

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

The Identity-Building Role of Reading

PHD THESIS

SUMMARY

**Doctoral supervisor:
Prof. univ. dr. VERESS CAROL**

**PhD candidate:
SZABÓ KATALIN**

2021

TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION.....	5
<i>Rationale for the choice of topic.....</i>	5
<i>Theoretical preliminaries.....</i>	6
<i>The research problem.....</i>	9
<i>Methodological considerations.....</i>	10
I. THEORETICAL NET.....	12
I.1. Personal character.....	12
I.2. Concepts and contexts.....	14
<i>Present tense.....</i>	15
<i>Experience.....</i>	30
<i>World.....</i>	37
I.3. Reflection 1.....	39
II. THE READER AND THEIR WORLD.....	42
II.1. Reading modes.....	42
II.2. Present-tense reading experiences.....	48
<i>Reading literary texts.....</i>	48
<i>Reading philosophical texts.....</i>	56
II.3. Reflection 2.....	62
III. APPLICATIONS – MY READING PRACTICES.....	65
III.1. Role dilemmas and forms of persuasion in the everyday life of a Hungarian teacher.....	65
III.2. My reading experiences.....	77
<i>An experience of time based on the novel Hősöm tere by Lajos Parti Nagy.....</i>	78
<i>Media and/or Medea? Two approaches to an interview.....</i>	87
<i>Visual effects – medial dialogues.....</i>	95
<i>The freedom of interpretation.....</i>	100
<i>Between metamorphoses.....</i>	106
<i>The question horizons of Megyek utánad.....</i>	114
<i>Experiencing the truth of the artwork.....</i>	127
III.3. Reflection 3.....	135
IV. THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN READING AND IDENTITY.....	139

IV.1. Is reading an investment?.....139

IV.2. The building of my personality.....141

IV.3. Reflection 4.....144

SUSPENSION (INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS).....146

ANNEX.....150

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....155

ONLINE BIBLIOGRAPHY (INTERVIEWS, CONVERSATIONS).....169

KEYWORDS

applied philosophy, bricolage, deconstruction, phenomenology, net-being, hermeneutics, homo narrans, identity, interdisciplinary perspective, present tense, reading, experience, world

THE IDENTITY-BUILDING ROLE OF READING

ABSTRACT

Contemporary art is an opportunity to look at one’s own world, to interpret its specificities. It’s an opportunity to meet yourself, to ask questions. And an opportunity for dialogue: to compare the cultural tradition with the world of today. The reflective reader becomes aware of the links between past and present, of otherness. Thus, reading a work of art is not an encounter with objects, but an encounter with the living.

I’m primarily interested in the *intense life* experienced by the reader in the present. The *topic* of my thesis is therefore the role of reading in shaping identity.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the intermediate medium, the world of the net, allows for a more open realisation of reading, but with similarities to the traditional one. *The aim of this research* is to interpret this hermeneutic situation and to explore how an individual socialized in the world of the internet can practice slow reading.

I discuss reading along *philosophical assumptions* as a human manifestation that creates identity. The research is paradigmatically situated in the **interdisciplinary** space of *hermeneutics*

on the one hand, *phenomenology*, the *reception aesthetics of deconstruction* on the other, and *social sciences* (network studies, cultural studies, literary studies).

The interpretation of the contexts of literary works and the identity of the reader as a human being is an ***applied philosophical*** question. In fiction texts, specific worlds are created. One can reflect on these worlds not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also from an epistemological, ethical perspective. The work of art, through its own unique world, thus allows the raising of the same questions/themes as a philosophical text. The conceptual framework constructed in the philosophical text, however, directs attention to the general, as opposed to the particularity of the work of art. In my thesis, I explore how the two ways of speaking, artistic and philosophical texts, shape my experience as a reader and thus my personality.

The ***research problem***, to which the title of the thesis refers, thus leads to the interpretation of reading habits.

Based on my assumptions about the research topic and my personal experience, my ***hypotheses*** are as follows: there is a similarity between traditional ways of reading and reading behaviours in the world of the internet – there is a constant dichotomy (here and there) and the access to the fictional/virtual world; despite freedom and coexistence, man's aim is to order his world, to define himself – *homo narrans*.

The ***first chapter*** is an outline of the theoretical network that has been of help to me during the preliminary research and the experiment that is the subject of this dissertation. In F. Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, the term "*active life*" seems to me to be a reference to active behaviour. It is the *critical approach* that explores the relationship and interconnections between past and present that allows me to understand my world. The understanding of my world is in fact an approach to everyday life.

H. Bergson also discusses in his writings (*Time and Freedom, Thought and Movement, Introduction to Metaphysics*) the relationship to the ambiguous world. From the empiricist's point of view, the everyday world, the present, can be described by the concept of *duration*. The duration is the effect associated with interest, qualitative time and its multiplication. The present is therefore determined by *extension*, and also by *movement*. We experience the variable in our existence. This is how *intuition* becomes important, which, according to H. Bergson, is an act whereby we become aware of our personality and then also of the plurality of worlds. In addition

to reason, therefore, sensuality and the will are also important, according to Bergson. But cognition is the confrontation with change.

E. Husserl draws attention to the temporal *perceptual field* in *The Crisis of the European Sciences*. The subjective and relationally generated *lifeworld*, however, is not only the experience of one's own situation, but also the awareness that our perceptual field is co-determined by the other. Thus, Husserl, and later M. Merleau-Ponty, emphasize *intersubjective relations*. For phenomenologists, self-reflexivity is emphatically complemented by a discussion of the topic of the other.

In his *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*, M. Merleau-Ponty discusses experience from a phenomenological perspective. In the always actual present, I can intuit my world to which I belong. Perception is defined by *the body* and *the horizon*. But experience can be expanded at the level of *consciousness*. I can even immerse myself in the *virtual*. *Intensionality*, a conscious relationship to myself and my world in time, enables an *existential* approach.

In M. Heidegger's phenomenological-ontic approach, which I got to know through his study *The Concept of Time* and his major work *Being and Time*, the dialogical form and the personal are paramount. The task of man is to experience *being-there*: to take *care* of the present in an appropriate way and to create an *authentic existence* for himself through a questioning attitude.

I must make authentic living a reality in the digitalised world of the 21st century. Based on the Norwegian social anthropologist T. Hylland Eriksen's work *The Tyranny of the Moment*, I have highlighted some of the features that are characteristic of today's world. The present can be described through the concepts of *information*, *fragmentation*, *acceleration*, and the *virtual*. With these characteristics in mind, I still consider *lingering* (*Weilen*, Heidegger's term) and *slow time* (Hylland Eriksen's term) to be of utmost importance. From my own point of view, this goal can be achieved through in-depth reading, as illustrated in the following three chapters of the thesis.

In the **second chapter** I engage with the reader and his world through a historical overview and thematisation of my experiences as a reader in the present. This historical overview offers an account of quantitative, qualitative and technical changes over the centuries. By describing my current reading experiences (based on literary and philosophical texts), I draw attention to different reading methods. Inclusive approaches (e.g., *hermeneutics*, *deconstruction*), which came

to the fore in the second half of the 20th century, have in common the dialogical form and the quest for understanding.

In H.-G. Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, the questioning attitude comes to the fore. The reader is confronted with the other world in a situation similar to that of the play. Confronting the particularities of one's own world and the world of the other means operating the *historically-effected consciousness*. Re-interpretation is the practical experience of the *hermeneutic circle*: new encounters produce new meanings, articulated by the reader through language. Interpretation is understanding the world of the other, a *gesture of hermeneutic goodwill*.

In his *Grammatology*, J. Derrida has cast *deconstructive suspicion* on Gadamer's point of view. By questioning the structure, he opened the way to doubt: the text is an acentric structure, so the works are unreadable. Interpretation can be built along the lines of the signs interpreted as traces by the reader.

The reading opened up by deconstruction is further complicated when I consider the reading procedures of *cultural studies*. Interdisciplinary approaches are seen as an opportunity. Understanding through reading is thus a function of different cultural textures and boundary situation, in fact an experience of networks.

In the **third chapter** I illustrate *networked being*. I start this section by asking about the reader's situation. I discuss my own role dilemmas and everyday experiences with reading and readers, and then illustrate my reading practices through seven *case studies*. In each subsection, I explore how reading and ontology can be linked through the interpretation of contemporary literary texts.

In the **fourth chapter**, titled *The relationships between reading and identity* I outline some of the features of the identity (identities) experienced through the modes of reading. Reading, which is an investment in myself, means going down different paths. The journey to the chosen work of art, the company of other texts I am reading it in and how I read it become important. I shape my identity according to these.

From the point of view of *philosophical hermeneutics*, *identity* is relegated to the background. As a player, I relate to others according to the rules, which also influences my self-interpretation. The change in the horizons of the questions leads to a change in my identity over time. Only the desire to understand is constant.

Derrida's proposition differs from the desire to understand. From his point of view, the emphasis is on diversity, on playing with differences. In Derrida, play is also movement, but without a centre or origin. The absence of a centre in terms of reading and identity formation results in the experience of *dispersion*. If I do not experience the linear in space and time, then identity will not be unified, but will be defined by the continuous *différance*. This is especially true in the networked world of the 21st century, where identity is articulated through the gestures of bricolage.

My experiment on the *identity-forming role of reading* cannot be closed, only suspended. In my thesis, I give examples of how I read texts that are important to me, and how reading contributes to the process of identity-shaping. I talk about a process, because although I can observe the different through the personality traits that change over time, the successive self-images reveal the changes I go through in the practice of reading.

I combine the hermeneutics of benevolence and the doubt-oriented perspective of deconstruction in the practices of reading in the networked present of the 21st century. By familiarising myself with primary texts and reading interpretations of them, I attempt gestures of *understanding*. The works cited in my thesis, which I have come to understand through my engagement with them, are both starting points and opportunities for me. Starting points to formulate questions, opportunities to confront differences. Diversity does not apply to reading methods. The reading procedures familiar from the world of the Gutenberg galaxy are still valid, and it is primarily the medial context that is changing.

In the course of the journey that I have illustrated in my thesis, it has not been my aim to create a conceptual system. Yet, I refer to the views of thinkers associated with different centuries, periods and schools in the history of philosophy (Plato, St. Augustine, Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleu-Ponty, Gadamer, Jauss, Derrida, Hadot, Patočka, Ropolyi): I realize the interplay of the concepts they use and the concepts they create, creating a kind of continuity theory, although their theories are not continuations of each other, but approaches to the topics (individual/experience, time, life/world) from different aspects. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that the horizon of each thinker is shaped by what the predecessors have said, just as my horizon is shaped by the texts of the thinkers referred to. The continuity for me derives from the fact that the highlighted concepts (present tense, experience, world) are dominant for all of them. How is my identity shaped by reading practices?

I have tried to answer the question of how in four ways. By outlining the changes in reading modes, I wanted to draw attention to historicity. By discussing the ways of reading fiction texts, I have highlighted the reader-centred approaches that came to the fore in the second half of the 20th century, which primarily define my being a reader and influence my position as an interpreter in my professional life (I am a secondary school teacher of Hungarian).

Because of my profession, I always link philosophical texts to works of fiction. This is how I came to the ancient thinkers, for whom philosophy was a way of life, the love of wisdom. In the sub-chapter Reading philosophical texts, I illustrate this: reading philosophy is knowledge, orientation, selection (also thematized in Plato's *Symposium*), systemic vision (dialectics) and pleasure. But first of all, as Pierre Hadot, following Plato, points out: reading is a spiritual exercise.

The fourth approach to the topic was to read seven contemporary works of fiction and to document their interpretations. In the seven case studies, I show how I read the work in question within a web of theoretical and other works.

The seven case studies and the other chapters of the thesis are, from my point of view, the mosaic pieces through which I can talk about the chosen topic and myself. Their unevenness is an imprint of my presence in the 21st century: some I spend more time on, others I observe in less detail, but still practicing the same metaphorical reading. And only small slices of the world, of the universe, are revealed, which can be seen primarily along the lines of my individual interests.

When I experience the world through reading, I am also confronted with *ontological questions*. Who am I? What defines me? How should I relate? Possible answers to these questions are provided by the case studies, in each of which the identity of the actors is thematised. And the changes in the reader's personality can be traced in her interpretations of the texts she reads.

Reading keeps the practice of questioning alive. In this way I can realize what the ancient thinkers called the love and cultivation of philosophy. Reading, especially in-depth reading, leads to a reflective lifestyle. Questions must be asked again and again, life must be wondered at again and again, its intensity must be experienced. Reading is therefore my personal encounter with the present.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

ASSMANN, Jan

1999 *A kulturális emlékezet*. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Bp. (fordította Hidas Zoltán).

AUGUSTINUS, Aurelius

1999 *Szent Ágoston vallomásai*. Szent István Társulat, Bp. (fordította: Dr. Vass József).

<http://mek.oszk.hu/04100/04187/04187.htm> (utolsó letöltés: 2015. július 27.)

BARABÁSI Albert-László:

2018 *A képlet*. Libri Könyvkiadó, Bp.

2020 *Behálózva*. Libri Könyvkiadó, Bp.

BERGSON, Henri

é.n *Idő és szabadság. Tanulmány eszméletünk közvetlen adatairól*. Franklin Társulat, Magyar Irod. Intézet és Könyvnyomda, Bp. (fordította: Dr. Dienes Valéria).

2012 *A gondolkodás és a mozgó*. L'Harmattan Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Dékány András).

BODOR Ádám

2015 *Vissza a fülesbagolyhoz*. Magvető Kiadó, Bp.

CAVALLO, Guglielmo – CHARTIER, Roger (szerk.)

2000 *Az olvasás kultúrtörténete a nyugati világban*. Balassi Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Sajó Tamás).

DERRIDA, Jacques

1994 *A struktúra, a jel és a játék az embertudományok diszkurzusában*. In: *Helikon* 1-2., 21–35. http://real-j.mtak.hu/1222/1/HELIKON_1994.pdf (utolsó letöltés: 2021. V. 4.) (fordította: Gyimesi Timea).

2005 *A papír (a)vagy én, tudják... Új spekulációk a szegények fényezéséről*. In: Bónus Tibor et alii. (szerk.): *Intézményesség és kulturális közvetítés*. Ráció kiadó, Bp., 381–415. (a fordítást az eredetivel egybevetette: Sutyák Tibor).

2015 *Grammatológia*. Typotex Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Marsó Paula).

ERIKSEN HYLLAND, Thomas

2009 *A pillant zsarnoksága*. L'Harmattan Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Vaskó Ildikó).

FEHÉR M. István

2003 *József Attila Esztétikai írásai és Gadamer hermeneutikája*. Kalligram kiadó, Pozsony.

2006 *Hermeneutika, irodalom, medialitás. Írásbeliség és könyvnyomtatás mint az irodalmi jelentés közvetítésének, a tudás és a tradíció átadásának a közege*. In: Oláh Szabolcs et alii (szerk.): *Szerep és közeg. Medialitás a magyar kultúratudományok 20. századi történetében*. Ráció Kiadó, Bp.

2013 *Szót érteni egymással. Jegyzetek a Gadamer–Derrida-vitához*. In.: Fehér. M. István, Lengyel Zsuzsanna Mariann, Nyíró Miklós, Olaj Csaba (szerk.): „Szót érteni egymással”. *Hermeneutika, tudományok, dialógus*. L’Harmattan Kiadó–MTA–ELTE Hermeneutika Kutatócsoport, Bp., 21–63.

FOUCAULT, Michel

1999 *A szexualitás története I. A tudás akarása*. Atlantisz Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Ádám Péter).

2000 *Mi a szerző?* In: Uő.: *Nyelv a végtelenhez*. Latin Betűk Kiadó, Debrecen, 119–146. (fordították: Erős Ferenc és Kicsák Lóránt).

GADAMER, Hans-Georg

1984 *Igazság és módszer. Egy filozófiai hermeneutika vázlat*. Gondolat kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Bonyhai Gábor).

GALLAGHER, Shaun – ZAHAVI, Dan

2008 *A fenomenológiai elme*. Lélekben Otthon Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Váradi Péter).

GEERTZ, Clifford:

2001 *Az értelmezés hatalma*. Osiris, Bp. (fordították: Andor Eszter, Berényi Gábor, Botos András, Farkas Krisztina, Fejér Balázs, Jakab András, Kárpáti Eszter, Kovács Éva, Lovász Irén, Sajó Tamás).

GRECSÓ Krisztián

2014 *Megyek utánad*. Magvető Kiadó, Bp.

HABERMAS, Jürgen

1994 *Képesek-e a komplex társadalmak észszerű identitás kialakítására?* In.: Uő.: *Válogatott tanulmányok*. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Bp., 141–183. (fordították: Adamik Lajos, Bendl Júlia, Felkai Gábor).

1999 *A társadalmi nyilvánosság szerkezetváltozása*. Osiris Kiadó, Bp. (fordították: Endreffy Zoltán, Glavina Zsuzsa).

HADOT, Pierre:

2010 *A lélek iskolája. Lelkigyakorlatok és ókori filozófia*. Kairosz Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Cseke Ákos).

2019 *Filosofia ca mod de viață. Convorbiri cu Jeanne Carlier și Arnold I. Davidson*. Humanitas, Buk. (fordította: Cotoră, Adrian).

HEIDEGGER, Martin:

1988 *A műalkotás eredete*. Európa könyvkiadó, Bp. (fordította: Bacsó Béla).

1992 *Az idő fogalma*. In: Uő: *Az idő fogalma. A német egyetem önmegnyilatkozása. A rektorátus 1933/34*. Kossuth Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Fehér M. István).

2004 *Lét és idő*. Osiris Kiadó, Bp. (fordították: Vajda Mihály, Angyalosi Gergely, Bacsó Béla, Kardos András, Orosz István).

HUSSERL, Edmund

1998 *Az európai tudományok válsága*. Atlantisz Kiadó, Bp. (fordították: Egyedi András, Ullmann Tamás).

JAUSS, Hans Robert

1997 *Az irodalmi posztmodernség*. In Uő.: *Recepcióelmélet – esztétikai tapasztalat – irodalmi hermeneutika*. Osiris Kiadó, Bp., 211-235. (fordították: Bernáth Csilla, Bonyhai Gábor, Katona Gergely).

KIRÁLY V. István

2004 *Kérdő-jelezés*, Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony.

2001 „*Legyen tanúja.*” *A tanúság hermeneutikája a Megbocsátásban*. In: Müllner András – Odorics Ferenc (szerk.): *Megbocsátás*. Osiris-Pompeji Kiadó, Bp.–Szeged, 42–49.

KITTLER, Friedrich

2005 *Optikai médiumok*. Magyar Műhely-Ráció Kiadó, Bp. (fordította: Kelemen Pál).

LÁNG Zsolt

2003 *Az időlátó*. In: Uő: *A szomszéd nő*. Koinónia Kiadó, Kolozsvár, 5-18.

LUHMANN, Niklas

2005a *Az írás formája*. In: Bónus Tibor et alii (szerk.): *Intézményesség és kulturális közvetítés*. Ráció Kiadó, 431–454. (fordította: Lőrincz Csongor).

2005b *Rendszerként működő rendszerek*. In: Bónus Tibor et alii (szerk.): *Intézményesség és kulturális közvetítés*. Ráció Kiadó, 294–340. (fordította: Oláh Szabolcs).

MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice:

2006 *A látható és a láthatatlan*. L'Harmattan Kiadó. Bp. (fordította: Farkas Henrik).

2012 *Az észlelés fenomenológiája*. L'Harmattan Kiadó–Magyar Fenomenológiai Egyesület, Bp. (fordította: Sajó Sándor).

MÉSZÖLY Miklós

Megbocsátás. https://konyvtar.dia.hu/html/muvek/MESZOLY/meszoly00105a_kv.html
(utolsó letöltés: 2021. V. 12.)

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich

2004 *Korszerűtlen elmékedések*. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Bp. (fordították: Bognár Bulcsú, Csatár Péter, Hidas Zoltán).

PARTI NAGY Lajos

2000 *Hősöm tere*, Magvető Kiadó, Bp.

2007 *Sárbogárdi Jolán A test angyala*. Magvető Kiadó, Bp.

PATOČKA, Jan

1999 *A jelenkor értelme*. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony. (fordította: Németh István).

PLATÓN

2005a *A lakoma*. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Bp. (fordította: Horváth Judit).

2005b *Phaidrosz*. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Bp. (fordította: Simon Attila).

2014 *Állam*. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Bp. (fordította: Steiger Kornél).

ROPOLYI László

2004 *Technika és etika*. In: Fekete László (szerk.): *Kortárs etika*. Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Bp., 245–292.

2006 *Az Internet természete*. Typotex kiadó, Bp.

2020 *A virtualitás mint az irodalom ontológiája*. In: Mészáros András (szerk.): *Filozófia és irodalom*. MTA – Szlovákiai Magyar Akadémiai Tanács, Bp.–Somorja, 13–30.

RICOEUR, Paul

1999 *Emlékezet – felejtés – történelem*. In: Thomka Beáta (szerk.): *Narratívák 3. A kultúra narratívái*. Kijárat Kiadó, Bp., 51–67. (fordította: Rózsahegyi Edit)

SAINT-VICTOR, Hugo

Didascalicon. <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/hugo.html> (utolsó letöltés: 2021. V. 24.)

SZABÓ Róbert Csaba

2016 *Alakváltók*. Jelenkor Kiadó, Bp.

SZLEZÁK, Thomas Alexander

2000 *Hogyan olvassunk Platón-t?* Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Bp. (fordította: Lautner Péter).

2008 *Cum să-l citim pe Platon*. Ed. Grinta, Cluj-Napoca. (fordították: Meheș Teona és Rigán Lóránd).

THOMKA Beáta (szerk.)

1999 *Narratívák 3. A kultúra narratívái*. Kijárat Kiadó, Bp.

VERESS Károly

2007 *Bevezetés a hermeneutikába*. Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó, Bolyai Társaság, Kvár.

VERESS Károly (szerk.)

2014 *Az igazság történései. Hermeneutikai és alkalmazott filozófiai kutatások*. Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó, Bolyai Társaság, Kvár.

2016 *Arról, ami kimondhatatlan. Hermeneutikai és alkalmazott filozófiai kutatások*. Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó, Bolyai Társaság, Kvár.

WITTGENSTEIN, Ludvig

2004 *Logikai-filozófiai értekezés*. Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, Bp. (fordította: Márkus György)