BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY DOCTORAL SCHOOL IN PHILOSOPHY

Selfgenerating sense in art

PHD THESIS

SUMMARY

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Keywords

phenomenon, duration (durée), intentionality, synthesis, passive synthesis, genesis, body, kinaesthesia, thetical, non-thetical, memory, meaning, affectivity, behaviour, meaning conveyance, meaning formation, perception, amodal perception, immanence, transcendence, lived-activity, lived-experience, lived-world, gesture.

Selfgenerating sense in art Abstract

The subject of the dissertation relates to the question of meaning in modernity.

The epistemological question starts with the expression of the intuitive truth of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*. The *subject* as the starting point of Cartesian considerations becomes at Kant the condition for the possibility of meaning conveyance, grounded in the universality of human abilities. The limits of meaning in Kant's philosophy are the limits of cognition, which are regulated by *a priori* conditions such as the forms of sensory perception, the *space* and the *time*. In Hegel's case, meaning is in the first place the meaning of the world, and the self, the man is only an overarching link aiming at the self-recognition of meaning.

The Aristotelian concept of *intentionality* revived by Brentano and rethought by Husserl brings to the fore the searching, discovering nature of consciousness. Phenomenological analyses search for the meaning formed during the process of experience. In his early period, Husserl offered a reinterpretation of Kant's *a priori*, and presupposed the transparency and rationality of the revealed meaning. Later, in his genetic period, Husserl adopted the stance that one cannot speak of the self-enclosure of meaning, that is, the totality of cognition, with respect to either self, or time. Merleau-Ponty connects to this idea with the re-assessment of sensory experience. The answer of "new phenomenology" given to epistemological considerations is that it takes the problematic of transcendence over to the field of ontology. Ontological considerations however fail to take into account the specific situationality of various experiences, the particularities which, for instance in the case of artistic experience, pertain to the concrete experiences or *activity* of a given artist, and thus level this experience. In contrast, a different kind of concept of *activity* can be elaborated, one that allows the *formation* at work in variety to be grasped.

The central problem of the dissertation is connected to the question of *meaning formation*. The formulation of the problem refers to the fact that, in contrast with the traditionally conceived *happening* of *meaning, meaning formation* can be examined as a *differentiation* process going on in the *being-within* generated from the *nothing*. The "nothing" can be used here as a liminal concept, which describes the nature of meaning formation devoid of *a priori*, devoid of the différance of *a priori* and *a posteriori*. This process of *meaning formation* is achieved as a mode of interplay of *senses, emotions, perception* and *reason* from which no element can be singled out as fundamental. At the same time, meaning itself cannot be placed in the centre of its own manifestation, but in accordance with the principle of interplay, it can be found as meaning precisely in the process of its manifestation; its manifestation is always one, but never the final phase of the process of its articulation.

The question referring to *meaning formation* necessarily leads to the problem of art, since it is in this field that one can trace a variety of modes of formation. In a first approach, I defined the process of creation, breaking it down into abstract elements, as a *state* in which the creator finds him/herself or brings him/herself in, or one which he/she is always a part of, when, under the influence of an *impression*, he/she feels constrained to *express* it. This presumed state is important to highlight because, in my view, it cancels the usual, everyday attitude. By *impression*, I mean a kind of vibration raised in this case by a sight or not merely a sight, which serves as a guiding principle in the creative process. The subject of the impression is the painter, who takes its part in creation either individually, or as a partner in the given interplay of fields. The third factor is the work, which takes part in the creative process either as also an active partner, or merely as an object.

Problems in the dissertation are formulated and analyzed by the *phenomenological method*. This approach is justified because the problem itself derives from the field of phenomenology. Starting from the Husserlian concepts of reduction and habituality, and corroborating this with the reduction concept of Merleau-Ponty, I use two complementary methods of phenomenological experience analysis. At the description of the articulation methods of conscious structures, the Husserlian *remaining* meanings are a secondary round compared to the *formation* field at their basis, which is *differentiation*. The notion of phenomenon epitomizes the formation process which organizes the thoughts connected to that what appears, and allows a phenomenological description. The possibility of synthesis is founded by differentiation. At the same time, it also offers a ground for the interpretation or authentic approach of the artist's work.

The first chapter, entitled *The changing notions of phenomenon*, delimits the notion of phenomenon in connection with the question posed. The line of thought starting from Kant sets out with an idea which emphasizes the integrative nature of perception. Kant discusses a priori formal determination as a precondition of experience with regard to sensibility, imagination and reason. Bergson's line of thought is a critique of Kant's concept of sensibility, and it also introduces another aspect of the relation of the world and the I. To Kant's quantitative side he opposes the qualitative side, which is characterized by a kind of indeterminacy. Bergson introduces this qualitative side in connection with art. He defines this indeterminacy as a tendency which emerges from virtuality and is articulated by memory. Husserl continues to rethink the problem formulated by Kant in connection with the concept of phenomenon. Holding the thesis of the thing-in-itself untenable, Husserl uses the dichotomy of *noema* and *noesis* to replace the Kantian standpoint based on the dichotomy of noumena and phenomena. By this, he sends back the thing-in-itself to the realm of immanence. Intentionality, which for Husserl means that the consciousness is originally object-oriented, recognizes no thing-in-itself, only meanings created within the noema noesis relation. For Husserl as well as for Bergson, there emerges the possibility lying in duration, which Husserl described in his static, that is, early period as the intentionality of the act extended in the trichotomy of protension, retention and primal impression. In opposition with Bergson, the question of the world for Husserl can be grasped through phenomenality and meaning conveyance. It should not be discussed as the Bergsonian memory which interferes with real perception. In Husserl's later period the objectual unity formation becomes questionable, which he connects primarily to the field of affectivity. The discovery of the affective field can be regarded as a result of genetic phenomenology in contrast to static phenomenology. The Heideggerian critique holds Husserl responsible for the exposedness to transcendence, that is, the thesis that the object-intentionality is connected to some kind of anonymous objectuality. In contrast, Heidegger emphasizes that we connect every object in the moment of its perception to some kind of totalitariness, that is, a way of use and its world. This way, in opposition with the theoretical orientation of the act, Heidegger draws attention to the primacy of an action directed to a certain goal. Sartre extends this Heideggerian viewpoint, including also the world-creating nature of the imaging consciousness, and the dimension of the allegation of the world by way of emotion. By this, it places the imagination into the original, world-creating mode of meaningfulness, that is, intentionality. At the same time, for him also judgment remains primary together with the difference between thetical and

non-thetical; that is to say, Sartre ultimately also approves of the thesis of self-enclosure of the consciousness.

The criticism formulated in the second chapter entitled *Amodal perception as affectivity* questions the sustainability of precisely this *judgment*-based consideration. For every such question leaves out that factor of *facticity* which would incorporate *indeterminacy* into the question so that it may remain inextricable.

I linked the question about the nature of indeterminacy to Merleau-Ponty's early analyses. In his The Structure of Behaviour and Phenomenology of perception, through the critique of physiology, psychology and reflexive philosophy, one may trace the role of the body and its meaningfulness. In these analyses Merleau-Ponty demolishes the ideal of meaningfulness, that is, the standpoints formulated as absolute determinacy. As he later emphasises – on the pages of *The Visible and the Invisible* – the critical reconsideration of the perceptual faith is a primary requirement, since its results are taken over unquestionably by researches of any philosophical conception or scientific theory. I have followed in these writings the outline of the dynamic relationship of part and whole. The endpoints of mute impression and saturated, determined impression encompass the level where intentionality in operation occurs in the mode of continuous transformation. Perception is thus an original way of connecting to the world in the process of which the seen and the visible are shaped together. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, in accord with Bergson, the idea of metamorphosis, the primacy of movement and dynamism in case of perception. Memory, which at Bergson appeared as an active principle, is found here as atmosphere. Judgment appears as a posterior product. The discussion of the concept of form shows that we are not dealing with the appearance of a previously created form, given in its totality. Rather, one can speak about a mode of articulation where the temporal dissemination or rythmicity is meaningful; that is, this meaning is formed in the kinetic melodicity of the articulation. The form cannot be included into the field of the thing-in-itself, but it is recognized as a substratum in which the relation between the organism and its environment is defined in a correlative way. This relation cannot be grasped in a mutual externality, but in the thesis that the elements recognize each other dynamically. The concept of being-in-the-world expresses a pre-objective field of this productivity. Productivity as action, as a continuous work (activity), questions the thesis of the self-enclosing consciousness. In the process of understanding, centripetal and centrifugal movements are inseparable; in this approach to understand means to live the harmony between *intention* and *execution*. This unity can best be grasped by the concept of bodily gesture. The musician's example shows that the gesture appears not as the formation

of some kind of new physical series, but as a kind of *consecration* in the course of which *affective* vectors are stretched and an *expression space* is formed. The affective dimension is where the *reality* can be exhibited *for the body*.

While trying to explore and understand the affective dimension, I arrived to the researches of Daniel N. Stern. The concept of amodal perception, which I derived from Stern, serves to describe the field at the basis of the perception-unit. The transpositions that Stern has reached as the results of certain experiments link this formation of unity to forms, intensities and temporal structures. This is how I arrived, in relation to Stern, to the introduction of the concept of vitality affects, which is meant to extend the traditional concept of physiognomy. The book called The Interpersonal World of the Infant presents a range of affects within the wider field of kinaesthesia instead of discrete affects. A characteristic feature of amodal perception, the domain in which these urges occur, is being-in-formation. We find here initiatives which, in their unfolding, can take on the form of any kind of discrete affects. If we treat the isolated, fact-like affects as existential aspects derived from a situation, then we may find new possibilities of articulation in the relation of expression and meaning. That is, a meaningfulness which does not exist separately from the expression but occurs in its formation. Thus one can speak about an integrated articulation of expression and meaning, the kinetic melodicity of which comprises a multitude of motivational relations. This way the body appears in the gesture as an expressive unit. The impression is no longer mute, it is not a state, but a turning to the world or away from the world of the embodied emotional being. Quality must be understood as a force, which the body takes over and becomes the quality itself, but not by the principle of merging, but that of tuning, and thus it becomes embodied essence. Essence here does not mean a kind of closed unity, but the meaning emerging in the experiment, which occurs primarily because of its affective nature.

In the last part of the chapter I outline one meaning of this concept of *gesture* as occurring in jazz (music) with the help of Sundow.

Fine art, or in this case the creative methods of a painter, is the subject of the third part of the dissertation. The train of thought of the chapter entitled *The hypothesis of meaning formation* begins with the separation and contextualization of the concepts of *meaning formation* and *meaning conveyance*, as well as *meaning formation* and *meaning fixation*. This also raises the problem of identity, since the questions of *meaning fixation* depends on the presumed identity in relation to which the meaning can reveal itself. At the same time, the question about art also comprises the question about the subject of the creative process and its role in it. The terminological differentiation is made on the basis of the analyses of László

Tengelyi. In these analyses the dichotomy of *lived life story* and *narrated life story* reveals that neither can be reduced to the other, but one must relate to both of them together; they keep their difference and unity together in a diacritical approach. In my view, the importance of the diacritical approach, or rather of the model of differentiation lies in the reinterpretation of the Husserlian passive synthesis or even the concept of affinity. The basis of this possibility is formulated by Merleau-Ponty in his work notes published in *The Visible and the Invisible*. The formulation goes that the "beam directed backwards" of which Husserl speaks in *Ideen* III, the world-beam is "not a synthesis and not passive reception, but the result of separation, unfolding, differentiation, that is, it presupposes that we are already in the world or in being." The world of the infant, that is, the exposition of the domain of amodal perception in Stern's conception suggests that the transpositions or the system of equivalences that appears there provides a basis for differentiation. That is to say, we face, or stand within, a certain region of the principle of articulation, which is an original mode of the world. Articulation however cannot be grasped as the primacy of objectual aspects highlighted by the subject, but rather in the course of temporal divisions, as standing in the light of intensity, in which the primary aspect is affectivity. We find here a kinaesthetic domain which is shaped by the différance of urges and initiatives. This can be correlated to the concept-pair of meaning formation and meaning fixation, that Tengelyi takes over from Richir. This is a concept of meaning outlined here which renders as a criterion of meaning the somethingness of things different and disparate, and their somehow emerging sameness. From this comes the meaning fixating nature of the gesture, and its outstanding role in meaning formation. Here, institution – now in the field of painting - can be described as an empty but outlined intention towards the painter's motif. I describe the corporeal condition of meaning formation as projection or ecstasy which is accompanied by a kind of strangeness, as a result of the fact that the inbetweenness of being-within offers a different kind of meaning than the opposition. Albeit differently, the thesis of strangeness can also be found in the writings of Kant and Nietzsche, both of whom also make reference to that uncontrollable factor at work in creation which I have considered the basis of meaning creation, and both call them conditions of the possibility of creation. In order to mingle these conceptions, I used the work of Nigel Wentworth, which presents creation with reference to the *lived-world*. I emphasized the ideas which are directed against the *fixed* factors – such as the omnipotence of the creator, the abstract aspects of quality, the abstract definitions of the instrument, the assumption of the work as a concrete empirical object. Thus I have used the concept of lived-activity to display those possibilities which correspond to a multitude of phenomenal formations. At the same

time, I have drawn attention to the fact that these possibilities occurred in the process of phenomenalization as modes formed in reference to *lived-experience*, that is, the work is shaped in the context of *indeterminacy* emphasized with reference to the *perceptual faith*, by the *operation* of the tuning and harmonization factors guided by *empty intention*. In this shaping process one may follow the *formation* of the *operation* of the creative act. The *end-product* defined by *operation*, that is, the work of art itself will be nothing else than a certain mode of *fixation*, which fits into the attempt to shape the *style of the gesture* or *express* a certain way of experience. The stations that one particular work means in this context can be equally defined as a certain mirroring of the whole, and as a kind of wholeness in denouement of the part; the meeting point of the two tendencies is precisely the given *work*.

I formulated the following *Conclusions*:

- 1) The fixed versions of the concept of *meaning* offered by theories grouped around the concepts of *attention* and *judgment* neglect that dimension or domain of meaning which moves within the limits of *indeterminacy*, but as *différance* it offers a basis for fixed aspects, or rather it can be rendered together with these. Thus we get a wider concept of meaning, which is organized along certain tendencies, and these tendencies can always be assumed as articulation stages of an affective ground.
- 2) In contrast to the autocracy of painting, the train of thought connected to corporeal conditions leads to the insight that the painter him/herself emerges from this shaping mode, from the shaping of this *gesture-based style* appearing in lived-activity, as a result of the interplay between the concepts described above. In other words, giving way to *indeterminacy*, the tendency for the *formation* of an existential attitude *shaping* in the process of determination is at work in the creative act.

In connection with these two problems, the triad of phenomenon, perception and meaning circumscribe a field in which the play of the dimensions, in a constant pulsation, marked by these three concepts, serves as the ground of art in certain modes of fixation. Any of the said dimensions can come to the forefront in a situational aspect by the affective modality, but none can keep its primacy except on a temporary basis.

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