

Prefazione / Preface

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Intentionality is one of the most crucial areas of inquiry in both sciences and the humanities. The different disciplines explore it through various approaches. In semiotics, and especially in structural semiotics, intentionality is investigated in relation to the concept of text. If a text is a portion of meaning that a culture isolates as peculiarly significant in relation to its context, the issue of intentionality essentially bears on the origin of textual significance and meaning. We realize that there is meaning in a text. But where is it from? In semiotics, the problem of intentionality comes down to asking meaning the same question that is usually addressed to a stranger: where are you from, meaning? The different disciplines of meaning, as well as the different branches of semiotics, answer this question in discrepant ways.

For some, meaning essentially comes from the reader, the listener, the spectator, etc. The one who receives a text becomes its master, and injects into it, or even onto it, one's subjective desire for meaningfulness. According to this perspective, the meaning that I find in the *Divine Comedy*, for instance, ultimately depends on what I, consciously or unconsciously, decide to project on its signifying surface. Ultimately, I am Dante, I am Virgil, I am Beatrice, I am the God of the text.

An alternative approach answers the same question “where are you from, meaning?” in a radically different way. It looks for indexical links between the surface of the text, that is, the way in which a roman, a fresco, a symphony, etc. appears, and those agencies that have caused this surface to be phenomenologically arranged as it is. The intentionality that matters in the creation of meaning, according

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to this perspective, is not that of the reader but that of the author. Ultimately, it is the author's mind that I look for when I peruse a text.

The novelty of the semiotic approach, and especially of Umberto Eco's point of view, has consisted in suggesting that a third kind of intentionality exists between that of the reader and that of the author. It is the intentionality of the text itself. The author arranges the text as she or he pleases, yet this arrangement takes place within a grammar and, even more importantly, within a culture. In creation, the author is never entirely free, not only for it draws the communicative materials from a socially shared deposit of semiotic forms but also for, once these forms are set, they entail meaningful consequences that usually escape the author's intentional control. A text means because of its author but also and above all beyond and sometimes even despite such author, especially as regards complex artistic texts. When this third approach faces the question: "Where are you from, meaning?", it looks for an answer neither in the subjective response of the receiver nor in the objective impulse of the author but in the inter-subjective encyclopedia of cultural relations that, shared by a community of interpreters, begets the grid of meaningful determinations through which a text is read.

Umberto Eco's solution, however, does not solve the problem of the intentionality of meaning but elegantly displaces it toward a different domain, that of cultural semiotics. How and, even more crucially, why does a community of interpreters take shape, bringing about a certain configuration of the socially shared deposit of forms and meaning that guides the correct interpretation of texts within the community? Even more mysteriously, if the intention of a text is inter-subjectively set by a society's hermeneutic culture, how does it change? And how do individual interpretations, including the wrong ones, influence this process?

The deep nature of textual intentionality, moreover, must be investigated not only theoretically but also historically, with an eye to considering the way in which it is affected by changes in communication technology. For example, how is a "community of interpreters" established in a society that, increasingly globalized, circulates meaning across traditional ethno-cultural and linguistic boundaries? Can such a thing as a "global community of interpreters" exist?