



## Intenzionalità Intentionality

L'idea della possibilità di recuperare l'intenzionalità di una mente a partire dalla struttura di un testo costituisce l'idea di autore. Questa è messa alla prova sotto molti punti di vista: dalla storia, poiché si tratta di un'idea sviluppatisi parallelamente alla nozione occidentale e moderna di soggettività; dalla tecnologia, giacché gli esseri umani creano fonti sempre più efficienti di creazione non-umana; dalla società, poiché le nuove ideologie semiotiche sembrano configurare un mondo nel quale hanno luogo interazioni efficaci anche senza un consenso volontario. Questo numero speciale della rivista Lexia tratta di alcune di queste sfide, nel quadro della semiotica, attraverso la stimolante cooperazione tra studiosi occidentali e cinesi.

Contributi di / Contributions by Emanuele Antonelli, Xiaoming Chen, Jifang Duan, José Enrique Finol, Nan Gao, Remo Gramigna, Massimo Leone, Julia Ponzio, Marco Sanna, Bruno Surace, Guanghui Tan, Bianca Terracciano, Ugo Volli, Xiaoming Wu, Jiang Zhang, Yiheng Zhao, Liyuan Zhu.

## Intenzionalità / Intentionality



# INTENZIONALITÀ INTENTIONALITY

*a cura di*  
Massimo Leone  
Jiang Zhang



## In copertina / Cover

Anonymous, Zhang the Immortal Shooting a Pebble Bow at a Heavenly Dog, Late Qing Dynasty (late 19th Century), from "The New Year Painting of Zhang Xian". Image in the public domain.

ISBN 978-88-255-2568-7



9 788825 525687

ISSN 1720-5298

euro 35,00

ARACNE

LEXIA. RIVISTA DI SEMIOTICA

LEXIA. JOURNAL OF SEMIOTICS

29-30

# Lexia

Rivista di semiotica

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## Sede legale / Registered Office

CIRCE “Centro Interdipartimentale

di Ricerche sulla Comunicazione”

con sede amministrativa presso

l’Università di Torino

Dipartimento di Filosofia

via Sant’Ottavio, 20

10124 Torino

Info: massimo.leone@unito.it

Registrazione presso il Tribunale di Torino  
n. 4 del 26 febbraio 2009

## Amministrazione e abbonamenti / Administration and subscriptions

Gioacchino Onorati editore S.r.l.

via Vittorio Veneto, 20

00020 Canterano (RM)

info@aracneeditrice.it

Skype Name: aracneeditrice

www.aracneeditrice.it

*La rivista può essere acquistata nella sezione  
acquisti del sito [www.aracneeditrice.it](http://www.aracneeditrice.it)*

*È vietata la riproduzione, anche parziale, con  
qualsiasi mezzo effettuata compresa la fotoco-  
pia, anche a uso interno o didattico, non au-  
torizzata*

I edizione: dicembre 2017

ISBN 978-88-255-2568-7

ISSN 1720-5298-20

Stampato per conto della Gioacchino Ono-  
rati editore S.r.l. nel mese di giugno 2017  
presso la tipografia «The Factory S.r.l.»  
00156 Roma – via Tiburtina, 912

«Lexia» adotta un sistema di doppio referag-  
gio anonimo ed è indicizzata in SCOPUS–  
SCIVERSE

«Lexia» is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal,  
indexed in SCOPUS–SCIVERSE

# **Lexia. Rivista di semiotica, 29–30**

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Lexia. Journal of Semiotics, 29–30  
Intentionality

*a cura di*  
*edited by*  
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Aracne editrice

[www.aracneeditrice.it](http://www.aracneeditrice.it)  
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[www.gioacchinoonoratieditore.it](http://www.gioacchinoonoratieditore.it)  
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via Vittorio Veneto, 20  
00020 Canterano (RM)  
(06) 45551463

ISSN 1720-5298  
ISBN 978-88-255-2568-7

*I diritti di traduzione, di memorizzazione elettronica,  
di riproduzione e di adattamento anche parziale,  
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I edizione: dicembre 2017

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## Prefazione / Preface

MASSIMO LEONE\*

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?