

# Aesthetica Edizioni

PREPRINT

*Periodico quadrimestrale*

*in collaborazione con la Società Italiana di Estetica*

N. 111

maggio-agosto 2019

Fondato da Luigi Russo

DIRETTORE SCIENTIFICO: Paolo D'Angelo (Università degli Studi Roma Tre)

COORDINAMENTO REDAZIONE: Leonardo Distaso (Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II)

SEGRETERIA DI REDAZIONE: Giacomo Fronzi (Università del Salento), Lisa Giombini (Università degli Studi Roma Tre), Leonardo Monetti Lenner (Università degli Studi Roma Tre), Gioia Laura Iannilli (Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna)

COMITATO SCIENTIFICO: Hans-Dieter Bahr (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen), Simona Chiodo (Politecnico di Milano), Pina De Luca (Università degli Studi di Salerno), Elio Franzini (Università degli Studi di Milano), Tonino Griffiero (Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata), Stephen Halliwell (University of St Andrews), José Jiménez (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), Jerrold Levinson (University of Maryland, College Park), Giovanni Matteucci (Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna), Winfried Menninghaus (Max-Planck-Institut für empirische Ästhetik), Dario Russo (Università degli Studi di Palermo), Baldine Saint-Girons (Université Paris-Nanterre), Richard Shusterman (Florida Atlantic University), Victor Stoichita (Universität Freiburg), Salvatore Tedesco (Università degli Studi di Palermo)

I contributi proposti per la pubblicazione sono sottoposti a *peer review* secondo la procedura *double-blind*

a cura di Lisa Giombini

# *Art and Its Counterparts*

Essays on Peter Lamarque

Aesthetica Edizioni

2019 Aesthetica Edizioni

ISSN (Print) 0393-8522

ISBN 9788877261212

[www.aestheticaedizioni.it](http://www.aestheticaedizioni.it)

[info@aestheticaedizioni.it](mailto:info@aestheticaedizioni.it)

# *Indice*

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction. In Dialogue with Peter Lamarque<br>di Lisa Giombini  | 7  |
| The Subject on Perceiving (Conceptual) Art<br>di Fabrizia Bandi  | 15 |
| Reading as Art: Literary Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art<br>di Dario Cecchi   | 23 |
| Peter Lamarque su verità e valore letterario.<br>Alcune riflessioni critiche<br>di Gabriele Tomasi                           | 31 |
| Aesthetic Necessity<br>di Simona Chiodo  | 45 |
| Aesthetic Essentialism and Aesthetic Uniqueness.<br>A Problematic Relation?<br>di Filippo Focosi                             | 53 |
| It's Not Easy Being Green. The Challenge of Colour<br>di Alice Barale  | 61 |
| Restoring the Work, Restoring the Object, di Lisa Giombini   | 75 |
| An Argument Against a Meta-ontology of Art Inspired by<br>Peter Lamarque's Reading of Jean-Paul Sartre<br>di Elisa Caldarola | 85 |
| Da oggetto a opera: variazioni immaginative di significato<br>di Sara Matetich   | 97 |

# *Reading as Art: Literary Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*

di Dario Cecchi

## ABSTRACT

The inadequacy of an approach concerned only with ontological issue in the definition of art has become evident in the recent debate, amid both analytical and continental philosophers – as well as those who work in-between them. Objects of research such as literature have proved to be promising fields for a new philosophy of art, as the seminal reflections of thinkers like Peter Lamarque (2009) have outlined. The very notion of “work of art” can be experimentally replaced by new concepts such as “art device” (Matteucci 2019). However, to rethink the work of art as a device to be implemented, one is brought to reconsider the role of reception and the aesthetic experience at large, which were largely neglected in the analytical ontology of art, Danto in particular. By reconsidering the aesthetics of reception (Iser; Jauss) contemporary philosophers and researchers, often concerned with the new challenges of the neuroscience and the new media, would probably focus on a form of imagination largely neglected so far: the imagination of the reader.

### *1. Introduction: rethinking the ontology of art*

Peter Lamarque is by far one of those post-Dantian analytical philosophers who attempt to restore a favorable attitude toward aesthetic experience. This peculiarity is probably bound to his interest in the philosophy of literature. The literary work raises in fact questions concerning the role of aesthetic reception in the definition of literature as art. His philosophy of literature is particularly charitable with all of those claims concerning issues like interpretation, judgment and reception of literary works<sup>1</sup>. I believe however that it is also necessary to investigate the reader’s reconstruction of the story because this reconstruction is fundamental to the definition of the literary work. I argue that this operation is a task of the *reader’s imagination*. To argument this statement, I will proceed as follows: firstly, I appeal to Wolfgang Iser’s response the-

<sup>1</sup> The acts of the symposium on his *Philosophy of Literature* (2009) confirm this impression: see the “British Journal of Aesthetics”, Vol. 50 No. 1, 2010. For an approach partly inspired by Lamarque’s philosophy of literature, and which develops his stance toward an exploration of the cognitive bias and import of reading as aesthetic experience, see W. Huemer, *Engaging with Works of Fiction*, “Rivista di Estetica”, No. 70, 2019, pp. 107-124.

ory; secondly, I argue that we should integrate our concept of ‘work of art’ with the notion of ‘device’<sup>2</sup>; thirdly, I suggest that reading a novel, considered from an aesthetic point of view, results from the negotiation between dealing with the text as object and the fact of being merged into the text. In other words, reading oscillates between the *experience of* and the *experience with* the text<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. *The imagination of the reader*

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, the *Rezeptionsästhetik* elaborated a new paradigm of literary theory, according to which the reader plays a key role in the process of interpretation. The interaction with the text is described as a “reception” (*Rezeption*) of the literary work, in particular by Hans Robert Jauss: it is a performance of which the active and creative sides are especially underlined. Nonetheless, Wolfgang Iser prefers speaking of “response” (*Wirkung*). By the way, *Wirkung* stays also for (aesthetic) effect: Iser mentions Josef König’s essay on that issue.

As far as the *Wirkung* of the literary work enjoys such double status (response and effect), the constituency of the aesthetic effect is as much *communicational* as it is *sensible*. Arguably, the coordination of these two levels is supplied by the reader’s *imagination* as far as this faculty compensates the lack of perception in the literary work.

Iser was influenced also by Roman Ingarden. The latter had already argued that the reader reconstructs the story she reads by imaginatively configuring its sense<sup>4</sup>. Iser adds a new element to Ingarden’s description: the sense configuration is not the act of an isolated mind, but is a process depending on the interaction with the text. It is not configuration *after* reading: it is configuration *through* reading. In other words, the “configurations” (*Gestalten*) produced by the reader form together a “flow” that accompanies the act of reading, and concurs to the formation of a general pattern of the story. Iser is not identifying reading with interpretation: on the contrary, reading precedes, prepares but only foreshadows interpretation. Reading is dynamical, whilst interpretation tends to “freeze” the story into an ultimate figure. But the ultimate interpretation of the text is as much elusive as the “figure in the carpet”

<sup>2</sup> This notion enjoyed a large use in the French philosophy: e.g. Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard and more recently Déotte. But I refer here to the use recently proposed by Giovanni Matteucci in his last book *Estetica e natura umana*, Carocci, Roma 2019.

<sup>3</sup> For these notions of experience, see G. Matteucci, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> R. Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973. See also L. Gasperoni, M. Tedeschini (eds.), *Tra fenomenologia ed estetica: l’opera letteraria di Roman Ingarden*, Syzthesis, Roma 2013.

in Henry James' short novel bearing this very title. Interpretation, therefore, returns to reading, while the reading of a text aims at being confirmed by its interpretation. Iser shows that the general condition of this circular approach to the text is the configurational process which incorporates, compares, shapes, blends or refutes the single parts of the text as far as reading proceeds. To make sense of a narrative text implies this process.

To realize a configurational process, and not a series of isolated configurations of the text, the reader needs to develop a *consciousness of time*. Every configuration of the text is, in fact, either an *anticipation* of what will happen or the *reformulation* of what has already happened. Or, to use Husserl's terminology, they are either "protensions" or "retentions" in the reader's experience<sup>5</sup>. So writes Iser:

The 'object' of the text can only be imagined by way of different consecutive phases of reading. We always stand outside the given object, whereas we are situated inside the literary text. The relation between text and reader is therefore quite different than between object and observer: instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a moving viewpoint which travels along *inside* that which it has to apprehend. This mode of grasping an object is unique to literature<sup>6</sup>.

Being slightly more radical than Iser, one could argue that reading is the *disposition of the subject's temporal intentionality in accordance with an imagined new spatial condition*. One might assume indeed that the feeling bound to the experience of reading points out to the *restoration of our sense of reality* as far as we cannot, as human beings, cast off our sensibility as our primary mediation to reality. In other words, the "chronotope" the reader reconstructs, while she reads, is really, as argues Mikhail Bakhtin, a sort of "Transcendental Aesthetics" at work in the literary text<sup>7</sup>. And as such, I argue with Iser, it orients the reader's experience and is a function of her imagination.

This feeling is particularly strong when we deal with complex narrative structures, which depend on more articulated plots than the mere opposition of protagonist and antagonist. This is the case for Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. The novel's very title suggests that this is Anna's story, that is, the story of the female condition in the late

<sup>5</sup> See. E. Husserl, *Of the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, *Husserliana*, Vol. 4, trans. Springer, Berlin-New-York 1991. Iser mentions Husserl's text. On the relationship between narrative and time, see also P. Ricoeur, *Narrative and Time*, Vol. 1, trans. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 1984.

<sup>6</sup> W. Iser, *The Act of Reading*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London 1978, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. The University of Texas Press, Austin 1983.

19th-century Russia. But if one focuses on the male protagonist Vronsky, then one might argue that the novel is concerned with a love affair and the nature of love, or with the rigid and unwritten laws of high society. But our review of the novel's characters has not come to an end yet: one could take the author's humanism seriously, and consider Anna and Vronsky's affair only as the counterpoint to Kitty and Levin's representation of the truly idyllic love. But what would happen if one just leaves aside these couples of lovers to focus on the apparently minor story of Dolly and Stiva, with their unhappy and yet tender marriage? Is the ordinariness of the latter couple's life really ordinary? Is the novel's famous beginning – stating that all happy families are alike, whilst only the unhappy ones stand alone as exemplary cases – an invitation to seek for the extraordinary (adultery and the challenge to commonsense) or to investigate the unordinary concealed in ordinary life? As we see, a lot of work is charged on the reader's imagination to fill the “blanks” of a structure (the plot) which is well designed for the very fact that it implies the reader's intervention.

### 3. *Literary objects: from works to devices, and back*

In the previous paragraph we saw that the reader's contribution to the operation of making sense of the text, i.e. the operation Eco calls “actualization”, is not limited, pace Eco, to a cognitive performance, but is likely to entail the reader's aesthetic experience as one of its necessary components. Hans Robert Jauss especially considers whether and to what extent reading can be described as an aesthetic experience. Considered from the point of view of literature and reading, aesthetic experience presents a fundamental trait – Jauss speaks of *Grunderfahrung* or *Grundbegriff*, i.e. “fundamental experience” or “concept” – alternatively called *katharsis* or “communicative function”<sup>8</sup>. The first definition dates back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, whereas the second one is rooted in Kant's notion of *sensus communis*. In a nutshell, when we read the deeds of a ‘hero’ or a ‘heroine’ – no matter whether lucky or unlucky, happy or sad – we identify ourselves with them, and put our own emotional life in communication with the values and modes conveyed through the story. In this way, argues Jauss, the readers' social world – i.e. the moral and political norms the readers feel as their own – becomes the object of a free critical reconsideration, attuned to the specific mood (dramatic, serious, tragic or ironic, playful, comic, etc.) the readers may assume in front of the text. By means of this fluidifi-

<sup>8</sup> See J.R. Jauss, *Kleine Apologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung*, Universitätsverlag, Konstanz 1972, *passim*.



cation of the moral or political values, as well as the emotions embedded with them, the readers are able to reconsider and eventually restore their ethical life: this is, according to Jauss, what Aristotle calls “purification” (*katharsis*) when speaking of the effects of tragedy on its audience.

Jauss’ perspective is consistent with Iser’s phenomenology of reading. Arguably, the latter’s reconstruction of the reading performance in the terms of its imaginative import adds a fundamental point to Jauss’ theory concerning the aesthetic experience. As I said, the reader’s imagination compensates in fact the lack of any direct perception of the fictional world. And it is by means of this compensation that the reader is able to open the “play space” (*Spielraum*) thanks to which the “horizon of expectation” (*Erwartungshorizont*) of reading becomes open, also to the free and critical reconsideration of moral and political norms; otherwise the reader would be bound to the bias concerning the seriousness of real life. Here, pace legions of analytical philosophers and cognitive scientists<sup>9</sup>, it is not at stake the opposition between reality and fiction: the condition of imaginative compensation of perception is valid also for nonfiction narrative, like most of Emmanuel Carrère’s novels.

It is again a matter of the reader’s position with regard to the text: it is in particular the problem of her *identity* within the text. Iser came to this conclusion while developing his response theory into a “literary anthropology”. As I said above, Iser, like Ricoeur after him, was especially concerned with the nature of time in reading. Nevertheless, Iser seems to foreshadow what we call “spatial turn” today as he argues in one of his posthumous essays that the literary text is like an “artificial habitat” (*künstliches Habitat*) for the reader<sup>10</sup>. My proposal is to cross this posthumous consideration of the literary text as artificial habitat with the anthropological perspective Iser argues in his later writings<sup>11</sup>. According to this perspective, the reader is an “actor” (*Darsteller*) within the text. Consequently, the text conceived as artificial habitat must be understood as the stage on which the reader acts. However, a question is left open, being concerned with what sort of action the actor-reader is to display on the textual stage inasmuch she is, properly speaking, only an *invisible actor* within the text.

<sup>9</sup> Let us consider, for them all, the influential position of Gregory Currie: see G. Currie, *Narrative and Narrators*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010.

<sup>10</sup> W. Iser, *Emergenz*, ed. by A. Schmitz, Konstanz University Press, Konstanz 2013, p. 228.

<sup>11</sup> See Id., *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London 1993, , *passim*.

Arguably, the reader's agency must be intended literally – at least if we consider the German word used, *Darsteller*: the reader's task is to offer a *Darstellung* in the Kantian acceptation of the word: namely, it is the *presentation* of an object, e.g. a literary text, according to a concept, no matter whether determinate or indeterminate<sup>12</sup>, which makes sense of it and anticipates its knowledge – or its interpretation. Actually the reader enacts her skills in handling the text, overlapping the boundaries of a purely cognitive performance. On the contrary, she engages her emotional and ethical life in the understanding of the different characters. This is what Jauss calls *katharsis* or communicative function, which depends on a sort of identification of the reader with the protagonist. The kind of presentation at stake in reading is therefore enriched of a variety of pertinences. As far as the issue of the narrative identification is concerned, Iser makes a fundamental remark: this identification does not happen within a one-to-one relationship between the protagonist and the reader, but entails the reader's wider consideration of the relationships existing between the protagonist and the other characters of the novel. And this is the tool by which the reader is able to display all sorts of attitudes in front of the text.

Let us take Stendhal's *Chartreuse*. Does the reader judge Fabrizio del Dongo's character alone? Or does she rather consider his character in relation to the other characters – Countess Pietranera, Count Mosca, Clelia and the others – according to the various situations presented in the novel, as well as her personal preferences? This is, properly speaking, the kind of *Darstellung* displayed by the reader: peculiarly aesthetic as far as she aims at including as many other standpoints as possible, and peculiarly anthropological, i.e. cognitive *and* emotional, as far as she restores her identity by passing through the others' ones. Most importantly, the artificial habitat, in which this anthropological and aesthetic performance takes place, is neither totally *outside* the text, being not the result of the reader's idiosyncrasies, not totally *inside* the text since the reader keeps a distance and refuses any definitive adherence to this or that part of the text.

#### 4. Reading as aesthetic experience

What is said above concerning the way the reader interacts with the literary text resists the criticism moved against the import of the aesthetic to cognition through reading. On the contrary, reading can

<sup>12</sup> In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant uses the apparently strange expression "indeterminate concept". What he means, is that the presentation of an object is possible also in the absence of any explicit concept of the object itself, only according to the general lawfulness of the understanding.

be considered as a form of interaction with the narrative text, in which the *experience of* the text as object *overlaps* the *experience with* the text as habitat<sup>13</sup>. As far as we consider the reader as an actor – in the sense indicated above – *outside* the text, we are pushed to recognize that the objective intentionality (the “experience of”) prevails: the reader aims at grasping the sense of the book, being able to say what it is about. But as soon as we consider her as an actor *inside* the book, we discover that she uses all sorts of clues, including her immediate sympathy or mistrust for this or that character, in order to make sense of the text as a world within which she is able to move, exploring its reality. In the latter case reading is predominantly an “experience with”, through which the reader’s imagination fabricates affordances making sense of the text as a sensed world.

Let us take Stendhal’s famous description of Fabrizio del Dongo’s participation to the Battle of Waterloo. All the episode is traversed by Fabrizio’s doubt concerning the authenticity of his participation to the event. He never stops wondering whether this or that detail, this or that encounter, made his presence there real. By identifying herself with the protagonist, the reader repeats Fabrizio’s “experience with” the “habitat” of the battle. Furthermore, she augments the event through her *reflective condition*. Nonetheless, the reader, because of this very reflective attitude, never stops considering the meaning of this episode in relation to the story, Fabrizio’s life and the other character’s reactions. In other words, she performs an “experience of”, contributing to the general configuration of the novel’s sense. It is by virtue of this overlapping that the literary device turns to work and has effects, in the reader’s experience. And this is a fair reason to argue that the literary text is but a *device*, and needs the reader’s contribution to become effective as *work*.

It seems to me a remarkable trait of reading: for it unveils a mechanism of imagination which connects and coordinates two different modes of experience, one oriented to anthropology and the other oriented to objective knowledge. And it expands the Kantian hypothesis<sup>14</sup> of the aesthetic experience as a form of indirect restoration of the cognitive faculties of the mind toward the inclusion of emotional and even practical skills<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Notably, the modern novel is one of the examples Matteucci brings to epitomize his idea of aesthetic experience as “experience with”: see G. Matteucci, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-79.

<sup>14</sup> See P. D’Angelo, *Estetica*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2011; E. Garroni, *Estetica ed epistemologia*, Bulzoni, Roma 1976; R. Kukla (ed.), *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006.

<sup>15</sup> For a similar perspective, applied however to the visual arts, see P. Montani, *Tecnologie della sensibilità*. Cortina, Milano 2014; S. Velotti, *Dialettica del controllo*, Castelvecchi, Roma 2017.

## References

- Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013
- Bakhtin, M., *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. The University of Texas Press, Austin 1983
- Currie, G., *Narrative and Narrators*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010
- D'Angelo, P., *Estetica*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2011
- Garroni, E., *Estetica e epistemologia*, Bulzoni, Roma 1976
- Gasperoni, L., Tedeschini, M. (eds.), *Tra fenomenologia ed estetica: l'opera letteraria di Roman Ingarden*, Syzetestis, Roma 2013
- Huemer, W., *Engaging with Works of Fiction*, "Rivista di Estetica", No. 70, 2019, pp. 107-124.
- Husserl, E., *Of the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, *Husserliana*, Vol. 4, trans. Springer, Berlin-New-York 1991
- Ingarden, R., *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973
- Iser, W., *The Act of Reading*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London 1978
- Iser, W., *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London 1993
- Iser, W., *Emergenz*, ed. by A. Schmitz, Konstanz University Press, Konstanz 2013
- Jauss, H.R., *Kleine Apologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung*, Universitätsverlag, Konstanz 1972
- Kant, I., *Critique of Power of Judgment*, ed. by P. Guyer, trans. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000
- Kukla, R. (ed.), *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006
- Lamarque, P., *The Philosophy of Literature*, Blackwell, Malden 2009
- Lamarque, P. et al., *Symposium*, "British Journal of Aesthetics", Vol. 50 No. 1, 2010
- Matteucci, G., *Estetica e natura umana*, Carocci, Roma 2019
- Montani, P., *Tecnologie della sensibilità*. Cortina, Milano 2014
- Ricoeur, P., *Narrative and Time*, Vol. 1, trans. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 1984
- Velotti, S., *Dialettica del controllo*, Castelveccchi, Roma 2017