidable question is whether artworks can be made by nature. It is true that natural things or events have often been seen as arts, but despite the longstanding practice of describing these objects as “miraculous masterworks of nature”, there can be no artistic intention assigned to geological processes or biological evolution without a firm belief in deities. The only way that completely natural things can really be turned into artworks is through the artistic demonstration; tree roots, strange-looking stones, or human bodies are not art, but they can become art if they are injected intentionality by demonstrators. This is not to mention mountains or rivers, which can be placed within a demonstrative frame, or displayed in a “sight-viewing way”. Demonstration, the pivotal link in generating intentionality, may sometimes be hidden or ignored, but must always exist. Demonstrated things are no longer purely natural things, for the artistic intention has been added.

A mediated text should undoubtedly become an artwork if the boundaries between intentional meaning, textual meaning, and interpretive meaning are clear enough. In human societies, it is the artistic demonstration (rather than the work’s creation) that renders the text with its final intentionality, because it somehow activates the cultural mechanism and places the text within the relational network of art.

The artistic demonstration is an intention with a strong tendency for sociability: caves of primitive murals, medieval churches, editors’ compilations, and contemporary galleries and art festivals are all significant mechanisms to construct literary and artistic intentionality. Music performers and singers, for

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instance, realise the essence of music by adding a “hyper-intentionality” to the intentions of lyricists and musicians. This all shows that the demonstration intention, as a “second-order intentionality”, outweighs the original intention, which is very likely to not exist at all (such as the case of animal “painters”), be no longer discoverable (such as the *Homeric Hymns*), or be shadowed by demonstration such that its importance has faded (such as Kafka’s final will).

Readers often do not recognise that the text they are facing is subject to a social and cultural intentionality that forces them to examine the text as an artwork. A poem, for example, will not be read as a poem if not written in separate lines or rhymes, or with no title or subtitle establishing it as a poem. Neither will readers seriously interpret the images in such a “non-poem”. Some, perhaps those who are sentimental enough, might consider that a text somehow has some “deeper meaning”. However, if they read the text as a poem, they may find deep meaning even where there is in fact nothing. Hence, the artistic intentionality of artists cannot ensure the generation of artworks. Only demonstration can precisely determine a symbolic text as being a literary or art work. Facing such a demonstration, supported by the whole mechanism, receivers have no opportunity to conduct a pure speculation free of cultural convention. In Althusser’s terms, the viewers are “interpolated” by the cultural mechanism into the place of artistic interpreters. Such an “interpolating” force works because our interpretation has been “formatted” by culture.

Artistic demonstration, by forcing interpretation to accord with artistic intentionality, combines texts with the art mechanism in the culture to “locate” them. As the Chinese aesthetician Zhu Qingsheng’s (2000) daring title has it, “No one is an artist, and no one is not an artist”. Perhaps it would be better phrased from the perspective of demonstration intentionality as, “No text is definitely an artistic text, and no text is definitely not an artistic text”. Alternatively, perhaps we are to see artworks as waiting to be set free from their rigid physicality, in which form vases or sculptures are just sealed up and keeping interpreters away; after all, only in the arts can the irreconcilable antagonism between subjectivity and objectivity be set aside. In sum, the sender’s intention will by no means determine whether a symbolic text

belongs to art or literature; what plays the decisive role is rather the intention to demonstrate that text as artistic or literary.

II . Textual Intentionality

The academic history of intentionality has seen the vital concept gradually evolve, from its beginning as some kind of psychological activity, to becoming a presentation of pure consciousness, to a mode in which the world of meaning is formed, and eventually to an interpretive way of constructing cultural communities.

The concept of intentionality was first proposed by the German philosopher Brentano in the 19th century as an object-oriented psychological activity (Brentano, 1974, p. 88). His student Husserl, who saw intentionality as the cornerstone of phenomenology, accepted Brentano's opinion that an intention is directive, but refuted its psychological structure. Once clarified by Husserl, intentionality can be simply put as a *meaning* intentionality, shown by an abstract connotation structure of consciousness.

As for the aforementioned "textual intentionality", how can a text—a non-subject—have intentions? One easily concluded explanation is that from the text the creative subject's intention can be recognised. As a matter of fact, however, textual intentionality is beyond the control of any individual subject, meaning that it not only belongs to an artist—a single writer or painter, perhaps—but, more importantly, is inherent in the social category added to the text by the demonstrator, therefore being a product of social and historical subjectivity. The combination of assorted elements serves to verify that texts become the intentionality of cultural history.

Except for performances where some of the creators directly face the receivers, in the interpretation process for most literary or artistic texts these two groups will not meet. Instead, receivers or interpreters directly face the texts and are influenced by textual intentionality. The concept of "textual intentionality" has not yet been approached in any straightforward way, though many scholars, particularly those in analytic philosophy, have engaged in discussions based on similar concepts. While intentionality, as many have believed, is a core issue for phenomenologists, it is, in fact, semiotic theorists,

who have been most concerned with the intentionality presented in texts, who underpinning the arguments in this paper.

The semiotician Eco, for example, put forward the idea of the “text’s intention”, believing that an intention must be presented in texts to be interpreted. Kaye Mitchell called this the “intention of the form”: some intentionality carried in the textual form (Mitchell, 2008, p. x). Important in this context is the 1943 paper of Mukarovsky from the Prague School, “Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art”, and Searles’ classic 1983 work in the philosophy of language, simply titled *Intentionality*.

Mukarovsky classifies various elements of a text into “Intentionality Elements” and “Unintentionality Elements”. The former refers to the elements comprising a text that were generated by the “writer’s intentionality”. Meanwhile, however, the signs created for literature and art differ from those aiming at usage (i. e. “signs for communication”), being not for the purpose of effectively conveying a certain meaning. What matters most in artworks, therefore, is the unified significance composed by both the intentional and unintentional elements. Mukarovsky further explained that the so-called “unintentionality” really is not intended by the author, representing those parts of a text that cannot be incorporated into the creator’s intentions. These elements altogether form interpretive obstacles that need to be supplemented by perceivers. In this way, Mukarovsky echoes Ingarden’s “indeterminacy” from the perspective of semiotics. The splendid explanation of the term “intentionality” given by Searle, meanwhile, is quite close to the textual demonstrator’s intentionality discussed in this paper. To make a text literary or artistic means representing it in the form of literature and art. For this reason, textual intentionality, namely the creative and demonstrative intention embodied in symbolic texts, is more of a cultural characteristic rather than the outcome of individual intentions highlighted in Phenomenology (McIntyre & Woodruff, 1982, p. 78).

Though seemingly abstract, textual intentionality has a concrete form in the genre classification of texts, so it is a vital part in the “textual metalanguage” in addition to being a kind of text-imposed cultural pressure on interpretation. Textual intentionality, when it comes to the meaning of artistic

texts, dwarfs the “artistic quality” of the textual form, for the classification of textual genre—a matter of cultural form—decides the textual meaning. Similarly, in terms of the expression of textual intentionality, the form category matters more than the content.

In the history of modern thought, there is abundant material regarding intentionality, and the role of textual intentionality in art has gained particular attention from the movements of Phenomenology and analytic philosophy. However, this paper still faces the difficulty that each side in the discussion of intentionality uses exclusive terms in presenting their statements, and there still lacks of any straightforward illustration of the textual demonstrator’s intentionality. To find support for the arguments in this paper, the statements of different schools of thought must be scrutinised.

III . Demonstration and “Indeterminacy”

The question now arises of how textual intentionality guides the interpreted artistic meaning. One consideration of this is Husserl’s analysis of Dürer’s copper etching *Knight, Death and the Devil*. First, the viewer takes the etching as an “image carrier”; second, the viewer recognises some images presented by the lines, “the knight on the horse”, “Death”, “the Devil”, and so on; thirdly, an artistic reflection occurs, through which the viewer sees the substantiality displayed by these images consisting of black lines: a knight of flesh and blood. These three processes (image vehicle—image object—image subject) cannot proceed without imagination. Husserl thus offered a vivid description of the process of the viewer from perception to recognition, from the perspective that the generation of meaning requires the blending of the viewer’s intentionality.

Ingarden, a literary theorist in the phenomenological tradition, provided a further explanation: the artwork that an interpreter faces is neither a physical object nor a conceptual one, but a pure intentional object combining the two (Ingarden, 1973, p. 56). Further developing Husserl, Ingarden (1973, p. 10) suggests four levels of literary work: first, sounds and phonetic composition; second, sense-groups and sentences; third, schematic outer appearance though which appear various images described in the work; and fourth, objects

described by the events of intentionality.

The contribution made by Ingarden lies in his emphasis on the “filling-in” from interpreters to artistic texts. The third level in the consciousness of interpreters, the schematic level, cannot represent every aspect of the real object. There are, in this layer, a series of “indeterminants”, where meaning is incomplete or unclear. He called the process by which interpreters supplement these “the concretization of the intended objects” (Ingarden, 1973, p. 145).

This “intention tension caused by indeterminants” is precisely where interpretation is activated. The truth is that literary and artistic texts retain the maximum amount of “indeterminancy” to form a tension in the interpreting process. Therefore, those texts are able to activate the meaning intentionality of interpreters, and provoke their pursuit for the completion of meaning. For example, untitled music, abstract art, and avant-garde drama are all equipped with numerous “indeterminants”, thus forcing the interpreters to strive for the meaning. Writers and artists may not know about this theory, even while they compete on it instinctively, resulting in their creative works possessing an increasing amount of indeterminancy to the point that it can nearly dominate those works. Such literary and artistic texts require a near reconstruction from their interpreters, thus becoming works of “open meaning”.

Though varying in terms and approaches, many other scholars have observed the same process. Culler (1975, p. 129), for example, raised the concept of “naturalisation”. In 1996, the German narratologist Monica Frudnick further proposed, in her book *Establishing A “Natural” Narratology*, that the standard for achieving “naturalness” is set by oral expression. Once a narrative text can be expressed by its readers as “natural” in oral presentation, then the turbulences in this text have been straightened out and intelligibility has been achieved. Frudnick’s remark once again made “secondary narrative” controversial, whereby a group of scholars, including Richardson, strongly opposed it by putting forward “unnatural narratology” (Alber, Nelson, Iverson, & Richardson, 2010). They believed that a great deal of narratives cannot be expressed as “natural” in oral presentation, which means they are “unable to be clear and coherent”. The author of this paper,

therefore, proposed four approaches to the “secondary narrative”: correspondence, collation, compromise, and creation (Yiheng, 2014). These approaches cannot be achieved without the intentionality of interpreters, and all belong to the readers’ intentional responses to the “indeterminants” in artistic texts. Only by reconstructing intentionality can literature and art derive their meaning.

The ancient Chinese may have shown a more profound understanding of “indeterminants”. In the poetics of Zen Buddhism they are called the “barriers of a text”, with the understanding that words in a text both facilitate and hinder understanding; they can advance the interpretation or, more likely, obscure the meaning. Tang Xianzu, a writer in the Ming Dynasty, made an excellent remark:

When Dharma came from India, from heart to heart he imparted Buddhist spirit to his disciples. With the five scriptures of Zen Buddhism emerging and prevailing, the usage of words was again popular among monks. This was probably because after Buddhism spread to China, the majority of Buddhists acquired its spirit by listening to doctrine explanation. The other reason may be that the heart-to-heart way had fallen into a rut; for example, instead of directly explaining doctrines, the Buddha just picked a flower while another saint beckoned a smile. Moreover, in the Zen tradition, a branch from orthodox Buddhism, *kasaya*, a vestment worn by monks, is used as a token of imparting doctrines. However, due to the tradition to use words to express ideas, Chinese people tried to remove barriers in understanding words by the means of words, so as to achieve the sudden enlightenment hoped for in Zen Buddhism. (Xianzu, 1982, p. 1072—73)

Another scholar at the end of the Ming Dynasty elaborated more clearly on the function of “indeterminants”: “If meaning is made clear, it is good; if not, better: where there is ambiguity, there is space for interpretation.” (Fuzi, 2008, p. 76)

It can be said that indeterminacies in literary and artistic texts are the evidences left by the sender’s intentionality that has already departed, so as to summon the interpreter’s intentionality to come. The combination of the two intentionalities makes the works of literature and art purely intentional

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objects. For example, the reading method differs for prose or poems, for to read poems is to perceive a deeper symbolic meaning, which leaves more meaning gaps needing to be filled. A short text is prose when put in an anthology, but a poem among other poems; when it is read as a prose or a poem, even the same words can have totally different meanings. Once produced, a text must be interpreted according to the methods determined by its genre, that is the “expectation” caused by textual intentionality.

This is even more the case in other forms of art. What makes Duchamp’s *Fountain* and Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* “artworks” is their being demonstrated at art exhibitions; likewise with performance art, which is firstly performed as some sort of art rather than someone running wild; likewise with animals’ paintings being considered fine art because, instead of being discarded like rags, they are exhibited as fine arts; likewise with installation art, on which jokes are made about “ignorant” housekeepers who clear out collections worth millions of dollars like garbage. Art is something created by humans, and consists of mediated texts of symbols. Upon seeing a demonstrated text, an interpreter will immediately understand the genre intentionality in the text; then, from his or her experience, will evoke the “prior understanding” toward the genre. An agreement between the interpreter and a cultural tradition has been reached before the interpretation takes place; the agreement is to interpret the work in accordance with some existing formula of the genre category. The interpreter, nonetheless, might be completely unaware of the process, for the interpreting model is almost all his or her intuition, and may scarcely require much effort at all.

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