

# INTERNATIONAL LEXICON OF AESTHETICS

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## ROMAN INGARDEN

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Roman Witold Ingarden was born in Krakow in 1893 and died in the same city in 1970. After studying philosophy and mathematics in Poland with Kazimierz Twardowski, from 1912 he was a student of Edmund Husserl, first in Göttingen and then in Freiburg, where he obtained his doctorate in 1918. He remained in contact with Husserl until his death in 1938. In 1931 he gained some fame following the publication of the volume *Das literarische Kunstwerk*, and from 1933 to 1941 he was professor at the University of Lwow. In these years he directed the journal "Studia philosophica". After the war he was professor in Krakow until his retirement, except for the period from 1949 to 1957, during which he was removed from teaching since he was considered a dissident.

### AESTHETICS AND REALISM

Ingarden is best known for his reflections on aesthetics, which start from the controversy between idealism and realism in order to study the peculiar mode of existence of the aesthetic object against any psychologistic interpretation. Ingarden has as his reference the Husserl of the *Logische Untersuchungen*, and therefore a phenomenology conceived as a renewal of thought in an objectivistic sense; in fact, he will argue against the 'turning point of transcendental idealism' which began with the *Ideen* (Husserl 1913). If Husserlian transcendental idealism affirmed the intentional nature of the objects of the real world, Ingarden's ontological conception aimed at confirming the absolute heterogeneity and independence between the external world and consciousness. It is in the context of this reflection that Ingarden places the literary work of art at the center of his study, as an object whose pure intentionality was beyond doubt, in order to highlight the structure and essence of all intentional objects in their difference from the real ones.

The intentionality of the work of art imposes itself in the first place when we try unsuccessfully to count it in the two classes of objects that are usually contemplated (real or ideal); the fact that the work does not belong to either of these two dimensions is evident from the fact that it cannot be considered autonomous, as to its existence, from the subjective act, but needs an adequate apprehension. Moreover, if we cannot say that the literary work, as a set of propositions, is a real object, a confirmation of the fact that it does not belong to the sphere of ideality is offered to us by the careful evaluation of its particular temporality, which provides a real duration liable to change. The investigation of the literary work thus allows Ingarden to clearly identify the characteristics of a third mode of existence, so that it represents a privileged example and a speculative pretext within a meditation of a much broader character, which comes to involve problems of ontological and cognitive nature. Ingarden defines as pure-intentional an objectivity that is 'produced' (one could say 'created', although in a very particular sense) through an act of consciousness or a set of acts by virtue of their intentionality. Its existence, thus constituted, is not real as ontically autonomous, but finds the *conditio sine qua non* of its being and its determinations in the circumstance of being understood. This cannot be said of real objects, autonomous as to their existence, which may occasionally find themselves in the situation of being intended, without this ever becoming a necessary condition for their existence. In the case of intentional objects, on the contrary, the dependence of their existence on the conscious act is confirmed by the variations that are produced in them at the change, even minimal, of the subjective act. The aesthetic object – this is the result of Ingarden's analysis – is the only purely intentional objectivity; differently, real things, present in the world, can possess the characteristic of intentionality without this totally exhausting their essence: in other words, they exist without being intended.

#### THE LITERARY WORK OF ART

Ingarden's aesthetic investigation finds its most articulated expression in the 1931 volume *Das literarische Kunstwerk*. Over the years Ingarden would devote other works to the work of art, to its fruition and understanding as well as to the different aspects of individual artistic genres (e.g. music, cinema); it is in this text, however, that he makes an attempt at a structural description of the literary work on the basis of the phenomenological method. Ingarden develops a long investigation, to be conducted with a descriptive and phenomenological attitude, in order to reach the definition of the aesthetic object as a purely intentional object, as well as to confirm the validity of the assertion of the multilayered nature of the work. The aim is to grasp the 'essential anatomy' of the literary text, the structure and the most authentic meaning of the work itself, beyond its multiple particular concretizations. The structure of the work will be revealed as an organic set of strata with different characters and functions, that is organized, however, in such a harmonious way as to be inseparable at the moment of aesthetic perception.

According to Ingarden, what must be avoided in the first place is the temptation of psychologism, the usual tendency to consider the work as a set of psychic connections, subjective factors, thus giving up the possibility to study the characteristics of the object. The consideration of the work of art as a result of the experiences lived by its author is not, according to Ingarden, sustainable without falling into contradiction;

on the other hand, even the identification of the aesthetic object with the multiplicity of psychic events of the reader leads to an unacceptable disintegration of its identity, according to which each reading would produce a totally new text. The first steps of the book identify the aspects that the research does not intend to deal with, as well as the elements that do not belong, from the point of view of a realist phenomenology, to the essence of the literary work of art. In the first place, the focus of the investigation is only the definitively completed works; this clarification implies the exclusion from the analysis of the phase of creation of the work, as well as of all the questions concerning the act of producing art. A further aspect, partly connected to the danger of subjectivism, remains outside the scope of the reflection: it deals with questions concerning the understanding of the aesthetic object, starting from the problem of its identity with respect to possible multiple readings, up to the distinction between objective knowledge of the work and individual opinions. Ingarden will deal with it in the volume *Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks*, appeared in Polish in 1937 and translated into German in 1968. Finally, for the same reasons, the study of the values of the work of art and of their essence will not be included in Ingarden's research; even such a theme, although strongly connected to the construction of an aesthetic object, presupposes in fact a clear and limpid vision of the structure of the work that has not yet been obtained.

The central and most articulate part of *Das literarische Kunstwerk* has as its primary objective the structural description of the literary work. Ingarden lists the four main and necessary strata of the structure of the literary work.

The first one is the stratum of the word sounds and phonetic formations: it plays a precise function in the constitution of the poetic object, both as a structural moment in its own right and as a special element that nevertheless carries out an irreplaceable activity with respect to the other strata.

The second is that of the meaning units: it constitutes the plot and the sense of the whole, it is the one around which all the other moments are organized, thus revealing their ontological dependence. Through this unity of meaning, a propositional correlate is constituted as its necessary counterpart, that is, a purely intentional objectivity which, while transcending the proposition, finds in it the foundation of its existence.

The third stratum is that of represented entities. The stratum of represented objects is inextricably intertwined with the next dimension, that of schematized aspects, the innumerable perspectives that emerge, as vividly as schematically, from artistic depiction. The particular mode of existence in which each represented entity appears undergoes, as in the case of propositions, the "modification of quasi": with this peculiar character – first attributed to propositional units, now to the objects of the literary work – Ingarden aims to emphasize once again their ontic dependence and the merely illusory claim to reality, therefore defining them as quasi-reals, as well as, depending on the different external habitus they assume in their representation, quasi-dreams, quasi-ideals and so on. One of the decisive characteristics of the stratum of represented objects is that it contains some places of indeterminacy, moments not positively determined, which need to be 'filled' by the subjective act.

The fourth stratum is that of schematized aspects: the essential structure of the literary work is made up of schematized aspects, which are not produced from a perceptive experience, as happens with real objects, but are manifested in the object represented through a propositional unity. These necessarily schematic

aspects are 'filled', completed by the reader on the basis of the analogy with the concrete ones, experienced by him in reality; since the perceptual experience is always different, depending on the different individuals who are subject to it, even in the fruition of a literary work it is impossible that identical aspects are actualized to those completed by another reader or prepared by the author himself. In this way Ingarden reiterates the schematic nature of the work and the need not to confuse its various concretizations, individual and always different, with its essence.

After having excluded the manifestation of an idea or a truth from the sphere of properly artistic aims – speaking in this regard of 'tendentious literature', which cannot be called authentic art – Ingarden affirms, in a rather surprising way, that the decisive function performed by the depicted objects is that of revealing, of bringing to light some 'metaphysical qualities' (*metaphysische Qualitäten*). With this term, which at first glance cannot fail to recall implications of an idealistic type, hitherto harshly criticized by the philosopher, Ingarden does not intend to restore transcendent or psychological elements, but rather to indicate properties, difficult to define through concepts, which also break into our daily lives and represent one of the most emotionally involving moments in the encounter with the aesthetic object. If the work of literary art reaches its climax according to Ingarden in revealing the metaphysical qualities through the objectivity represented, this can happen precisely because of what ontologically declines as a fragility, that is, its being intentional. The appearance of lived life, the quasi-reality that distinguishes the depicted world in fact allows the viewer to serenely perceive some metaphysical properties that in reality he can neither consciously produce, nor observe in a detached way. They are qualitatively determined, but ontically dependent like the objective literary layer from which they are manifested.

Each moment of the work, since it is not totally closed in itself, contains elements that serve as a basis for the so-called subsequent ones, just as it can in turn be based on others that have preceded it, so to speak, in a way that is analogous, but not identical, to the temporal succession of events in concrete time. This connection of the various phases, far from confirming the application of the attribute 'temporal' to literature, demonstrates only, according to Ingarden, the relativity of the independence of the individual parts, and, consequently, the polyphonic organicity of the work of art.

The need to reconsider the literary work in the context of its realization, within the concrete cultural and spiritual life, arises from the affirmation of its schematic nature, or rather from the decisive circumstance of the existence in it of some "places of indeterminacy". If it is true that there are some 'gaps' in the literary work, moments not fully defined, as well as aspects only 'prepared', still in the potential state, it is clear that the contact with the reader is anything but marginal. It should be added, however, that Ingarden, while reiterating the need for an investigation of the concretizations, does not fail to define them, precisely in the introduction to their analysis, as "opposed" to the work itself. The most general, overall difference between individual concretizations and the work itself is found in the circumstance that the former contain many more elements than the schematic structure of the latter. In particular, following the course of the various layers, in the concretization the words-voices acquire fullness and reality from the declamation; the meanings of the propositions can intertwine with other elements of meaning that determine them more precisely, and above all they are actualized in intentionality. Again, in the particular

realization of a work, the stratum of schematized aspects, which undergoes the most decisive change, is completed through the intuitive act, or even actually experienced in the case of a theatrical performance; the represented objects are explicitly manifested, and some places of indeterminacy, though not all, can be 'filled in', so that the reader is led to believe that he is dealing with real and not purely intentional objects. This illusion of reality is one of the major causes of the fascination aroused by art in general, which disposes us to a completely disinterested attitude and therefore adequate to appreciate pure aesthetic values.

#### POLYPHONY AND SUBJECTIVE ACT

The concluding reflections of *Das literarische Kunstwerk* turn to the question of the polyphony of aesthetic values that radiate from the work of art: only in the abstract, on analytical grounds, can aesthetic values be isolated from the different structural moments, which directly participate in the essence of the work. Only in the connection between intuitively given objects and qualities of value, it is possible to experience the latter in the polyphonic harmony of the work. The question of polyphony will be resumed in the volume *Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Kunst. Musik – Bild – Architektur*, written in the same years of the book on the literary work but published in 1962. Here Ingarden attempts to determine the ontological status of musical, visual, and architectural works, and also its relationship to concrete entities such as copies of the score, musical performances, painted canvases, or buildings, as well as to the creative acts of artists and the conscious states of viewers.

The different moments of the subjective act, whose plurality reflects the composite structure of the object they address, will be studied by Ingarden in his book *Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerk*, written in 1937. As for the subjective aesthetic operations, it should be said first of all that, in a similar way to the multi-layering of the literary work, they are also composed of different cognitive acts: the initial perceptive moment, through which the verbal signs are grasped; the understanding of different meanings, formed from the propositions; the vision, made by the imagination, of the objects and events represented with their qualitative aspects, and also, in some cases, the contemplation of the metaphysical qualities revealed. The user can also experience the real aesthetic pleasure, as well as the feelings and emotions aroused by reading, which, although not directly participating in the understanding of the work of art, they condition the cognitive development. It is essential to remember that the complexity of the cognitive operation derives from the circumstance that the subject, in the fruition, can perform only some acts in a full way, experiencing instead others with a less absolute involvement. A further consequence is the fact that the work of art is grasped, depending on the different moments of the same reading, in a perspectival reduction, that is, in a partial vision that cannot give back the components of all the layers in their completeness.

COMPARISONS WITH CONTEMPORARIES AND CRITICAL DEBATE

As mentioned above, the critical comparison of Ingarden with Husserl will continue through their correspondence throughout the life of the philosopher: Ingarden, like many students of the first Husserl, criticizes the path followed by his teacher from the publication of the *Ideen*, in which Ingarden sees a betrayal of going “back to the things themselves” proposed in the early writings. Among the students of the first Husserl Ingarden within the book on the literary work of art is polemically confronted with Waldemar Conrad, and his definition of the work of art as an ideal object. According to Ingarden just the possibility that a literary work is completed in its places of indeterminacy with elements different from time to time, without ever losing its essential identity, is evidence of the fact that it cannot in any way be called an ideal object. As for his analysis on the subjective act, Ingarden himself refers instead to the work of another student of Husserl of the Göttingen period, Moritz Geiger, and in particular to the investigation conducted by him in *Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genusses* (1913).

Among the authors strongly influenced by the phenomenological aesthetics of Ingarden, one can mention Mikel Dufrenne, who in his *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (2 vols., 1953) also raises some objections against Ingarden. In particular, in Ingarden's affirmation of intentionality as the third mode of existence, Dufrenne identifies the main misunderstanding of his thought: for Dufrenne the intentional object is not different from the real or unreal object, but it is that same object caught in the perspective of reduction. This separation between the natural object, existing in nature, and the intentional object, existing only in experience, is according to Dufrenne the same error that every psychologism runs into, and that Husserl had constantly tried to avoid.

Ingarden's work on the ontology of art finds today some resonances in analytic aesthetics: for example, in the theories of Joseph Margolis, Nelson Goodman and Jerrold Levinson, who in different ways work on the definition of the mode of existence of the work of art. Ingarden's book on the literary work has also been influential in the field of literary studies, for example where its effects can be seen for example in the work of René Wellek or Wolfgang Iser, particularly in the field of Reader Response Theory.

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