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A framework to map approaches to interpretation

Abstract

In this paper, an over-arching framework is presented and discussed which enables the mapping of the approaches to the interpretation of creative acts or artefacts for the purposes of analysing the underlying referential frameworks which inform assessment. Informed by literary and aesthetic theory, the framework's horizontal axis relates to what might broadly be termed the sources or locus of meaning (that is, the author, the text, and the reader), and its vertical axis refers to broad approaches to how the problem of meaning is negotiated, whether representation or signification (differentiated in the framework as 'eucharistic', 'objective' and 'operative' criticism). The framework was initially constructed to analyse the embedded and often tacit interpretative approaches underpinning assessment practices in the creative arts in higher education, particularly in fine art studio practice, and as such the discussion of the methodological value of the framework is situated within this context.

Key words

Interpretation; assessment; fine art; creativity; authorship; methodology

Introduction

With rare exception, research on approaches to interpretation in teaching and learning has not been extensive, and in studio learning it is vastly under-researched. The issue of the students' intentionality in higher education, as the artist or author of the work, is complex and contentious. Whilst in a dated study authorial intentionality was found to be a crucial consideration for learning in art making in the US ¹, in criticism it has been greatly reduced as a criterion of importance², which is perhaps why in previous research I found this difference playing out awkwardly in assessment situations ³.

Increasingly, art education literature has explored and expanded on traditional approaches to assessment. Recent research is predominantly informed by educational development and quality assurance discourses, and as such is concerned with changes to practice aligned with outcomes-based education, criterion-referenced assessment, "assessment literacy" and "the development of pedagogic intelligence"⁴. However, despite the influence of such educational discourses on developing referential frameworks, and sincere attempts at 'innovations' in assessment practice, a concern has arisen that little has fundamentally shifted in practice⁵. Having taught in the creative arts practice and then later in education development, I began to recognise that such models could be more productively explored when situated against a broader analytical narrative, informed by aesthetic and literary criticism, towards substratal engagement with the referential frameworks underpinning judgment in the domain of fine art studio practice (FASP) in higher education.

When conducting previous research⁶, I found that approaches to interpretation had been imported to studio practice from literary criticism studies, without due consideration of the impact of such approaches on the student experience. However, as Barrett ⁷ notes, criticism is "more than a

means; it is considered a subject matter in itself and as subject matter, criticism is presented as a body of knowledge which has a logic, various recommended procedures, and a variety of goals". Whilst evaluation is very much at the heart of the interpretative purpose of assessment in FASP, it has become the least important or desired aspect of contemporary art criticism.

Moreover, while art historians and critics may be relinquished of responsibility for any effects of such interpretative approaches on the art maker, FASP studio staff are specifically tasked with fostering creative development, yet were seemingly unaware of the potential "backwash effect"⁸ (Biggs 1999, p.68) of anti-intentionalist summative panel assessments on their formative interactions with students. Similarly, in his research, Barrett⁹ found that studio teachers saw the primary goal of assessment as the improvement of the artwork, i.e. a formative function focused on the product and not the learning process. This may well be because there has been little rigorous empirical research on the effects of interpretative approaches on the development of artists' professional practice.¹⁰ In my interactions with FASP staff in various geographic contexts over the years, it emerged that those who suspect negative effects on their students' development feel ill-equipped to question or combat such interpretative approaches, because of their import in contemporary criticism.¹¹ Added to this, none of the dominant studio teaching traditions, whether the master-apprentice, reproduction, innate or gifted traditions, focus on intentionality.¹² However, I have found that those staff who have engaged with professional development courses or scholarship in higher education studies most often do not find those discourses adequately equip them to challenge such approaches substantively, and that in fact the discourses conflict.¹³

Whether authority resides with assessors in academia or art critics in professional communities, the issue of authorship is fundamentally imbued with the negotiation of power. And when it comes to issues of interpretation, assessment and the possibilities for autonomous learning, authorship is a concern. These tensions emerge particularly within the oral genre of the art school Critique, for instance. As dialogues between assessors and students, they engage different perspectives with discussion that is sometimes interpretive and often evaluative¹⁴, or borrowing from ancient rhetoric, descriptive and judicative.¹⁵ Recognizing the fluidity and slippage between interpretation and judgment in practice is perhaps more important than how they are differentiated.

Approaches to assessment are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, such as the culture of individual institutions, the academics' identities and preferences, values from the contemporary art world and art criticism. Separating out assessment practice and values from artistic practice, individual and group identity in fine art may be an impossible task, as in practice they are enmeshed and create implicit referential frameworks through which artwork is assessed.¹⁶ Whilst the referential frameworks from educational discourses are well chartered terrain in art education literature, this paper offers a framework which expands that discussion by considering the referential frameworks of interpretation influential to professional practice, and the significance for the larger problem of authorship. My focus on the *significance* of interpretation for the conditions for creativity in a recent research project¹⁷, was motivated particularly by concerns with student engagement, and the development of metacognition and reflexivity necessary for them to practice as reflexive practitioners in the contemporary art context. Thus the merit of different interpretative approaches, in terms of what informs the artwork's meaning or significance, was not at issue. Rather the concern was with how these different approaches played out within referential frameworks in

teaching, learning and assessment interactions in higher education, and their significance for the conditions for creativity.¹⁸

Towards this, in this paper I outline the framework I constructed for the purposes of analysing interpretative approaches adopted during assessment in the creative arts discipline of fine art studio practice (FASP). I discuss the framework and then relate it to over-arching interpretative approaches in contemporary criticism. This offers the possibility of a broad application of the framework to interpretative approaches adopted in educational assessment.

Constructing a framework to map approaches to interpretation

Informed by the different philosophical traditions, arguments and understandings of interpretation, I constructed a framework on which to map the interpretative approaches (IF 1). The framework is delineated by a horizontal axis which relates to what might be termed the *sources of or locus of meaning*, and a vertical axis which refers to different approaches to *how problem of meaning* is negotiated, whether representation or signification.

I had been working for a considerable length of time on narrowing down the sources of meaning, when I encountered this deceptively simple statement of how they may be plotted based on historical periodization:

*One might very roughly periodize the history of modern literary theory in three stages: a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years.*¹⁹

However, the divergent approaches to interpretation dominant within Anglo-American and Continental interpretative approaches do not conform so neatly to such historical categorization. The divisions between the three 'sources' of the author (or artist), the text (or artwork), and the reader (or viewer and critic) are not as clear in practice. The lines may be demarcated in principle, however they are underpinned by vastly differing assumptions about the nature of authorship (whether real, imagined, fictive or figural) and subjectivity; language and the text or art object; and the various disciplines which inform them.

Whilst there may be consensus that artworks have meaning, there are vast differences in how artworks are seen to 'do' this, in addition to methodological differences between how analysts are to read this from the work. The vertical axis of the table I present below relates to differences in terms of "how artworks mean or signify and, to a lesser extent, on what constitutes an adequate reading—where does analysis fittingly conclude".²⁰ In determining the distinctions between approaches, I adopted a broader rather than more fine-grained approach, undercutting apparent differences to comprehend what is more deeply inscribed.

Operatic criticism (signification) (3)			
Objective criticism (intrinsic representation) (2)			
Eucharistic criticism (representation of external referent) (1)			
	Artist (A)	Artwork (T)	Viewer (R)

IF 1: Framework for plotting interpretative approaches

The first horizontal band I define as ‘eucharistic criticism’ following Preziosi’s²¹ inclusion of both the mimetic and inspirational traditions under this term. In Plato’s ‘mimetic tradition’, the artwork or text is an unmediated representation of objective reality or nature which itself is a copy of a higher realm, and where the artist is a copyist whose authorial subjectivity and inventiveness is absent. The emptying out of subjectivity in the mimetic tradition occurs similarly in the ‘inspirational tradition’, where the author is seen as a ‘scriptor’ through which the divine script is impersonally performed as a public revelation rather than private consciousness. The various forms it has taken, from the Adamic doctrine through to South American shamans and Hellenic cultures, all serve to simultaneously elevate the author as an elect figure set apart from others due to a divine gift or being chosen, while simultaneously depriving the author the possibilities of creating anything original or expressing his/ her subjectivity, but rather as passively awaiting divine inspiration. While ‘mimetic’ may indicate that the artwork must visually approximate that which it imitates, and so was originally about the skill of the artist, the inclusion of both traditions broadens this area to be more about the strong relationship between signified and signifier (whether about a person, object or message). The word is posited as an index to a divine or human author, and the analytical task is to evoke that which is already there in the object. This notion of unilinear representation as indication has informed positivist drives towards the ‘discovery’ of truths in research. Distinctions between columns within this band (A1, T1, R1) are often weak.

In both of the mimetic and inspirations traditions the subjectivity of the artist is often subsumed or negated by the importance placed on the representational link to an external referent. However, I have included ‘expressive criticism’²² within this area despite its strongly subjective authorial ethos. This Romantic approach, where the attention is shifted away from the audience or nature (the

mimetic tradition) towards the artist's inner sensibility, psyche or emotions, is still concerned with embodying an external referent as an expression of a feeling or mood. This band is most concerned with how meaning is determined by the *representation* of content.

The second horizontal band, 'objective criticism',²³ is characterised by the assumption that the artwork is primarily internally motivated. This band includes many of the approaches of the modernist discipline tradition, where a strong distinction is made between subject and object, with the latter given more emphasis as autonomous from the outside world. Modernist notions allow for more variations in how signification is construed, since the analyst's task is rather to construct a narrative of the causal connections between phenomenon – a system of culture with formal analytical methods, such as iconography and connoisseurship. Formalism and New Criticism, with their focus on the form of the artwork as its content, and iconography, which focuses on symbols and signs in artworks, fall within this area. A perhaps less obvious inclusion is that of some late 20th Century literary theory where texts are seen to generate meaning. This band is most concerned with inherent representation, where the artist (A2), text (T2) and reader (R2) are constructed as autonomous and distinct formalist atoms.

The third horizontal band, 'operative criticism', includes all notions of how the different sources (author, text, reader) function or figure within larger societal concerns. The emphasis is on how the artwork (and to some extent the artist) are received and function operationally in terms of their significance for the reader or audience, that is within specific societies and contexts. Rhetoric and pragmatic criticism fall within this band, in that they relate to how the artist becomes aware of the ways in which to engage, please, communicate or educate the public. This band is concerned with how signification *operates* in certain societal contexts, and as such boundaries are blurred between A3, T3 and R3.

Interpretative approaches and the significance of their constructions of 'author', 'text' and 'reader'

In this section, I provide an analysis of dominant interpretative approaches in aesthetic and literary criticism to demonstrate the framework's application within this philosophical landscape. I begin with some broad differentiations before structuring the discussion in the order of the horizontal axis of the framework: intentionalist approaches which focus on the author as the locus of meaning (A); those anti-intentionalist approaches which clearly privilege the text (T); those that privilege the reader (R). This acts to frame and be inclusive of the various movements or philosophies which have been most influential in interpretation globally.

At the dividing lines between differing notions of authorship lie realist and anti-realist assumptions.²⁴ In classic realism, the object/ text is severed from the subject/author that produced it, however the subject's desires can be *discovered* as they are ontologically 'there'. For instance, in the tradition of the Adamic doctrine, the subject is both the originator of language and s/he whom guarantees meaning. As such, much intentionalist approaches to interpretation are underpinned by realism.

The distinction between subject and object is blurred in anti-realist philosophies, with a focus on the subject or a displacement to language that 'speaks through' the subject. Many anti-realist notions

hold that the text has an agency and history that may be *initiated* by the author but whose meaning or signification cannot be *determined* by him/her. Meaning is not 'there' to be discovered but is continually emergent, constructed or fashioned. Realism's closing of the object or text as inert, is disrupted through the interrogation of the subject and sense of the text itself as autonomous. Authors are seen not as authorities but as subjects to be scrutinized, with the text conceived of as a process, dictated to by contextual history and orders of discourse, not by the personality or self-expression of the author. In some anti-intentionalist approaches, the analytical task is not to discover nor construct the author but rather focus on the text's foundations – its history and discursive organization (T). In others, the theory of authorship is re-constructed to see how the author functions as a 'figure' within the text and how readers utilize this figure in their reading (R).

A useful broad framing approaches to interpretation, which relates specifically to authorship, is whether they are intentionalist, in the importance ascribed the author's (real or imagined) intentions when determining the text's meanings (A), or anti-intentionalist (T and R). Of the latter, are both those who position the text as locus of meaning (such as New Criticism and Formalism) and those who position the interpretations of the reader as all important (including pluralistic approaches and reader-response). Interwoven within these approaches are distinctions and debates between literary readings (i.e. those that are aesthetically motivated) and non-literary readings; whether there are single or multiple interpretations of a work; whether the content of the work can be determined through only interior or inherent properties or those that are exterior and beyond its boundaries; and the political implications of assigning determinacy or creating possibilities for plurality.

Intentional Approaches

Whilst not exclusively, in the 20th and 21st centuries, many Anglo-American analytic philosophers of art have chosen intentionalist approaches. An agreement across the different intentional approaches is that the goal of interpretation is the understanding and the appreciation of the text/artwork. This is underpinned by a 'contextualist ontology' of the work (Davies 2010: 167), where the identity of the artwork is determined by the context of its creation or origin, including the author's intentionality and the particular art-historical context (such as the artistic or literary conventions, styles and genres). As such, intentional approaches can be placed in quadrants A1, T1 and T2.

Despite such commonality, the three dominant intentionalist approaches are driven by different purposes.²⁵ Actual Intentionalism holds that interpretation aims to discover what is meant in the work, where the author's 'actual' intentionality leads to the 'correct' readings. Actual Intentionalism can be seen as a realist approach in the eucharistic tradition, linking signified and signifier and rejecting interpretations that are not the same as that intended by the author. Hypothetical Intentionalism holds that interpretation is meant to reveal what could have been meant, where the author's intention is one of many other possible readings. Whilst Value Maximisers contend that interpretation should provide valuable ways of reading the work, which may or may not correlate to the author's intentions. Both Hypothetical and Value Maximising Intentionalism hold that interpretation cannot be determined exclusively by the meaning intended by the author. In their extreme versions, such approaches can be read as anti-realist in that authorial intention is constructed through the interpreter's projections.

Actual Intentionalists hold that intentions are real states of mind connected to the individual's will or volitions. For instance they may focus on understanding an artist's oeuvre or corpus, the ways in which his/her work has been coordinated over time, assuming a linear trajectory towards one larger underpinning intention. Ipsative assessment in education may be situated here. In this model, 'actual' intentionality is used as evidence, external to the work itself, to support claims made by analysts.²⁶ At its most extreme, 'The Identity Thesis' of Absolute Intentionalism proposes that the meaning of the work is identical to that which the author intended to convey, communicate or express, and therefore it is the author's meaning which determines the work's meaning.

Understanding the notions of authorship which underpin Absolute Intentionalism is helpful for understanding how the authorial self is constructed and resisted in other conceptions. Influenced by phenomenological humanistic notions, the actual author is attributed an extreme degree of conscious control over his/her goals, and appears to be more divine than human. One of the influential proponents of Absolute Intentionalism was E.D. Hirsch,²⁷ whose 'Validity of Interpretations' argues that a speaker's intentions are a necessary condition for meaningful communication. In a bid to be objectivist, the historical and context-bound nature of knowledge is denied, creating a distinction between the 'meaning' of the work as that which is linked to authorial intention, and its 'significance' as a subjective evaluation of the text by the analyst or reader. There is a clear separation privileging column A over R.

Moderate Actual Intentionalism holds that authorial intentions partly constitute a work's meaning, in addition to aspects of the text and the historical context in which the work was made. What this approach allows for is the possibilities of unintended meanings, and unrealised or irrecoverable intentions, i.e. the "failure of texts to perfectly represent the author's intentions"²⁸, resulting in a more tolerant view of the purposes of interpretation that is not limited to the author's 'actual' intention. In cases where more than one interpretation emerges, authorial intention is the final determinant, however when the readings of the artwork seem not to approximate the author's unsuccessfully realised actual intentions, then there is an allowance for an alternative reading of the meaning to stand.²⁹ This suggests an emphasis on column A with some allowance for column R.

One of the dominant approaches of Moderate Actual Intentionalism is the 'Conversational Model', proposed by Noel Carroll³⁰ amongst others. In this conception, the experience of art is as an act of conversation or communication, where the goal of the analyst and reader becomes to understand the speaker's 'utterance' or meaning, and a fulfilling experience of art comes from the surety that the author's intention has been grasped. Elevated above more Romantic notions of the aesthetic satisfaction, the experience of art is a "human encounter"³¹ between the author and reader with the text as the medium of a message. A number of objections to this approach have been raised, such as those that question whether the analogy between communication and the experience of art and its interpretation can be drawn.³²

Another approach falling under the umbrella of Actual Intentionalism is Conventional or Categorical Intentionalism,³³ which holds that the convention under which the artist intended the work to be interpreted should be utilised by the analyst, and so the artist's intention disambiguates and determines the category of art, and the actual aesthetic properties of the work can only be perceived through this 'correct' category. This interpretative approach is inclusive of column T, in

addition to column A and R. A strong accent is placed on the connoisseurship of the expert interpreter, over and above that of lay readers. A number of objections question this privileging of conventions and genres, such as that generic labels should not be applied to heterogeneous works, and that many artworks fundamentally depart from their genres.

A consideration of the more general objections to Actual Intentionalism is beneficial for situating this approach. From anti-intentionalist New Criticism is the 'publicity paradox', which contends that since a fundamental intention was to produce work for public consumption, the artwork should operate as a self-contained object severed from private meanings.³⁴ In addition, the validity of applying linguistic approaches to the plastic and performing arts has been questioned.³⁵ In terms of notions of the self, the 'Identity Thesis' has been critiqued for ascribing divine mastery to the author. Additional objections arising from non-realist paradigms have questioned Actual Intentionalism's claims to surety of 'objective', 'correct' and 'exhaustive' readings. This relates to what has been termed the 'knowledge of intention dilemma'³⁶, which involves concerns as to how the author's intentions may be determined when this includes unrealised intentions gleaned from external sources and unintended meanings discovered within the text, described as "fortunate aberrations" in art education literature.³⁷

In response to some of these objections, Hypothetical Intentionalism shifts the concern from the 'actual' to 'virtual' authorial intention, in so doing shifting from the author as source of meaning, to the text determining interpretation, and through this process the intentions of a 'fictive', 'implied' or 'postulate' author. From the variations in approach, I will discuss the two most dominant – the emphasis on the analyst (R) proposed by William E. Tolhurst, and Jerrold Levinson's focus on the text (T1).

Tolhurst held that the work's meaning is determined by the interpreter's hypothesis about the author's intention, where the analyst is placed as the author's intended or target audience. In this way, the resultant hypothetical author 'determines' the work's intention, as s/he is aware of the context and conventions in which s/he operates and is in total control of his/her intentions (thus addressing concerns as to unrealised intentions and unintended meanings). Levinson instead saw the author's categorical intention as influential in determining the work's meaning as it too identified the ideal audience.³⁸ Evidence in this conception is a strong shift in focus towards the text as the embodiment of meaning, which is why some have labelled this 'Textual intentionalism'. The ideal audience, who is historically situated to know the body of the artist's work and has access to the art-historical context of creation, would present the 'best' (i.e. the most charitable interpretation) hypothesis of the author's intentions. Authorial intention, in this conception, has a heuristic rather than deterministic role. Many possible meanings may emerge, but Levinson³⁹ argues that these should relate overarchingly.

The third intentionalist approach I will discuss here is that adopted by Value Maximisers, which links the aim of interpretation and the experience of art with the appreciative experience of seeking value. As with Hypothetical Intention, the artwork is seen as bearing meaning which cannot be equated with a personal, one-sided conversation of the Conversational Model. In a shift towards quadrant T3, importance is given to the socio-historical context of production, where the linguistic and artistic conventions and practices which generate the work's possible meanings are elevated

over and above the authorial intention which may have motivated their use. As the aim of interpretation is seen as increase the merit of the work as art or literature, the imagined intentions of a postulate author defeats any 'inferior' intentions. Objections to this movement stem from questioning the assumed purpose of interpretation as enhanced appreciation of the artwork itself.

Anti-intentionalist approaches

Literary criticism has focused on the divide between those who value authorial intention, as relevant to interpretation, and those who do not, with no apparent middle-ground apparent between absolute intentionalism and absolute anti-intentionalism. Continuing from objections to intentional approaches and the argument that authorial intentionality is inaccessible, indeterminate and unknowable, in their extreme versions anti-intentionalist approaches hold that authorial intentions are irrelevant to and never decisive of a work's meaning, effectively disregarding interpretations falling within column A. Whilst realist understandings strongly link the author to his/her work to claim referential surety, the anti-realist shift of separating the work from its author may be underpinned by an epistemological anxiety and a "risk-averse epistemic attitude" of readers about making claims about the external referent,⁴⁰ shifting analysis away from eucharistic criticism (specifically A1; T1). Similar concerns around surety and indeterminacy, objectivity and subjectivity, that underpin intentionalist approaches, can be traced through the different anti-intentionalist approaches.

Replacements of authorial intent from the locus of meaning are many and varied, such as with the features of the text (formalism and New Criticism); with language (structuralism and poststructuralism); with a reduction of the intention-bearing author to a depersonalized 'function' (Barthes) or figure (Foucault); with the 'readings' or constructions made by the readers. In place of a closed understanding of the meaning of the work being fixed at its origin or composition, anti-intentionalist approaches look at its production (formalism and New Criticism) but also its reception (Reader-response and Reception theory and Intertextuality), a shift to T and R, which is how I have structured the focus of this discussion below.

Formalism

Formalism is influenced by Kantian notions of aesthetic response as a product of the human mind, which drew from Plato's separation and elevation of ideal beauty (experience and judgment) from nature and art (utility, origin and context). The elevation of form created a break from other traditions of 'eucharistic criticism' which look at representation, imitation or cognition. Any form of subjectivity, whether the focus be on the subject (author/ reader) rather than the object (text/ artwork), is to be opposed.

Formalists to some extents see the form of the work as its achieved content. Led by formalists in art history such as Clement Greenberg and New Critics such as Wimsatt and Beardsley, the concept of artwork as a self-contained object continues the notion of its autonomy. A separation is made between the 'internal' and 'external' evidence for determining meaning, where the external is seen as involving 'private' idiosyncrasies and revelations irrelevant to the interpretative project. Rather the 'internal', that is the elements that are 'publically' accessible, are valued as the 'facts' of the work.⁴¹ These include the structure of the work, as well as its historically embedded practice, as the conventions that set normative parameters for interpretation. Thus the artwork is seen to have

internal laws (autonomous) and internal aims (autotelic), to be objectively appreciated (i.e. interpreted) by competent readers/ viewers.⁴² This approach sits mostly within objective criticism (A2; T2; R2).

Because of the influence of their arguments on the interpretation-intentionality debate, I have given the formalist approaches of the New Critics particular focus.

New Criticism

New Criticism arose in 1920's and was institutionalised in 1940's to become the dominant mainstream American approach of critical practice⁴³ even though it has been challenged substantively since the 1950s. Underpinned by formalist philosophies, New Criticism is against common-sense biographical criticism, focusing instead on the inherent artistic features of finished art object, with no distinction made between the text and the artwork. This interpretative approach emphasis T2, with some inclusion of A2 and R2, but with tight parameters. Two influential texts defined the argument of the New Critics W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy'⁴⁴, which can be read as an attack on the author and intentionality, and 'The Affective Fallacy'⁴⁵, which can be read as an attack on the reader.

In 'The Intentional Fallacy', the origins or composition of the work become irrelevant. Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that "critical enquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle", i.e. the artist, to the extent that to attempt to determine the artist's intention for the artwork becomes "the personal heresy".⁴⁶ Important in the context of teaching and assessment artmaking, whilst authorial intention was not seen as irrelevant to the composition of works, it was posited as such when it came to the work's reception and its evaluation. For the New Critics, the exclusion of such external or private information led to reading meaning into the work. Drawing from their argument of the publicity paradox, they argued that for interpretative and evaluative purposes, the artwork should be seen as public object only.

Wimsatt and Beardsley (1949) took the notion of the text (T) being autonomous of the author's biography, history and psychology (A) further in 'The Affective Fallacy', where they argued that the artwork was autonomous from the reader (R) too, so that its results, reception or effects are irrelevant to its meaning (column R). In this paper, they argue against interpretations which include reader-response, whether emotional or psychological, as well as the analyst's impressionistic or relativistic criteria for interpretation. Both reader-response and affective theory, they believed, make the art object disappear into subjectivity. By disallowing any possible evolution of the art object, they effectively avoided any potential for relativity that is perhaps inevitable when different readers' read, or the return of the author which Burke⁴⁷ recognizes in the privileged position of critic as creator of the meaning of the text.

Especially since the 1970s, formalism's indifference to the author and reader; its rejection of intertextual possibilities; its privileging the status of the art object; have been ridiculed as "intellectually naïve", undemocratic and "methodologically useless".⁴⁸ Formalism's equation of the purely aesthetic option as the art experience and the notion that the emotional vitality of the aesthetic object is "its intensity",⁴⁹ has been critiqued for unwittingly ascribing expression of feeling to the art object itself (an Expression Theory of Art). Instead of such a generalized feeling or thought, is the argument that such responses must be particular. The isolation of the work separated from

the circumstances of its readings and reception, has been seen as artificial and impossible and linked to a philosophically regressive idea of an atomistic world critiqued by Hegel, Marx, Sartre, Freud and many others. The aim to isolate the object of study from its broader context and thereby abstract form as absolute, has been re-read as an 'historical positivism' which reduced history to static atomized constructs. The formalist notion of the 'purely optical' has been specific to post-war Western culture following a sense of political helplessness, an indication of an insular disposition of social alienation and withdrawal from the world. The theological conviction in the formalist critic is seen to mask anxiety at the prospect of relativism.⁵⁰

Those that have critiqued the New Critics' 'publicity paradox' argue that works cannot be seen as public only but also contextual, in terms of the culture, historic embeddedness, and traditions of both the creator and the reader. A number of arguments have been made against the New Critics' exclusion of what they saw as external to the work, which point out that such slippages such as including references to the date of the work's production indicates the value of historical context; references to the citation of other artwork presumes biographical information about what the artist has seen, as does any reference to the artist's oeuvre or reputation. Such classifications as genre, which Wimsatt and Beardsley allow, can also be seen as strictly external to a work.

Relativism and plurality

Against such generalist and abstracting theories in philosophical aesthetics are relativist and pluralist approaches of interpretation.

In terms of relativism, varying approaches dot the continuum between extreme polarities. An example on the one end is Gaut's 'Patchwork Theory', which is more of a response to indeterminacy than ascribing to absolute relativism.⁵¹ Arguing against global or universal interpretation, Gaut argues for the local relationship between viewer construction, interpretation and evaluation. Interpretative activity includes both that which is found in the text (discovered in T2) and that which is projected by the viewer (constructed by R1+2). Important to this approach is the resolution of indeterminacy. An approach on the opposite end of the continuum is Margolis' 'Robust Relativism'⁵², which too includes properties in the text that are discoverable ('descriptive access') and those that are generated through the perspective of imaginative schemes or myths ('interpretive access'). In this conception, interpretation cannot claim to draw 'true' conclusions but rather aim to make 'plausible' proposals or hypothesis which can be plural, non-convergent and incompatible. Many objections have been raised to relativism, particularly by realists.⁵³

Whilst relativism suggests that there may be multiple interpretations of a work that are not necessarily compatible, critical pluralism argues that not all interpretation has the same aims, such as the presumption of much absolute intentionalism and formalism, that the aim of interpretation is the 'discovery' of meaning. The theoretical influence of Structuralism is felt here, in that the observer is seen to create rather than discover or find the world. Both relativist and pluralist approaches view the contribution of the reader as favoured over the text or the author, so that the work's meaning is partly conditional on its reading or interpretation, and as such the meaning of the work evolves beyond its origin and production to become context dependent. Although culturally delineated norms may create dominant interpretations, these cannot be seen as 'correct', 'true' or 'proper' because readings cannot be equated with the originating text or artwork, but rather stand

as creative works in themselves, a shift towards R. This lessens the need to insist on the force of interpretative claims.

Reader-response and Reception Theories

Reader-response and Reception theories are interested in the role of the reader in the overall structure of a literary, aesthetic or rhetorical situation. Whilst acting particularly against Formalism these theories can be seen as part of a long, diversified tradition since antiquity, with Plato's construction of the 'disturbing' power of art to affect at the level of passion and morality appealing to one's lower nature (irrationality). More tolerant of the role of the audience, Aristotle defined the properly structured tragedy as that which inspired cathartic emotions of fear and pity. Many classical and medieval theorists included literature as a branch of rhetoric, because of its persuasive intentions and its awareness of the composition and expectations of its audience. Romanticism values the powerful emotional impact of artworks; and the Symbolists and Impressionists also valued the reader's subjective response to art; branches of hermeneutics and phenomenology have been concerned with how readers engage cognitively and historically with texts; while political criticism such as Feminism and Marxism, has been interested in how the art object operates within social structures, such as gender or class relations.

A focus on the context, both in terms of production and reception, in which the text is embedded, characterizes reader-response approaches as understanding meaning as context-dependent. The main proponents of reader-response theory, such as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, looked in particular at what they saw as the dialogical nature of textual production in the interaction between text (T) and reader (R). The text is positioned either as providing a set of directions for the reader to follow⁵⁴, or as offering unlimited opportunities for free play⁵⁵. Thus the balance between text as autonomous object and reader as perceiving subject is still often tipped.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is one of the approaches which sits between the poles of text (T) and reader (R), in that it looks at the relations between texts and other texts, whether literary or not. This approach involves negotiated methodologies, because there is a move from the autonomous, static text to the communal nature of interpretation, including a consideration of interpretative conventions and norms, and reading strategies. Included here are explicitly more political and ideological approaches (such as Marxist, Feminist, Post-colonialist approaches), which look at how readers interpret differently due to the impact of structures such as race, gender, class etc. One such political approach is that of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of 'heteroglossa', as a response to univocal, totalitarian, dogmatic approaches to interpretation, such as extreme formalism.⁵⁶

Due to the elevation of content over form, literary criticism's intertextuality has been linked with art history's iconography, where the latter includes both literary as well as visual textuality.⁵⁷

Iconography traditionally focused on the meaning of the subject matter of the artwork. Its most dominant proponent, Erwin Panofsky⁵⁸, divided analysis into three levels. The first 'pre-iconographic' level was concerned with the description of subject matter (T1); this was to be followed by the level where the conventions and precedent of the image was determined by identifying the text behind the image (T2); the third level was concerned with determining the meaning of the image, by looking at the context of production, the genre, artist's oeuvre and

patron's influence, and external sources. The project of iconology went farther than this. Defined by Ernst Gombrich as the science of the large programme to which the artwork belongs, it included the cultural and artistic setting.⁵⁹ Such traditional understandings of iconography and intertextuality are underpinned by linear, historical assumptions about cause and effect, which place the artist in a passive position of accepting the origin(al) as the precedent. More contemporary understandings allow for the 'later' artist to be more active, and intervene in the material which s/he chooses to appropriate.⁶⁰

Although aesthetic and literary interpretative approaches are linked, it is the undecidability of the aesthetic work which causes a shift from the ontological to the epistemological. In place of the interpretative aim being to determine, classify or close meaning in an attempt to solve an embedded message or enigma, is grappling with the dynamic tracing of the processes of meaning production over time and differing contexts (T3). The previous reliance on historical narrative now shifts to the subjective discourses of intertextuality and interdiscursivity from which arise pluralist meanings and readings that, it is argued, cannot be reduced to the actual artist's intentionality.

With relativism and plurality, the notion of the text shifts from an object to an experience or activity with which the reader/ viewer engages. The reader, though, has been conceptualized in a number of different ways, from a hypothetical abstract product of the critic's mind to 'real' in-the-flesh people; and from unique individuals to constructed subjects. Iser's concept of the implied reader, for instance, posits the text as the governing structure for interpretation which involves 'decoding' or 'realising' the text. One objection to such a construction is that the reader becomes a product of the text, which ultimately determines the meaning in a manner not dissimilar to formalist methods.⁶¹ Fish's approach to readership was to place the context of reading within communities (a notion influential to research on assessment in fine art), with each community determining validity by creating its own texts and standards of competence.⁶² Objections raised include concerns as to the political implications of this approach, with Fish accused of neglecting the reasons as to why people choose or change from one interpretative community over another, which may have to do with structure, culture and agency. Different to such notions of the intended reader is the authorial audience which is presupposed by the text, which opens up interpretation to the history, culture and ideology of the text's production.

Such undermining of the stability of interpretation has significance for the evaluation of the artwork (the cause of anxiety for realists such as the New Critics and Absolute Intentionalists). Evaluation, to a larger degree than interpretation, depends on the ascribing of literary or aesthetic *value*. As the text becomes re-cast as partly the product of particular choices based on taste, ideological and cultural values, relativist and pluralist approaches put pressure on the belief that the academic canon represents the 'best' thought or texts. This has implications as to whether connoisseurship is the 'best' approach for evaluation, shaking the authority of assessment in creative education, and shifting the emphasis from R2 to presumptions around the more 'democratic' R1 or the more political R3.

Limitations and future research

This paper cannot possibly encompass all the different interpretations of the movements or approaches to interpretation, and is not necessarily inclusive of the actual intentionality of the main

proponents. I have however extended this discussion to a meta-level analysis of dominant interpretative approaches in aesthetic and literary criticism. Those scholars, interested in utilising this framework for empirical research in education, may wish to engage with the findings of its application to examine the contextualised referential frameworks emerging from empirical data I generated for a comparative case study of fine art schools I recently undertook.⁶³ Of interest, it that regardless of the espoused interpretative approach, where one school firmly favoured intentionalism, the overall interpretative approach for evaluation emerged as strongly anti-intentionalist in all the cases studied.

The few other frameworks developed for the analysis of interpretative approaches have mostly been for purposes of bridging the divide between criticism and laypersons' approaches to interpretation, to enable diverse communities "intellectual access".⁶⁴

I considered a recent model developed for the purposes of identifying the relation between ideas of art and the interpretations of educators from the Tate Britain⁶⁵. Applying the framework to their model, eucharistic criticism underpins their descriptor of "works of art as a visual representation and interpretation as identification"; "works of art as a message to be revealed, and interpretation as decodification" sits within objective criticism; while operative criticism can be seen within "works of art as an intellectual, historical and cultural fact, and interpretation as an opportunity for critical reflection". Of importance is that the educators in that context are tasked with a different purpose to those engaged with the development of authorship in FASP.

Thus a caution to this framework's application: certain distinctions should be delineated in the *context* of the framework's usage to inform analysis and interpretation of the empirical data. When it comes to assessment in art education, such contextual awareness would consider the purposes of development (formative assessment for and of the artist and/or artwork), evaluation (summative assessment for academic purposes), and reception (in real world contexts, by various readers, over time). In educational contexts, interpretative approaches differed according to these purposes,⁶⁶ and how they are interwoven with the formative and summative purposes and politics of assessment.

Conclusion

This paper offers a framework of methodological import, constructed particularly to map approaches to the interpretation of creative texts and related references made to composition processes, the author and the text's reception. Having emerged from a recent project analysing assessment approaches in fine art studio practice in higher education, references are made to this context. For the purposes of the framework's pragmatic use and for readers to ascertain the soundness of its use-value, dominant interpretative approaches in aesthetic and literary criticism are related to the framework, differentiated through a broad delineation between intentionalist and anti-intentionalist approaches.

NOTES:

- ¹ T. Barrett, "A Comparison of The Goals of Studio Professors Conducting Critiques and Art Education Goals for Teaching Criticism," *Studies in Art Education* 30, no. 1 (October 1, 1988): 22–27, doi:10.2307/1320648.
- ² J. Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism?* (Chicago, Ill: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2013).
- ³ D. Z. Belluigi, "Intentionality in a Creative Art Curriculum," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 45, no. 1 (2011): 18–36.
- ⁴ R. Harland and P. Sawdon, "From Fail to First: Revising Assessment Criteria in Art and Design," *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* 10, no. 1 (April 2012): 67.
- ⁵ B. Williamson, "Recent Developments in British Art Education: 'Nothing Changes from Generation to Generation except the Thing Seen,'" *Visual Culture in Britain* 14, no. 3 (2013): 356–78.
- ⁶ D. Z. Belluigi, "Intentionality in a Creative Art Curriculum."
- ⁷ Barrett, "A Comparison of The Goals of Studio Professors," 25–26.
- ⁸ J. Biggs, "What the Student Does: Teaching for Enhanced Learning," *Higher Education Research & Development* 18, no. 1 (April 1999): 68.
- ⁹ Barrett, "A Comparison of The Goals of Studio Professors."
- ¹⁰ As much as I could determine, the few published discussions on this issue are not empirical in nature nor produced within the traditions of what is considered 'scientific' research, but rather are of an informal, populist nature about the effects of criticism on the artist's career or psyche (for instance J. R. Lennon, "How to Write a Bad Review.," *Salon*, 2012, http://www.salon.com/2012/08/how_to_write_a_bad_review/).. Of interest, is that even within such forums, there is recognition that the critic's responsibility is to the viewer/reader not to the artist/author (for instance, Page-turner'. "How to be a critic," *The New Yorker* (August 22, 2012). Available at <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-to-be-a-critic>).
- ¹¹ Even if staff willingly engaged in teaching and learning courses, as these are mostly informed by higher education studies and educational development discourses, they may not surface implicit domain-specific referential frameworks or enable negotiation with related discourse conflicts. It is noteworthy that those steeped in and engaging with debates on interpretation and art criticism, have been found not to be conscious of their interpretative approaches *in practice*, such as educators from Tate Britain, see Amaia Arriaga and Imanol Aguirre, "Concepts of Art and Interpretation in Interviews with Educators from Tate Britain," *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 32, no. 1 (2013): 126–38.
- ¹² R. Cowdroy and E. de Graaff, "Assessing Highly-creative ability.," *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 30, no. 5 (October 2005): 507–18.
- ¹³ D. Z. Belluigi, "The significance of conflicting discourses in a professional degree: assessment in undergraduate fine art practice", *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1075961> (2015).
- ¹⁴ T. Barrett, "Studio Critiques of Student Art: As They Are, as They Could Be with Mentoring," *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 1 (January 1, 2000): 29–35.
- ¹⁵ J. Elkins, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
- ¹⁶ S. Orr, "'Being an Artist You Kind Of, I Mean, You Get Used to Excellence': Identity, Values and Fine Art Assessment Practices," *Journal of Art & Design Education* 30, no. 1 (2011): 37–44.
- ¹⁷ D. Z. Belluigi, "The problem of authorship: considering the significance of approaches to interpretation on the conditions for creativity in undergraduate fine art studio practice," Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Kingston University (2015). <http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/32459/>
- ¹⁸ D. Z. Belluigi, "A Proposed Schema for the Conditions of Creativity in Fine Art Studio Practice," *International Journal of Education & the Arts* 14, no. 19 (December 9, 2013): 1–23.
- ¹⁹ T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 74.
- ²⁰ D. Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1989), 108.
- ²¹ *ibid.*
- ²² M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Poetry and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).
- ²³ *ibid.*
- ²⁴ D. Kennedy, "Intention and the Subject of Interpretation: A Response," *Pheonix* 59, no. 1/2 (2005): 143–49.

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- ²⁵ S. Davies, *Philosophical Perspectives on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),
- ²⁶ P. Livingston, *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007).
- ²⁷ E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1967).
- ²⁸ B. Rosebury, "Irrecoverable Intentions and Literary Interpretation," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 37, no. 1 (1997): 15.
- ²⁹ D. Nathan, "Art, Meaning and Artist's Meaning," in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Maiden: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 282–93.
- ³⁰ N. Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- ³¹ Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics*, 122.
- ³² G. Dickie and W. Kent Wilson, "The Intentionality Fallacy: Defending Beardsley," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 3 (1995): 233–50.
- ³³ This is called Convention-constrained Intentionalism in R. Stecker, "Interpretation and the Problem of the Relevant Intention," in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran, 5 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 273.
- ³⁴ W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946): 468–88.
- ³⁵ A. Kiefer, "The Intentional Model in Interpretation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 3 (2005): 271–81.
- ³⁶ S. Trivedi, "An Epistemic Dilemma for Actual Intentionalism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 41 (2001): 192–206.
- ³⁷ Cowdroy and de Graaff, "Assessing Highly-creative ability."
- ³⁸ Livingston, *Art and Intention*.
- ³⁹ J. Levinson, *Contemplating Art: Essays in Aesthetics* (Oxford : Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 2006).
- ⁴⁰ Livingston, *Art and Intention*, 168.
- ⁴¹ Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," 477–478.
- ⁴² T. McEvelley, *Capacity: History, the World, and the Self in Contemporary Art and Criticism*, Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture (Amsterdam, Netherlands: G+B Arts International, 1996).
- ⁴³ P. Rabinowitz, "Whirl without End: Audience-Oriented Criticism," in *Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 81–100.
- ⁴⁴ Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy."
- ⁴⁵ W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 57, no. 1 (1949): 31–55.
- ⁴⁶ E. M. W. Tillyard and C. S. Lewis, *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy*, Oxford Paperbacks; No. 94 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 2.
- ⁴⁷ S. Burke, *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).
- ⁴⁸ J. Willingham, "The New Criticism: Then and Now," in *Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 37–38.
- ⁴⁹ M. Schiralli, "Anxiety and Uncertainty in Aesthetic Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36, no. 2 (2002): 57.
- ⁵⁰ McEvelley, *Capacity*.
- ⁵¹ B. Gaut, "Interpreting the Arts: The Patchwork Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 4 (1993): 597–609.
- ⁵² R. Margolis, "Robust Relativism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35, no. 1 (1976): 37–46.
- ⁵³ See A. Barnes, *On Interpretation: A Critical Analysis* (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1988), 76.
- ⁵⁴ W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).
- ⁵⁵ R. Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976).
- ⁵⁶ M. Bakhtin, "The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays," ed. Micheal Holquist, trans. Emerson and Micheal Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981).
- ⁵⁷ M. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio : Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- ⁵⁸ E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).
- ⁵⁹ E. Gombrich, "Four Theories of Artistic Expression," in *Gombrich on Art and Psychology*, ed. R Woodfield (Machester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 141–55; *Art and Illusion : A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1968).

⁶⁰ A. Svetlana and M. Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁶¹ M. L. Pratt, "Interpretative Strategies/ Strategic Interpretations: On Anglo-American Reader-Response Criticism," *Boundary 2*, no. 11 (1981): 201–31.

⁶² S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁶³ Bellugi, "The problem of authorship: considering the significance of approaches to interpretation on the conditions for creativity in undergraduate fine art studio practice."

⁶⁴ H. Lynch. *Mapping Interpretative Practices in Contemporary Art*. (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 2006): 3.

⁶⁵ A. Arriaga and I. Aguirre. "Concepts of Art and Interpretation in Interviews with Educators from Tate Britain." *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 32, no. 1 (2013): 126–38.

⁶⁶ For instance, a recent study on social justice art education, identified the three aspects of intentionality, the process of production, and the operatic reading of the artist, text and reception, as central for evaluation criteria. See M. Dewhurst, "Where Is the Action? Three Lenses to Analyze Social Justice Art Education," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 44, no. 3 (2011): 364–78.