Reassessment of the Aesthetics of Reception: Convergences and Epistemological Ruptures in the Field of Information and Communication Sciences

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Abstract:- This article examines the epistemological foundations of reception aesthetics, highlighting the contributions of the Constance School, in particular the concept of the horizon of expectation. It analyzes how these ideas have been adapted to contemporary studies in information and communication sciences to study the reception of modern media. It evaluates its current applications, identifies its limits and epistemological ruptures in the field of information and communication sciences, and proposes a reevaluation of its concepts in the light of recent developments in reception studies.

Keywords:- *Reception Aesthetics, Information and Communication Sciences, Reception, Reader, Text, Media.*

I. INTRODUCTION

From the 1960s onwards, the question of reception emerged within a German translation of literary studies, later known generically as the Constance School, which directed the attention of literary criticism towards the reader. This represented a paradigm shift that invited literary criticism to abandon formalist or Marxist approaches to aesthetics in favour of the study of the social, cognitive and aesthetic conditions of influence.

Reception aesthetics, considered the first generation of reception studies, played a founding role in laying the foundations for research on the interpretation of textual content and its reception by readers. This approach has aroused great interest in critical literary theory, allowing for a diversification of the subjects of study and a redefinition of the debate on analysis.

Through reception aesthetics, information and communication sciences have seen the emergence of several theoretical approaches that lie at the crossroads of literary analysis, cultural studies, and American empirical research on mass communication. Information and communication sciences have adapted some key concepts from reception aesthetics to apply them to studies of media interpretation and reception. Thus, the initial focus on text reception and text-reader interaction has evolved to that of media reception and media-audience interaction.

II. EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE AESTHETICS OF RECEPTION

➢ *Conceptual Clarification*

The Dictionnaire de la critique littéraire defines reception as: "A perception of a work by the public. Studying the reception of a text means recognizing that the reading of a work is always a reception influenced by the place and time in which it takes place" (Garde-Tamine & Hubert, 2002, p. 174). Two key concepts emerge from this definition: reading and the public. Indeed, when they emerged in the 1960s, reception theories highlighted these essential aspects in their analysis of works.

➢ *The Tradition of the Constance School*

In the late 1960s, the question of reception began to emerge in the German tradition of literary studies, later referred to as the Constance School. It was Hans-Robert Jauss who introduced the concept of "reception aesthetics," which aimed to refocus literary analysis on the reader, listener, or viewer, rather than focusing solely on the text or author (Breton & Proulx, 2006, p. 225).

Reception aesthetics, founded by Hans-Robert Jauss, is the first theoretical approach to reception theories (Piégay-Gros, 2002, p. 54). Developed in the 1970s by the Constance School, this approach marks a reevaluation of the active role of the audience in the process of interpretation. The main representatives of this school are Wolfgang Iser and Hans-Robert Jauss (Saemmer, 2016). Other scholars, such as Rainer Warning, Manfred Fuhrmann, Wolfgang Preisendanz, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Felix Vodicka, Karlheinz Stierle, Wolf-Dieter Stempel, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Michael Riffaterre, and Stanley Fish, have also enriched the thinking around the aesthetics of reception.

The Konstanz School was a major influence on literary criticism in Germany in the 1970s, bringing a new perspective on the literary work and introducing methods of analysis applicable to various cultural artifacts, such as

literary fiction, film, visual arts, and advertising. Hans-Robert Jauss, a prominent scholar of Romance literature and literary theorist, is recognized as one of the main representatives of this school. This term refers to a group of scholars associated with the University of Konstanz, founded in the late 1960s (Kalinowski, 1997, p. 151).

The study of reception according to Jauss involves the reconstruction of the horizon of expectations of the initial public of a work, and the comparison of this horizon with those of subsequent readers, taking into account historical contexts, expectations, opinions, as well as the aesthetic and social values and norms in force. According to Jauss, "The reading of a new work is always inscribed on the background of previous readings and the rules and codes that they have accustomed the reader to recognize. It also mobilizes his experience of the world. Also, reading is always a guided perception" (Piegay-Gros, 2002, p. 54).

By breaking with the traditional aesthetics of production and the dominant literary paradigm, the aesthetics of reception places the reader at the center of literary theory and examines the social and historical conditions that influence the emergence and formation of interpretation (Saemmer, 2016).

In this perspective, literary criticism operates a paradigm shift by abandoning formalist and Marxist approaches to aesthetics to focus on the social, cognitive, and aesthetic conditions that influence the reception of literary works. Philippe Breton and Serge Proulx note: "Alongside the object traditionally favored by literary criticism (studying "what the structure of literary texts does to readers"), a new object is emerging: the study of what readers do with literature" (Breton & Proulx, 2006, p. 225). This development marks a break with the literary analysis of the structuralist tendency, often criticized for its textocentrism, because it focuses mainly on the work itself (its codes, its meanings) while giving little importance to the interpretative activity of the reader, or reducing it to a simple linear process (Louise, 2009, p. 125).

Rainer Warning defines the aesthetics of reception as "the study of the modalities and results of the encounter between the work and the recipient", while aiming to "go beyond the traditional forms of the aesthetics of production and representation, which it suspects of maintaining outdated substantializations" (Kalinowski, 1997, p. 151). However, this definition can be contested, because the use of the term "recipient" suggests an approach centered on the work rather than on the reader. This assumption, although relevant in the context of the work of Wolfgang Iser and Rainer Warning, is problematic for Hans Robert Jauss's approach. Indeed, there is a marked difference between the aesthetics of effects (Wirkungsästhetik) and the aesthetics of reception, as well as between a theory of the recipient (Adressat) and a theory of the receiver (Rezipient) (Kalinowski, 1997, p. 151).

These divergences explain why the Konstanz School was characterized more by a community of scientific interests than by a theoretical unity. In the context of the German university reform, the Konstanz School aimed to establish a science of literature distinct from traditional German philology. This was manifested in the establishment of the first department of literary science, as well as in a turn towards a theory of reception and effects. This development was catalyzed by the history of literature, which acted as a provocation, and by the text-calling structure developed by Wolfgang Iser.

- *Horizon of Expectation and Aesthetic Gap*
  The notion of the "horizon of expectation" has been explored by several thinkers, including Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Its origins lie with the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, a pioneer of phenomenology, who introduced the concept to describe active consciousness during reading, with an emphasis on temporal experience. Gadamer enriched this notion with the idea of "fusion of horizons," arguing that the meaning of a text emerges from an ongoing dialogue between the past and the present, implying that the meaning of a text is intrinsically linked to its reception history (Zid Aziza, 2014, p. 128). According to Jauss, "the horizon of expectation depends on the reader's prior experience of the genre, form, and themes of previous works" (Nassima, 2013, p. 25). By reintegrating the notion of horizon of expectation into his work on reception, Hans Robert Jauss highlights the crucial importance of this concept for understanding the work. According to Jauss, the appropriation and interpretation of the literary text by the reader, whether explicit or implicit, is based on codes, standards and references that guide the actualization of the meaning of the work. Communication between the text and the reader is achieved through these contextual elements. Influenced by his perception of the world and his personal experience, the reader plays a determining role in the construction of the meaning of the work (Zid Aziza, 2014, p. 129). Thus, the horizon of expectation constitutes a framework of artistic references that allows the reader to approach a new work. This concept functions as a code guiding the understanding of the text, based on the reader's expectations and prior experiences.

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The aesthetic gap is fundamental to understanding how an innovative work is received in relation to previous works. This gap leads to adjustments in poetic and intertextual strategies, both on the part of the author and the reader. It constitutes an essential criterion of innovation, influencing the way in which the novelty is received or rejected by the reader. According to Jauss, "if the gap between the reader's horizon of expectation and the work is reduced, no change of horizon would be necessary ; On the contrary, the work satisfies the immediate expectations of the public, confirming its habits and reinforcing its familiar experiences" (Jauss, quoted by Zid Aziza, p. **130).**

III. APPLICATIONS OF RECEPTION AESTHETICS IN THE FIELD OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

It is clear that reception aesthetics represents a major contribution to communication studies. The reflections of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss have profoundly influenced the foundations of information and communication sciences, particularly in the development of contemporary reception theories.

Thanks to their interdisciplinary approach, information and communication sciences are particularly well placed to explore the various dimensions of reception. By integrating texts into a communication model or by conceiving them as acts of communication, CIS take into account all the sociological, technical and human filters influencing the reception of a text. They strive to reconcile technical, semiotic and social aspects to reveal a complex network of intermediaries involved in a relationship of heteroconstruction of meaning. This approach explains why reception studies have developed particularly in this field,

often surpassing other disciplines such as literary studies or aesthetics (Servais, 2012, p. 4).

➤ Theoretical Roots of Reception Aesthetics in CIS

Since they are at the crossroads of the social sciences, information and communication sciences (ICS) have drawn on the theories and methods of these disciplines, integrating their operational concepts to establish their epistemological anchoring. Consequently, reception aesthetics has also been the subject of in-depth studies in the field of communication. According to Saemmer (2016), "reception aesthetics draws ever-current avenues for the analysis of all cultural artifacts (literary fiction, cinema, visual arts, and advertising)." Cultural artifacts such as cinema and advertising are indeed privileged areas of research in CIS, while also taking into account other aspects of culture.

The notion of horizon of expectation captures the attention of communicologists because of its ability to explain how the reader appropriates a literary text and interprets its content. This process establishes a game of communication between the text and the reader, based on codes, standards and references that guide the updating of the meaning of the work. Information and communication sciences have succeeded in adapting this logic of text reception to the field of media analysis. To assert that the aesthetics of reception has laid the foundations for studies on media reception is to recognize the existence of a close scientific dialogue between literary theory and that of CIS. This dialogue makes it possible to think of scientific objects by mobilizing concepts and grounds common to both disciplines. In this regard, Robert Escarpit was not wrong to consider "the book and literature as objects and acts of communication" (Bouchardon & Deseilligny, 2019).

➤ Clarification of Concepts in CIS

• Reading and Reader

The notion of "reading" is omnipresent in both disciplines. In literary studies, various theories of reading are explored, among which Iser's theory of the implicit reader is particularly renowned. In parallel, the aesthetics of reception developed by Jauss associates the reading that the text programs, constructed by the enunciation, with the notion of horizon of expectation. This approach highlights how the text directs the reading while taking into account the pre-existing expectations of the reader.

In recent decades, literary studies have experienced two major shifts in their understanding of the reception process. The first shift consists in breaking with the conception of a reader solely inscribed in the text, to consider reading as a creative activity. Text theorists and historians have thus introduced the notion of reader freedom. The second shift, stemming from the work of historians of books and reading practices, highlights the materiality of book forms, their "expressive function" and the diversity of reading practices, thus drawing the attention of literary scholars to these essential and often neglected aspects.

On the other hand, information and communication sciences do not rely directly on theories of reading, but rather favour theories of use and diversion. This approach includes in particular the idea of "poaching" proposed by Michel de Certeau. Contrary to a vision of the omnipotence of the author over his work or to a biographical interpretation of texts, Michel de Certeau maintains that readers are creative and inventive actors, who divert and reinterpret texts while challenging institutions likely to overdetermine their interpretation.

It should be noted that, beyond reading, Michel de Certeau's approach also influences research on media uses and the sociology of reception. It can be hypothesized that work on media reception, firmly anchored in American research since the 1940s and constituting the foundations of information and communication theories, has undoubtedly contributed to the robust establishment of these approaches in information and communication sciences (Bouchardon & Deseilligny, 2019). Robert Escarpit was one of the first researchers, in the 1950s, to recognize the reader as a key actor in the communication process, which he considered essential in the field of literature.

➢ *Reception Aesthetics and its Fields of Study in CIS*

In information and communication sciences, reception aesthetics is mobilized in several fields of study, demonstrating its influence and relevance beyond the field of literary criticism. Here are some areas where this approach plays a crucial role:

- Media reception studies: reception aesthetics is used to analyze how audiences perceive and react to media content such as films, television series, advertisements and video games. This approach allows us to understand how media messages are received, interpreted and valued by various groups of spectators.
- Cultural studies: In the field of cultural studies, this approach helps to explore how cultural products are received and reinterpreted by different social communities. It examines the meanings attributed to cultural works according to the horizons of expectation and the specific sociocultural contexts of individuals.
- Media studies: integrates reception aesthetics to study the consumption and understanding of new forms of digital and interactive media. This includes the analysis of the reception of online content, social networks and streaming platforms, taking into account evolving consumption practices and interactions.
- Advertising communication: in advertising communication, reception aesthetics is applied to understand the perception of advertisements by the public. It analyzes how advertising campaigns are interpreted and how they influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors.
- User-Interface Interaction Studies: this approach is also relevant for the study of the interaction between users and digital interfaces. It helps to understand how users interact with technologies, applications and websites,

and how these interactions influence their experience and interpretation of digital content.

➢ *Limits of reception aesthetics*

Several decades later, it is clear that reception aesthetics has fallen into disuse. It seems that its methods of analysis are no longer practiced or claimed in a significant way. It is now crucial to demonstrate the interest of updating the key concepts of this literary theory. As Pillet (2011, p. 763) points out, "the factors that have led reception aesthetics to obsolescence are due both to the "tensions" between the theoretical concepts developed and their applications in case studies and to the evolution of literary criticism since the 1980s. They are therefore both internal and external."

➢ *n the Field of Information and Communication Sciences, Reception Aesthetics has Several Notable Limitations:*

- Focus on the literary dimension: reception aesthetics, initially developed in the context of literary criticism, focuses mainly on the interaction between the text and the reader in the context of literary works. This approach may be insufficient or unsuitable for analyzing contemporary media, which are characterized by a great diversity of formats, consumption practices, and complex interactions;
- Ignorance of media and technological contexts: this theoretical approach does not always take into account the technological and media contexts in which texts are consumed. Information and communication sciences, on the other hand, are interested in the impact of media technologies on the reception and dissemination of content, an aspect that is often neglected by reception aesthetics;
- Inadequacy with digital media: reception aesthetics theories do not sufficiently take into account the particularities of digital media and interactive platforms. New media, such as social networks and digital applications, present very different modes of reception than traditional formats, requiring theoretical approaches specifically adapted to these digital characteristics;
- Lack of analysis of communication processes: Reception aesthetics focuses mainly on the reading process and the interaction between text and reader, often neglecting broader communication processes, such as the interactions between content creators, distribution platforms and various audiences. Information and communication sciences shed light on these dynamics by studying networks of intermediaries and communication mechanisms;
- Limitations in understanding media uses: The emphasis placed by reception aesthetics on the individual reading experience may be insufficient to understand collective practices and media uses. CIS explores these dimensions by examining the cultural, social and institutional practices that influence the way individuals use and interpret media;

- Critique of universal approaches: Central concepts of reception aesthetics, such as the horizon of expectation, can be criticized for their tendency to adopt universal perspectives that do not always take into account the diversity of sociocultural contexts and individual variations in media reception.

IV. CONCLUSION

This reflection mainly aims to explore the epistemological foundations of reception aesthetics, an emblematic theory of the Constance School. Considered the pioneering current in the field of reception studies, this approach owes its development to the contributions of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, two central figures of this tradition. These scholars profoundly challenged the predominant paradigm of literary analysis by introducing the concepts of the horizon of expectation and the implied reader. Their work marked a major turning point by shifting the debate from literary analysis, previously centered on the text, to a focus on the reception of the text by the reader. Thus, the emphasis has shifted to the study of the interactions between the reader and literature, abandoning the Marxist perspectives that had dominated until then.

In information and communication sciences, reception aesthetics in CIS provides essential tools for understanding how individuals and groups interpret, negotiate, and give meaning to media and cultural content in various contexts. Ignoring reception aesthetics is to ignore the epistemological foundations that underlie this research. From the analysis of the reception of literary texts to that of contemporary media, the anchoring of reception aesthetics in the field of CIS has favored the development of various approaches such as cultural studies and media studies. These approaches have demonstrated their relevance and applicability in communication studies.

In summary, although reception aesthetics has made significant contributions to understanding the relationship between text and reader, its limitations in the field of CIS lie in its focus on literature, its lack of integration of contemporary media and technological contexts, and its inadequacy in explaining broader collective practices and communicational processes. CIS has developed approaches that are more suited to addressing these challenges in the context of modern media.

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