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a cura di Lisa Giombini

Art and Its Counterparts

Essays on Peter Lamarque

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Introduction

In Dialogue with Peter Lamarque

di Lisa Giombini

To this day, analytic approaches to art and literature still maintain a bad reputation among theoreticians from different philosophical backgrounds. The causes are a matter for speculation, but two are at least likely. First, analytic philosophers are frequently thought to do excursions into aesthetics only to illustrate their theories of language, epistemology, logic or metaphysics, referring to art more as a means to account for different conceptual purposes rather than as a scientific end in itself. Second, many of them still seem content to ignore, when not completely dismiss, what is done in other more peripheral or simply not English-speaking aesthetic circles.

The British philosopher Peter Lamarque (1948), emeritus Professor at York University and former editor of *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, represents an exception to both these tendencies. The author of a considerable body of books as well as of a good number of seminal essays and papers, over the decades Lamarque has been immersing himself in studying central issues in the philosophy of literature¹, the ontology of art and the aesthetics² and ethics of restoration and ruins³, providing important contributions to the advancement of debates in each of these areas. Perhaps as a result of his genuine interest for aesthetic phenomena, Lamarque has been also brought to confront with philosophical traditions that extend

¹ See P. Lamarque and S. H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1994; *The Philosophy of Literature*, Blackwell Publishing, Hoboken, NJ 2009; *The Opacity of Narrative* Rawman and Littlefield, London 2014.

² See P. Lamarque, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition, An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishing, Hoboken, NJ 2003; *Work and Object. Exploration in the Metaphysics of Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010.

³ See, in particular, P. Lamarque, *Reflections on the Ethics and Aesthetics of Restoration and Conservation*, in "The British Journal of Aesthetics", Vol. 56, n. 3, 2016, pp. 281-299; P. Lamarque and W. Nigel, *The Application Of Narrative to the Conservation of Historic Buildings*, in "Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics", Vol. LVI/XII, no. 1, 2019a, pp. 5-27; P. Lamarque, *The Values of Ruins and Depiction of Ruins*, in Bicknell, J., Judkins, J., Korsmeyer, C. (eds.), *Philosophical Perspectives on Ruins, Monuments, and Memorials*, Routledge, New York 2019, pp. 83-94.

beyond the boundaries of analytic philosophy, including phenomenology, post-modernism and French theory.

In this light, the attention his work has lately started to gain in our country – leading to the Prize he was awarded with in 2018 by the *Società italiana di estetica* (SIE) and the subsequent translation of his *Work and Object* (2019)⁴ – should be anything but surprising. This special issue of *Aesthetica Preprint* aims at contributing to the current process of dissemination and acquaintance of Lamarque's work in the context of Italian aesthetics. Some of the nine essays that comprise this collection are re-elaborations of talks held during the XVII National Congress of SIE *L'estetica in opera* (Naples, May 25-26 2019), within the frame of a special panel dedicated to Lamarque's award-winning book. Others result from the conference *Work and object. Discussing aesthetics with Peter Lamarque*, organized at the University of Parma on 4 April 2012.

As diverse as they can be in terms of style and sensitivity, the contributions presented here testify to the extent and variety of Lamarque's philosophical interests. The authors discuss a whole range of topics that shape Lamarque's approach to aesthetics, issues ranging from the value of literature, the features at the core of this value, literary truth, the ontology and meta-ontology of art, art evaluation and interpretation, the status of works of fiction, the role of the recipient in aesthetic experience, and the restoration and conservation of works of art. In what follows, I will confine myself to providing the readers with a number of cues by which to frame this multifaceted variety of issues. Each of this cue could be profitably addressed alone, but taken together they offer a hopefully worthwhile theoretical outline for understanding and evaluating the particular reflections developed in the papers that form this volume.

The guiding assumption informing Lamarque's approach to aesthetics is probably the thought that engaging with the arts is not just about appreciating and responding to artworks – but an activity deeply informed and shaped by cultural conventions. These conventions, broadly specifiable within a practice, dictate the kinds of expectations that viewers bring to artworks and the values they seek from them, which the great works of art are able to fulfill. The attempt to characterize these conventions in a way that is both rationally justified and able to accommodate the vast variety of artistic genres and styles represents a major objective in his work, and the core of his philosophy of art. The central idea in this approach is that works of art do not exist independently of the

⁴ *Opera e oggetto. Esplorazioni nella metafisica dell'arte* (tr. it. di L. Giombini), Macerata 2019.

context in which they are rooted, since this context is necessary for them to be identified as works of art in the first place – that is, to be distinguished from the physical objects they are made of – the statue from the marble, the painting from the painted canvas and so on. Artworks, including literary works, are indeed for Lamarque “institutional objects”, entities whose existence relies on a set of social rules as to how these works are created, appreciated, and evaluated. As institutional objects, works of art are also *dependent* on the attitudes, expectations, and responses found in artists and viewers. This has consequences for both artworks’ identification and appreciation.

In the first place, it implies that to be identified as such, works of art must be recognized by a group of viewers whose evaluations stand out against the background of a specific social and artistic context. This background – which constitutes what Arthur Danto’s famously called “the art world” – determines both artworks’ mode of creation and the conditions of their survival in time. Embedded as they are within the social practices that allow their aesthetic appreciation, artworks can only survive, according to Lamarque, as long as these practices survive. Should these practices get lost in collective memory, or find themselves gradually replaced by other customs or habits, artworks themselves would cease to exist, even if the physical objects that constitute them were to remain physically intact. As a result, if in the future we were no longer able to give meaning to the notion we now have of a “statue”, then statues would be doomed to disappear from the world, even though the marble blocks that constitute them continued to exist. Despite their ontological dependence on human actions, beliefs and institutions, artworks should however not be considered, according to Lamarque, either ideal, mental, or imaginary entities, but real objects as much as their physical counterparts. The analogy, in this sense, is with “social objects” in Searle’s sense – things such as money, schools, states and laws, which are not reducible to the physical objects in which they are embodied and depend, for their existence, on collective intentionality.

Secondly, and relatedly, this means that, for each work of art, the core of aesthetic properties that identifies it as a particular artwork cannot be attributed to the work independently of the human mind, but relies on the judgments and evaluations of recipients. Factors related to the appreciation and interpretation of the work constitute indeed, according to Lamarque, an integral part of the work itself. In this sense, a work of art is what it is *via* the aesthetic qualities that arise in the framework of the aesthetic experience undergone

by recipients. Although being intrinsically relational, these aesthetic qualities are nevertheless possessed by artworks in an essential and objective way. It follows that all aesthetic judgements that fail to recognize, deny or contradict these properties are, by definition, inappropriate, inadequate or simply wrong. What we call aesthetic experience, in turn, is never for Lamarque a simple experience of perception. The scope of aesthetics, for him, encompasses yet is not reducible to the scope of mere perception – of what is directly perceived through the senses, as clearly demonstrated by the case of literature. Therefore, although the essential aesthetic character of a work of art can only be grasped through direct encounter with a work, the resulting experience is infinitely richer, deeper, and more complex than mere sensitive apperception.

Lamarque's recognition of the complexity underlying the realm of aesthetic phenomena is the expression of an attitude which, to my mind, represents one of the most valuable aspects of his approach to art and aesthetics. In all his scholarly publications – both those dealing with broader aesthetic issues as well as those specifically devoted to the topic of literature – Lamarque is indeed more committed to do justice to the complex variety of artistic expressions than to force them into the ranks of a simplistic theory. Relevantly, it is precisely the sensitivity he shows to the social and cultural character of art, combined with his anti-reductionist methodology, that makes his work approachable and stimulating even to scholars belonging to philosophical traditions other than analytic aesthetics.

As the readers will appreciate, the essays collected in this volume – briefly outlined here below – provide a clear evidence of the possibility and fruitfulness of this confrontation.

In her interesting contribution "*The Subject on Perceiving (Conceptual) Art*" Fabrizia Bandi tries for example to establish a relation between Lamarque's conception of what it is to appreciate art (and conceptual art particularly) and Michel Dufrenne's phenomenological approach. Comparing Lamarque's idea that works of art "must invite" a certain kind of perception with Dufrenne's notion of artworks as "imposing" themselves to the spectator, Bandi discusses the role of the recipient in the context of aesthetic experience. This leads her to a view in which the spectator, more than a simple observer, is a "witness" of the work of his experience who, in Dufrenne's terms, realizes through his presence the "intentions of the work".

A similar effort towards building a dialogue between Lamarque's analytic perspective and contemporary German aesthetics can be found in Dario Cecchi's insightful paper *Reading as Art: Literary*

Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. Addressing the topic of literature as art, Cecchi focuses on the role of the reader's imagination in the reception of literary works. Comparing Lamarque's conception of literature with the German tradition of the *Rezeptionsästhetik* and especially Wolfgang Iser's idea of *Wirkung* – the “response” or “effect” of a literary work – Cecchi scrutinizes the role played by the reader's imagination in appreciating literature. While reading a text, Cecchi argues, the reader is like an actor or a *Darsteller* who *interacts with* the work in an experience of active aesthetic engagement.

The subject of literature is also examined in Gabriele Tomasi's thorough essay “*Peter Lamarque su verità e valore letterario. Alcune riflessioni critiche*”. Tomasi investigates the complex issue of truth in relation to literary works by questioning Lamarque's idea that cognitive value is not relevant for determining the literary value of a work of fiction. This idea, according to Tomasi, arises from Lamarque's unjustified assumption that literary truth is to be understood only in propositional terms. Accepting a deflationary conception of truth as related to non-propositional forms of knowledge, however, may enable us to account for the central role that truth seem to play in our ordinary experience of fiction. In this light, Tomasi argues, the claim that literature aims at truth could be understood as meaningful and consistent.

Reference to literature constitutes as well the starting point of Simona Chiodo's sagacious study “*Aesthetic necessity*”. Drawing on the example of Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, Chiodo analyses Lamarque's conception of aesthetic essentialism by contrasting it to some stimulating theoretical insights put forward by the Italian philosopher Giulio Preti at the end of the Nineteenth century. Adopting Preti's terminology, Chiodo argues that artworks work by *persuading* (rather than *convincing*) the viewers to appreciate them in a certain way. Artworks, in other words, can be conceived of as “examples”, inviting the recipient to adopt a specific attitude or to react in a peculiar manner. Triggering a unique, necessary type of response, artworks' aesthetic character can, according to Chiodo, be seen as essential in Lamarque's sense.

A further brilliant contribution to the exploration of Lamarque's notion of aesthetic essentialism is provided by Filippo Focosi in his “*Aesthetic Essentialism and Aesthetic Uniqueness: a Problematic Relation?*”. Focosi relates Lamarque's essentialism to Levinson's theory of aesthetic uniqueness, the view that each work of art has a “unique character” which depends, for its existence, on the unique interconnectedness among its parts. While, according to Lamarque, only *some* of the properties possessed by an artwork have a neces-

sary character with regard to the identity of the work itself, insofar as they determine its nature as a specific work of art, on Levinson's account *every* component of the work is equally essential to the whole that the artwork is. These two positions, according to Focosi, are not necessarily at odds with each other, but to be proven consistent the difference between what Focosi calls the aesthetic *character* of a work and its aesthetic *content* must be accounted for.

The question of which properties of an artwork may count among the “real” features that constitute its aesthetic character is also explored in Alice Barale's captivating text “*It's not easy being green: The challenge of colour*”. Questioning Lamarque's idea that colours can be thought of as part of the “object” that constitutes a picture, Barale introduces and discusses the most widespread positions in the analytic debate concerning the metaphysical status of colours (eliminativism, relativism, physicalism and naive realism). Drawing on the example of the “Città fantasma” series of paintings by the Italian artist Velasco Vitali and on the use of colours that is displayed in these works, Barale argues that in our ordinary experience of colours the physical cannot be separated from the symbolic dimension.

The importance played by symbolic values in the framework of artworks' appreciation and evaluation constitutes the background of Lisa Giombini's “*Restoring the Work, Restoring the Object*”. Giombini considers some potential implications of Lamarque's ontological contextualism for discussions in the field of art conservation and restoration. If, following Lamarque, artworks are understood as social emerging objects whose existence depends essentially on appropriate cultural conditions, then preserving them means in the first place preserving this web of social, cultural, historical meanings, rather than just conserving the objects' physical features. Conservation, Giombini argues, can therefore be considered as a “meaning-enhancement” intervention, focused more on the symbolic value of an artwork than on the hypothetical original condition of the material object.

A focus on ontological and meta-ontological issues also characterizes Elisa Caldarola's thought-provoking paper “*An Argument against a meta-ontology of art inspired by Peter Lamarque's reading of Jean-Paul Sartre*”. Caldarola draws a comparison between Lamarque's discussion of Sartre's idealism about the existence of works of art and Stephen Yablo's meta-ontological fictionalism concerning the ontological status of numbers. According to both positions, when talking about artworks and numbers we engage in a game of make-belief, that is, we “pretend” that there really exist such things in the world, yet our talk is in fact metaphorical. According to Caldarola, however, a fictionalist meta-ontology is misguided in the case of visual

artworks, for there actually is no reason to believe that we are just talking *fictionally* when we refer to works that exist as distinct entities with regard to the material vehicles that embody them.

A stimulating critical reconsideration of the ontological distinction between the notion of “work” and “object”, in Lamarque’s sense, is offered by Sara Matetich in her “*Da oggetto a opera: variazioni imaginative di significato*”. According to Matetich, a work of art can be defined – using Adorno’s definition – as an object that, whilst accepting its “thingliness”, is however able to transcend it so as to be open to the meanings that make it a “critical object”. Applying this consideration to Christoph Büchel’s 2017 proposal for a work of land art resulting of part of Trump’s border wall between the US and Mexico, she argues that this transfiguration is made possible by what she calls an “imaginative deal” with the receiver, which, as Michel Foucault argues, is based on a form of curiosity.

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The Subject on Perceiving (Conceptual) Art

di Fabrizia Bandi

ABSTRACT

This paper concerns the role of the subject in the relationship with artworks, in particular with conceptual art. The aim is to make a comparison between two approaches coming from different traditions: an aspect of Peter Lamarque's *Work and Object* theory and Mikel Dufrenne's phenomenology of the aesthetic object. The central question is to understand whether the intentional properties possessed by artworks are sufficient by themselves to elicit a proper aesthetic response or experience, and so to distinguish common objects from works of art. To answer this question, according to phenomenological aesthetics, one has to look also at the subject involved. In the end, the core of the aesthetic experience, but also the definition of what an artwork properly is, has to be sought in the encounter between work and spectator. In the light of this, one can read anew Dufrenne's idea of the spectator not just as a simple accessory of an artwork, but even as a "performer" and a "witness".

The issue of conceptual art is, and always will be, particularly challenging. Given his philosophical tradition and references, I was particularly impressed by the perceptual approach Peter Lamarque proposed, especially at the end of his *Work and Object*. So, in this short dissertation, I'd like to read some of the elements elaborated by Lamarque about perceiving conceptual art in dialogue with a phenomenological perspective, with particular reference to some aspects of Mikel Dufrenne's theory of aesthetic experience. This will be an opportunity to take the first steps in between two traditions, analytic philosophy and phenomenology, giving rise to difficult questions more than good answers.

Lamarque's *Empiricist Principle* states: "If there is a difference between a work and a 'mere real thing' or object (including a text) then that difference must yield, or be realizable in, a difference in experience."¹ In a nutshell, we may infer that the way in which the object is presented, the fact that it has been labelled with a title, that it has some properties, and above all the fact that someone, namely the artist, has picked up this object intentionally for dis-

¹ P. Lamarque, *Work and object: exploration in the metaphysics of arts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010, p. 229.

playing it to a public, all of these reasons – all contributing to the fact that that artwork is a *work* – make the object look different, while inviting the observer to a specific experience. The challenge is to pinpoint this “difference” in experience.

In the case of conceptual art, where the ideal aspect seems the paramount element of the artwork, the difference between object and work seems unstable, so to disclose the difference one has to refer to the intentional and phenomenological content of the experience. So as Lamarque suggests: “[...] If they [objects] are to succeed in becoming *works* distinct from the things themselves, must invite a kind of perception which makes salient particular aspects and suggests significance for them. If they fail to generate this kind of experience they have failed as art [...].”²

First of all, I would like to focus on the expression “must invite”. I’m totally on board with the charming wording, but at the same time it poses a high-priority question: how is actually possible that an artwork, perceptually identical to a common object, can lead the subject to a specific attitude. In fact, the expression “must invite” suggests a sort of intentionality present in the work. This point is very close to the phenomenology perspective proposed by Dufrenne. In his *Phenomenology of aesthetic experience*, he writes: “The work imposes itself to the spectator”, as if the object of my experience as work cannot be avoided; or “I am in the service of the work, which seems [...] to ‘posit’ me. The work therefore has the initiative”.³ Moreover, in this last sentence, the fact that it requires a specific attitude seems even to “pose” the subject, that is to assign him a task, again to force him to assume a specific outlook.

Nevertheless, although on the one hand the artwork would require a specific attitude, or at least a special level of attention, one cannot state properly that it’s the artwork to ask for it. Our experience always starts from the perceptual, from the visible side of the world, where the intentional and relation properties of artworks are not something really perceivable, even if they have to be considered constitutive aspects of the works themselves. The case of conceptual art adds even more awkwardness to the issue: how could a

² Ivi, p. 231.

³ M. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of aesthetic experience*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973 (original work published 1953), p. 59. Dufrenne at the end of the volume “Aesthetic Object”, the first part of his *Phenomenology of aesthetic experience* (1953), defines the work of art as a “quasi-subject”, to make the work closer to the way in which is conceived the subject more than a mere object. He confers to the work this intermedium status halfway between a person and a thing, making even more evident the complexity behind the creation as well as the fruition. See M. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of aesthetic experience*, cit., pp.146; 196; 241-2; 329.

work, perceptually indiscernible from a “mere real thing”, induce a certain outlook at first glance? We may consider the question of the context, both spatial and cultural, so in its wider significance, as Eddie Zemach says: “Out of that context [Duchamp’s] *Fountain* cannot exist”⁴. But, again, is it enough to provoke a specific aesthetic experience, which –according to Lamarque – if doesn’t occur, determinates the work failure as piece of art?

Finally, instead of questioning the object for something regarding the spectator and his attitude, namely the aesthetic experience, one needs first to focus on the person who is invited to perceive: the subject himself. Then, we can state that saying the work “must invite” means the object makes the subject capable of having an experience, by which he can grasp given particulars. It represents a sort of “condition of possibility”, but at the end the responsibility to carry out the aesthetic experience is on the subject. The subject in front of an artwork is already informed of the cultural contest: he assumes the object is a work, namely that it has some relational and intentional properties. Starting with this certainty, since he wants to grasp the specifics of the work, he adopts a specific attitude. We may say that in front of a certain kind of objects, in a certain context, we have learnt to pay a precise attention in spite of an ordinary perception: by this way some aspects of the object are able to become more vivid or they can even surface for the first time, due to the fact the gaze doesn’t fly over the object, but it rests and studies the details, the colour blending, the little imperfections.

Involving the subject in this discussion could be seen as an easy way out an or old-fashion scheme, but actually it is not. According to Lamarque’s perspective, we can’t determinate what a work is without considering the subject and his attitude. In a phenomenological view, the determination of what an aesthetic object is, is always a fact *in between* the subject and the object. Besides determining which properties an object must satisfy to be a work, we have also to consider the crucial experience of the subject.

The case of the ready-mades particularly sheds light on this issue. As Lamarque states: “The objects literally *seem* in appearance to be different from what they are”⁵. It’s all about that “seem” in italics. *Perceptually*, works are exactly what they are, mere objects: bottles, branches... It’s not totally correct to state that the subject is acting “as if” they were different, because it is not the object in front of me that is changed, neither it’s me pretending this object is different: the bottle is just a bottle, but as artwork I really look at

⁴ E. Zemach, *Real Beauty*, Penn State University Press, University Park 1997, p. 160.

⁵ P. Lamarque, *Work and Object*, cit., p. 231.

it, probably – as in the case of Duchamp’s *In Advance of the Broken Arm* – having a so intimate and private experience of the object for the first time. All the proprieties it has, as the cultural object it is, make it worthy of a particular kind of attention, but finally it is the beholder’s intentionality what makes the object a work. Even though the work “must invite” the spectator, it is in the encounter with the observer that it is actually recognised as a work. The example taken by Dufrenne makes the point very clear: “The painting on my wall is a thing for the mover but an aesthetic object for the art lover; it is both, but alternately, for the expert who cleans it.”⁶ Without going into the question about what an aesthetic object is to Dufrenne, it’s evident how the approach of the three named by the French philosopher (the mover, the art lover and the restorer) is different. The object is the same, it is always that work of art, but subjects adopt different attitudes. In the mover’s case, the perceiving subject, let’s say, “fails” in experiencing the work of art, because he doesn’t adopt a proper attitude in front of it. That is to say, the moment in which there is no aesthetic experience is when – using Lamarque’s language – the spectator doesn’t recognize that object as a work, but simply as an object, again: bottles, branches... etc. This example can be applied not just to conceptual art, but it must be referred also to artworks in general. Conceptual art makes evident the boundary between work and object, which is always in act in every artwork: as Lamarque demonstrates, the objective substrate is not the work of art. However, in front of a more traditional artwork, the spectator is more inclined to recognize that object as a work, but in the case in which the artist’s activity is less evident, or is not evident at all, he refuses to adopt the same aesthetic attitude he had, for instance, towards a Van Gogh’s painting.

But what happens to a work which is not recognised as such? We could even question if it is still a work. In fact, in the case of the mover, or more simply of somebody without a correct aesthetic approach, we could go so far as to say that the *work* goes back to be an *object*. This statement doesn’t contradict Lamarque’s definition of what a work is: “Works (of art) are *real*, not ideal, entities (they do not exist only in the mind of those who contemplate them); they are *public* and *perceivable* [...]; they possess their properties objectively, some essential, some inessential.”⁷ The *work* is still out there, real, perceivable, public. However, it is in coming face to face with the observer that the common object is recognised as a work of art every time. On second thought, that’s not so far from the doomsday

⁶ M. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of aesthetic experience*, cit. p. LXV.

⁷ P. Lamarque, *Work and Object*, cit., p. 60.

scenario depicted by Lamarque in the third chapter of this book, where the works have gone but the material objects remain. If nobody is capable of recognising the intentional and relational properties of the works, the works vanish: and that's what happens not just in a possible post-apocalyptic world where there are no men at all, but also every time people ignore objects as works.

Here the difference between *being* and *being recognised* surfaces, and the more radical question whether *the being of the artwork depends on being recognised* by a spectator. So, the more structural and ontological issue and the phenomenological implications of artworks intertwine reciprocally, again. As Dufrenne states: "The work's vocation is to transcend itself toward the aesthetic object, in which alone it attains, along with its consecration, the fullness of its being"⁸. To clarify this sentence, we have to say that the aesthetic object in Dufrenne's thought is basically the work of art when is perceived. So, the work has been made to be enjoyed by a spectator, to elicit an aesthetic experience (and here we are back at the beginning of our inquiry where we say "artworks must invite"). Perhaps we can distinguish three way in which we can assume, say, a sculpture: the object, as the material substrate; the work, as the cultural object having specific properties; and finally, as an aesthetic object, when the work is recognized and consequently perceived as such. But problems in Dufrenne's claim arise in the second part when the author continues "in which [in the aesthetic object] alone it attains, along with its consecration, the fullness of its being."⁹ Apart from the question concerning the precise meaning of the expression "fullness of its being", along Dufrenne's perspective, the ontological status of the artwork seems to be strictly depending on the engagement in an aesthetic experience of a subject, otherwise the work wouldn't reach the "fullness of its being".

We have seen how much conceptual art makes the crucial role of the spectator evident, precisely because, despite the properties the object as an artwork is endowed with, is also in the encounter with him/her that the bottle rack ceases to be a mere real thing without any intentional and relational property, and instead is grasped as the cultural object it actually is. Nevertheless, can we actually affirm that the work finds its proper completeness as a work just in front of an attentive subject? Or, as Dufrenne claims, that the subject is even the "performer" of the artwork?

This perspective seems to betray the actual status of artworks. If the "fullness of their being", as Dufrenne named it, depended

⁸ M. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of aesthetic experience*, cit. p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

also on the aesthetic experience of the subject, one should have defined what the proper experience is; that is to say, not just how it happens, which faculties are properly involved and what kind of awareness the subject can achieve (the phenomenological analysis carried out by Dufrenne); but we should determine what is the proper content of this experience, the right one capable of giving the artwork its “fullness”. Nevertheless, as Lamarque also states, the sense grasped from that experience rests internalist.

Furthermore, this position should also face the very complicated and debated problem of the public. Before questioning about the role of the public¹⁰, it's necessary to establish who the public is and, eventually, which kind of competences it should have. According to Levinson's, we need a qualified observer, that is: “who views a work correctly [...] who properly situates a work with respect to its context of origin, including its place in the artist's oeuvre, its relation to the surrounding culture, and its connection to preceding artistic traditions.”¹¹ However, even if we can establish what exactly a qualify public should be ideally, the truth is that the range of spectators, and their competence, is quite undefinable. There are different levels and shades about the fruition of artworks, which are as unpredictable as the infinite singularities of human existences. So, the baggage of knowledge with which we face the artwork is crucial, but we can't define which is the proper one, everyone has his own. Otherwise we should establish which is the proper standard for a qualified public, but art would be reduced to an elite phenomenon, at least ideally. Moreover, what if the observer doesn't possess one of these competences? What about people who enjoy exhibitions without satisfying these requirements, should we say they don't live a *complete* aesthetic experience or they don't grasp the aesthetic value of an artwork? And if so, what does it mean? Should we say that, in this case, according to Dufrenne, the work is not really completed, even from an ontological point of view?

These are too relevant questions to be answered in a short paper like this. So, coming towards the end, we can trace at least some final considerations.

First, it is not possible to comprehend the whole ontological status of artworks without considering their entire existence, embracing the creation, so when the matter or the object becomes a

¹⁰ See, for instance, the ideas of “participation” and “fruition” developed by Kendall Walton in *Mimesis as make-believe. On the Foundations of Representational Arts*, Harvard University Press, Harvard 1990.

¹¹ J. Levinson, *Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative force, and differences of sensibility*, in E. Brady, J. Levinson (eds.), *Aesthetic Concepts: Essay after Sibley*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, p. 62.

brand-new artwork, as well as the fruition, in which that object of my experience is recognised as the cultural object it is. Secondly, this kind of art in particular requires a revision of our categories and methods. So, it may be limiting to speak of “fullness of being” of artworks and to state that artworks are accomplished by the spectator, as if the ontological status of artworks was a picture to be coloured, which has to be filled by the observer.

At the end, we should say that the observer is called to bring out the qualities of artworks, which are there to be grasped. So, along this perspective, we can recover at least Dufrenne’s definition of the spectator as a “witness”: “the witness penetrates the world of the work, not to take action in it or to be acted on by it, but to bear witness, so that this world may take on meaning through his presence, and the intentions of the work may be realized.”¹². Therefore, the witness is someone who affords evidence of the artwork as a work, that is to attest the richness of the artwork, its value, its properties.

In conclusion, this kind of aesthetics compels us to reconsider the question of art neither only from the analytic-objective point of view nor from a solo-subjective point of view. The question “What is art?” or “What is a (art)work?” has to embrace the still radical question “Who is art(work) for?”. The challenge is to force these two paths to confront each other and to unveil their inner and essential intertwinings.

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¹² M. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of aesthetic experience, cit.*, p. 59.

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 works¹. 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-

¹ 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’²; 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 text³.

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 sense⁴. 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”

² 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.

³ For these notions of experience, see G. Matteucci, *op. cit.*

⁴ 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 experience⁵. 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 literature⁶.

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 text⁷. 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

⁵ 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.

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

⁷ 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”⁸. 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-

⁸ 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 scientists⁹, 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 reader¹⁰. My proposal is to cross this posthumous consideration of the literary text as artificial habitat with the anthropological perspective Iser argues in his later writings¹¹. 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.

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

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

¹¹ 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 indeterminate¹², 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

¹² 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 habitat¹³. 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 hypothesis¹⁴ 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 skills¹⁵.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.

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Peter Lamarque su verità e valore letterario. Alcune riflessioni critiche

di Gabriele Tomasi

ABSTRACT

Among the views defended by Peter Lamarque in his well-structured and well-argued account of literature, there is a sceptical claim about the role of truth and knowledge in accounting for the artistic value of literary works. Obviously, he does not deny that literature can be a source of knowledge; what he questions, however, is that the possible cognitive value of a work contributes to its artistic value. Roughly, the idea is that aims and expectations of writers and readers are, among other things, normative for literary value and that, while we read e.g. a philosophical or scientific work to learn some truth, we do not read a novel with the same aim; instead, in a novel we look for, above all, that particular kind of pleasure which originates in our imaginative engagement with the narrative content, the description of characters and places, the evocative use of the language, etc.

In this article, Lamarque's conception is largely endorsed; however, it is suggested that the thesis that truth is not significant for artistic value should not be generalized to all literary works. At least in some cases, the cognitive value of a literary work might contribute to its artistic value. Though a fully developed defence of this view is not provided, the article raises doubts, on the one hand, on the exclusion of cognitive expectations from the literary point of view and, on the other hand, on Lamarque's implicit adoption of propositional truth as a paradigm. It is argued that in particular from this latter assumption a rather narrow conception of the ways in which literature can be a source of knowledge is derived.

Catturati dal fascino delle storie che leggono, molti lettori probabilmente concordano con l'intuizione cognitivista che la narrativa di finzione può essere una fonte di conoscenza e che l'eventuale valore cognitivo di un'opera concorre al suo valore artistico¹. Peter Lamarque, nel contesto di una concezione filosofica articolata e argomentata della letteratura, ha però fornito ragioni per guardare con un certo scetticismo al ruolo dei concetti di verità e cono-

¹ In ciò che segue, quando parlerò genericamente di letteratura o di opere letterarie, è inteso che il riferimento è soprattutto alla narrativa. Similmente, con l'espressione generica "valore artistico" intenderò il valore della letteratura *come* arte. Con lo stesso significato è usato "valore letterario". Per ragioni di spazio, nelle considerazioni che svilupperò non farò riferimento, se non occasionalmente, a opere particolari. Il discorso resterà pertanto inevitabilmente astratto.

scienza nell'attribuzione di valore alle opere letterarie². Egli non nega che la letteratura possa essere una fonte di conoscenza; il suo punto riguarda il concorso del valore cognitivo al valore artistico. Semplificando un po', alla base della sua posizione c'è la considerazione tanto semplice quanto difficilmente contestabile che mentre un'opera filosofica, storica o scientifica si legge per apprendere delle verità, un'opera narrativa si legge cercando il particolare tipo di piacere che viene dal coinvolgimento immaginativo con il contenuto narrativo, da un uso del linguaggio che ha qualcosa di magico nella sua capacità di evocare immagini e pensieri e trasportare la mente in mondi altri dall'attuale³.

Pur trovando illuminanti e condividendo molte delle considerazioni di Lamarque, ho qualche perplessità sull'idea che la verità non sia rilevante per il valore letterario. Senza necessariamente aprire a una commistione dei generi – la filosofia, la storia, la psicologia ecc. sono discorsi costitutivamente cognitivi, i romanzi non si leggono per imparare – non generalizzerei la tesi. Non credo che adottare nei riguardi della narrativa di finzione l'idioma della verità generi, come sembra pensare Lamarque, attese fuorvianti su ciò che essa può conseguire e non sia d'aiuto come pietra di paragone del suo valore artistico; credo anzi che in alcuni casi il valore cognitivo sia rilevante per quello artistico. Per difendere questa convinzione bisognerebbe però almeno mettere in dubbio da un lato l'esclusione di attese cognitive dal punto di vista letterario e, dall'altro, l'implicita adozione della verità proposizionale come paradigma della verità – da essa deriva una concezione ristretta del modo in cui la letteratura può essere una fonte di conoscenza. Lo scopo di queste riflessioni non va oltre questi due obiettivi minimali. Comincerò con un'esposizione molto sintetica dell'idea della letteratura come pratica. Da essa, infatti, Lamarque deriva la convinzione che la motivazione che ci spinge a leggere un'opera per quanto può offrire esteticamente sia distinta dal desiderio di acquisire delle conoscenze e non sia comparabile con tale desiderio. Questa convinzione, come

² Non è possibile in questa sede entrare nel merito della distinzione (e delle connessioni) tra i concetti di verità, conoscenza, apprendimento, valore cognitivo. Mi limito a osservare che nelle scienze e in filosofia con "sapere" si intende prima di tutto il sapere che ovvero il sapere proposizionale. Ci sono però anche altri tipi di sapere. Per quanto sia plausibile assumere che la verità non sia che la verità di una proposizione, l'uso del termine "sapere" ad esempio per i casi di "sapere *come*" complica la situazione. Inoltre, se si ammette che la conoscenza non sia esaurita dalla conoscenza di proposizioni vere, si deve anche ammettere che l'apprendimento non può riguardare solo il processo di acquisizione di queste verità, e che non hanno valore cognitivo solo i fenomeni che facilitano tale apprendimento. L'apprendimento, ad esempio, può anche consistere nell'acquisizione di una abilità; conseguentemente possono avere valore cognitivo anche i processi che la facilitano.

³ P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, Rowman & Littlefield, London-New York 2014, pp. vii-viii.

si può immaginare, è determinante per la concezione del valore letterario⁴.

1. *La letteratura come pratica e l'idea del valore letterario*

Guardare alla letteratura come a una pratica (in senso wittgensteiniano) significa fundamentalmente prestare attenzione a due dati e cioè (i) ai ruoli realizzabili nella pratica secondo le regole che la costituiscono ossia il ruolo di autore, quello di opera e quello di lettore, e (ii) ai vincoli implicati da tali regole: vincoli sul modo di leggere, sugli scopi e le aspettative di autori e lettori, suoi modi di valutazione, sul focus dell'attenzione, il tipo di inferenze permesse ecc. Essi definiscono il punto di vista o l'interesse letterario⁵. Considerando questi elementi è possibile cogliere, secondo Lamarque, il senso del concetto di letteratura, e dunque il tipo di cose che meritano attenzione nelle opere, le caratteristiche di queste ultime che sono rilevanti per il loro valore artistico⁶.

Nella prospettiva della letteratura come pratica, determinanti per il valore letterario sono infatti le aspettative e gli interessi normativi condivisi dai partecipanti. Ora, questi interessi si dispongono, secondo Lamarque, su due dimensioni: la dimensione *creativa/immaginativa* e quella del *contenuto*. Quanto alla prima dimensione, egli sostiene che i partecipanti alla pratica condividono l'aspettativa che le opere letterarie siano creative o attraverso un'invenzione finzionale oppure attraverso l'imposizione di una particolare forma a un soggetto, l'organizzazione di un complesso di elementi in un tutto unificato. Complessità della trama, personaggi convincenti, un uso creativo del linguaggio, coerenza, connessione interna, struttura sono fra le

⁴ Cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, Blackwell, Oxford 2009; P. Lamarque, *Literature and Truth*, in G.L. Hagberg and W. Jost (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester 2010, pp. 367-384 (ora in P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, cit., pp. 121-139) e P. Lamarque, *Wittgenstein, Literature and the Idea of a Practice*, in "British Journal of Aesthetics", L, 2010, pp. 375-388 (ora in P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, cit., pp. 105-119).

⁵ Diversamente da altre pratiche, nel caso della letteratura è difficile specificare le regole costitutive, né si può dire che la pratica sia appresa interiorizzando regole esplicite. Di per sé ciò non rappresenta un problema per l'adozione di questa prospettiva analitica. Come osserva Lamarque, è sufficiente prestare attenzione al fatto che, in generale, conformarsi a una pratica significa impegnarsi in attività di un certo tipo sostenute da accordi su concetti condivisi e sulla loro applicazione. Questo vale anche per la letteratura. Ne consegue che le regole costitutive della pratica sono rese evidenti nelle attività che la fondano ovvero negli assunti condivisi, secondo i quali i partecipanti alla pratica parlano delle opere, le valutano, le interpretano, le apprezzano ecc. (cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, cit., pp. 105-119).

⁶ Cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, cit., pp. 105-119. Il punto è anche ontologico. Senza il riconoscimento condiviso di norme, di standard da seguire – riconoscimento che corrisponde alla definizione di che cosa sia avere un interesse letterario per un'opera – semplicemente non potrebbe esserci qualcosa come la letteratura. Cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, cit., pp. 66-81.

qualità rilevanti in questa dimensione del valore letterario. I lettori non provano però piacere solo per le qualità in senso ampio formali delle opere e non cercano solo quelle. Dalla narrativa di finzione si attendono che suscitino e sviluppino, attraverso il contenuto che le opere presentano e le emozioni immaginate, un qualche interesse umano generale, che inviti alla riflessione su questioni di ampio interesse e magari porti a esaminare le proprie assunzioni su se stessi e il mondo. In altri termini, riguardo alla dimensione contenutistica delle opere c'è quella che Lamarque chiama un'attesa di "serietà morale"⁷.

L'aspetto contenutistico della serietà morale e quello formale della dimensione creativa, immaginativa trovano poi, secondo Lamarque, un elemento unificante nel tema (o nei temi) di un'opera. Il tema è il principio di organizzazione capace di fornire una prospettiva sull'argomento e di ordinare, andando al di là degli eventi rappresentati, il contenuto dell'opera sotto una concezione generale⁸. Che un'opera sia interessante a livello tematico così come a livello dell'argomento e del modo in cui questo è presentato e sviluppato, è appunto un segno del suo carattere di "letteratura". Suscitare questo tipo di interessi, sostiene Lamarque, è una peculiarità delle opere letterarie e i lettori convenzionalmente si aspettano che temi umanamente interessanti – l'amore, l'amicizia, la realizzazione di sé, la finitezza della nostra vita e che cosa la renda degna di essere vissuta, la morte, il trascorrere del tempo, il contrasto di valori, l'estensione e i limiti della nostra libertà, colpa e redenzione ecc. – siano esplorati e sviluppati: essi amano trovare nelle opere maestria espressiva, coerenza, struttura e interesse a livello tematico.

Un elemento molto rilevante – e problematico – per la questione del ruolo del valore cognitivo emerge considerando che, nell'artificio letterario, le risorse linguistiche non sono elementi meramente contingenti, quasi che lo stesso contenuto potesse essere presentato anche in altri modi. Nel contesto della letteratura, il contenuto è invece *costituito* dai modi della sua presentazione: forma e contenuto sono indivisibili, c'è un'interazione tra ciò che immaginiamo e gli aspetti del linguaggio narrativo che sollecitano l'immaginazione e la rappresentazione degli eventi narrati come se si trattasse di eventi reali. Quest'aspetto della creazione letteraria è reso in modo molto efficace da Lamarque, introducendo il concetto di *opacità narrativa*⁹. Con esso egli intende suggerire che le risorse linguistiche

⁷ Cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, cit., pp. 62-65.

⁸ Per questa ragione Lamarque ritiene che il tema sia l'oggetto proprio dell'interpretazione letteraria (cfr. *ivi*, pp. 150-151).

⁹ Cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, cit., pp. 3-14 e 141-167. Il concetto di opacità è articolato da Lamarque in relazione alla nozione di trasparenza introdotta da Kendall Walton per indicare la capacità, da lui attribuita alla fotografia, di metterci in

in letteratura non sono veicoli “trasparenti” per sollecitare l’immaginazione; esse forniscono piuttosto un tipo più opaco di prospettiva per osservare e comprendere un mondo finzionale. Pertanto, invece di supporre che le descrizioni letterarie siano una sorta di finestra attraverso cui si osserva un mondo (finzionale) esistente indipendentemente – un mondo che potrebbe di conseguenza essere presentato (e osservato) anche in altri modi, da punti di vista differenti – dobbiamo accettare che esse siano come un vetro opaco, dipinto, per così dire, con figure viste non *attraverso* esso ma *in* esso.

La considerazione che proprio l’attenzione agli aspetti del linguaggio apre alla ricchezza e alla complessità del mondo narrativo presentato, spiega perché, nelle opere letterarie, l’attenzione si diriga convenzionalmente ai modi della presentazione di eventi, situazioni, personaggi ecc. Lamarque non sembra però considerare la possibilità che tali modi di presentazione abbiano un valore cognitivo, o meglio, sembra pensare che, se hanno tale valore, esso non consista tanto nel promuovere l’acquisizione di credenze o la rivelazione di verità, quanto in qualcosa di insieme più sottile e più “povero” cognitivamente. Egli ritiene che i pensieri e le immagini che sorgono dal modo e dalla prospettiva in cui dei particolari finzionali (personaggi, dialoghi, scene) e un contenuto narrativo sono presentati e prendono forma nella mente possano acquistare profondità e interesse dai temi richiamati attraverso quei particolari e magari “modellare” la mente dei lettori¹⁰. Questo beneficio cognitivo sarebbe comunque una sorta di effetto collaterale perché lo scopo delle opere letterarie, anche quando trattano temi umanamente rilevanti, è quello di esplorare, rappresentare, sviluppare e realizzare immaginativamente tali temi, senza avanzare pretese di verità.

Mi sembra tuttavia legittimo chiedersi, se il valore dell’esplorazione letteraria di un tema di interesse in senso ampio morale sia realmente indipendente da ogni connessione con la verità. La questione si pone, prima di tutto ma non solo, considerando che le opere spesso contengono o invitano a esplicitare concezioni, punti di vista, proposizioni di carattere generale. È plausibile pensare che il valore artistico di un romanzo sia indipendente dalla verità di tali

contatto percettivo con il mondo (cfr. K. Walton, *Transparency Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism*, in “*Critical Inquiry*”, XI, 1984, pp. 246-277).

¹⁰ Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 160-167. Se quei pensieri abbiano effetti sulle loro azioni, sui loro atteggiamenti o sulla concezione che hanno di sé, è per Lamarque del tutto contingente e dipende sostanzialmente dalla disposizione psicologica del singolo. Di fatto, su molte questioni sembra che si possa cambiare opinione apprezzando nuove possibilità o immaginando vividamente le conseguenze che potrebbero derivare dall’adozione di una certa concezione.

proposizioni (o della concezione che incorpora o invita a esplicitare), e che ciò che conta sia semplicemente che siano interessanti? L'interesse letterario può essere realmente separato dalla verità o essere indifferente a essa¹¹?

Lamarque sottolinea che a volte le proposizioni generali contenute in un romanzo – si pensi al celebre e sempre citato *incipit di Anna Karenina* – hanno solo la funzione di avvertire il lettore di temi o particolari drammatici. Non sembra però che lo svolgimento di questa funzione richieda la forma universale. Perché escludere allora che il conferimento della forma universale sia un indizio che rientra fra le intenzioni dell'autore, riferire certe proposizioni non solo al mondo del romanzo ma, al di là di esso, all'esperienza generale dell'umanità? La distinzione tra “essere a proposito del mondo” e “riguardare l'opera” si applica indubbiamente alle “verità” universali formulate nelle opere o ricavabili da esse, ma non è detto che sia sempre nettamente tracciabile o che sia sempre facile separare le questioni di significato da quelle di verità. Ciò sembra vero in particolare per i comportamenti dei personaggi: quali aspetti del comportamento di un personaggio sono considerati dall'autore unici dell'individuo e quali invece tipici della natura umana in genere¹²? D'altra parte, è anche vero che non sempre l'eventuale falsità o assurdità di proposizioni generali contenute in un'opera o implicate da essa influisce sul suo valore artistico. In fondo il valore che attribuiamo alla *Divina Commedia* non è diminuito una volta che la concezione astronomica incorporata nell'opera è risultata errata e ammiriamo opere che incorporano concezioni morali che possiamo ritenere errate o non appropriate. Se tuttavia non isoliamo la rilevanza della verità per il valore letterario, forse è perché il senso di “falsità” o “assurdità” che abbiamo presente ha a che fare con il modo imperfetto in cui gli eventi narrati sono stati immaginati; ma cosa significa questo, se non che troviamo che i moventi delle azioni siano poco plausibili e gli esiti forzati¹³, che lo scrittore abbia una visione fondamentalmente difettosa della realtà e della natura umana, che non veda il mondo come realmente è o ne veda solo una parte e la scambi per il tutto¹⁴? Che a volte agli scrittori si

¹¹ Sulla questione cfr. anche le osservazioni di G. Currie, *Review of Truth, Fiction, and Literature. A Philosophical Perspective*, by P. Lamarque and S.H. Olsen, in “Mind”, N.S., CIV, n. 416, 1995, pp. 911-913.

¹² Cfr. M.W. Rowe, *Lamarque and Olsen on Literature and Truth*, in “The Philosophical Quarterly”, XLVII, n. 188, 1997, pp. 322-341, qui p. 330.

¹³ Cfr. M.W. Rowe, *Lamarque and Olsen on Literature and Truth*, cit., pp. 333.

¹⁴ Cfr. Ivi, pp. 324-327. Per mettere in dubbio il valore cognitivo della narrativa, spesso si osserva che nelle opere mancano argomenti a sostegno delle idee o delle riflessioni tematiche presentate. Ciò è indubbiamente vero se si considerano le forme standard dell'argomentazione. Si dovrebbe però considerare che le credenze rilevanti su temi come

muovano rimproveri di questo tipo – forse i più dannosi per il loro credito – sembra attestare l'esistenza di un legame tra interesse letterario e verità, a dispetto del fatto che, quando leggiamo una storia sapendo che è di finzione, mettiamo in conto che chi l'ha scritta non era soggetto a un vincolo di fedeltà ai fatti e siamo consapevoli che questo genera una differenza nel nostro atteggiamento verso la verità della narrazione. Vorrei approfondire almeno un po' il punto, tornando agli aspetti normativi della pratica.

2. *Opacità della narrativa?*

Come si è visto, Lamarque riconosce che nell'interesse per un'opera narrativa *come arte* rientra un'attesa di serietà morale: dalla narrativa i lettori si aspettano che, attraverso la presentazione e lo sviluppo di un certo contenuto, siano trattati temi di ampio interesse umano. In effetti, una delle ragioni per leggere la narrativa di finzione è sempre stata la speranza di vedere trattati in modo illuminante, profondo, temi importanti, vitali, concernenti il mondo, come siamo o potremmo essere. Se apprezziamo il modo in cui un oggetto è stato trattato, parte del nostro apprezzamento sembra dipendere anche dalla considerazione di ciò che è stato trattato in modo significativo e coinvolgente. A promuovere o diminuire il valore artistico di un'opera è appunto, per usare categorie tradizionali, la relazione tra forma e contenuto, tra ciò essa "dice" su un tema serio, profondo, e il modo – adeguato o meno – in cui lo "dice". L'impegno con temi che vanno al cuore della condizione umana richiede alle opere anche la ricerca di una qualità artistica elevata a livello creativo, immaginativo. Sembra tuttavia strano che, se il tema trattato è di questo tipo, nella valutazione dell'opera si sia indifferenti alla plausibilità di ciò che essa afferma o implica, e ci si limiti alla considerazione del modo in cui il tema è presentato ed

quelli trattati dalla letteratura sono molto spesso contingenti e comunque non sono del tipo che ammette una rigorosa giustificazione. Pretendere che le giustificazioni che possono essere addotte al loro riguardo abbiano la necessità logica delle dimostrazioni a partire da premesse non arbitrarie sembra inappropriato. Dostoevskij, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Joyce, Mann, Philip Roth ecc. non argomentano e per lo più non presentano tesi articolate sui temi dei loro romanzi. Le loro storie offrono però alla considerazione del lettore una delineazione molto accurata e ricca di possibilità; spesso le (grandi) opere narrative rappresentano la forma paradigmatica di un fenomeno e possono pertanto avere il valore di un esempio in un'induzione retorica aristotelica (cfr. T. Zamir, *Double Vision. Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2007, pp. 7-10) o comunque condurre il lettore a prospettive migliorate, approfondite su questioni importanti. Che poi un'opera possa presentare una visione opposta a quella presentata da un'altra opera che si considera altrettanto valida esteticamente, non dimostra che la verità sia irrilevante nella valutazione letteraria; mostra semplicemente, come osserva Rowe, che, su certe questioni, può essere difficile stabilire quale sia la verità (cfr. M.W. Rowe, *Lamarque and Olsen on Literature and Truth*, cit., p. 338).

esplorato. Siamo realmente disposti a considerare profonda, illuminante l'esplorazione di un tema, pur ritenendo falso ciò che l'opera "dice" (o implica) su esso?

È vero che i romanzi non sono duplicati del nostro mondo, non sono fattualmente veri, ma molti di essi sono costitutivi di un modo in cui possiamo vedere il mondo, possono esprimere una comprensione attendibile di un mondo umano. Presentando una visione della sofferenza, dell'amore, della colpa ecc. resa disponibile dalla nostra cultura, un romanzo può segnare il momento in cui a un aspetto del nostro mondo è conferita forma, figura, senso e in tal modo, come scrive John Gibson, usando un'immagine opposta a quella dell'opacità, offrire "la lente attraverso cui possiamo" vedere quest'aspetto particolare del mondo¹⁵. Se questo è vero, perché dovremmo escludere che l'arte – o almeno la grande arte in quanto distinta dall'arte che mira semplicemente a intrattenere – tenda alla verità in qualche modo come la credenza mira alla verità ovvero perché dovremmo escludere che il tendere alla verità sia un tratto saliente dell'arte "seria"¹⁶, e dunque che un'attesa di verità sia interna alla pratica della letteratura?

Benché gli scopi della letteratura non siano da confondere con quelli di altre forme d'indagine (la filosofia, la storia, o la psicologia), può essere parte essenziale del contenuto di un'opera che la comprensione in esso manifestata di un aspetto del mondo o della natura umana sia accompagnata da una pretesa di verità¹⁷. E, parallelamente, sembra del tutto ragionevole assumere che, almeno da certa narrativa, i lettori si attendano che, attraverso il piacere

¹⁵ J. Gibson, *Fiction and the Weave of Life*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007, p. 73.

¹⁶ Una tesi del genere, con l'annessa distinzione fra arte alta o elevata (*high art*) e altri tipi di arte che tendono all'intrattenimento, al piacere, all'utilità o alla fantasia, è sviluppata e difesa da A. Hamilton, *Artistic Truth*, in "Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement," LXXI, 2012, pp. 229-261. Sulla nozione di *high art* cfr. *ivi*, pp. 232-234. In verità non è semplice tracciare la distinzione in questione e, al di là dell'aspetto elitista che può avere, è discutibile che abbia senso tracciarla. Forse, come sostiene Ted Cohen, è una distinzione insieme indifendibile e indispensabile (cfr. T. Cohen, *High and Low Thinking about High and Low Art*, in "The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism", LI, n. 2, 1993, pp. 151-156, qui p. 152). Sembra che essa abbia a che fare con la misura in cui un'opera deve essere presa seriamente, con l'esistenza di una sorta di obbligazione a riconoscerla come significativa per la nostra vita perché raggiunge l'umano al di là delle differenziazioni ovvero che abbia a che fare con la misura in cui ricompensa il tipo di attenzione che, nel caso della narrativa, abbiamo qualificato come letteraria. Nel dire questo si deve però anche considerare, come nota Lamarque, che vi sono scale di valore diverse: molta letteratura di genere non ricompenserebbe quel tipo di attenzione, ma che un romanzo di genere non sostenga un interesse letterario non è di per sé una caratteristica negativa; non se ne deve desumere che sia un'opera priva di valore, ma solo che il suo interesse primario non è di valere *come letteratura* (cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, cit., cap. 7).

¹⁷ Sul piano dell'arte in generale il punto è difeso ad esempio da M. Kieran, *The Impoverishment of Art*, in "British Journal of Aesthetics", XXXV, n. 1, 1995, pp. 15-25.

della lettura, essa sviluppi anche una comprensione dei temi che presenta. È tuttavia legittimo chiedersi se sia realmente disponibile, a questo riguardo, il lessico della verità, perché, quando si legge una storia di finzione, si immaginano – in qualche senso di “immaginare” – le sue proposizioni ovvero si pensa che siano vere, ma non si crede che lo siano, e dunque non le si integra nel nostro sistema di credenze¹⁸. L’immaginare attivato nella lettura di un romanzo ha un carattere “quasi-fattuale”, è un pensare le proposizioni che leggiamo, senza impegnarsi con la loro verità (senza asserirle); ma perché dovremmo escludere che l’intenzione di un autore concorrente alcuni enunciati presenti in un romanzo sia che il lettore li faccia anche oggetto di credenza?

Gli scopi di un autore possono essere molteplici e se il soggetto di un romanzo è molto spesso, ma non necessariamente, finzionale, il contenuto tematico raramente è finzionale; l’esplorazione di un tema potrebbe allora rispondere anche all’intenzione che i lettori immaginino certe cose per accedere a un punto di vista morale o religioso. Può essere che, elaborando un contenuto, costruendo un personaggio, esplorando un tema, un autore intenda anche attivare in essi processi di tipo cognitivo, promuovere la comprensione di una particolare situazione o di una concezione o di un’affermazione generale di qualche tipo che ritiene vera. E un lettore, oltre che un interesse per il modo in cui un tema è esplorato, potrebbe anche essere sensibile allo scenario che proprio quell’esplorazione invita a immaginare e a come sarebbero – o si vedrebbero – le cose, se ciò che è invitato a immaginare fosse vero¹⁹, vale a dire, per usare i termini di Lamarque, potrebbe essere interessata non solo al “modo d’espressione”, ma anche a “che cosa è espresso”²⁰. Leggere un’opera come letteratura significa indubbiamente non essere interessati alla verità letterale della maggior parte delle sue proposizioni, ma ciò non comporta che si deponga ogni interesse per la verità²¹.

¹⁸ La finzione è un invito a immaginare. “Costruendo una finzione – scrive Kathleen Stock – un autore fa certe affermazioni con l’intenzione che il lettore o l’ascoltatore si impegni immaginativamente con esse” (K. Stock, *Only Imagine. Fiction, Interpretation, and Imagination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, p. 7).

¹⁹ Per un’articolata difesa del valore cognitivo della finzione letteraria guardando a quest’ultima sul modello della supposizione cfr. M. Green, *How and What We Can Learn from Fiction*, in G.L. Hagberg and W. Jost (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester 2010, pp. 350-366 e Idem, *Narrative Fiction as a Source of Knowledge*, in P. Olmos (ed.), *Narration as Argument*, Springer, Berlin 2017, pp. 47-62, nel quale è discussa la possibilità di considerare alcuni romanzi come degli esperimenti mentali.

²⁰ Cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, cit., p. 132.

²¹ Cfr. al riguardo l’analisi di M.W. Rowe, *Literature, Knowledge, and the Aesthetic Attitude*, in “Ratio”, N.S., XXII, 2009, pp. 375-397, qui pp. 381 ss. Se poi si colloca la letteratura all’interno di concezioni dell’arte come quella di Hegel, Heidegger o Adorno,

La difesa del (moderato) cognitivismo qui abbozzato può del resto accontentarsi di un senso deflazionistico di verità, per il quale l'affermazione che l'arte mira alla verità significa semplicemente che essa mira a sollevare o affrontare questioni che un pubblico potrebbe discutere, a offrire possibilità per la considerazione e l'interpretazione del pubblico²².

Alla fine del paragrafo precedente ho ricordato che la presenza di un interesse dei lettori alla verità si manifesta nel rimprovero che si può muovere a uno scrittore di avere una visione difettosa o parziale della realtà o della natura umana. Questo difetto assume vari aspetti, segnalati dall'uso di predicati critici come "sentimentale", "non realistico", "immaturo", "presuntuoso" e altri analoghi. Fatte salve le convenzioni dei generi, questi predicati suggeriscono l'esistenza di una qualche connessione del valore artistico alla verità, all'adeguatezza ai fatti. Ad esempio, quando di un'opera si dice che è (troppo) sentimentale le si imputa di offrirci un'immagine ingannevole, eccessivamente benevola del mondo, tale da impedirci in qualche modo una visione realistica di esso, ovvero le si rimprovera di offrire una rappresentazione falsa della realtà umana, di dare un'immagine troppo pura, unilaterale di noi stessi²³. Che a volte si attribuisca alle opere letterarie un difetto di questo tipo suggerisce che, leggendo un romanzo, un racconto ecc. abbiamo davanti non solo il modo in cui esso ci rappresenta il mondo, ma anche il modo in cui il mondo è o pensiamo che sia e che da un'opera, o meglio, dalle opere di un certo tipo, ci aspettiamo che ci aiutino ad avere una visione più chiara della realtà. Certo, si potrebbe obiettare che, almeno per quanto riguarda il sentimentalismo e i difetti analoghi, la nozione operativa è sì quella di verità, ma nel senso di sincerità,

diventa difficile sostenere che artisti e lettori non abbiano un interesse alla verità che un'opera può comunicare.

²² Cfr. A. Hamilton, *Artistic Truth*, cit., p. 231. Un guadagno epistemico può aversi non solo nella forma della giustificazione di una conclusione proposizionale, ma anche in quella della sollecitazione di una buona domanda. La ricerca di una risposta a tale domanda può infatti portare allo sviluppo di distinzioni e risorse concettuali che estendono la nostra conoscenza. A un'opera che pone buone domande si può attribuire valore cognitivo, anche se non offre le risposte, ma sollecita i lettori a cercarle (cfr. M. Green, *Narrative Fiction as a Source of Knowledge*, cit.).

²³ I difetti evocati minano la credibilità di un'opera (e il suo possibile valore cognitivo). Un'opera narrativa deve infatti essere credibile ovvero internamente coerente e consistente con le intuizioni ordinarie sulla natura umana e le ragioni dei comportamenti umani e soprattutto convincente, il che, almeno in un significato del termine, significa che lo sviluppo della storia, da un punto di partenza consistente con ciò che crediamo (o siamo invitati a credere) sulla nostra natura e sul mondo, deve apparire altamente plausibile. Questo non vuol dire che essa debba essere realistica. La realtà fisica o quella psicologica possono anche essere profondamente alterate in un romanzo, ma lo sviluppo di queste alterazioni deve essere coerente e avere un esito plausibile dato il modo in cui l'autore ha configurato le cose.

onestà, chiarezza di visione, e cioè una nozione che si discosta dalla verità proposizionale, il paradigma di verità familiare alla scienza, alla storia, alla filosofia²⁴. Il punto allora è forse il ruolo di paradigma attribuito e questa nozione di verità.

3. *Immaginazione e verità*

L'importanza della verità proposizionale è fuori discussione. Non tutta la conoscenza, benché magari generata attraverso proposizioni, è però proposizionale nel senso di derivabile da inferenze da altre proposizioni o esprimibile in proposizioni ovvero riducibile a una lista di proposizioni. Questa considerazione è importante per il valore cognitivo della letteratura.

Come si è accennato, le proposizioni che compongono nel loro insieme una narrazione sollecitano l'immaginazione proposizionale; a questa forma di immaginare possono però accompagnarsi altre attività immaginative e in particolare quelle attraverso cui raffiguriamo e reagiamo emotivamente alle persone e agli eventi narrati in una storia. L'immaginare cui la finzione narrativa ci invita può comprendere qualcosa di più della semplice visualizzazione interna – una sorta di popolamento dello spazio mentale – e, svolgendo una funzione performativa, invitare a una messa in atto, un'adozione di un'attitudine. Quando ciò accade possiamo diventare in un certo senso qualcuno o provare emozioni, sentimenti in tutto o in parte nuovi, il che è diverso dal giocare, per così dire, la parte del pubblico in una sorta di teatro mentale²⁵. Attraverso esperienze immaginative di questo tipo possiamo anche scoprire modi nuovi di concettualizzare la realtà o di intendere la nostra esperienza²⁶.

Pensiamo alla capacità che un'opera può avere, per il modo in cui la narrazione, anche dal punto di vista stilistico-grammaticale – ad esempio con l'adozione del discorso indiretto libero – è costruita, di aprire una nuova prospettiva o un punto di vista per noi inconsueti su un aspetto del mondo o di noi stessi. Un punto di vista esprime un particolare accesso al mondo; essendo definito da un certo orientamento percettivo, da aspetti cognitivi e disposizionali, esso costituisce il modo in cui una persona risponde, reagisce al mondo. Ciò che pensiamo, proviamo, facciamo ecc. lo facciamo sempre dal nostro punto di vista. Che per questa ragione il nostro

²⁴ Cfr. P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, cit., p. 127.

²⁵ Situazione del resto non priva di potenzialità epistemiche: considerando il modo in cui reagiamo agli eventi narrati, possiamo ad esempio imparare qualcosa su noi stessi.

²⁶ Il rilievo cognitivo della (grande) letteratura è spesso collegato alla sua capacità di cogliere, in frammenti d'esperienza, forme paradigmatiche, quintessenziali ovvero quelle forme che sottostanno anche ad altre esperienze dello stesso tipo e ne mostrano il significato, illuminando e contribuendo ad articolare in tal modo dei vissuti personali.

accesso al mondo sia limitato, non esclude che i punti di vista di altri ci siano accessibili: anche se non possiamo occupare il punto di vista di un'altra persona (altrimenti saremmo lei), possiamo farci un'idea di come il mondo le appaia²⁷. La narrazione di una storia, ad esempio, può trasmettere qualcosa del punto di vista di un altro – di un personaggio – e condurre alla sua comprensione ovvero a comprendere le risorse conoscitive, percettive, pratiche ecc. che esso rende disponibili²⁸; in particolare se il rapporto con uno o più personaggi è di tipo empatico, si può arrivare ad accostare il mondo da un'altra prospettiva e guadagnare così una comprensione abitualmente non disponibile per noi.

Ora, un punto di vista o elementi di esso possono essere descritti riportando il modo in cui un personaggio risponde, reagisce al mondo; in questo caso forse non parleremmo però di una narrazione *dal* punto di vista di un personaggio. D'altra parte, non sembra che un punto di vista, una prospettiva dalla quale delle proposizioni diventano possibili, possa essere a sua volta un contenuto proposizionale; come si accennava, a comporlo non sono solo credenze o schemi concettuali ma anche modi di sentire, desideri, emozioni, valori ecc. Un'opera narrativa, se lo stile del discorso è appropriato, e dunque anche in virtù delle sue qualità estetiche, può però, stimolando l'immaginazione, "comunicare" qualcosa di tutto ciò, qualcosa dello stato o della disposizione mentale in cui un personaggio affronta il mondo e darci un accesso immaginativo a esso²⁹. Se ciò accade, essa può essere considerata la fonte di una conoscenza che potremmo chiamare "soggettiva" in quanto non sembra riducibile alla conoscenza oggettiva fornita dalle scienze³⁰. Può essere conservato, per questa conoscenza, un riferimento alla verità?

Sopra ho accennato al fatto che il (moderato) cognitivismo qui abbozzato si accontenta di una concezione deflazionistica di verità; essa riguarda però principalmente le proposizioni che implicita-

²⁷ Cfr. T. Cohen, *Identifying with Metaphor: Metaphors of Personal Identification*, in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, LVII, 4, 1999, pp. 399-409.

²⁸ Per l'argomentazione di questa tesi cfr. G. Currie, *Narration, Imitation, and Point of View*, in G.L. Hagberg and W. Jost (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester 2010, pp. 331-349.

²⁹ L'esperienza immaginativa in questione – paragonabile a una sorta di viaggio nella mente di un'altra persona dal quale ritorniamo al mondo reale arricchiti – può essere integrata nel nostro bagaglio di conoscenze e portarci a conoscere qualcosa di più del mondo nei termini di una conoscenza esperienziale analoga a quella acquisita dalla Mary del celebre esperimento mentale di Frank Jackson (cfr. L. Kajtár, *What Mary Didn't Read: On Literary Narratives and Knowledge*, in *Ratio*, XXIX, 2015, pp. 327-343).

³⁰ L'obiezione che la conoscenza richiede evidenze e giustificazione è affrontata da R. Stroud, *Simulation, Subjective Knowledge, and the Cognitive Value of Literary Narrative*, in *Journal of Aesthetics Education*, XLII, 3, 2008, pp. 19-41.

mente o esplicitamente le opere narrative formulano o consentono di desumere. La conoscenza ora in questione non è però proposizionale³¹; almeno in parte ha un carattere “esperienziale” o fenomenico (è una conoscenza dell’effetto che fa avere una certa esperienza o provare un certo sentimento o un’emozione particolare). Non proposizionali sono anche gli altri tipi di conoscenza di cui la letteratura sembra poter essere una fonte e cioè la conoscenza percettiva, la conoscenza empatica della situazione in cui un altro può trovarsi, il sapere-come, la conoscenza pratica, quella concernente l’uso, la padronanza di certi concetti o di modi nuovi di concettualizzare delle situazioni³². La narrativa di finzione può essere fonte di uno o più di questi tipi di conoscenza attraverso la vivida esperienza immaginativa che promuove, ossia può mobilitare le forme di conoscenza citate in virtù delle qualità di scrittura, trama, soggetto, costruzione ecc. che toccano e sollecitano l’immaginazione dei lettori. Focalizzare l’attenzione sulla verità e la conoscenza proposizionali, oltre che condurre a una concezione ristretta di conoscenza, rischia di far perdere di vista il fatto che il carattere dell’esperienza immaginativa generata da un’opera può concorrere a renderla arte e insieme una possibile fonte di conoscenza e verità – di una verità resa reale per l’immaginazione³³. La verità in questione si qualifica infatti come possibile *nella* letteratura e distintiva *della* letteratura come arte, e in tal senso come verità artistica, in quanto è la verità della conoscenza (o della com-

³¹ Essa potrebbe però avere un ruolo per la conoscenza proposizionale. Si potrebbe infatti sostenere che un’opera letteraria, fornendo possibilità d’esperienza, modi di esperire come certe cose stanno o appaiono, può, in questa forma peculiare, fornirci credenze, renderle plausibili, supportarle e conferire loro una qualche forza. Alcune forme di conoscenza richiedono infatti che si esperisca qualcosa e alcune delle esperienze richieste possono dipendere dall’immaginare mondi inventati. Questa possibilità è esplorata in T. Zamir, *Double Vision. Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*, cit. Zamir concepisce la partecipazione immaginativa come base di giustificazione di credenze che, se l’esperienza su cui sono fondate è costruita con cura, possono trasformarsi in un sapere esperienziale.

³² Su queste forme di conoscenza cfr. M.W. Rowe, *Literature, Knowledge, and the Aesthetic Attitude*, cit., pp. 383 ss. e B. Gaut, *Art and Cognition*, in M. Kieran (ed. by), *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Blackwell, Oxford 2006, pp. 115-126. Sul contributo della letteratura alla conoscenza concettuale cfr. E. John, *Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context*, in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, LVI, 4, 1998, pp. 331-348.

³³ L’adozione a paradigma, anche per la verità artistica, della verità proposizionale è messo in questione da L. Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth. Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2004, secondo il quale, quando si parla della verità nell’arte, ci si riferisce al modo in cui l’arte svela, offre alla vista “qualcosa di importanza vitale che è difficile spiegare chiaramente”, mettere a fuoco (ivi, p. 126). Formulazioni di questo tipo prestano però il fianco all’obiezione che di solito si rivolge a chi, in alternativa alla verità proposizionale, suggerisce di concepire la verità artistica attraverso nozioni come quelle di “apertura”, sincerità, autenticità, fedeltà, verosimiglianza ecc., e cioè di formulare in termini di verità quella che propriamente sarebbe l’importanza che l’arte ha per noi.

preensione) consentita dall'esperienza che si compie attraverso ciò che le opere ci fanno immaginare³⁴.

Se però si ammette che la narrativa possa essere fonte di conoscenza e verità in modi che dipendono essenzialmente dalla forma in cui si esplica il suo essere finzionale, diventa difficile negare che il valore cognitivo sia un elemento importante del valore artistico. Almeno nei casi in cui un'opera non è semplicemente un mezzo di comunicazione, ma è piuttosto ciò attraverso cui una verità è guadagnata (o conosciuta), il valore cognitivo sembra concorrere al valore artistico; e sembra concorrervi appunto perché è *nell'esperienza* che l'opera struttura e promuove attraverso i suoi aspetti formali e di contenuto, che apprendiamo qualcosa su noi stessi o sul mondo. Almeno in questi casi l'interesse per ciò che un'opera ha da dire su temi umanamente importanti è semplicemente parte dell'esperienza di lettura come esperienza estetica³⁵.

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³⁴ Ho qui riformulato M. Kieran, *The Impoverishment of Art*, cit., pp. 22-25.

³⁵ Ringrazio Francesco Campana per osservazioni critiche e suggerimenti che hanno contribuito a migliorare una prima versione del testo.

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Aesthetic Necessity

di Simona Chiodo

ABSTRACT

The aim of what follows is to focus on two cornerstones of Lamarque's *Work and Object*: first, his aesthetic empiricism and, second, his essentialism. By focusing of them, I shall briefly take into account also other major aesthetic issues, such as the notion of art in its elite version, the notion of style and the relationship between art and emotion.

The title I choose is *Aesthetic necessity* because it gives me the possibility of underlining two cornerstones of Lamarque's *Work and object*: the first is his aesthetic empiricism, the second is his essentialism.

Let us start from his aesthetic empiricism, which intelligently argues for two important conditions:

1. the aesthetic character of a work of art is essential;
2. yet, the aesthetic character of a work of art cannot be reduced to its perceptual character. On the contrary, it is open to a wider notion of experience (Lamarque writes: "The mistake of the naïve aesthetic empiricist is not to base aesthetic value on how a work looks or is experienced but on too narrow a conception of the kinds of experiences relevant to aesthetic appreciation"¹).

This is true, I think. But Lamarque's reformed aesthetic empiricism seems to be even too less founded on perception, at least in some cases. He writes: "Whether this implies the logical inescapability of the aesthetic in art I am not sure. It does not seem to be part of the concept of art that it demands aesthetic appraisal"². In particular, he argues: "Literature is a non-perceptual art open to aesthetic description"³.

¹ P. Lamarque, *Work and object*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2010, p. 138.

² Ivi, p. 228.

³ Ivi, p. 227.

I would like to try a little experiment by reading some lines of an Italian literature's masterpiece, which is *Jerusalem delivered* by Torquato Tasso. Two lovers, Clorinda and Tancredi, are fighting a duel without knowing the identities of the persons the two helmets are hiding. The lines in which the author describes the duel are the following⁴:

Non schivar, non parar, non ritirarsi
voglion costor, né qui destrezza ha parte.
Non danno i colpi or finti, or pieni, or scarsi:
toglie l'ombra e 'l furor l'uso de l'arte.
Odi le spade orribilmente urtarsi
a mezzo il ferro; il piè d'orma non parte:
sempre è il piè fermo e la man sempre in moto;
né scende taglio in van, né punta a voto.
(XII, 55, 1-8)

Torquato Tasso seems to use precisely the perceptual character of the words (in particular, the rhotacism, which is the iteration of the sound of the letter "r"). Then, in order to describe their being exhausted, he seems to use the iteration of the sound of the letter "e":

Tornano al ferro, e l'uno e l'altro il tinge
con molte piaghe; e stanco ed anelante
e questi e quegli al fin pur si ritira,
e dopo lungo faticar respira.
(XII, 57, 5-8)

At last, in order to describe Clorinda's death, he seems to use the iteration of the letter "v":

Ma ecco omai l'ora fatale è giunta
che 'l viver di Clorinda al suo fin deve.
Spinge egli il ferro nel bel sen di punta,
che vi s'immerge, e 'l sangue avido beve;
e la veste, che d'or vago trapunta
le mammelle stringea tenera e leve
l'empie d'un caldo fiume. Ella già sente
morirsi, e 'l piè le manca egro e languente.
(XII, 64, 1-8)

Through my little experiment, I would like to underline the essentiality of the dimension which, in almost every Lamarque's page, is considered crucial in a work of art, that is, its aesthetic dimension.

⁴ Here and below, see T. Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, L. Caretti (ed.), Einaudi, Torino, 2014.

And this point brings us to another crucial point. We could ask ourselves: “If it’s true that the aesthetic character of a work of art is essential, even including its perceptual character, why is it essential? That is, what is the thing it does so well, better than other objects?”. I think that Lamarque’s answer could be found where he establishes the analogy between the functioning of a work of art and the functioning of a metaphor. His words are the following:

Rather than thinking of metaphor as a kind of assertion, or vehicle of truth, or propositional content, it is more illuminating to think of it as an act of a certain kind, embedded in a practice. The act is not assertion but exhortation, an encouragement to pursue comparisons imaginatively, conceptually, propositionally, or imagistically [...] the core of a metaphor has the force more of an invitation to *do* something than to *believe* something⁵.

I think that this idea is particularly intelligent, and it has the power to answer our question: it seems that the thing a work of art does so well, better than other objects, is precisely to be a sort of “invitation to *do* something”. And I shall try to argue that the aesthetic, and even perceptual, character of a work of art is its *condicio sine qua non*.

An Italian philosopher who lived in the last century, Giulio Preti, seems to propose something analogous. His reflection is on the difference between the notion of conviction and the notion of persuasion. He quotes something said by Rousseau: if you are dealing with a child, then the former cannot be useful: only the latter can be useful. In Preti’s opinion, this happens because “Convincing does not directly bring us to actions. It directly brings us only to ‘beliefs’”⁶. On the contrary, persuading seems to bring us to actions, directly and powerfully; if it is true that a human being is “‘also’ emotion, willingness, feeling, practical intuition, tradition [...], also, and moreover, need, work, action, love and hate, hope and fear”⁷, and if it is true that “in his life all this matters”⁸, then it should be noticed that “all this is expressed by persuasions”⁹, that is, we may say, on the basis of a notion of truth which has necessarily to do with the notion of value, and with that special way of representing human life which has deeply to do with non-objective judgments – and we know that that special way of representing human life which has deeply to do with non-objective judgments is, for instance, art (also thanks to Lamarque’s work). Preti’s argu-

⁵ Ivi, p. 186.

⁶ G. Preti, *Retorica e logica*, Einaudi, Torino 1968, p. 149, my translation.

⁷ Ivi, p. 153.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

ment seems to propose a last thing: persuading, that is, the power which art seems to have, means having the form of an example, and not of a theory. You can convince thanks to a theory (and, in Rousseau's opinion, this is simply useless with a child), but you can persuade, that is, bring both a child and an adult to actions thanks to an example – and I think that this is what a work of art seems to do so well, better than other objects, and this is also the reason why the aesthetic, and even perceptual, character of a work of art is necessary: it is the aesthetic, and even perceptual, character of a work of art what has the form of an example, being almost analogous to the actions it has the power to bring us to. If it is true that a work of art has the form of an example, by being persuading, and not convincing, then it seems that one of the reasons why it works (that is, one of the reasons why it is so important to us) is that it is somehow homogeneous to an action. Thus, thanks to a work of art, we can see what it actually means to do a specific action which artistically represented (for instance, if we want to understand what it means to be ashamed, then it is possible to be illuminated by the character of Ajax represented by Sophocles, by the character of Phaedra represented by Euripides, as well as by Masaccio's painting about Adam and Eve expelled from the Paradise, more than by the definition of being ashamed given by a dictionary, and even by a treatise of psychology). Thus, we may have one reason, at least, to argue that the aesthetic, and even perceptual, character of a work of art is necessary, and the reason is that it is precisely its aesthetic, and even perceptual, character that has the power to make it do so well, better than other objects, that sort of "invitation to *do* something", that is, that sort of having the form of a persuading example, that sort of being somehow homogeneous to an action (which is something that the form of a convincing theory does not seem to have).

This reflection introduces another cornerstone of Lamarque's *Work and object*: his essentialism. He writes that when we judge a work of art we can find "a necessary truth. The aim of such judgements is to characterize a work, in the sense of saying not just what kind of work it is but what partly constitutes it as the work it is. The judgments serve, in part, to identify and define the work itself"¹⁰. For instance, "that the final scene of *King Lear* is tragic [...] *must* be true"¹¹: "*Lear* could not possibly be other than tragic"¹², "the play is necessarily so"¹³, and "it is tragic in every pos-

¹⁰ P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 101.

¹² Ivi, p. 107.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

sible world in which it exists”¹⁴. And, in general, Lamarque’s thesis, which is particularly radical (he writes: “The essentialist claim I am advancing [...] is stronger, more metaphysical, a claim about the very nature of the work”¹⁵), is founded on two arguments:

1. again, the essentiality of the aesthetic character of a work of art (even if it is true that there are other dimensions, and in particular “expressive and representational qualities”¹⁶, in Lamarque’s opinion, several “expressive and representational qualities” are aesthetic. Thus, he can argue: “The essentialism I am defending is a relation between a *work of art* and an *aesthetic property*”¹⁷);

2. a sophisticated notion of truth, that is, a notion of truth which is not necessarily reduced to an absolute truth. He writes something remarkable: “not all necessary truths are definitional, analytic, or tautological”¹⁸. At last, he adds: “Necessary truths are no more immune from disagreement than contingent truths, nor is necessity equivalent to certainty”¹⁹. Thus, his thesis is that “To assert that the end of *King Lear* is necessarily tragic is not to say something trivial or something that can be looked up in a dictionary. It arises ultimately from a response to the play, a response, if the thesis is right, that is demanded by the play, a normative response, a necessary condition not only for a correct understanding of the play but for the recognition of the play as the play it is”²⁰.

I think that it is true. Thus, my following question is: “Why?”. Lamarque gives several reasons, but I am trying to ask: “Why ‘the end of *King Lear* is necessarily tragic?’”. Here, we seem to find the following structure: we have “an *aesthetic property*”, registered by the adjective “tragic”, and we are saying that the “*aesthetic property*” registered by the adjective “tragic” is “a necessary truth”. But we are not dealing only with an aesthetic necessity. Lamarque argues more than once that a work of art is a matter of several dimensions: the dimensions which constitute the cultural context in which the work of art is produced and fruited. Thus, we may say what follows: an *aesthetic property* is a necessary truth if, considering a particular work of art, it is acknowledged to be a successful formal (that is, aesthetic) way to be the representation of a cultural

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 102.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 106.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 110.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 112.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 110.

object which is not a formal (that is, an aesthetic) object, but a sort of value. Thus, we may say that “the end of *King Lear* is necessarily tragic” because its formal (that is, aesthetic) composition is acknowledged to be a successful way to be the representation of a sort of value, and this sort of value is, here, the real tragic dimension which characterizes the real human beings’ real existences. Thus, we may say, at last, that, even if we do not have to do with a notion of truth which is “definitional, analytic, or tautological”, Lamarque writes, we have to do with a notion of truth anyway, because when we read *King Lear* we can say: “Yes, it is true: its formal, aesthetic dimension, which is so powerful thanks to its being, again, a sort of example somehow homogeneous to an action, does illuminate what it means to live a tragic fact”. Thus, we seem to find, here, a notion of truth that cannot do without a relationship with the notion of value. And one of the challenges of a work of art is the following: being extremely precise about values to illuminate through a formal, aesthetic representation.

Now, I would like to underline some points related to Lamarque’s aesthetic empiricism and essentialism.

The first point is about a sort of *élite* notion of art, which I truly appreciate. Speaking of art is speaking of an extraordinary, and not ordinary, process:

1. we need a powerful thing: an aesthetic thing that has the extraordinary power to illuminate a value, a fact founded on a value, by being a sort of example somehow homogeneous to an action, and by being extremely precise;

2. and we need an extremely precise artist, who seems the artist described by Poe in his philosophy of composition (Lamarque writes, for instance, that “the work is completed as a result of a decision by its creator that the work is complete”²¹, and that “creating a work essentially involves bringing something new into the world”²². The artistic idea is not enough: the artistic work is required, and it requires an extraordinary artefactual skill);

3. at last, we need an extremely precise audience (Lamarque writes, for instance, that we need “qualified observers”²³, and that “Only someone suitably trained or experienced can offer informed aesthetic characterizations of works of art or can say what makes them the works they are”²⁴).

²¹ Ivi, p. 36.

²² Ivi, p. 46.

²³ Ivi, p. 19.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 121.

An interesting consequence of the promising notion of art argued may be a limit which divides a good interpretation from a bad interpretation. Lamarque does not seem so severe: “creative readings”²⁵ are allowed, because “so close is the linking of work and mode of interpretation that there is an inevitable blurring of what is ‘in’ a work, or part of its inherent nature, and what is ‘imputed to’ it through interpretation”²⁶. He is probably right. Yet, in order to respect the work of art (if it is true that we think that it is a special thing that has a special power by illuminating a precise value through a precise form), we may try, at least, to understand, and then to state, the kind of interpretation we are working on, because a “creative reading” may be a promising idea, but may also neglect the promising idea (which can be even more promising) represented by the work of art (and by its author).

The second point I would like to underline is about the notion of style. A notion of style founded on a psychological basis seems to be rather successful. Danto, for instance, starts from the etymology of “style”, which is *stilus*, to argue for this kind of thesis. And Lamarque argues for an “act-based definition”²⁷: “style is defined as a way of doing something”²⁸. Again, I think that it is a promising way of reflecting on the notion of style. Yet, I would like to add something: we should not neglect that we can use a style also as a tool. It is true that there is a sense in which a style, by being partly the result of a psychological ground, is partly uncontrolled. Yet, I think that it is also true, and important, that there is a sense in which a style, by being partly the result of a choice, is partly (may be partly) controlled. And, when it comes to an artist’s work, it is important to be aware that a style can be a choice, that is, a partly controlled tool, because this can be a precious resource for the artist in order to work at her/his best (Cassirer writes interesting, and even touching, pages by speaking of Kant’s style, which changes so incredibly from his first works to his three masterpieces. We cannot think that Kant’s psychology changed so deeply. Yet, we can think that Kant’s will change so deeply: he seemed to deeply change his style, by controlling it as a chosen tool, in order to get to the perfect form to perfectly explain his philosophical vision).

The third point I would like to underline is about the relationship between art and emotion. I truly think that Lamarque argues for an intelligent thesis by writing that “A work is sad not because

²⁵ Ivi, p. 32.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 183.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 141.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

it causes sadness in an audience, or even because it is disposed to do so, but rather because of how it is correctly perceived, for example on analogy with a sad person”²⁹. This is an important point, also because the opposite thesis is still argued by several philosophers. I think that one of the best way to understand the reason why it is a mistake to state that “A work is sad” “because it causes sadness in an audience, or even because it is disposed to do so”, is Kant’s reflection on the aesthetic judgement: the aesthetic judgement is authentic if it is founded on the (rather sophisticated) capacity of recognising the quality of the relationship between a form and our sensations, not on the (rather trivial) capacity of recognising the quality of the relationship between a form and our emotions (which causes the paradox of judging a bad music good because we feel an emotion when we hear it, but the reason why we feel an emotion when we hear it may be that we used to hear it when we were children, and this association is touching for us). Thus, and again, a work of art is more demanding, and an authentic aesthetic judgement is asked to be able to do not a trivial, but a sophisticated, operation, which requires culture, care, sensitivity and intelligence.

And the sophisticated essence of art is clearly explained by Lamarque:

The bottles, the branches, the bricks, the clothes, the on and off lights, if they are to succeed in becoming works distinct from the things themselves, must invite a kind of perception which makes salient particular aspects and suggests significance for them. If they fail to generate this kind of experience they have failed as art precisely because they have failed to distinguish themselves from the things that are their constitutive base³⁰.

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²⁹ Ivi, p. 117.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 231.

Aesthetic Essentialism and Aesthetic Uniqueness: a Problematic Relation?

di Filippo Focosi

ABSTRACT

The thesis of Aesthetic Essentialism, in the version put forward by Peter Lamarque, states that some of the aesthetic properties that a work of art possibly possesses are essential to its aesthetic character. While illuminating some important aspects of the philosophy of art and of the practices of restoration, performance, and interpretation, the thesis seemingly runs counter to a well-entrenched principle in aesthetics, namely, the thesis of Aesthetic Uniqueness, which maintains that we cannot distinguish between essential and inessential features in a work of art, since each feature of a work of art performs an irreplaceable function. I'll try to show that the claim to truth of both theses is justified, according to which kind of essentialism is at stake. This will involve clarifying the difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic essentialism and, within the former, between the aesthetic character and the aesthetic content of a work of art. The refined version of aesthetic essentialism thus advanced will also have important consequences for the practice of art evaluation.

1. Aesthetic Essentialism: thesis and consequences

In Chapter 5 of his book *Work and Object* (2010), Peter Lamarque defends a thesis regarding the relation between a work of art and a subset of the aesthetic properties that the work possesses. The thesis, which he labels Aesthetic Essentialism (AE), states that “all works of art that possess aesthetic properties, possess at least some of them essentially”¹, insofar as they identify the work's aesthetic nature or character. He gives an indication of what could count as an essential property of a work in Ch.3, where he states that “a property is essential to a work only if its presence makes a relevant difference to the [quality of the] experience of the work (when correctly perceived) and bears on the work's value as a work”².

AE entails that some aesthetic attributions (e.g. “*King Lear* is tragic”) have the character of constitutive judgments, that is, of

¹ P. Lamarque, *Work and Object. Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art*, Oxford UP, Oxford (NY) 2010, p. 96.

² Ivi, p. 72.

statements of identity condition (e.g., it cannot be false that *King Lear* is tragic; the play is necessarily so; “being tragic” is something that moulds the character of the play). Hence, some interpretations will prove to be necessary truths, to the extent that they identify a work’s essential properties³. The thesis also has important consequences for the practices of art restoration, performance and criticism: (1) restorers would have to preserve the aesthetic character of a work, not just its material composition (it is not essential to a painting *p* “that it be made of precisely *those* physical materials”, where enough of *p* has been retained in order to achieve the same aesthetic effect); (2) performers would have to “be constrained by the aesthetic qualities, as well as the purely notational, in their rendering of a work” (a few wrong notes in a performance do not in themselves compromise work-identity; on the other hand, “sticking slavishly to a sequence of notes” may not assure a good musical interpretation); (3) literary criticism demands an aesthetic, as well as a purely linguistic, understanding (textual criticism “is never a sufficient enquiry for determining the properties of a literary work”, since the latter cannot be reduced to a mere set of sentences)⁴.

2. *Aesthetic Essentialism vs. Aesthetic Uniqueness*

It may be objected to AE that the aesthetic understanding that is demanded by art interpretation and art criticism is doomed to relativity, given the relational, i.e. response-dependent nature of aesthetic properties: indeed, as is recognized by Sibley, Pettit, and Scruton, aesthetic properties are all grounded in a relation between a work’s lower-level perceptual properties and the responses of a class of appropriate perceivers. Thus, such a response – which could be described as a “*gestalt* switch”, or “seeing as” – is normative both for the recognition of X as a work of art and for the recognition of X as the work it is (e.g., as tragic, peaceful, spiritual, and so on). In order to avoid such difficulty, Lamarque further specifies that, within the class of essential aesthetic properties, expressive and representational ones are most prominent, and this ensures a minimal degree of objectivity in aesthetic judgments, insofar as the response that such properties require in order to be assessed – although calling for a special epistemic access, i.e. a “*gestalt* or aesthetic receptivity” – is, if compared with affective qualities such as being moving or disturbing, less dependent on the psychological dispositions of the audiences, and is partly determined by a background knowledge

³ Ivi, p. 120.

⁴ Ivi, pp. 73-74 and 119-120.

of a work and of the historical context of its creation⁵.

However, the most pressing problem that Lamarque's AE has to face lies in its *prima facie* lack of compliance with another well-entrenched principle in aesthetics, namely, the thesis of Aesthetic Uniqueness (AU), which – as Levinson has put it – maintains that every structurally distinct work of art has a unique aesthetic content⁶. The uniqueness of a work of art depends on the organic interconnectedness of its parts/elements: each feature performs a specific function with respect to the global form of the work and to the meaning of the whole, and thus is – as is stated by Pareyson – “equally essential” and irreplaceable⁷.

AU relies on a common thought in aesthetics, according to which even very small structural differences can lead to aesthetic differences, since an aesthetic quality is the outcome of a unique combination and interaction of non-aesthetic properties (e.g., shapes, colors, musical notes, words, sentences, and so on). To quote Sibley: “[An] aesthetic quality [e.g., gracefulness] depends upon exactly this individual or unique combination of just these specific colors and shapes so that even a slight change might make all the difference”⁸. In a similar vein, Beardsley asserted that “the presence or the absence of an aesthetic quality is very often [...] at the mercy of extremely subtle variations in non-aesthetic qualities”⁹. Such a thought resonates with what the great painter Giorgio De Chirico once stated: a work deserves to be labelled as an “artwork” only if any small change in its configuration would modify its meaning and value.

AU also accounts for artists' ongoing effort to find the right words and sentences in a novel, to successfully combine the notes and melodies in a musical composition, to find the right balance between shapes, colors, and volumes in a painting. As Italo Calvino

⁵ Ivi, pp. 102-103 and 108-111. The same is true also – if not primarily – of aesthetic formal qualities, whose claim to objectivity is guaranteed by the fact that they are strongly dependent on – while not being completely reducible to – a work's structural features, and as such are the least likely to vary depending on the affective reactions, evaluative stances, or cognitive attitudes of the audiences.

⁶ J. Levinson, *Aesthetic Uniqueness* (1980), in Id., *Music, Art, & Metaphysics. Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*, 2nd ed., Cornell UP, Ithaca (NY) 1996, p. 107. It must be noted that here Levinson criticizes the core arguments supporting AU and argues for a much more restricted version of the thesis. For a discussion of Levinson's position regarding AU, see F. Focosi, *Completezza, unicità, identità delle opere d'arte*, in P.F. Corvino, F. Focosi (ed. by), *La ritenzione della traccia*, Eum, Macerata 2019, pp. 13-24.

⁷ L. Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (1954), Bompiani, Milano 2002, p. 109.

⁸ F. Sibley, *Aesthetic Concepts* (1959), in Id., *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2001, pp. 11-12.

⁹ M. Beardsley, *The Descriptive Account of Aesthetic Attributions*, in “Revue Internationale de Philosophie”, 28, 1974, p. 343.

remarked in the second of his *American Lectures* ("Quickness"): "Just as for the poet writing verse, so it is for the prose writer: success consists in felicity of verbal expression, which [...] as a rule involves a patient search for the *mot juste*, for the sentence in which every word is unalterable, the most effective marriage of sounds and concepts. [...] In both cases it is a question of looking for the unique expression, one that is concise, concentrated, and memorable"¹⁰.

We can clarify the discordance between AE and AU through the following scheme:

<i>Aesthetic Essentialism</i>	<i>Aesthetic Uniqueness</i>
some of the aesthetic properties that a work of art possibly possesses – most notably, semantic ones – are essential to its aesthetic character/identity	every feature of a work of art performs a specific and irreplaceable function with respect to the work's overall structure and meaning
some features or properties of a work can be inessential to its specific identity	there are no inessential features in a work of art

Table 1: Aesthetic Essentialism vs. Aesthetic Uniqueness

¹⁰ I. Calvino, *Lezioni americane* (1988), eng. tran. *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, Vintage Books, New York 1993, p. 48-49.

3. *Aesthetic Essentialism and Aesthetic Uniqueness reconsidered*

In order to address this issue, I'm going to work two additional distinctions into Lamarque's account of AE: (1) the distinction between two kinds of essentialism, depending on whether it (i.e., the essentialism at stake) concerns non-aesthetic or aesthetic properties; (2) the distinction between aesthetic content, which (according to Levinson's definition¹¹) comprises all of a work's aesthetic attributes, and aesthetic character, which is constituted only by the dominant or salient ones. In light of these distinctions, I hope to arrive at a better assessment of the relation between AE and AU by pointing out the following claims:

(I) Where aesthetic qualities are concerned, Lamarque's intuitions about AE are preserved, to the extent that the distinctive aesthetic character/identity of a work of art mainly relies on the work's (aesthetic) expressive and representational – or, I would rather say, semantic – properties (e.g., the qualities of being tragic, serene, peaceful, spiritual, profound, ironic, symbolic, and so on), which are the most connected with human needs, values, interests and emotions.

Instances of properties of a work X which are essential for the recognition of the specific aesthetic identity of X may comprise the melancholy of a melodic line, the irony of a literary character, the symbolic quality of a movie scene, or the metaphysical atmosphere of a still life painting. Aesthetic properties not belonging to a work's aesthetic character would thus have to be taken as inessential to its individual identity, although it remains possible that the possession of some of them will prove to be essential for an item to be classified as an artwork. *Contra* Lamarque, I would suggest that the most promising candidates for this role are aesthetic formal properties such as organic unity or internal interconnectedness¹².

(II) When we move to the field of non-aesthetic features, AU still holds true, every feature (part or component) of a work being essential to the work's aesthetic content and overarching form, al-

¹¹ J. Levinson, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹² While Lamarque's AE is an instance of Individual Essentialism, insofar as it refers to essential properties in individual works of art, he allows the existence of Class Essentialism, according to which there is at least one property that all items belonging to the class of artworks possess necessarily. Lamarque further specifies that such a property must be of the relational/historical kind – since many works belonging to Conceptual Art have no aesthetic properties –, thus aligning himself with the institutional theory of art (P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97). For a critique of the institutional and historical accounts of art and for a defense of a revised version of the aesthetic definition of art in which formal unity – intended as the successful interpenetration of a work's aesthetic properties – plays a key role, see F. Focosi, *Form and Function in Art Definition*, in F. Pau, L. Vargiu (ed. by), *Following Forms, Following Functions*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2018, pp. 11-27.

though the very same feature might be inessential to the distinctive aesthetic identity of the work, i.e. to its aesthetic character.

Instances of inessential features may include external features, such as “being owned by X” or “being heavier than Y”¹³, as well as – this is my hypothesis – structural features, such as the descriptive – or, to borrow a term introduced by Benedetto Croce, “unpoetic” – parts in a novel (Croce spoke of, e.g., the “expository parts of plays, poems and novels”, “the psychological explanations”, “the introduction of characters and episodes to carry on the action of the plot”¹⁴), the transitional sections in a musical composition (e.g., passages of music composed to link the main theme with a subordinate theme), some subtle details in the background landscape of a pictorial portrait. This doesn’t amount to say that they are aesthetically worthless, since they serve the purpose of preserving the balance of the whole; it just implies that substitution or replacement of one (or more) of such properties in a work of art by any feature of the same sort and level of specificity would not compromise work-identity, nor would it destroy its distinctive aesthetic character, assuming that the admired qualities of the work are retained.

4. *Aesthetic Essentialism, Aesthetic Attitude, and Artistic Value*

We just stated that a feature can be labelled as inessential if it may be substituted by some similar feature without causing any significant change in the work’s aesthetic character. Is it possible to identify some even “more inessential” features – as it were – that is, features that can be not only substituted, but even left out without being replaced by some other similar feature? This is what Peter Lamarque seems to suggest, since he states that a feature *f* whose presence or absence in a work *w* “makes no difference to the quality of the experience of *w* (in a suitable informed perceiver)” cannot be “essential to the identity of *w*”¹⁵. Now, we might agree with Lamarque on the fact that our experience of a work *w* would remain basically unaffected by our lack of knowledge of some of its relational properties, if only in the case that *w* doesn’t demand nor is capable of rewarding a detailed attention; otherwise, the author’s *oeuvre*, the genre to which *w* belongs, the conditions of its production, and so on, may be considered as essential in order to fully understand *w*, assumed that *w* is a work of a sufficient degree of complexity and profundity. In any case, it’s hard to think that a perceiver’s experience of a work deprived of some of its structural

¹³ P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁴ B. Croce, *La poesia* (1942), Adelphi, Milano 1994, p. 101.

¹⁵ P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

features, albeit inessential to its distinctive character, wouldn't be impoverished, as far as appreciation of formal qualities such as coherence and completeness is concerned.

That said, although the ideal perceiver's attitude is that of acquiring contextual knowledge relevant to a work's proper appreciation and of paying attention to almost all of the internal components of a work of art, audiences tend to focus on those aspects which trigger their imaginative promptness and emotive responsiveness and which thus are, according to the above-mentioned distinction, essential to the work's aesthetic character. Such shifts of attention result in some typical behaviours on the part of perceivers: think of the common habit of underlining, copying and nowadays "posting" on a social network those phrases or sentences of a literary work that strike us as profound, poignant, enlightening, or unsettling. In a similar manner, we are inclined to identify a movie with its most impressive scenes or lines, as well as being willing to re-listen to those musical pieces imbued with moving melodies or thrilling rhythms.

The refined version of the thesis of AE here advanced, while being able to account for the existence of different levels of essentialism and, accordingly, of aesthetic attitudes, bears further consequences for the practice of art evaluation, to the extent that in light of the above considerations – not all artworks seem to possess the same degree of aesthetic distinctness. Are we then entitled to say that the possession of a remarkable variety of "human" aesthetic qualities – that is, of those properties that, since they belong to the expressive and semantic realm, "are naturally interesting to us" and "touch us where we live"¹⁶ – not only is essential to a work's individual aesthetic character but also increases the work's overall artistic value?

Well, if artistic value – i.e. the value of a work of art as art – is intended as a function of the intrinsic value of the experience that a work of art offers, the latter mainly relying on formal qualities such as the coherence and the completeness of the experience itself, the question should probably be answered negatively. If, instead, artistic value is intended in a wider sense, i.e. as comprising a work's

¹⁶ M. Beardsley, *What Is an Aesthetic Quality?* (1973), in Id., *The Aesthetic Point of View. Selected Essays*, Cornell UP, Ithaca (NY) 1982, pp. 109-110. It was Monroe Beardsley's insight to have labelled the aesthetic properties of the expressive and/or semantic kind as "human", insofar as they are qualities "similar to qualities found in persons". These qualities are named by such terms as "tenderness", "sadness", "anguish", "calm", and many others – but not by such predicates as "being balanced, unified, tight", and the likes, which primarily belong to the (aesthetic) formal field (*Ibid.*) After all, when we speak of the aesthetic *character* or *identity* of a work of art, we implicitly make a connection with the realm of human traits, behaviours, and actions.

capacity to give insights into the deepest feelings or emotions or to disclose previously unavailable points of view on reality, the question might be answered affirmatively. From this point of view, what Beardsley stated about human – that is, in our terminology, aesthetic identity-grounding – qualities, holds true: “the more clearly and distinct they are articulated, the more abundantly and yet purely are displayed, the more reason we have for the aesthetic [as well as the artistic] judgment”¹⁷. I think that, in our current troubled times, works of art with a distinctive identity and a strong aesthetic character are what we most need.

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¹⁷ *Ibid.*

It's Not Easy Being Green. The Challenge of Colour

di Alice Barale

ABSTRACT

This essay addresses the question of the relationship between “work” and “object” from a particular point of view: the problem of color, as part of the “object” that constitutes a picture. In doing so, it aims to build a bridge between “analytical” and “continental” philosophy in relation to the question of color and, possibly, to make some remarks on the idea of “object”, as it is formulated by Peter Lamarque.

The discussion will be divided in three parts:

I. The first part will give a short sketch of the debate on the concept of color that arose in the Anglo-American philosophy since the end of the 1980s until today, with a particular focus on the position called “naïve realism”.

II. The second part will consider the question of color in painting through the works of two contemporary artists, not so well-known yet but chosen here for their way of using color to deal with some issues of today, in particular the tension between city and nature.

III. The conclusion of the paper will consider a few problems that color raises to the idea of “object”, as it is articulated by Lamarque.

The essay examines the question of the relationship between “work” and “object”¹ from a particular point of view: the problem of colour, as part of the “object” that constitutes a picture. In fact, colour is one of the elements that Peter Lamarque quotes at the beginning of his book:

A distinction between “work” and “object” runs through this study [...] Associated with every work is what might be called its constituted medium or material. For pictures the medium includes such material as canvas, paper, paint, charcoal, as well as configurations of line and *colour*. For carved sculpture the material is stone, marble, wood, or broadly anything that can be carved; for cast sculpture it is bronze or iron or other materials that can be moulded and set [...] But it helps to yield a key question to be investigated, namely how a work and its constituting medium are related. If the medium – patches of paint, configurations of lines, pieces of bronze, sequences of words or sounds or movements – can be squeezed into a catch-all notion of “object”, then the question becomes: how does a work relate to the object

¹ The reference is of course to P. Lamarque, *Work and Object. Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010; It. trans. *Opera e Oggetto. Esplorazioni nella metafisica dell'arte*, ed. by Lisa Giombini, Quodlibet, Macerata 2019.

that constitutes it? The answer to be proposed and developed is that a work is not identical to its constituting object [...] The culture-independent existence of objects is determined by the degree to which the investigation can proceed without reference to cultural practices and using only, for example, the language and methods of the physical sciences. The properties of paint, *colour*, bronze, sounds, and movements are amenable to such description².

The goal of this essay will be to build a bridge between the so called “analytical” and “continental” philosophy in relation to the question of colour and, possibly, also to make some very short remarks on the idea of “object”, as it is formulated by Peter Lamarque.

1. *Colour for Philosophers*

Colour is something very familiar to us. It is very important for children, as it is known. Yet colour is also something very mysterious, and this is the aspect in which philosophers are most interested. Wittgenstein stated that “colours spur us to philosophize”³, and before him, Goethe wrote that “the ox becomes furious if a red cloth is shown to him, but the philosopher, who speaks of colour only in a general way, begins to rave”⁴.

This essay, however, will focus on a more recent period: on the debate on colour that arose in the Anglo-American philosophy at the end of the Eighties and is still going on today⁵. The first part will give a short overview of the different philosophical positions inside this discussion. A starting point can be found in the title of one of the first books that was published on colour in those years: “Colours for Philosophers: *Unweaving the rainbow*”⁶. In fact the main question of this debate on colour is: “do colours really exist, do they belong to the real world”?

² Ivi, pp. 3 ff. (my emphasis).

³ L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, Blackwell, Oxford 1980, p. 66.

⁴ J. W. Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre*, Engl. trans. *Theory of Colours*, trans. by C. L. Eastlake, Murray, London 1840, p. V.

⁵ For the beginnings of this discussion see: D. R. Hilbert, *Colour and Colour Perception: A Study in Anthropocentric Realism*, CSLI, Stanford 1987; J. Westphal, *Colour: Some Philosophical Problems from Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, Oxford 1987; C. L. Hardin, *Colour for Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1988; C. Landesman, *Colour and Consciousness*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1989; A. Clark, *Sensory Qualities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993; E. Thompson, *Colour Vision*, Routledge, London 1994. It is interesting to notice that Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on Colour* were published a few years before the beginning of the debate, in 1978. The discussion is still very intense today, as it is demonstrated by the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Colour*, ed. by D. Brown, P. McPherson, Routledge, London 2020. For an overview of the debate see L. Angelone (ed.), *Ontologia dei colori*, “Rivista di estetica”, 43, 1/2010; Z. Adams, *On the genealogy of colour*, Routledge, London 2015. See also M. Silva (ed.), *How Colours matter to Philosophy*, Springer, London 2017.

⁶ C. L. Hardin, *Colour for Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow*, cit. (my emphasis).

Surprisingly, one of the most popular answers is: “no, colours are not real at all, the world is not coloured”. This is the so-called “colour eliminativism”⁷. The main argument for this thesis is that of the “perceptual variation”: the fact that colours are perceived differently according to the situation, for example under different illuminations, or against different backgrounds, and also according to different observers⁸. Something can look orange to a person and red to someone else, or orange under a certain light and red under another kind of light.

Sometimes, even if nothing is changed in the context, the colour is perceived in a different way. One of the clearest examples is that of the unique green⁹. If different types of green are shown to different subjects, they usually give different answers on which one is the unique green. “It’s not easy to be green”, it can be said say with the words of a famous song performed by Kermit in *The Muppet Show*¹⁰. In fact, this is also the title of a classical text on the philosophy of colour that I borrowed for this essay¹¹.

It is very difficult, then, to tell what is the “real” colour of something, and the conclusion for eliminativists is that there are no real colours at all. However, there is also another possible conclusion: that all colours are real. This is what is called “colour relationalism”¹². Colour relationalists think that colours are real, but they can be conceived only in relation to a certain subject and a certain situation. For the relationalist, if we see a colour in two different ways, we actually see two different colours.

The problem with this, is of course how to explain the stability of colours, their constancy: the fact that if something is orange, it

⁷ For the classification of the different positions see A. Byrne, D. R. Hilbert, *Introduction*, in *Readings on Colour*, vol. 1, MIT Press, Cambridge Ma./London 1997, pp. XI-XXV; J. Cohen, *The Red and the Real*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, pp. 1-15. For an updated overview of the different positions see B. Maund, *Colour*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, CSLI, Stanford 1997, 2nd ed., 2018.

⁸ See on this K. Allen, *A Naïve Realist Theory of Colour*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 48 ff.

⁹ See on this C. L. Hardin, *A Green Thought in a Green Shade*, in “Harvard Review of Philosophy”, Spring, 2004; J. Cohen, *It’s Not Easy Being Green, Hardin on Relationalism*, in Id. (ed.), *Colour Ontology and Colour Science*, MIT Press, Cambridge Ma./London 2010, pp. 230-1; K. Allen, *Locating the Unique Hues*, in “Rivista di Estetica”, 43, 2010, *Ontologia dei Colori*, pp. 13-28.

¹⁰ Joe Raposo, *Bein’ Green*, originally performed by Kermit the Frog on *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show*. In this popular song, Kermit laments his green colour, but at the ends he accepts it: “It’s not easy being green/ Having to spend each day the colour of the leaves/ When I think it may be nicer being red, or yellow or gold/ Or something much more colourful like that [...]”.

¹¹ J. Cohen, *It’s Not Easy Being Green*, cit.

¹² Or (according to one of the main variants of this position) “dispositionalism”. See on this J. Cohen, *The Red and the Real*, cit., pp. 1-15.

seems to remain orange even under different lights¹³. This is usually the starting point of two other types of realism. The first one is colour physicalism. According to this position, colours can be reduced to their physical basis¹⁴: to the microphysical structure of objects or to the way in which different objects reflect light at different wavelengths. The problem, of course, is that when we see a colour, we don't see molecules or wavelengths.

This critique is the basis of a third realist position that is named naïve realism¹⁵. Naïve realists argue that colours are not dependent on our experience of them (as eliminativism and relationalism state), but they cannot even be reduced to the physical structures of objects (as physicalism states). Colours are «queer» properties¹⁶: they supervene on physical properties, but they are something different.

This position is particularly interesting in this context, because it tries to overcome something that is quite evident inside the discussion on colour that was described above: the gap (or the «clash»: as Wilfrid Sellars writes)¹⁷ between our everyday and qualitative image of the world and its scientific and quantitative image. In our common experience, colours don't seem to be something that doesn't exist. They don't even look like dispositions to produce a certain colour in a certain situation, or like molecules or wavelengths, as noticed above.

There is, however, also something else that seems to be left out from the discussion on colour that was considered above: the symbolic character of colour that for Goethe (who is a very important author indeed for naïve realists)¹⁸ cannot be separated from its physical character.

This leads to the second part of the analysis, which will concern the question of colour in painting. In particular, a key will be found in the works of two contemporary artists. They are not classical authors yet but they have been chosen here for the way they use colour to deal with a very important issue of today, which is the relationship between city and nature.

¹³ See on this K. Allen, *A Naïve Realist Theory of Colour*, cit., pp. 16-46.

¹⁴ See A. Byrne, D. Hilbert, *Colour Realism and Colour Science*, in "Behavioral and Brain Sciences", 26, 2003.

¹⁵ Sometimes also called "primitivism" (see A. Byrne, D. Hilbert, *Colour Primitivism*, in "Erkenntnis", 66, 2007, pp. 74). This definition, however, can be at least partially misleading: see K. Allen, *A Naïve Realist Theory of Colour*, cit., p. 4, 133.

¹⁶ J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1977, p. 38; quoted in K. Allen, *A Naïve Realist Theory of Colour*, cit., p. 108.

¹⁷ W. Sellars, *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*, in Id., *Science, Perception and Reality*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, pp. 25 ff.

¹⁸ See J. Westphal, *On Colour*, cit., p. 2.

2. *Entering the painter's lab*

The symbolic character of colour is something that seems to be left out even from the naïve realist perspective. This can be shown through the example of the colour white. It is interesting to compare the way white is addressed by an important naïve realist philosopher, Jonathan Westphal, and by a contemporary Italian painter, Velasco Vitali.

White is the first colour that Westphal analyzes in his book *Colour: Some Philosophical Problems from Wittgenstein*. The first chapter of the book, dedicated to white, begins with two quotations that are quite different one from the other. The first one, from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, is a famous passage about the supernatural and frightening character of white:

Bethink thee of the albatross, whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature [...] Nor, in some things, does the common, hereditary experience of all mankind fail to bear witness to the supernaturalism of this hue [...] Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour, and at the same time the concrete of all colours? [...] And of all these things the Albino Whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?¹⁹

White in this passage is the colour of ghosts. Also the white albatross of Coleridge's poem, quoted here, is the spirit of a killed albatross, who comes back to haunt the sailors.

The second quotation is from Hilary Putnam: «the truly best therapy is a sensible theory of the world»²⁰. There is an evident contrast, then, between the supernatural character of white underlined by Melville and the «sensible theory of the world» that constitutes the «best therapy», according to Putnam. To understand the meaning of this contrast it is necessary to consider how Westphal defines white, a few pages after: «a white surface is a surface which scatters back or reflects nearly all the light incident upon it»²¹. The best therapy against the supernatural and frightening character of white, therefore, is to understand that the concept of this colour, and that of any other colour, is entirely natural, it can be discovered in our sensible experience of the world.

Yet, is it really like that? And even more important, when we

¹⁹ H. Melville, *Moby Dick*, cap. XLII; cit. in J. Westphal, *On Colour*, p. 15.

²⁰ H. Putnam, *Language and Reality*, in Id., *Philosophical Papers*, vol. II, *Mind, Language and Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1975, p. 290; cit. in J. Westphal, *On Colour*, p. 15.

²¹ J. Westphal, *On Colour*, cit., p. 20.

see white, do we really see only, as Westphal states, «a surface which scatters back or reflects nearly all the light incident upon it»? Or do we also see something else?

In order to answer, it is necessary to consider a few pictures by Velasco Vitali. Between 2010 and 2013 Vitali painted a series of white cities, which are called “città fantasma” (“ghost cities”)²². They are real cities that men built in different parts of the planet but never used, they were never inhabited. One of the most impressive ones, for example, was built in China, for a petrol company [fig. 1].

These, however, are not the first white cities that Velasco painted. At the end of the Nineties, he started to paint some Mediterranean cities: Palermo, Genova, Napoli... [fig. 2]. They too are mainly white, because of the light and also because they are at a sort of middle point between what is going to be destroyed (by the sun and abandon) and what is going to be built. According to Velasco, it is exactly this in-between character which makes these cities capable of welcoming new people (and dogs, which are among the most mysterious inhabitants of these cities [fig. 3]). In these images, then, the physical and the symbolic meaning of white can not be separated one from the other. Yet one could object that white is an oversimplified case, from this point of view, because white is at the border of colours.

It is worth considering, therefore, how *colours* are used in the illustrations that another painter, Santi Moix, did for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*²³. In one of these pictures [fig. 4], all of the characters are searching for the little Huckleberry. The young boy is hidden under the plants of the river and sees them all, very near to him:

I lit a pipe and had a good long smoke, and went on watching. The ferryboat was floating with the current, and I allowed I'd have a chance to see who was aboard when she come along, because she would come in close, where the bread did. When she'd got pretty well along down towards me, I put out my pipe and went to where I fished out the bread, and laid down behind a log on the bank in a little open place. Where the log forked I could peep through.

By and by she come along, and she drifted in so close that they could a run out a plank and walked ashore. Most everybody was on the boat. Pap, and Judge Thatcher, and Bessie Thatcher, and Jo Harper, and Tom Sawyer, and his old Aunt

²² See V. Vitali, *Foresta rossa*, a cura di L. Molinari e F. Clerici, Skira, Milano 2013.

²³ M. Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), in Id., *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*, ed. and intr. By A. Gribben, New South Books, Montgomery 2011; Spanish trad. *Las aventuras de Huckleberry Finn*, ilustrado por Santi Moix, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2011. These works were exhibited at the “Fundación Círculo de Lectores” in Barcellona (2011) and at the Kasmin Gallery in New York (2012).

Polly, and Sid and Mary, and plenty more. Everybody was talking about the murder, but the captain broke in and says:

“Look sharp, now; the current sets in the closest here, and maybe he’s washed ashore and got tangled amongst the brush at the water’s edge. I hope so, anyway.”

I didn’t hope so. They all crowded up and leaned over the rails, nearly in my face, and kept still, watching with all their might. I could see them first-rate, but they couldn’t see me²⁴.

In the whole novel there is a contrast between nature, on the one hand – the nature into which Huck and the black man Jim escape, when they go down to the river with their raft – and, on the other hand, the civilized world. Colour is used by Santi Moix to express the contrast between nature and civilization. This is known to be quite an old issue. What is new here – and it seems to also stem from Moix’s experience: the painter lives in New York, but he comes from a little town in the countryside of Spain – is the humor that we find in this use of colour and that expresses very well the impossibility of an opposition between civilization and nature. Civilization is at the border between the two dimensions: this is one of the most important messages of Twain’s novel as well.

3. Conclusion

In his book Peter Lamarque states that the “object” of a work of art is something that can be described prior to every cultural or symbolic aspect, in physicalistic terms²⁵. Yet colour, as part of the object that constitutes the work of art, doesn’t seem to be reducible to a mere physicalist description (as shown in part I). Moreover (as shown in part II), the consideration of colour in painting suggests something that seems to belong to our experience of colour in general: that the physical and the symbolic dimension of colour co-originate and cannot be separated.

Does this imply an endorsement of an idealistic position? The answer that this essay suggests is: perhaps not, if we try to conceive objects as a real but still indeterminate presence [fig. 5], which never stops to inform in unexpected ways our thought and our language.

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²⁴ M. Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, cit., p. 272.

²⁵ P. Lamarque, *Work and Object*, cit., p. 5.

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Fig. 1. Velasco Vitali, *Kowloon*, 2013



Fig. 2. Velasco Vitali, *Genova*, 2005



Fig. 3 Velasco Vitali, *Sbarco*, Sant'Agostino, Pietrasanta, 2010



Fig. 4. Santi Moix, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 2011



Fig. 5. Santi Moix, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 2011

Restoring the Work, Restoring the Object

di Lisa Giombini

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I consider some implications of Peter Lamarque's ontology of art for the theory of artworks' restoration and conservation. My basic assumption is that the way we conceive of an artwork's identity impinges directly on the actions that are taken with regard to the conservation of the work. For example, if we take the work to coincide with the physical object touched by the artist, even the smallest intervention will alter what "the artist made". Conversely, if we take the work to coincide with an a-temporal image-type contingently embodied in a material support, restoring it can make it look closer to what "the artist made".

None of these options, I argue, is fully satisfying, because neither is able to take into account the fundamental reason why we are concerned with conserving artworks: the fact that, as Lamarque (2010, p.4) suggests, these are not merely physical objects, nor simply ideal images, but rather culturally emerging objects, whose existence depends on appropriate social conditions. Conceiving artworks as symbols of webs of collective meanings (Sagoff 1981) implies that conservators should focus more on preserving a work's collective values than the object's hypothetical original condition. This, I contend, doesn't mean that care for physical integrity should be ruled out, but only that this form of preservation is insufficient if the artwork's cultural significance is not similarly taken into consideration.

In this short paper I consider some potential implications of Peter Lamarque's ontology of art for the theory of artworks' restoration and conservation. This approach is justified, I think, by the growing attention Lamarque has been paying to the issue in recent years. Relevantly, however, in none of the essays devoted to the topic does he explicitly take the metaphysical aspects of this practice into consideration¹. This may seem surprising if one considers that, as Lamarque himself admits somewhere in *Work*

¹ They are rather focused on conservation ethics. See, in particular, P. Lamarque, *Reflections on the Ethics and Aesthetics of Restoration and Conservation*, in "The British Journal of Aesthetics", Vol. 56, n. 3, 2016, pp. 281-299; P. Lamarque and W. Nigel, *The Application Of Narrative to the Conservation of Historic Buildings*, in "Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics", Vol. LVI/XII, no. 1, 2019a, pp. 5-27; P. Lamarque, *The Values of Ruins and Depiction of Ruins*, in Bicknell, J., Judkins, J., Korsmeyer, C. (eds.), *Philosophical Perspectives on Ruins, Monuments, and Memorials*, Routledge, New York 2019, pp. 83-94.

and *Object*², many of his basic ontological claims about artworks' identity have important consequences for the way art preservation is to be conceived. In the following, I will try to scrutinize what, if anything, these claims have to tell us about fundamental questions like: What principles underlie restoration practices? What is the rationale for this kind of interventions? Who decides what to do when it comes to restoring an artwork? Even among conservation professionals there is still a lack of agreement on how these questions need to be answered, perhaps because they are simply too general or abstract in nature. Interestingly, however, this brings philosophy into play. Indeed, it seems that until some philosophical clarification is made on these issues, disputes and controversies in the field of restoration will presumably have to flourish.

Let us consider for example one paramount case of restoration controversy, the 1999 cleaning of Michelangelo's frescos in the *Sistine Chapel*, Rome, one of the largest such projects ever undertaken. The frescos had darkened over the centuries because of smoke particles from the Chapel candles accumulating all over the work's surface. After the restoration, the unexpected emergence of a brilliant color-palette (including coral pinks, apple greens, ginger oranges, bright yellows and pale blues) from the previously monotonous reddish and grey ceiling of the chapel triggered opposite reactions among commentators. Some praised the project for its care and capacity to reveal details of Michelangelo's art that had been concealed for centuries, to the point of holding that: "every book on Michelangelo would have now to be rewritten", because the Sistine Chapel "unexpected and astounding"³ restoration revealed that he was a brilliant colorist. Others, however, were just upset by the new technicolor liveliness of the frescos, which, they claimed, betrayed the art of the great Italian painter⁴.

Without going into the specifics of the debate, what is interesting to notice is that all parties to the controversy agreed on the basic principle that conservation's aim was to preserve "what Michelangelo made"⁵. Everybody, in other words, granted that restorers should strive to respect as best as possible the artist's *original achievement*. Difficulties arise when they tried to identify *what*

² See, for example, P. Lamarque, *Work and Object*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010, p. 3; p. 119.

³ J. Osborne, quoted in R. Fulford, *Art Restoration in Italy*, "The Globe and Mail", 11 February 1998. Available at: <http://www.robertfulford.com/restore.html>.

⁴ See, for example, J. Beck and M. Daley, *Art Restoration: The Culture, the Business, and the Scandal*, W.W. Norton, New York 1996, pp. 56-59.

⁵ I borrow this formulation by D. Carrier, *Art and Its Preservation*, in "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", Vol. 43, no. 3, 1985, p. 291.

exactly such an accomplishment was, for at the end of the day this seemed more a matter of a metaphysical conviction than of a technical decision.

Did Michelangelo create a material object which would fade and darken since the moment of its completion due to natural forces and aging processes causing damage and decay? Or did he rather create an ideal aesthetic structure, a timeless image-type, say, the *Last-Judgment*-type, that should be conceived of as only contingently related to the perishable material in which it was embodied? This ties into the broader question of whether an artwork can be reduced to its physical material, to the object it is composed of – a question that lies at the core of Lamarque’s philosophical investigations in *Work and Object*.

Significantly, our answer to this question impinges directly on the actions we decide to implement with regard to artworks. If we take the fresco to coincide with the material object directly touched by Michelangelo, even the smallest restoration intervention will change the meaning and significance of the object, thus altering “what the artist made”. Alternatively, if we take the fresco to coincide with an a-temporal image-type, something like a Platonic form, to restore it is to make it appear ideally closer to “the way it is”⁶ (in a metaphysical sense) – namely, to what “the artist made”. Since both options are consistent with a part of our intuitions concerning the nature of visual art objects⁷, the extent to which artworks are restored may be subject of endless debate between adherents of different metaphysical persuasions.

In the philosophical literature, these conflicting perspectives have been famously christened *purism* and *integralism* by the British philosopher Mark Sagoff⁸. Purists, among which Sagoff himself, reject the idea that artworks should be restored and only allow for the “cleaning”⁹ and “reattachment” of components that might have fallen off from it, giving priority to consolidation of the work’s material and prevention of further decay. According to purists, any

⁶ R. De Clercq, *The Metaphysics of Art Restoration*, in “The British Journal of Aesthetics”, Vol. 53, no. 3, 2013, p. 263.

⁷ For this conflict of intuitions, see particularly P. Lamarque, *Work and Object*, cit., p. 60.

⁸ See, in particular, M. Sagoff, *On Restoring and Reproducing Art*, in “The Journal of Philosophy”, Vol. 75, no. 9, pp. 453-470.

⁹ This principle, while apparently straightforward, is in fact more complicated than it seems. As a matter of fact, cleaning the surface of a painting often results in altering the painting’s original relationship of colours. In other words, it means changing the work’s original look. Hence, even when “simply” cleaning the paint surface, restorers can in fact be making drastic changes to the work. For discussion on this issue, see: E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1972, pp. 54-57.

modification to an object that goes beyond the necessary operations to maintain its current status results into a forgery. The reason stems from purists' absolute respect for the unique *historic value* that an artwork possesses in its untouched condition, as causally related to the original artist's handiwork.

Integralists, on the other hand, allow any additions, refurbishment and rebuilding to an artwork aimed at restoring its aesthetic appearance, which might have been altered or obscured through aging, dirt, accidental damage, or disruptive events occurred in the course of time. For integralists, the aesthetic integrity of the artwork – the ability of an object to produce specific aesthetic sensations upon the observer¹⁰ – is more important than the conservation of the object's historicity, because it represents a work of art's "rationale", so to speak. Restoration's aim should indeed be to reconstitute an artwork's pristine *aesthetic value*, even if this involves attaching or substituting newly fabricated components to the object.

Despite the amount of consideration these solutions have gained from philosophers, none of them seems fully satisfying when it comes to moving from theory to practice. The problem, in a nutshell, is not so much that these proposals are incorrect or mistaken *per se* as it is that they are incomplete. Insisting on either purism or integralism implies ignoring the crucial fact that an artwork, meant especially as an object worthy of preservation, cannot be merely thought of as a material testimony of history to be safeguarded for the benefit of specialists (as it would happen if restoration was limited to the pure preservation of the work's *status quo*) nor as a timeless aesthetic surface to be integrally restituted for the pleasure of the eye. Indeed, both purism and integralism are unable to take into account the central reason why we are concerned with conserving artworks: the fact that these are fundamentally *cultural entities* whose survival in time depend on the persistence of certain social conditions. This idea stands as a basic assumption in Lamarque's art ontology. As he puts it: "A work is a cultural entity whose existence depends essentially on appropriate cultural conditions. Without those conditions, which make possible the creation of the work in the first place and ensure its subsequent survival, the work would not exist even if the materials that make it do exist and exist in just that form"¹¹.

Qua cultural entities, works possess a number of intentional or relational properties that are *essential* to their identity as artworks

¹⁰ For further discussion on the notion of "aesthetic integrity", see M. Clavir, *Preserving What Is Valued: Museums, Conservation, and First Nations*, UBC Press, Toronto 2002, pp. 53-55.

¹¹ P. Lamarque, *Work and object*, cit., p. 5.

and determine their specific value and meaning: “Work-identity, like the identity of all intentional objects, is “soft” identity. It is dependent on what is “thought” as well as what merely is. It rests [...] not just on cultural factors but on values, perceptions, meanings, ‘seeing as’”¹². This is why, according to Lamarque, the simple survival of an artwork’s physical or intrinsic properties – those which can be identified in a scientific or quantitative way – is not enough to guarantee for the continual persistence of the work. As a consequence, artworks could fail to survive even though all their non-relational material properties do survive or are preserved in their pristine state¹³.

This consideration has important consequences for the practice of conservation, for it follows from this that what restorers have to do is to ensure that the essential *relational* character of the artwork is preserved, and not just its material composition, if they want to preserve the work itself¹⁴. To fulfil the work conservation task, restorers should thus focus on the cultural, social, historical values that artworks possess, *qua* cultural entities – on what they “mean” as symbols of a web of collective meanings, to borrow again one of Sagoff’s expressions. “It should be plain”, Sagoff writes, “than an important boundary, a social boundary, exists between objects we view as symbols and as parts of our heritage, to be preserved from the past and transferred to the future, and articles we merely use, and which therefore, wear out or have a natural life”¹⁵.

But in what sense are artworks symbols of collective meanings when viewed as objects of conservation? Artworks are symbols in the sense that they all communicate or express a collectively recognized message. This message, in turn, constitutes the fundamental reason why we preserve them: we do not preserve them simply because of their material features (either documentary or aesthetic), but because they convey meanings that we consider relevant to our society. Of course, many objects convey messages, and it could even be argued that *every* object is symbolic in some sense, but it would be mistaken to assume that all objects are equally symbolic: some seem to be very powerful, while others very weak. Generally speaking, artworks tend to be powerful vehicles of symbols, and the more powerful a work is as a symbol, the stronger our attempt at preservation will be¹⁶.

¹² Ivi, p. 115.

¹³ Ivi, p. 119.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 119-120.

¹⁵ M. Sagoff, *On the aesthetic and economic value of art*, in “The British Journal of Aesthetics” Vol. 21, n. 4, 1981, pp. 318-329.

¹⁶ Throughout the last decades, the existence of a symbolic mechanism grounding art

Notice that the symbolic value of an artwork, while essential to it as a conservation item, is not wholly inherent to the object, but is rather generated collectively. In Lamarque's terminology, works of art are "culturally emergent, institutionally-grounded, intentional objects"¹⁷ whose salient properties are of a relational nature. This means that "no works of art, as culturally emergent entities, bear their art status, as it were, 'on their sleeves'"¹⁸: being a work of art, in other words, is not an intrinsic property of an object "like being red or square"¹⁹, but rather an intentional property involving an act of external, collective recognition. Collective recognition, i.e. the sharing of an artwork's symbolic meaning by a large number of subjects, is thus what gives an artwork its meaning and what makes of it a conservation object. Meanings, however, exist because subjects interpret them, so if people no longer agreed that an artwork has any meaning for them, it would lose its art status and consequently its right of protection. If Michelangelo were not regarded as a genius by so many people for so many centuries, his works would not be safeguarded today. Of course, not all subjects contribute equally to the process of meaning-creation. Power, as institutional theorists argue, plays a decisive role when it comes to assigning value to an art object²⁰, because it can enforce the mechanisms determining the object's meaning among powerless people. Nevertheless, even in these cases, the result must always be collective agreement.

From the point of view of conservation theory, this implies that we protect art objects not because of their qualities *qua* physical objects, but because of the intangible, symbolic effects that their unjustified alteration might have upon the subjects that make up society. The widespread protection of world heritage sites is based upon and is a proof of the meaning those sites have within society: protection laws have been developed in order to prevent meaning loss produced by heritage gradual or sudden change over time. Interestingly, this allows a voice for the community, and not just the professional specialists, in decisions about restoration. Indeed, although interventions should be determined on technical grounds, non-expert people must also be involved in the process, for ob-

preservation has been acknowledged as an essential feature by many authors working in the field. See, among the others, C. Caple, *Conservation Skills. Judgement, Method and Decision Making*, London, Routledge 2000; M. Clavir, *Preserving What Is Valued: Museums, Conservation, and First Nations*, cit., and S. Muñoz-Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Restoration*, Elsevier, Oxford 2009.

¹⁷ P. Lamarque, *Work and object*, cit., p. 107.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 110-111.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 111.

²⁰ See G. Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: an Institutional Analysis*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (NY) 1974.

jects of conservation are so because of what they mean for people. Their interests (their needs, their preferences and their priorities) should thus be considered among the most important factors when it comes to decision-making, regardless of their training.

What happens, then, when restorers do take into account the collective meaning of a work as a symbol more than its physical property as an object? Let us consider the unusual story of one iconic painting by Raffaello Sanzio, the *Portrait of Young Woman with Unicorn* (“Dama con il liocorno”) dated 1505/1506 and located in the Galleria Borghese, Rome²¹. In the 18th century inventory of the Gallery, the painting was identified as a Saint Catherine of Alexandria and attributed to Pietro Perugino. A first restoration of the work made in the years 1934-36, however, established attribution of the work to Raphael, while removal of heavy repainting in the course of the cleaning process revealed a unicorn, symbol of virginal purity, behind Saint Catherine’s wheel. The discovery helped increase interest in the painting, which from then on became very popular. A few decades later, however, a second intervention showed that in place of the unicorn the woman initially held a small dog in her arms, symbol of conjugal fidelity. Ironically, though, not even this dog was by the hand of Raphael, but by a second unknown artist! What happened, in chronological order, is that Raphael portrayed a lady, probably commissioned by a family of the Roman nobility. In 1520 (ca.) another layer of varnish was added by a second unknown artist to include a dog to the painting. Circa 1550, the dog was then modified into a unicorn. However, around 1682, further interventions transformed the figure of the woman into a Saint Catherine of Alexandria, with the addition of a cloak and the wheel. Finally, cleaning procedures carried out in the last century brought the spurious mythological animal back to light.

Significantly, while being aware of the truth about the work, contemporary restorers have chosen to go against Raphael’s original drawing “because of the popularity and exoticism”²² associated with the *liocorno* portrait. They have considered the on-going life of the painting and its various changes in time more crucial to the identity of the work than the hypothetical original condition of the object itself. In doing so, they have decided to valorize one (strong) meaning the painting had acquired over time even though it contradicted the authentic design of “what Raphael made”.

What this example shows, I think, is that when the function of

²¹ I borrow this revealing example from D. A. Scott’s *Art Restoration and Its Contextualization*, in “The Journal of Aesthetic Education”, Vol. 51, no. 2, 2017, pp. 94-95.

²² Ivi, p. 95.

artworks as meaning-bearing symbols is acknowledged, this contributes to create a kind of open space in decisions about conservation. Appeal to artworks' symbolic meaning, indeed, challenges the thought that there is always only single way to proceed or that there are stock or standard answers to the problem of conservation like the purist's "Don't touch anything!" or the integralist's "Make the change regardless!". Again, because there are different meanings associated with an artwork, it invites recognition of the possibility of multiple solutions, reflecting different interests or points of view. To the extent that this is a less dogmatic approach, allowing space for creativity, it may also represent a more pragmatic way of proceeding.

But is this going to make the decision-making process in conservation easier or more determinate? Unfortunately, no: for an entire panorama of new debates opens once we recognize the symbolic value of artworks as culturally emergent entities. The same art object can have different meanings for different people and these meanings are neither fixed, nor are they universal. Moreover, it is not possible to determine the exact number of people for whom an artwork is significant, or measure precisely the extent to which these people would be affected by a given alteration on such work. For instance, for how many people is the Sistine Chapel actually meaningful? How meaningful is it for Romans compared to the inhabitants of Paris, Madrid or New York? Clearly, there is no obvious answer to these questions. The impossibility of "measuring" artwork's collective meanings, however, should not lead us to the belief that they are trivial or negligible, for although this complexity can make conservation decision-making extremely challenging, trying to avoid the challenge through philosophical shortcuts is just that: sheer *avoidance*.

The lesson to draw from all this discussion is that if the relevance of artworks as meaningful symbols is acknowledged, respect for the object simply ceases to be the only guiding criterion for conservation. This is not to say that restorers could ever ignore the material state of an artwork: after all, there would be nothing left to contemplate if efforts to ensure the survival of the original material object were to cease. The point is rather to understand that conservation practices cannot be effective if the cultural significance of art objects is not similarly taken into consideration alongside the physical, since it is precisely *because* of this cultural significance that these objects are preserved (and not the other way around). To quote again from *Work and Object*: "Works can fade into oblivion as cultural conditions change and as cultural memories are lost.

An analogy might be the gradual disappearance of a language. A language dies as fewer and fewer people are able to interpret its symbols [...] and as fewer and fewer symbols remain interpretable.”¹ The main task of conservation, thus, is to keep these symbols alive. The realization of this simple idea is a fundamental intuition of Lamarque’s ontology of art, one, I think, that should not be disregarded.

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An Argument Against a Meta-ontology of Art Inspired by Peter Lamarque's Reading of Jean-Paul Sartre

di Elisa Caldarola

ABSTRACT

As Peter Lamarque explains in *Work and Object*, the claim that artworks are not identical with their vehicles lies at the core of a variety of art-ontological accounts, including Jean-Paul Sartre's one. In chapter 10, Lamarque gives us an insightful reading of Sartre's art-ontological proposal: works of art in themselves do not exist, while what exists is their 'material analogue' which, when perceived, arouses in us certain imaginings. What we call 'artwork' is the object of such imaginings – an object that doesn't exist. Although Lamarque does not embrace Sartre's view, others might find Sartre's proposal at least *prima facie* promising. In particular, to those inclined to be skeptical about the genuine theoretical weight of debates about the existence of some kinds of objects, artworks *qua* ontologically distinct from their vehicles might look like a case where there is no fact of the matter to be right or wrong about and continuing to engage in ontological disputes is futile. Those scholars might then be sympathetic towards a proposal, inspired by Sartre as well as by Stephen Yablo's analysis of folk number statements, according to which when we talk about artworks we are merely pretending that certain objects of our imagination exist. In the first part of this paper, I rapidly explore this meta-ontological view. In the concluding section, I argue against the proposal previously outlined.

1. Introduction

In *Work and Object*, Peter Lamarque defends the view that artworks coincide in space and time with the objects that are their vehicles but are not identical to them.² As Lamarque explains, the (broader) claim that artworks are not identical with their vehicles lies at the core of a variety of art-ontological accounts, such as the ones put forward by R.G. Collingwood, Jean-Paul Sartre, Roman Ingarden, Jerrold Levinson, Gregory Currie and David Davies.³

² P. Lamarque, *Work & Object. Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art*, OUP, Oxford 2010, ch. 2.

³ P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-53; see also R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1938; J-P. Sartre, *L'Imaginaire: psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*, Gallimard, Paris 1940; Engl. tr. by J. Webber, *The Psychology of Imagination*, Carol Publishing, New York 1991; R. Ingarden, *Artistic and Aesthetic Values*, in "British Journal of Aesthetics", n. 4, 1964, pp. 198-213; J. Levinson, *What a Musical Work Is*, in *Journal of Philosophy*, 77, 1980, pp. 5-28; G. Currie, *An Ontology of Art*, Macmillan, Basingstoke 1989; D. Davies, *Art as Performance*, Blackwell, Oxford 2004.

Lamarque's main goal, however, is to give us the general metaphysical picture underlying the claim (as well as other related views), rather than to argue for a specific ontology of art. Additionally, in the concluding part of the book (chapter 10), after having elucidated his own view, Lamarque gives us an insightful reading of Sartre's art-ontological proposal, as it emerges not only from the philosophical work *The Psychology of Imagination*, published in 1940, but also from the novel *Nausea*, published in 1938.⁴ In a nutshell, Lamarque explains that, according to Sartre, works of art in themselves do not exist, while what exists is their 'material analogue' which, when perceived, arouses in us certain imaginings: what we call 'artwork' is the object of such imaginings – an object that doesn't exist and that is, however, "grounded in properties of physical objects"⁵ and therefore not just an idea in the mind, as the idealist would argue.⁶ Sartre, Lamarque explains, considers artworks "intentional objects of the imagination".⁷ Note that Lamarque does not embrace Sartre's view, which, he observes, has no room for the fact that artworks are 'institutional' objects, i.e. objects produced within established 'practices' – much like e.g. mayors, that "only exist where the appropriate constitutional and legal systems are in place".⁸ Others, however, might find Sartre's proposal – or some view originating in it – at least prima facie promising. As Lamarque himself acknowledges, in his own view about the ontology of art "mentalistic elements are present. There have to be appropriate beliefs, attitudes, modes of appreciation, and expectations for works to come into, and be sustained in, existence".⁹ Perhaps it could be argued that the activity of engaging in certain imaginings that are grounded in properties of physical objects is the kernel of certain institutionalized practices – those of making and appreciating artworks. Moreover, as I shall explain below, to those inclined to be skeptical about the genuine theoretical weight of debates about the existence of some kinds of objects, artworks qua ontologically distinct from their vehicles might look like a case where there is no fact of the matter to be right or wrong about and continuing to engage in ontological disputes is futile.¹⁰ Those scholars might then be

⁴ J-P. Sartre, *L'Imaginaire: psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*, cit.; J-P. Sartre, *La Nausée*, Gallimard, Paris 1938; Engl. Tr. by R. Baldwick, *Nausea*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1965.

⁵ P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

⁶ P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-216.

⁷ P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

⁸ P. Lamarque, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰ See S. Yablo, *Must Existence-Questions have Answers?*, in D. Chalmers, D. Manley, R. Wasserman (eds.), *Metametaphysics. New essays on the foundations of ontology*, OUP,

sympathetic towards a proposal, inspired by Sartre's view, as well as by Stephen Yablo's analysis of folk number statements, according to which when we talk about artworks we are merely pretending that certain intentional objects of our imagination exist.¹¹ Following this lead, in the next section I shall rapidly explore a meta-ontological view inspired by Sartre and Yablo. In the third and last section, I shall argue against the proposal previously outlined, relying on arguments put forward by Yablo.¹²

2. A meta-ontology of art inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre and Stephen Yablo

In this section, I shall first briefly introduce Yablo's meta-ontological view, which, in some writings, he grounds in *presuppositionalism* – a nonstandard account of how to evaluate sentences with false presuppositions – and, in other writings, he grounds in *figuralism* – one of the views according to which claims made within certain regions of discourse are best regarded as some kind of fiction;¹³ then, I shall equally briefly sketch out a meta-ontological account of artworks inspired by both Yablo's views and Sartre's ontology of art – as elucidated by Lamarque.

Here are the key claims of presuppositionalism, according to Yablo:

Presuppositions are propositions assumed to be true when a sentence is uttered, against the background of which the sentence is to be understood. Presupposition *failure* occurs when the proposition assumed to be true is in fact false. Failure is catastrophic if it prevents a thing from performing its primary task, in this case making an (evaluable) claim. Non-catastrophic presupposition failure then becomes the phenomenon of a sentence still making an evaluable claim despite presupposing a falsehood.¹⁴

Oxford 2009, pp. 507-508.

¹¹ See S. Yablo, *Does Ontology Rest on a Mistake?*, in "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society", Suppl. Vol. 72, 1998, pp. 229 – 226; Id., *Go Figure: A Path through Fictionalism*, in "Midwestern Studies in Philosophy", 25, 2001, pp. 72 – 102.

¹² See S. Yablo, *Must Existence-Questions have Answers?*, cit. and Id., *Non-Catastrophic Presupposition Failure*, in J. Thomson and A. Byrne (eds.), *Content and Modality. Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Stalnaker*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, pp. 164-190.

¹³ See e.g. S. Yablo, *Must Existence-Questions have Answers?*, cit. for presuppositionalism and Id., *Go Figure: A Path through Fictionalism*, cit., for figuralism; for an introduction to fictionalism and figuralism see M. Eklund, *Fictionalism*, in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2017 Edition, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/fictionalism/>>.

¹⁴ S. Yablo., *Non-Catastrophic Presupposition Failure*, cit., p. 164. The first scholars to theorize on presupposition failure were G. Frege (*On Sense and Meaning* (1872) in M. Beaney (ed.), *The Frege Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford 1997), P. Strawson (*A Reply to Mr. Sellars*, in "Philosophical Review", 63, 1954, pp. 216-231; *Identifying Reference and Truth-Values*, in *Theoria*, 30, 1964, pp. 96-118).

Here's an example of catastrophic presupposition failure: the sentence "The King of France is bald" presupposes the false proposition that there is a King of France. The failure of the presupposition is catastrophic because it prevents the sentence "The King of France is bald" from making an evaluable claim. Here's an example of *non-catastrophic* presupposition failure: the sentence "The King of France is sitting in this chair" presupposes the false proposition that there is a King of France. The failure of the presupposition, however, is non-catastrophic because it doesn't prevent the sentence "The King of France is sitting in this chair" from making an evaluable claim: it makes perfect sense to say that the "The King of France is sitting in this chair" is false, *because there is nobody sitting in the chair*. "The King of France is sitting in this chair" can be false for a reason that has nothing to do with the question whether there is a unique King of France: because nobody is sitting on a chair.

According to Yablo, our folk statements about numbers make non-catastrophic presuppositions about the existence of numbers.¹⁵ For instance, the statement "The number of homeless people is increasing" presupposes that numbers exist but it makes an evaluable claim regardless of whether numbers exist or not: it claims that more and more people are becoming homeless. According to Yablo, many existential presuppositions about abstract objects (like numbers) fail non-catastrophically, but the same is true also of some existential presuppositions about concrete objects.¹⁶ For instance, the sentence "The mereological sum of my pants and jacket is at the cleaner's" presupposes that mereological sums exist but, in case mereological sums of concrete objects didn't exist, it wouldn't be prevented from making an evaluable claim, because it can be true or false for reasons that have nothing to do with the existence of mereological sums of concrete objects, since they concern merely the presence or absence of one of my pairs of pants and one of my jackets at the cleaner's.

In a nutshell, the meta-ontological lesson Yablo draws from his views on presuppositions is that the same number sentences would strike us as true and the same number sentences would strike us as false in the case that number existed as in the case that numbers did not exist. The existence of numbers has no impact on the "felt truth-value"¹⁷ of typical utterances of number sentences. This seems to make it very hard to settle the question whether numbers

¹⁵ See S. Yablo, *Must Existence-Questions have Answers?*, cit., p. 522.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ S. Yablo., *Non-Catastrophic Presupposition Failure*, cit., p. 187.

exist. Yablo's view is that there is no fact of the matter concerning numbers' existence.

The problem addressed by Yablo's presuppositionalism is that there are circumstances in which, in order to say certain things (e.g. that there are more homeless people than there used to be), we use mathematical vocabulary (e.g. we say that *the number* of homeless people is increasing). According to Yablo, sometime using mathematical language is the only way to express certain contents: "Numbers enable us to make claims which [...] we [...] would otherwise have trouble putting into words".¹⁸

Yablo addresses the same problem also with another doctrine: figuralism.¹⁹ According to Yablo's figuralism, for instance, our number talk is metaphorical talk.²⁰ When we say "The number of homeless people is increasing", the *literal* content of our talk is that *there is a number* that is the number of homeless people and that this number is growing, while the *real* content of our talk is merely that there are more homeless people than there used to be. The function linking literal content and real content can be identified in terms of what Kendall Walton has called 'principles of generation' in 'games of make-believe'.²¹ A principle of generation is a function that links what is true in the real world to what is true in the *fictional world*. The general scheme is: '[According to the fiction F] iff G' – where G (the *prop* of the game of make-believe) stands for what is really the case, and F (the *content* of the game of make-believe) stands for what is fictionally the case. In *prop oriented* games of make-believe we exploit the fact that, based on our knowledge of the principles of generation, we can say things about the real world by means of saying things which are only fictionally true.²² For instance, when we say "Crotone is on the arch of the Italian boot" we launch a game of prop oriented make-believe which allows us to talk about Crotone's location (a thing about the real world) by means of saying things that are true within the make-believe world where we pretend that Italy is a boot. Now, according to Yablo, talk about numbers is a case of metaphorical, make-believe talk that is *prop*

¹⁸ S. Yablo, *Abstract Objects. A Case Study*, in "Philosophical Issues", 12, 2002, pp. 220-240, here p. 230.

¹⁹ See S. Yablo, *Things. Papers on Objects, Events, and Properties*, OUP, Oxford 2010, p. 4.

²⁰ See e.g. S. Yablo, *Go Figure: A Path through Fictionalism*, cit.

²¹ See e.g. S. Yablo, *Does Ontology Rest on a Mistake?*, cit. p. 245ff.; K. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Harvard University Press, Boston (MA) 1990; Id., *Metaphor and Prop Oriented Make-Believe*, in "European Journal of Philosophy" 1, n.1, 1993, pp. 39 - 57.

²² See D. Liggins, *Abstract Expressionism and The Communication Problem*, in "British Journal of the Philosophy of Science", 65, 2014, pp. 599 – 620, here p. 603.

oriented: by means of talking about make-believed objects (numbers) we manage to say things about the real world.²³ For instance, when we say that the number of homeless people is increasing in the game of make-believe where we pretend that numbers exist, we manage to say that (in the real world) there are more homeless people than there used to be.

In general, *fictionalism* about a discourse claims that the sentences of the discourse are not true, although they are useful.²⁴ *Revolutionary fictionalists* about the sentences of a certain realm of discourse typically recommend that we should cease to believe that such sentences are true, but we should still carry on using the sentences, accepting them without believing them.²⁵ What they recommend is a *change of attitude* towards the sentences at issue. *Hermeneutic fictionalists*, on the other hand, claim that we do not currently believe what the sentences say, even if we seem to believe them: no change of attitude towards such sentences is required.²⁶ A reason for Yablo to opt for hermeneutic fictionalism is that it provides the best explanation of certain aspects of the practice of folk number talk: David Liggins has called “‘abstract expressionism’ [...] the doctrine [held by Yablo and others] that mathematics is useful in science because it helps us to say things about concrete objects which it would otherwise be more difficult, or perhaps impossible, for us to say”.²⁷ Number talk, *qua* fictional talk, according to this view, does not merely tell us how we think about numbers (as the revolutionary fictionalist claims), but is a useful expressive instrument to describe how things are. For instance, we can say “The number of sheep is square” instead of uttering the much more complicated sentence “The number of sheep is zero, or the number of sheep is one, or the number of sheep is four, or the number of sheep is nine...” (an infinite disjunction).²⁸

Now let’s look at artworks. Here’s one way to develop on Sartre’s view about the ontology of art. As we have seen, according to Sartre, material vehicles produced by artists exist, but what we

²³ See e.g. S. Yablo, *Go Figure: A Path through Fictionalism*, cit.

²⁴ See D. Liggins, *Fictionalism*, in “Oxford Bibliographies Online”, 2011.

²⁵ The distinction between revolutionary (prescriptive) and hermeneutic (descriptive) nominalism was introduced by John Burgess (*Why I am Not a Nominalist*, in “Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic”, 24, 1983, pp. 93 - 105), famously used in by Burgess and G. Rosen (*A Subject with No Object: Strategies for Nominalistic Interpretations of Mathematics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997, p. 6), and applied to fictionalist accounts by J. Stanley (*Hermeneutic Fictionalism*, in P. French and H. Wettstein (eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy Volume XXV: Figurative Language*, Blackwell, Oxford 2001, pp. 36 - 71).

²⁶ See D. Liggins, *Fictionalism*, cit.

²⁷ D. Liggins, *Abstract Expressionism and The Communication Problem*, cit., p. 600.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 604, commenting on S. Yablo, *Abstract Objects: A Case Study*, cit., p. 231.

call works of art are not such objects, while they are objects whose existence we merely imagine, grounding our imaginings in certain physical properties of the material vehicles produced by artists. Inspired by Sartre and Yablo, one could argue as follows. Our statements about artworks presuppose the existence of artworks as objects that are not identical to certain material vehicles produced by artists. For instance, the statement “The *Mona Lisa* is at the Eremitani Museum in Padova” presupposes that the artwork *Mona Lisa* exists as distinct from a certain material vehicle produced by Leonardo. The failure of such presupposition, however, is non-catastrophic. If it were the case, as Sartre holds, that artworks didn’t exist as objects that are distinct from certain material vehicles produced by artists, the statement “The *Mona Lisa* is at the Eremitani Museum in Padova” would not be prevented from making an evaluable claim because its truth or falsehood would depend entirely upon whether a certain material vehicle produced by Leonardo is located at the Eremitani Museum (which it obviously isn’t), independently on whether artworks exist or not.

Developing on the analogy with Yablo’s view on folk mathematical statements, one could argue that the fact that our statements about artworks presuppose non-catastrophically propositions about the existence of artworks as objects that are not identical to certain material vehicles produced by artists shows that there is no fact of the matter whether artworks exist as objects that are not identical to certain material vehicles produced by artists. Given this, our debates about the existence of artworks as objects that are not identical to certain material vehicles produced by artists would end up having no theoretical weight and being futile.

One might also argue – inspired this time by Yablo’s figuralism – that our talk about artworks as objects that exist and are not identical to certain material vehicles produced by artists is metaphorical talk: while the *literal* content of our talk is that *there is an artwork* that is the *Mona Lisa*, which is not identical to a certain material vehicle produced by Leonardo and that such artwork is at the Eremitani Museum in Padova, the *real* content of our talk is that there is a certain material vehicle produced by Leonardo, whose physical properties ground imaginings about a certain object, within a certain practice, and that such vehicle is at the Eremitani Museum in Padova.

The function linking the literal content and real content of our talk is that whenever we say that there is an artwork in the game of make-believe where we pretend that artworks exist as objects that are not identical to certain material vehicles produced by artists,

we manage to say that (in the real world) there is a certain material vehicle that grounds imaginings about a certain object, within a certain practice. Hermeneutic fictionalism, then, seems an appropriate methodological option also for our ontology of artworks: when we say that there are artworks, we don't believe what we say, but we speak metaphorically because this is advantageous: it allows us to say things about certain material vehicles produced by artists that it would otherwise be complicated to explain – i.e. that such vehicles ground certain imaginings within certain practices.

3. *Why it doesn't work*

In this section, I shall argue that the proposal outlined above is open to a criticism inspired by some remarks of Yablo's.

As we have seen, Yablo argues that the sentence "The mereological sum of my pants and jacket is at the cleaner's" presupposes non-catastrophically that mereological sums exist: it can be true or false for reasons that have nothing to do with the existence of mereological sums of concrete objects, since they concern merely the presence or absence of one of my pairs of pants and one of my jackets at the cleaner's.²⁹ Interestingly, Yablo also considers whether a sentence like "There is a pair of pants at the cleaner's" works similarly to "The mereological sum of my pants and jacket is at the cleaner's".³⁰ One might think not only that the sentence "There is a pair of pants at the cleaner's" presupposes that material objects (such as pants) exist, but also that it has the implication that there are "pantishly arranged microparticles"³¹ at the cleaner's – an implication that is presupposition-free, meaning that it would follow from "There is a pair of pants at the cleaner's" no matter the truth or falsity of the presupposition that material objects exist³² –, just like "The mereological sum of my pants and jacket is at the cleaner's" presupposes the existence of mereological sums of concrete objects and has the presupposition-free implication that there are a pair of pants and a jacket at the cleaner's. If this were true, then one could argue that also the presupposition of "There is a pair of pants at the cleaner's" fails non-catastrophically: the sentence could be true or false for reasons that would have nothing to do with the existence of ordinary material objects like pants, since they would concern merely the presence or absence of particles arranged in a certain fashion at the cleaner's. Yablo, however, criticizes this line

²⁹ See S. Yablo, *Must Existence-Questions have Answers?*, cit., p. 522.

³⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 522-523.

³¹ *Ivi*, p. 522.

³² *Ivi*, p. 513 and ff.

of reasoning. “The mereological sum of my pants and jacket is at the cleaner’s” has implications (i.e. “statements whose truth follows *analytically* from the truth of their impliers”)³³ that are true or false independently of whether mereological sums exist. The same, Yablo observes, *isn’t true* of a sentence like “There is a pair of pants at the cleaner’s”, however: “the pants-statements does not analytically imply there are such things as microparticles, let alone that there are pantishly arranged microparticles at the cleaner’s”.³⁴ The alleged presupposition-free implication that there are “pantishly arranged microparticles” at the cleaner’s actually isn’t at all implied by the sentence “There is a pair of pants at the cleaner’s”! Therefore, the analogy between “The mereological sum of my pants and jacket is at the cleaner’s” and “There is a pair of pants at the cleaner’s” doesn’t work.

What does this argument reveal about the prospects for a hermeneutic fictionalist meta-ontology of art? The argument, I submit, shows that the analogy between a sentence like “The mereological sum of my pants and jacket is at the cleaner’s” and a sentence like “The *Mona Lisa* is at the Eremitani Museum in Padova” is partly misleading. “The mereological sum of my pants and jacket is at the cleaner’s” presupposes that mereological sums of concrete objects exist and analytically implies that my pants are at the cleaner’s. “The *Mona Lisa* is at the Eremitani Museum in Padova” does imply that a certain material object (the work’s vehicle) is located in Padua, so it does have analytical implications whose truth/falsity does not depend on the truth/falsity of a certain metaphysical hypothesis (that the artwork is identical to its material vehicle). In this sense, the *Mona Lisa* example is closer to the mereological sum example than to the pants example: “There is a pair of pants at the cleaner’s” does **not** imply anything about microparticles, whereas both in the *Mona Lisa* example and in the mereological sum example the sentences have implications whose truth value is independent from the truth of certain philosophical doctrines (whether there are pants at the cleaner’s does not depend on whether mereological sums exist and whether a certain canvas is located in Padova does not hinge upon the truth of the identification of that canvas with the artwork). However, “The *Mona Lisa* is at the Eremitani Museum in Padova” doesn’t presuppose that the artwork *Mona Lisa* exists as distinct from a certain material vehicle produced by Leonardo, which marks an important difference with respect to the mereological-sum example, where the relevant sentence does presuppose

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 522-523.

that mereological sums exist.³⁵

The project of a general hermeneutic fictionalist meta-ontology of art, then, is misguided: in figuralist terms, we have no reason to claim that when we utter “The *Mona Lisa* is at the Eremitani Museum in Padova” we are talking fictionally about artworks that exist as distinct from certain material vehicles produced by artists, in order to talk more effectively about the fact that certain material vehicles produced by artists ground imaginings about certain objects, within certain practices. It remains an open question, however, whether an hermeneutic fictionalist meta-ontology for abstract artworks is viable.³⁶ It could be argued that sentences like “Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* has had many performances” are analogous to “The number of homeless people is increasing”: while the latter presupposes non-catastrophically the existence of numbers as abstract objects, the former presupposes non-catastrophically the existence of works of music as abstract objects.³⁷

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³⁵ See S. Yablo, *Must Existence-Questions have Answers?*, cit., n. 21, p. 522.

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³⁷ The author would like to thank Matteo Plebani for his insightful comments on the paper.

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Da oggetto a opera: variazioni immaginative di significato

di Sara Matetich

ABSTRACT

The physical object, the mere thing, does not present evident qualities that allow any modification. It can be transfigured, however, into an aesthetic and critical object which – emblematically in the form of work of art – is characterized by differential properties attesting its variability.

This *new* object hybridizes and amalgamates its nature; it does not deny its substantial ‘thingness’ but, by opening up to the opacity of unexpected meanings, becomes a *critical object* inclusive of that excess of meaning that aesthetics is called to acknowledge as the driving force of the sensitive mechanism that mainly directs and makes human beings adapt to the world.

The object-work connects its essence to the binomial that connotes it: it is neither an object nor a work, but an object in work that works the thingness without exhausting it *in that form* that the work shows, and must necessarily refer to the representations emanating from it. The object-work maintains its physical characteristics, remains *just that object there*: its meaning will be varied primarily by its imaginative capacity.

The following essay proposes the possibility of a necessary pact that imagination must establish with the object so that the latter can *play* at transfiguring itself into the work of art.

Il titolo di questo breve saggio può prestare il fianco ad un immediato equivoco da cui vorrei senza indugio sgombrare il campo, a mo’ di analisi preparatoria all’argomentazione che proporò: il movimento indicato nell’espressione “da oggetto a opera”, grammaticalmente inteso quale moto a luogo, non indica affatto il luogo presso il quale l’oggetto, a partire dalla sua “oggettività”, si dirige per smarcarsi da essa e convertirsi in altro da sé. Tra oggetto e opera non vi è alcuna negoziazione di attributi intrinseci che stabilisca l’avvenuta variazione dell’uno nell’altra. Tantomeno vi è la possibilità di identificarli quei peculiari attributi che l’oggetto dovrebbe possedere affinché si proceda al suddetto mutamento. E non per eventuali cecità analitiche in merito: non vi è scienza o filosofia che possa testimoniare l’esistenza di alcunché che sia all’opera nell’oggetto per modificarne la sua natura. Vi sono “somialgenze di famiglia” (Wittgenstein), “sintomi estetici” (Goodman), “effetti essenzialmente secondari” (Elster), ma non evidenze che

testimonino a favore dell'esistenza di uno o più 'speciali' attributi che abilitino l'oggetto ad essere traslato nella categoria "opera d'arte". Eppure l'oggetto, quello fisico, si trasfigura in opera, ossia in oggetto eminentemente estetico che, esemplarmente, espone le proprie peculiarità sotto forma di prodotto artistico.

Esisterebbero, quindi, delle proprietà che l'oggetto estetico possiede e che lo differenziano dall'oggetto fisico: prime tra tutte proprietà rappresentative (Wollheim), proprietà relazionali (Danto) e contestuali (Lamarque).

Quanto detto potrebbe così riassumersi: l'oggetto fisico, la cosa in sé, non possiede evidenti qualità che ne permettano alcuna modifica, tuttavia esso può trasfigurarsi in oggetto estetico (e critico) che, emblematicamente in forma di opera d'arte, si connota di proprietà differenziali attestanti la sua variabilità.

Che "curioso" sillogismo! E l'aggettivo scelto per l'esclamazione non è casuale, ci tornerò.

1. *Oggetto Vs Opera: istruzioni d'orientamento*

Prendendo spunto dall'adorniano 'primato dell'oggetto', è possibile sostenere che un'opera d'arte è tale solo se rivendica la sua oggettività (il suo esser cosa) smentendo il suo appartenere al "mondo delle cose": l'opera è oggetto che non nega la sua cosalità, ma significa a partire dal rifiuto del suo "semplice esistere".

[...] Prima ancora di funzionare nel senso della rappresentazione o dell'espressione, di rappresentare o esprimere alcunché, le opere d'arte per Adorno sono "cose" che negano il mondo delle cose al quale indubitabilmente appartengono, cose che significano di per sé, anteriormente ad ogni significato o contenuto determinato, e significano anzitutto negativamente in forza di quel fattore di resistenza che deriva dal loro semplice esistere¹.

E di più: la possibilità che un oggetto ha di trasfigurarsi – ossia di farsi figura significativa – in altro da sé, non lo rende "altro", ma lo sospende nella criticità, opaca, della sua immanente esistenza, al cospetto della quale la percezione sensibile acquisisce sì un dato (che si tratta proprio di 'quell'oggetto lì'), ma allo stesso tempo mette in crisi lo sguardo che si apre alla possibilità di figurarsi, idealmente, inaspettati e "curiosi" significati di essa.

Questo "nuovo" oggetto (originale, ma non originario) ibrida e amalgama la sua natura, non smentisce la sua sostanziale coseità ma, aprendosi all'opacità (instabilità) di inattesi significati, si fa

¹ F. Desideri, *Oggetti critici. Crisi della percezione, fine della rappresentazione e criticità dell'oggettivale nell'arte contemporanea (una riflessione generale e alcuni casi esemplari)*. In E. Crispolti, A. Mazzanti, *L'oggetto nell'arte contemporanea. Uso e riuso*. Liguori Editore, Napoli 2011, pag. 252.

“oggetto critico”, ossia comprensivo di quell’eccedenza di senso, di quel “non so che” che l’estetica è chiamata a riconoscere quale movente del meccanismo sensibile che, principalmente, orienta e adatta l’uomo al mondo.

Eppure l’identificazione di tale e inedito oggetto non pare soddisfare del tutto, né tantomeno redimere la ben nota questione dell’indiscernibilità tra oggetto e opera d’arte, se non a patto di dover ricorrere agli svariati criteri di discernimento che alcuni tra i già citati esponenti della filosofia analitica ci hanno proposto quali ‘teorie dell’arte’, a cominciare dal ben noto “metodo degli indiscernibili” che, riprendendo e capovolgendo le indicazioni che N. Goodman aveva avanzato in merito, A. C. Danto ci consegna per orientarci nella distinzione tra meri oggetti (*real things*) e oggetti d’arte. L’occasione per riflettere sulla messa a punto di una modalità per distinguere gli oggetti dalle opere viene offerta al filosofo statunitense nel 1964, quando Andy Warhol espone alla *Stable Gallery* di New York le sue *Brillo Box*, scatole quasi-identiche a quelle contenenti spugnette abrasive vendute al supermercato.

Arrivai così al concetto di coppie indiscernibili, con un oggetto che era un’opera d’arte e l’altro no, così che potessi interrogarmi su quali basi un elemento di ciascuna coppia doveva essere un’opera d’arte, mentre l’altro solo un oggetto².

Dunque, a partire dall’indistinguibilità tra oggetto comune e opera d’arte, Arthur Danto individua due condizioni, sufficienti e necessarie, all’individuazione di un prodotto artistico di per sé identico alla mera cosa: esse sono l’*aboutness* e l’*embodiment*. Un’opera d’arte si differenzia dall’oggetto, dal quale non si distingue per *co-salità*, in quanto è “a-proposito-di” qualcosa che rimanda, in qualità di contenuto, al significato che l’opera stessa deve incarnare (*embodied meaning*). Da ciò consegue l’inclusione di “intenzionalità dell’autore” e di “interpretazione” tra i privilegiati parametri identificativi e cognitivi di un artefatto.

A sostegno della sua teoria, Danto rievoca le circostanze di una vicenda emblematica: nel 1917 Marcel Duchamp propose la sua *Fountain* per l’imminente mostra che sarebbe stata allestita dalla *Society of Independent Artists*. L’opera, come noto, fu scartata e mai esposta – l’unica testimonianza che ce ne rimane è uno scatto fotografico effettuato da Alfred Stieglitz. Danto riporta il commento del critico d’arte W. Arensberg che, in difesa dell’orinatoio di Mr. Mutt, sostiene durante la riunione indetta per discutere intorno

² A.C. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty. Aesthetic and the Concept of Art*, Carus Publishing Company 2003, tr. it. di C. Italia, *L’abuso della bellezza. Da Kant alla Brillo Box*, Postmedia Book, Milano 2008, pag. 19.

all'artisticità dell'opera: "Svincolata dai suoi scopi funzionali [essa] si rivela una forma affascinante, di conseguenza si tratta di un vero contributo estetico".

Ancora: una piccola rivista di settore pubblica un articolo dal titolo *The Richard Mutt Case* nel quale si legge:

Che il signor Mutt abbia fatto con le sue mani la *Fontana* o no, non ha nessuna importanza. È lui che l'ha SCELTA. Ha preso un articolo comune della vita di tutti i giorni, lo ha sistemato in modo che il suo significato utile scomparisse con il titolo nuovo e il nuovo punto di vista - ha creato un nuovo pensiero per questo oggetto³.

Assegnando un nuovo pensiero ad un oggetto l'artista conferisce ad esso la possibilità di ri-figurarsi in inediti significati che, esteticamente, lo aprono alla criticità dell'opera.

Come Danto anche Peter Lamarque investiga le "condizioni necessarie" che un'opera deve possedere per potersi distinguere da una mera cosa reale:

Le opere sono oggetti (o tipi di oggetti) che esistono grazie all'attività degli artisti (o degli esseri umani in generale). Sono costituite da sostanze materiali o da tipi (di solito tipi di sequenze di parole o di suoni) ma non sono identiche a tali materiali costitutivi⁴.

Sostenuta la tesi della "non-identità" tra oggetto e opera, Lamarque sottolinea inoltre:

Nulla può essere un'opera (d'arte) se non svolge un ruolo, o non è atto a svolgere un ruolo, in una certa pratica umana, all'interno della quale un numero sufficiente di professionisti esperti ne riconosce lo status e risponde a essa in modo appropriato. [...] L'esistenza di un'opera dipende dalla possibilità che l'opera continui a ricevere una risposta adeguata. Un'opera può essere mantenuta in vita in parte dai comportamenti, dalle credenze e dai desideri di coloro che ne riconoscono il ruolo come opera e come un'opera specifica. [...] Un'opera non è un'entità 'ideale' che esiste solo in qualche mente, ma è un'entità *intenzionale*, che dipende essenzialmente dal modo in cui viene recepita da osservatori competenti⁵.

L'esistenza e la sopravvivenza di un'opera d'arte, pertanto, *dipendono* da diversi fattori tra i quali predomina un agente di ordine specificamente culturale che ne riconosce (o investe di) una funzione e ne individua (o investe) la cerchia di competenti atti ad accreditarla come tale e di 'altri competenti' atti a mantenere viva

³ A. C. Danto, *What Art Is*, Yale University Press 2013; tr.it. di N. Poo, *Che cos'è l'arte*, Johan&Levi Editore, Milano 2014, p. 34.

⁴ P. Lamarque, *Work and Object. Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art*, Oxford University Press 2010; tr. it. di L. Giombini, *Opera e oggetto. Esplorazioni nella metafisica dell'arte*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2019, p. 86.

⁵ Ivi, pp. 88-90.

la funzione interrogante ad essa connaturata. Contesto e intenzionalità plasmano la ‘specialità’ di un oggetto che si muove verso la sua trasfigurazione in opera d’arte.

Propongo di verificare l’efficacia delle tesi pronunciate da Lamarque applicandole non agli esempi di opere d’arte (soprattutto concettuali) da lui stesso prese in considerazione, ma ad un recente esperimento (artistico?) che proprio sulla possibilità trasfigurativa di un oggetto in opera d’arte basa la sua unica possibilità d’esistenza.

2. *Oggetto-Opera: il curioso patto dell’immaginazione*

Christoph Büchel, artista svizzero, è paradossalmente più citato nelle sezioni di cronaca dei giornali di tutto il mondo che sulle riviste d’arte! Questo a causa dei suoi provocatori progetti che proprio sulla variazione di significato degli oggetti fondano la loro essenza.

Riflettendo sul potere che le opere d’arte hanno di ‘fare la Storia’, Büchel propone di risignificare gli otto prototipi commissionati da Donald Trump nel 2017 per la costruzione del “suo” muro di confine, da innalzare per separare (definitivamente) gli Stati Uniti dal Messico. Queste otto sezioni di muro, una diversa dall’altra (ed ognuna caratterizzata da straordinarie capacità di protezione), costate all’incirca 3 milioni di dollari, sono state temporaneamente sistemate nel sobborgo californiano di Otay Mesa, accanto alla barriera che già separa San Diego da Tijuana. La proposta\provocazione di Büchel, lanciata con una petizione patrocinata dall’organizzazione no profit MAGA – acronimo che rievoca lo slogan elettorale di Trump “Make America Great Again”, è di proclamare quegli otto prototipi ‘monumento nazionale’.

In un’intervista rilasciata al *New York Times* per chiarire le motivazioni dell’istanza, Büchel dichiara che le sue inclinazioni politiche nulla hanno a che fare con la sua proposta artistica. Inoltre, a chi gli contesta che i prototipi non sono l’opera di un’artista, replica che il fatto che essi siano stati progettati e costruiti da appaltatori privati non compromette il risultato finale dell’impressione che danno: “un giardino di sculture indesiderate voluto dal presidente e dai suoi elettori”.

Quegli otto pezzi di muro sono una scultura collettiva realizzata su indicazione di un’artista scelto dal popolo.

Christoph Büchel insiste sulla necessità di conservare quei prototipi perché essi sono in grado di “significare e cambiare significato nel tempo” e “possono ricordarci che un tempo c’era l’intenzione di costruire quel muro di confine”. L’impatto visivo che provocano è fortemente concettuale e tanto li accomuna ai prodotti della *land*

art, ma quei prototipi vanno salvati e dichiarati opere d'arte soprattutto perché sono in grado di “parlare tanto della nostra storia”⁶.

Quegli oggetti lì sono capaci di dire molto della nostra storia, più di quanto la storia stessa non sia in grado di fare. La cosalità di quegli oggetti custodisce in sé un enorme potere trasfigurativo che permetterebbe, nella sua relazione con il soggetto, di farsi altro da sé e risignificarsi per significare un pezzo di storia da trasmettere al futuro quale efficace, ed unica, testimonianza di quella peculiare esperienza in cui lo sguardo del soggetto è messo in crisi dal significato (*extra*-ordinario) dell'oggetto.

Eppure quel ‘potente’ suggerimento è rimasto inascoltato e quei prototipi non ci sono più: sono stati abbattuti a marzo del 2019. Con loro non è svanita, però, la possibilità di riflettere sulla potenzialità ri-conosciuta a quegli oggetti in relazione al contesto (fisicamente storicizzato), nonché al riconoscimento di essi quali oggetti la cui funzione interrogante non si sarebbe senz'altro esaurita nella mera esposizione temporanea.

Quegli otto prototipi di muro sono il campione esemplare di un oggetto-opera, sul quale è agevole verificare l'efficacia di quelle condizioni necessarie d'esistenza e sopravvivenza enunciate da Danto e Lamarque e che ci indirizza verso ulteriori considerazioni teoriche.

L'oggetto-opera lega la propria essenza al binomio che lo connota: né oggetto, né opera, ma oggetto in opera che opera l'oggettività senza esaurirla “in quella forma lì” che l'opera mette in mostra, ma che deve, necessariamente, rimandare alle rappresentazioni (sintesi figurali) che da esso emanano. L'oggetto-opera mantiene le proprie caratteristiche fisiche, rimane “proprio quell'oggetto lì”, a variarne il senso sarà *in primis* la sua portata immaginativa. Sì, l'oggetto-opera contiene senz'altro un significato incarnato (*embodied meaning*) che lo immette nel mondo dell'arte facendone risaltare la sua conformità a schemi storico-relazionali che lo rendano riconoscibile, ma ciò che essenzialmente lo rende “oggetto critico”⁷ è quella capacità che lo pone nella possibilità (in potere, in forza) di trasfigurarsi in altro da sé, in un altro non dissimile per oggettività, ma per variabilità di significati.

Il *medium* che, innanzitutto, permette queste variazioni è l'immaginazione – classicamente intesa quale dispositivo (facoltà) del

⁶ È possibile leggere l'intero articolo contenete l'intervista registrandosi a *The New York Time* al seguente indirizzo: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/arts/design/is-donald-trump-wall-builder-in-chief-a-conceptual-artist.html>

⁷ Peter Lamarque definisce le opere «una specie di oggetti culturali la cui esistenza dipende essenzialmente da complesse proprietà intenzionali e relazionali». Cfr. P. Lamarque, *Opera e oggetto. Esplorazioni nella metafisica dell'arte*, cit., p. 75.

“render presente ciò che è assente” e, soprattutto, nella sua accezione kantiana di facoltà creatrice che “sottoposta al dominio delle regole meno di altre facoltà è perciò tanto più capace di originalità⁸”. Non mi soffermerò ad indicare le peculiarità di questa facoltà. Ciò su cui in conclusione vorrei brevemente riflettere è l'eventualità che sussista un necessario patto che l'immaginazione deve istituire con l'oggetto affinché esso possa “giocarsi” la possibilità di trasferirsi in opera.

Questo patto immaginativo può, a mio avviso, funzionare solo sotto l'egida della curiosità.

Vediamo come, a partire dal significato del termine: la parola curioso deriva dal latino *curiosus*, dunque, dal termine *cura* che, oltre al *cor* (cuore) latino, i moderni fanno risalire alla radice sanscrita *ku-/kav* che vuol dire osservare. Secondo la definizione etimologica, è curioso “colui che è in possesso di desiderio sollecito e impellente di appressarsi a significati (e fatti) altrui, che non gli appartengono”. La curiosità è quell'ardore ad accedere a qualcosa d'altro che segue all'atto dell'osservazione. Ma l'osservare della cura è “responsabilità”. E così la curiosità si fa necessità (desiderio impellente) responsabile di poter esplorare territori inaspettati (non pre-visti, mai visti prima) e inesplorati dai sensi.

Michel Foucault scrive in merito:

La curiosità è stata un vizio stigmatizzato di volta in volta dal Cristianesimo, dalla filosofia e persino da una certa concezione della scienza. Curiosità, futilità. Eppure, la parola mi piace. Mi suggerisce una cosa affatto diversa: evoca la ‘cura’, l'attenzione che si presta a quello che esiste o potrebbe esistere; un senso acuto del reale, che però non si immobilizza mai di fronte a esso; una prontezza a giudicare strano e singolare quello che ci circonda; un certo accanimento a disfarsi di ciò che è familiare e a guardare le stesse cose diversamente; un ardore di cogliere quello che accade e quello che passa; una disinvoltura nei confronti delle gerarchie tradizionali tra ciò che è importante e ciò che è essenziale⁹.

“L'attenzione che si presta a quello che esiste o potrebbe esistere”: ecco cosa “sigilla”, vincola, l'immaginazione all'oggetto-opera: la responsabilità dell'osare guardare oltre (attraverso) quello che è (c'è), senza che l'invisibile smentisca il visto e viceversa. Il patto immaginativo che si istituisce tra oggetto e opera affinché l'oggetto-opera possa farsi possibilità combinatoriamente infinita di significazioni è un “patto curioso”, “curiosamente attivo”, attivato dalla

⁸ I. Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, Nicolovius 1789; tr. it. di G. Vidari, *Antropologia pragmatica*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1969, p. 113.

⁹ M. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, Édition Gallimard 1994; tr. it. di S. Loriga, *Archivio Foucault 3. Interventi, colloqui, interviste. 1978 – 1985*, Feltrinelli Editore, Milano 1998, pp. 141-142.

curiosità quale essenziale movente. E la stessa curiosità che muove e vincola l'immaginazione all'oggetto dovrà vincolare e sostenere il soggetto nell'urto percettivo con l'oggetto-opera, che mai esaurisce i suoi significati nell'esser visto.

Ma questa è un'altra storia.

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