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Communication as Shared Existence, Dasein as Co-being: A Review of *Communication Communities in Fiction*

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Abstract: *Communication Communities in Fiction* systematically traces the theoretical trajectory of “communication community” through interdisciplinary approaches, unveiling its ontological significance via literary criticism. The study examines three constitutive dimensions: presuppositional analysis demonstrates how transcendental humanity underpins community formation, evidenced by ethical choices in Shakespearean romances; mediatic exploration deciphers the dual mechanisms of linguistic and digital communication, revealing through *Purity* the erosion of real-world belonging by virtual communities; practical investigation establishes communication acts as constitutive forces, with linguistic failures in Conradian tragedies exposing roots of isolationist crises. The work foregrounds literary language’s unique capacity to build communication communities through fictionality, alterity, and ethical discourse—proposing literary solutions to the crisis of belonging in globalization. Ultimately, it positions fiction as prophetic praxis for a community with a shared future for mankind, marking the theory’s revolutionary shift from methodology to social engagement.

Keywords: Communication Community; Literary Community; Novelistic Hermeneutics; Community with a Shared Future for Mankind; Digital Media

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题目：沟通即共同，此在即共在——评《小说中的沟通共同体》

摘要：《小说中的沟通共同体》以跨学科视野系统梳理了“沟通共同体”的理论脉络，通过文学批评揭示其本体论价值。该书从预设维度论证先验人性对共同体的奠基作用，以莎士比亚传奇剧中爱与宽恕的伦理选择为文本案例；从媒介维度解析传统与数字媒介的双重沟通机制，通过《纯洁》呈现虚拟共同体对现实归属感的消解；从实践维度阐明沟通行为对共同体的建构功能，借康拉德悲剧中的语言失效案例揭示隔离性危机的根源。作者强调文学语言通过虚构性、差异性与伦理言说构建沟通共同体的独特价值，为全球化时代的归属感缺失提供文学解决方案。全书最终指向小说对人类命运共同体的预言性实践功能，彰显了沟通共同体理论从方法论到社会实践的革命性意义。

关键词：沟通共同体；文学共同体；小说阐释；人类命运共同体；数字媒介

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Over the past two decades, a series of Western theoretical works on community have been introduced to China, engaging in mutual dialogue with traditional Chinese concepts such as “Great Harmony (天下大同)” and resonating with contemporary China’s call to build a community with a shared future for mankind. Among these, the Chinese translation of J. Hillis Miller’s *Communities in Fiction* stands as an exemplary case. The translator, Chen Guangxing, has consistently focused on the issue of community, publishing related research such as “Diaspora and Community Crisis in the Digital Media Era in *Purity*” and “How is Community Possible? A Study of J. Hillis Miller’s thought on Communication Community.” These works creatively situate community theory within the horizon of literary criticism. Building upon this foundation, Chen has authored the monograph *Communication Communities in Fiction* (Northwest University Press, 2024). The book is divided into three parts, exploring the connotations of the communication community and their corresponding novelistic forms through three dimensions: the Presupposed Human Communication Community, Communication as Community, and Communication Achieves Community. The author skillfully integrates presuppositions about communication, rhetorical criticism, and practical concerns, combining them with textual criticism of representative literary works, thereby facilitating the theoretical journey of community from methodology to ontology. It can be said that this monograph itself embodies the boundless “co-being” power of the communication community.

1. What is the Communication Community?

The book systematically traces the conceptual history of the “communication community,” clarifying its development over the past fifty-plus years. The term “communication community” was coined by Karl-Otto Apel in 1972, initially as a cultural concept. He argued that both natural sciences and humanities must first be communication communities, with “intelligibility” as the foundation for the community’s existence. Gerard Delanty’s *Community* (2010), a seminal synthesis of community thought that connects theory with social reality, posits communication as key to understanding any theory of community. Stanley Fish (1976),

combining literary studies, proposed the “interpretive community,” viewing communication, including textual interpretation, as an open, dynamic community. Raymond Williams (1961) held a similar view in *The Long Revolution*, stating that art, as a mode of communication, can present the “structure of feeling” of an era, expressing shared meanings of human existence. Anthony P. Cohen (1985) proposed that community is not a form of social practice but a symbolic structure. Only through the “complementary juxtaposition” of different communities can individuals gain self-awareness through communication and contrast. Benedict Anderson (2006) incorporated Cohen’s ideas into a critique of reality, viewing the nation as an imagined community and pointing out that the novel, as a medium, can foster communication among the populace, aiding in the formation of the national community.

In summary, the author succinctly summarizes the meaning of the communication community: in the current age of prevailing globalization and digitalization, the loss of a sense of belonging stems precisely from the neglect of community. Returning to community is a decisive factor for a poetic life, and whether community can be achieved depends on the possibility of communication. How does communication achieve community? The author analyzes this through three dimensions. First, the transcendental dimension: the presupposed human community. Drawing on theories by Terry Eagleton and Jean-Luc Nancy, the author points out that communication is an essential attribute of humanity, which can be restored through a process of “unconcealment,” thereby allowing humans to return to an ever-present community-in-itself. The author uses Shakespeare’s romance plays as textual cases to argue that love and forgiveness inherent in transcendental humanity led to comedic resolutions. Second, the mediatic dimension: communication as community. The author enumerates contemporary communicative media that potentially enable community, most notably the virtual communities of digital communication, followed by traditional media such as language and spatiotemporal media. Utilizing Jonathan Franzen’s *Purity* as an example, the author analyzes communication dilemmas in the digital media era and the novel’s imagination of a community with a shared future for mankind. Finally, the practical dimension: communication achieves community. Citing J. Hillis Miller’s “novelistic communication community” and Jürgen Habermas’s (1994) “theory of communicative action,” the author analyzes, from literary and pragmatic perspectives, the performative function of communication in constructing community. Using Joseph Conrad’s works as examples, the author summarizes tragic plots arising from communication barriers, reflecting the decisive role of communicative practice in community formation.

Beyond tracing the theory and classifying the forms of the communication community, particularly noteworthy is the author’s clarification of the origins of Nancy’s concept of the “unworked community.” The author points out a widespread misunderstanding in current academia regarding The unworked Community, mistakenly believing that, in Nancy’s view community is impossible. This is actually due to long-standing differing definitions of community within academia. For Nancy, community is possible, but he believes it is constituted by the communicative nature of humans themselves, and that any organized form of “fusion” harms this universal community. The author rectifies the understanding of Nancy’s “unworked community,” clarifying the viewpoints of Delanty, Miller, Agamben, Yin Qiping, and others. Furthermore, the translation

of “unworked” as “无为” (*wuwei*) is profoundly meaningful. The author connects it with Laozi’s concept of “无为而为” (acting through non-action) and Feng Youlan’s “negative philosophy,” using “无为” to convey Nancy’s negative attitude towards constructing community, while the semantic association of “无为而为” restores Nancy’s firm belief in the “effective result” of community. Whether in tracing the conceptual history of the communication community, classifying its forms, or rectifying specific theories, the author’s scholarly prowess is outstanding.

2. What Can the Communication Community Achieve?

In the present era, swept along by globalization and digitalization, what can the communication community accomplish? Throughout the book, the author provides answers from at least three dimensions. The first is the literary dimension: the communication community constructs literature’s ideal realm. Starting from the relationship between language and existence, drawing from Martin Heidegger (1997)—language as Being itself, which connects humans and things, making the world the extension of *Dasein*’s unfolding—the author notes that literary language, distinct from everyday language, belongs to what Maurice Blanchot (2016) termed “essential language,” most capable of unconcealing the Being of beings. Literary language constructs a literary community composed of author, text, and reader. It possesses fictionality, allowing the three to connect thoughts across millennia and visions across vast distances; it rejects identity, generating endless interpretation and dialogue among them; it is non-continuous, maintaining the strangeness of community members through gaps in dialogue; finally, it proves the ethical value of literature by speaking the unspeakable. While analyzing Miller’s “novelistic communication community,” the author further elaborates on the value of the literary community: literature completes the dual shaping of readers’ cognition and ethics by “witnessing” or “prophesying” the experiences of real communities. The author’s defense of the literary community can be seen as a contemporary “defense of poetry,” and the emphasis on literature’s function rewrites the poetic view since Aristotle. This defense is both timely and classical.

The second is the social dimension: the communication community constructs a field of social exchange. In the era of globalization and digitalization, traditional communication media—time and space—have been disrupted and reconfigured, leading to phenomena like time-space distanciation and disembedding. Human social activities are increasingly detached from their immediate locale; communicative spaces are filled with uncertainty and fluidity; the determinacy of traditional communities is eroded; humans gradually lose their sense of belonging in real space. Furthermore, traditional communication media are gradually being replaced by emerging digital media. People live in a reality shaped by media, spending significant time interacting with strangers in the virtual world while neglecting genuine social experiences, placing individuals in a state of universal loneliness. However, the author does not stop at diagnosing the ills of the times but proceeds to prescribe remedies. The first is communication media as memory. Memory, unlike history, possesses an ethical function. Countless individual memories connect to form collective memory, evolving across generations into cultural memory, enabling communication across time and space. Avishai Margalit (2015) terms this the “community of memory.” Within shared memory, individuals achieve value and identity recognition. The

second is communication media as space. Within humanistic geographical space, place is endowed with dual social and geographical attributes. Whether Ferdinand Tönnies's (2020) "community of place" or Yi-Fu Tuan's (2019) "topophilia," both contemplate the communicative relationship between the individual and nature, and between individuals and others, by reconstructing emotional bonds between people and space. In postmodern space, Edward W. Soja (2006) proposed the "Thirdspace," a fusion of the real and imagined, and Jacques Rancière (2015) proposed the "community of sense," both hoping to build consensus and construct communication communities using feeling, imagination, and art as ties. Globalized space, as a decentered governance system, gathers differentiated individuals. Individuals preserve themselves long-term by integrating into the collective, finding life's meaning within the community. Besides reaching the communication community through spatiotemporal media, the role of virtual communities cannot be overlooked. Here, the author compares the virtual community with Nancy's "unworked community," noting that the virtual community is a type of unworked community. Both seek harmony while preserving difference, value common ground while accepting divergence, and simultaneously exhibit a tendency to escape reality. The author provides a dialectical analysis of the virtual community's role, arguing that while it cancels interpersonal distance to some extent, potentially enhancing intimacy, it ultimately constitutes an escape from the otherness encountered. This "death of distance" may ultimately hinder communication. The author not only reveals the root causes of the widely felt yet often unarticulated "universal loneliness" in contemporary society but also wields the three tools of time, space, and the virtual community, offering pathways for constructing a social communication community. As Karl Marx (2004) said, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point is to change the world." In the author's writing, community theory is far from mere armchair speculation; it is a revolutionary mode of social practice.

Finally, the universal dimension: the communication community constructs a community with a shared future for mankind. Against the backdrop of globalization, issues like war, ecological crises, and capital flows transcend national borders, forcing people to confront their interdependent needs. By integrating the theories of Eagleton and Nancy on the transcendental community, the author provides legitimacy for the existence of a community with a shared future for mankind: it is not a political fantasy but a response to the human instinct for communication. Eagleton (2003) believes that death is humanity's only material commonality, and the body is the unpleasant proof of human mortality. The vulnerability of the flesh leads individuals to empathize with others and determines that individuals must be interdependent, living in mutually supportive groups. Therefore, mortality is the natural premise of human communication. Nancy's (1999) view is similar. A true community refuses to treat individual death as a tool, process, or means to an end, but respects death itself. The death of others allows us to taste samples of death repeatedly, feeling our own mortality. Thus, precisely because of the commonality of mortality, humans inherently possess the instinct to communicate. Following this instinct will inevitably lead to a community with a shared future for mankind. The author's impassioned tone is deeply moving. In a present marked by fractures between individuals and between nations, the author still believes that community is far from an imagined utopia or a nowhere land, but a reality inevitably reached by following instinct. Elevating theory from text to a prophecy about human destiny fully reveals the

contemporary scholar's humanistic concern. This monograph itself is a literary practice of constructing a communication community. It not only connects author and reader but also inspires readers to discover the necessary connections between the individual and all of humanity.

3. The Communication Community in Fiction

Communication Communities in Fiction does not stop at mere theoretical organization but incorporates highly representative textual cases for analysis. Each of the book's three parts includes an example, demonstrating the author's profound skill in textual interpretation. Part One analyzes the presupposed communication community in Shakespeare's romances. The author focuses on the original intention behind Shakespeare's late romances: after the storm, how do people attain happiness? The gaps in life presented in the four great tragedies urgently need to be filled with meaning, and Shakespeare provides answers with *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. The protagonists realize that all positions they previously occupied could be substituted by others, except for one that cannot be replaced: their own death. Mortality leads the characters, when faced with deep-seated hatred, instinctively to choose love and forgiveness. Love becomes the sole force welding character and plot, proving from a literary perspective the possibility of a community founded upon transcendental humanity. Part Two uses Franzen's *Purity* as a case study. The author incisively points out that the entire plot of Franzen's work is built upon the difficulty of communication; each character is a "diasporic subject," seeking themselves anew amidst displaced identity. The author argues that Franzen uses characters' inner anxiety to address social issues, reflecting communication dilemmas in the digital media era. "We may fear globally, but we suffer only locally and temporarily" (Chen Guangxing, 2024). The communication barriers in *Purity* are issues everyone must face in daily life. The lack of information exchange among characters in the novel conversely proves the mediatic role of communication, warning individuals to act proactively to enhance communication, thereby realizing a community with a shared future for mankind. Part Three uses Conrad's tragic works as examples to explore the role of communication in achieving community. The author provides an outstanding summary of the plot structure of Conrad's tragedies, namely the "structure of isolation," where a series of tragedies stem from the isolation of the individual from society, ultimately leading to internal division and destructive outcomes. Language, as a crucial tool of communication, plays a significant role in Conrad's works. Using *The Secret Agent* as an example, the author analyzes how the "conventionality" and "specious eloquence" of language constitute barriers to communication. Conrad's tragedies remind us to abandon the obfuscations of language and face others with genuine countenance. Only then can true communication occur, making the construction of community possible.

Communication Communities in Fiction is extensive in content and rich in information; readers can always find what they seek within it. Readers with a "peculiar fondness for crafting fine lines" can perceive the beauty of the text; literary practitioners can feel enlightened amidst the forest of extensively cited theories; those suffering from existential anxiety can find solace in "negative philosophy" and the "necessity of death"; solitary wanderers can envision a utopia where companions have never truly departed. The author once wrote: "We certainly cannot expect any single book or theory to solve all of humanity's problems. It is already

remarkable if it can inspire us in some aspect" (Chen Guangxing, 2024). Despite such humility, we discover such rich spiritual connotation within the book. This monograph, through its own existence, demonstrates the power of the communication community—from text to reality, from Dasein to co-being, the community with a shared future for mankind has always existed, and will continue to exist.

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