

Doctoral School of the University of Theatre and Film Arts

Intentional approach in film production

Thesis of doctoral dissertation

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My doctoral dissertation is about the application of intentional approach in film production and film education. My argument is that this method can more accurately explain certain processes in filmmakers and recipients than other methods and can more effectively forecast certain types of impacts of the film.

The expectation to effectively forecast and explain certain types of impacts of a film is a decisive factor both in actual film production and cinematography education. However, I believe that no really good explanations have been provided against this expectation to provide valuable answers to questions raised by some fiascos in the film industry. My dissertation studies not only certain viewer reactions but, approaching from the filmmaker's point of view, I attempt to explain certain failures by filmmakers.

In the first chapter of my dissertation entitled *Intentional approach*, I describe the special characteristics and benefits of the intentional approach in comparison with other explanatory and forecasting techniques (physical approach, draft-default position). I point out how these benefits appear in specific cases and in intentional systems. My definition of intentional systems is that these are systems whose behaviour can be explained and predicted by assigning suppositions and desires (as well as hopes, fears, intentions, intuitions, etc.) to the system. I also discuss more advanced intentional systems where system characters have not only suppositions and desires but also suppositions and desires about other characters' suppositions and desires. I provide an overview of human intentional ability as a precondition for intentional approach and, among others, I cite the experiments by Josef Perner as illustrations. I study certain situations from everyday life as intentional systems as examples, and through them I demonstrate how naive human intentionality, also known as mind reading ability, works in everyday life.

As the next step, I illustrate how the unity of the filmmaker, the artwork and the recipient primarily in arts can be perceived as an intentional system, based on which assumption we can find useful explanations regarding reactions by recipients.

Studying these mechanisms of action, I arrive to one of the fundamental conclusions of the dissertation: in each case recipients are forced to use their own semantic knowledge to insert, in their minds, the elements not portrayed by the artwork and thereby, in a sense, complete the work themselves.

The examples cited from painting, sculpturing, photography and literature, as products somewhat less complex than films or more specifically some of their elements easier to observe, are used to demonstrate the very essence of the intentional approach and the supplementing activity performed by the viewer or reader.

After all this, the chapter entitled *Intentional approach in film* uses some cinematic examples (Chaplin, Kurosawa, Truffaut, Hitchcock, Lelouch, Jancsó, Forman, Mikhalkov, the Coen brothers) to demonstrate how the filmmaker, the film and the viewer can be studied as an intentional system, the special characteristics of viewers' supplementing activities and the connection between the two. I also write in detail about how films can be perceived as more advanced intentional systems because it is not only viewers who have suppositions and desires but the filmmaker also has suppositions and desires about viewers' suppositions and desires. Regardless of the age, the location and the genre, the filmmaker always counts on the viewer to somehow supplement the information displayed, or as Bordwell puts it: "The artwork is necessarily incomplete, needing to be unified and fleshed out by the active participation of the perceiver." I actually prove that whether the filmmaker wants it or not, a film cannot be created without omissions.

Next I use the famous animation and the resulting research by Fritz Heider and Mary-Ann Simmel as an example to highlight that one of the factors of the viewer's intentional profile, i.e. the desire to understand the film as a message, a story, a cause and effect relational system, etc. is usually given and it works. One of my key conclusions stems from there: if the reactions of the recipient are different from the ones expected, this difference originates not from the viewer's urge to understand the film but rather from the wrong definition or complete negligence of the suppositions attributed to the viewer (knowledge, experience, culture, etc.).

Consequently, after classifying them into four categories (realistic, composition, artistic and transtextual suppositions), I focus on the analysis of viewer suppositions. I believe that accurate definitions of these suppositions are required to forecast certain viewer reactions. I devote considerable energy to composition suppositions, shedding some light on the filmmaker's key role in developing these suppositions in viewers. Viewers acquire composition supposition as a result of the learning process when watching the film.

Therefore, I briefly summarise as to what information psychology currently has about this learning process.

As another cause for failed forecasting of viewer reactions, I study creative mechanisms that overwrite rational conclusions based on the analysis of viewer suppositions.

Since the issues related to the assessment of viewer suppositions are fairly well-known in the film industry worldwide, even if the terms used may differ, a number of solutions have been worked out to remedy the situation over the more than 100 years of cinematographic history, from which I compiled a short selection based on the experience and advice given by script consultant Linda Seger and director Michael Rabiger.

In the chapter entitled *Boredom and confusion* I discuss the potential physiological consequences of an erroneously defined intentional profile or the negligence of a well-defined intentional profile. This is about nothing more than boredom, its potential causes and the ways to avoid it. Relying on the study conducted by Tibor Scitovsky and some cinematic examples, I explore the relationship between viewer suppositions, the completing activity and the mind's activation levels. In this chapter I focus on issues such as the stimulating effect of a new and surprising experience and the confusing or even frightening effect of an excessively new experience. Consequently, I conclude that the most pleasant new element is one whose processing (viewer supplementation) does not exceed the mind's information processing capacity but makes fairly good use of it. In the light of this conclusion, I review some Hungarian experimental and television films and motion pictures to identify the causes of this boredom and the sources of aesthetic excitement stemming from film language.

The final chapter entitled *Practical implementation of the intentional approach in three areas of film production and in film education*, I describe the workings and applicability of intentional approach as a descriptive and forecasting technique in the fields of film production and education.

Firstly, I discuss the marking of spatial and temporal relationships and the difficulties of incorporating those into a set of rules. I also point out the uncertainties and contradictions of rules in the prevailing public perception of the film industry. What is more, I do my best to convince the reader that we can arrive at potentially more efficient theories and answers if we do not insist on defining the possible means of marking space and time but rather realise the

models developed in the viewers' minds about time and space as suppositions, and we conduct our creative operations with those.

Secondly, I explore the background stories to characters and plot. Even though the industry agrees that developing the background story is an indispensable element to script writing and film production, I must ask this question: if the background story is not presented in the film and only the filmmakers know about it, is it really necessary, is it really that important? If so, why? What role does it play and how does it work? After analysing a scene each from films directed by Stephen Frears, Miklós Jancsó, Miklós Szinetár, Roy Andersson and Tim Burton, I come to the conclusion that the background story, as an organising force, offers the guarantee to the authors that the viewer models developed as a result of the plot are consistent, which in turn ensures that viewers through their successful mind theories understand the story.

Thirdly, I research the relationships between viewer emotions and mind theory. Based on a review of a cut each from films directed by Haneke, Fellini and Tarkovsky and a poorly executed exam film, I am convinced that in order for the viewers to identify themselves with the film, they need to understand the plot via mind reading, i.e. they have to work for their emotions by applying mind theory.

In reviewing the opportunities for using the intentional approach in education, I make some suggestions both in the fields of theoretical and practical education. I hope the thoughts above will trigger some discourse not only among filmmakers but also in education, where such debates are, perhaps, more needed.