Theses of doctoral (Ph.D.) dissertation

CHILDHOOD AND CHILD REARING ON CANVASES

The childhood conception of dualism in the artworks of a painting school

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Debrecen, 2016
1. The aims of dissertation, definition of subject
In our researches we attempt to analyze pictures from the turn of 19-20th century which depict peasant children from Alföld, and their life experiences, life situations; our aim is to highlight the main patterns of child conception and child perception of archaic rural society by the method of picture analysis.

**Aims of research.** In our dissertation we attempt to analyze images of painting of Alföld by pedagogical, childhood historical iconographical methods. The aim of our research is to explore the main patterns of child conception and child perception of the examined period through the childhood representations of paintings of Alföld. To that we need to examine the forms of social consciousnesses and experiences of our period, life idea, human ideals, raising aims and educational values of communities of archaic peasant societies, and we have to describe some features, qualities of the anthropological space. In our research we try to answer some important questions: what patterns of colonializing childhood rhetoric (which keep within limits the discourse about the childhood – see: Cannella and Viruru, 2004) we can see on our imagery and what influences of what pedagogical conceptions we can feel on these images? To answer that question we need to use the iconographic method, whith which we can explore the sphere of document intelligence (Panofsky, 1955). It’s also important to diagnose what are the under- and overrepresented topics connected with the childhood and children’s life,
compared to the childhood-ethnography, educational history, childhood history literature, and what is the connection between the child conception and the ideals (ideal of girl and boy, men and woman, life ideal) on the canvases? To answer this latter issue we need to synchronize with each other the informations from educational history literature and the iconographical method (especially the analysis and fixing of childhood-motifs and -attributes). Another important issue is that what signs refer to the process of peasant embourgeoisement or the staying in state of archaic rural society on our paintings and drawings?

**Definition of our subject.** In our dissertation we analyze 118 pcs pictures of artists of artists’ colony of Szolnok (Lajos Deák-Ébner, Sándor Bihari, Adolf Fényes, Artúr Tölgyessy, Péter Szüle and József Koszta) and Hódmezővásárhely (János Tornyai and Béla Endre). In this era (from 1870s to 1918) the painters of these regions were interested in representation of rural life, and they take serious this topic, unlike the members of „Art Gallery Painting” („műcsarnoki festészet”), who painted the peasant life jovially, stereotypically and superficially;
briefly: these artists were able to vocalize and present the „folksoul”, independently of the social-economic status. The artists exceeded the level of representing reality of childhood (the social verdict about the childhood), since they tried to construct different patterns of child conception and child perception.

In our research we synchronize with each other the tematical nodes, categories and concepts of childhood history literature (Pukánszky Béla, 2005; Linda Pollock, 1998; Shulamith Shahar, 1998) and the informations of childhood-ethnography (Deáky Zita, 2011; Fügedi Márta, 1988; Jávor Kata, 2000; Gazda Klára, 1980) in order to have correlations that we can use in our educational researches.

The theme of our research is the child conception and child perception of the peasant society in the age of civil modernization (c. 1880-1920). In the peasant society the child raised by observation, natural imitation and organic raising, thus he or she becomes a member of community. In contrast teachers raised and educated citizen children by speech and frontal teaching, in the spirit of ethical intellectualism, put him or her into the role of passive-
receptive factor. Schoolchildren acquire and internalize the system of civil values and aims (e. g. self-discipline, precision, reliability, regularity) by the way of hidden curriculum, but peasant children was educated by direct life situations, life experiences and activities, thus they internalized the system of norms and duties of adults’ world.

The main goal of civil education is endeavor to lead the child from the „animal taint” (or iniquity) to the sphere of clean morals. That was an important component of the theory of Kant and Pestalozzi, and we can recognize that conception in many pedagogical studies and books on the turn of 19-20th century. But these formulations were linked to the life of schoolchildren, namely in the rural society the children often stayed at home and they worked on the field. So the civil modernization limited in the peasant society. An important part of rural communities was in archaic state at the turn of 19-20th century, because the everyday life of peasants was defined and determined by superstitions, beliefs, old traditions and reguls, and that archaic state we can explore on our imagery, related to the childhood.
Topics of analyses. In our thesis we examine the next themes of childhood:  (1.) children in communities (especially participation on fairs, religious celebration and wedding procession, learning ceremony behavior), (2.) family life, (3.) mother-child relation (with special attention to the image type of Peasant Madonna), (4.) siblings, (5.) groups of children and relations between children, (6.) learning (in connection with civil modernization), (7.) work, (8.) representation of girls (portraits), (9.) representation of boys. These topics are in harmony with the categories of childhood history and educational researches, and these aspects allow the functioning of the pedagogical anthropologic and micro-historical way and approach.

2. Applied methods
The artwork is a medium for contemplation, that inspire us to admire and incessant asking. Consequently, the viewer is not just a viewer, but also reader and interpreter of drawing, painting or sculpture. We linger on the work of art, and we move away from the commonplaces and our preconceptions: so the contemplation enables the
reflective thinking and self-reflection in the everyday (and pedagogical) practices too. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1997), during reading of a picture we try to understand the artwork, our mind penetrates into the painting, and this process puts our perspectives, beliefs, attitudes, literacy and patience to the test.

In our thesis we also review the visual anthropology, that focus on analyzing myths and narratives. According to Hans Belting (2009) the viewer's duty is more then the perception, since he/she has to revive the picture, and experience it as living picture, but this is possible only through our cultural perspective. We overview some thesis and author of the visual communication, and we attach these knowledges to the preiconographic description (Panofsky, 1955). Inter alia, we mention Rudolf Arnheim's theory (1974); according to that theory we have to use our eyes to live through the atmosphere of artwork. After then we overview the semiotic model (Imre Gráfik, 2014; Özséb Horányi, 1975; Roland Barthes, 1996); according to that the pictures are visual constructions, which consist of messages, the messages consist of signs, therefore the process of creation is
encoding process, and the analyzing is decoding (Orsolya Endrődy-Nagy, 2015).

Image science approaches which serve as the basis of our methods. According to Gadamer (1994), the analysis of an artwork is like reading, since if we want to understand a painting or drawing, first of all we have to spell that, and after then we get closer and closer to capture the essence of an artwork. During this research we apply an improved version of the Panofsky model by Ulrike Mietzner and Ulrike Pilarczyk (2013, pp. 31–49). In this variation the first level is the pre-iconographical (formal) analysis, which means that we define the elements of composition (e.g. line, shape, form, space, color, light, repetition, point of view, texture). The second level is the iconographical description, which means we record the theme, subject, date of creating, technique of the image and we review the relevant biographical informations. The third level is the iconographical interpretation, which means we define and systematize the deep-rooted motifs, symbols and we interpret the image, the conceptions which influence the creating process. In this proceeding we have to survey,
explain and interpret the confessions and opinions about the artwork – or an artistic period –, which are written by the painters of images, the painter’s acquaintances or contemporary and later art historians, critics, aestheticians. The fourth level is the iconological interpretation (or iconological synthesis), which means we try to understand the essence of the image, and we have to interpret the allegorical meanings (Mietzner and Pilarczyk, p. 2013, 36). So the iconography includes the description, classification (sorting), systematization and analysis, perambulate the theme and subject of painting (as suggested by Louis Réau, 1986), but the iconology means we take (interpret) the picture as a document, which is a part of the social consciousness, thus we can note or fix sentiments, attitudes, forms of behavior, ideals on the image as claimed by János Géczi (2010).

We can complement our method with the analysis criterions of Piotr Sztomka (2009), which are concern to the social life (everyday life), these considerations make our analyses more articulated and transparent, more exact, more reliable and more relevant to our childhood history researches. According to Sztomka on the images
we can observe the characteristics of the human individuals (body languages, facial expressions, posture, gestures, costume elements, coiffure), children’s activities (rituals, routines, ceremonies), social interactions (relationships, contacts, chat), the factors of children’s activities (the partners’ spatial location, status, social competences), communities and community actions (aims, activity rhythm) and the manifestations of a culture (financial goods, symbols, the characteristics of using space, the iconographic signs of prohibitions and commands).

Our research method. As we can see now, the basis of our educational research is the Panofsky-model (1955) and the Mietzner-Pilarczyk schema (2013). We also reviewed hungarian pedagogical studies (Katalin Kéri, 2009; János Géczi, 2010), and we use some aspects from these works. Furthermore we use criteria system of analysis of social space by Piotr Sztompa („Visual Sociology”, 2009) and we overview the perceptions and thoughts of critics and followers of the Panofsky-model (1955), e. g. Konrad Eberlein (é. n.), Louis Réau (1986),
In our analyses we can recognize the next aspects of educational researches and childhood history: external characteristics of children (body language, age, sex, position in the space and composition, activity etc.), sociocultural code (environment, landscape, enterieur, wear etc.), the activities and social interactions in terms of education, but we also review some arthistorical aspects, e. g. styles, symbols, allegories.

In our researches we adapt concrete, definite, analysis aspects to the Panofsky-model and Mietzner-Pilarczyk schema, so we create a new, childhood-historical schema of analysis aspects, and we attempted to define the artistic attitude, and in this connection we overview the problem of „the picture as representation or construction”. In our dissertation we often refer to the artistic attitude, and that concept includes the attitude to the subject of artwork. Patterns of that we can explore by style analysis, and the style is a superficial layer of the image conception and aesthetician views of artist. The low-lying layers of that are the attitudinal aspects; if we
explore and highlight these layers, we can understand the
document intelligence of artwork (see: iconological
synthesis). So, the artistic attitude starts from the society
concept and the artist’s life view, and the basis of that is
the artist’s view of nature, and the basis of that view is
the aesthetician view. Finally, from the artistic attitude
we can make conclusions starting to the attitude to some
social problems, e. g. the problematique of childhood,
too.

3. Main scientific results and theses of our doctoral
dissertation

1. Child conception. In our imagery we find many
pictures in the next categories: mother-child relation,
work, children in community, girl-portraits. On the
pictures we can recognize the construction of the
obedient and submissive child and the image of miniature
adult, but we have to distinguish from each other the
image of the quiet, shy girl child and the viable, movable,
eccentric boy child. The subject of representations is the
child, but the probleme of these images is not the
childhood, but it’s the order and laws of peasant life. The
true child-scenes are limited, and starting from that we can conclude the construction of „miniaturized adult” dominates the child representations. The representations are about the order of archaic peasant society, through the represented children.

On the images the childhood is not rich in peer group experiences and exploration activities – the children’s world was not separated from the adults’s world. So the artists sought the folksoul in the child bodies, and less the lyrical childish experiences. These child representations are defined by the „predestination of roles”. The children’s and adult’s activities are similar to each other, therefore we can talk about the image of „miniaturized adult” regarding to the childhood in archaic peasant societies. The child is often represented on portraits, taken out of their social context (often construct ritual and iconic stiffness, e. g. József Koszta’s girl portraits), and this fact refers to the appreciation of the child (interest in childhood topics), because the infant is worthy to perpetuate. So the artists represent the spontaneity of childhood, and that fact refers to the
influence of the child study movement (see: György Mikonya’s photoseries from the 19-20th century, 2008).

To talk about the child image we have to mention that the representation of girls and female children are overrepresented in the whole sample, and the main reason of that is the next: the artists could represent the ideal of the humility, obedience, dependence or averageness, and the virtue of self-discipline, diligence and strenuousness through the girl’s figures, against the eccentricity of boys. This is evidenced by the attributes, symbols and metafores, that are typical characteristics of the peasant life (e. g. rooster and hen – vigilance, fertility, sacrifice; jar and basket – fertility, race preservation), that emphasize the fertility, passivity, resignation (acquiescence), diligence, amiability (hunger for love) and self-control, furthermore these features highlight the declared order of peasant life, unlike the peasant honor and the unpredictability of everydays of village life.

2. Child perception. First of all, before the analyses of child perception (educational attitude and attitude to the childhood) we need to mention the various shades made
by the different topics of childhood. The image of beloved, helpless child is well represented on the representations of the mother-child relations and we also recognize the childhood as a sensitive stage of life on the representations of twinnings (Adolf Fényes, Louis Deák-Ébner) and on a few portraits and boy-representation (Artúr Tölgyessy), and on these images we can recognize the contemplative, meditative artistic attitude. On the „child in community” themed pictures the child is on her mother's side, but we can't feel the sensitivity to the childhood, instead of that the emphasis on the collective existence: the child has not yet been initiated, he/she is not an insider, therefore he/she is represented as a „procession man” („supernunenary”). The epical, anecdotal character of the „child in community” type images is emphatic (Deák-Ébner, Bihari). Based on our analyzes we can conclude the childhood was determined by the laws of ground and agriculture and the norms of rural community, so the children’s education was defined by the organic raising and inarticulate education.

In our imagery we can recognize some signs of civil modernization (peasant embourgeoisement), for example
ornaments and pictures on the wall, school book, reading, wealthy, almost civilian clothing, itinerant, wandering teaching). Furthermore similar signal is the child’s big figure and eye (facing) view (contrary the plan view which express the authority, and the presence of adult’s control and hierarchy), suggesting the child-centric pedagogical attitude in some social groups of the peasant society, referring to the civil modernization. The child’s wealthy clothing and confident behavior (body language) also refer to this process and the indirect influences of child study movement too, especially Adolf Fényes’ paintings.

3. Childhood mitologies, child rhetorics. To talk about the rhetoric of childhood mitology we can say that the artist express and show the forms of consciousnesses of the archaic rural society, therefore the painter depicted the child whom he seen on the marketplace, on the field or at home. The attributes, motifs of behavior, the symbols, the interactions are interpretable by the contexts of peasant life, but at the same time sometimes we can recognize the influences by the pedagogical flows of the turn of 19-20th century (experimental pedagogy, child
study movement, reformpedagogy), namely the high level of interest in the functions of childhood, children’s thinking (reasoning) and emotions is a typical feature of painting of Adolf Fényes. We can recognize the children’s naturalness, self-activity (independent activity) and self-value on other painters’ paintings too (János Tornyai, Artúr Tölgyessy), but we can also talk about the voices of the agrarian socialism in connection with some images (János Tornyai).

If we want to summarize the childhood rhetorical phrases of our imagery, we can talk about the next categories:

(a) The child as labor force, the pledge (mortgage) of family continuity;
(b) The girl child as the incarnation of ideal of peasant life (Koszta’s girl portraits);
(c) The girl child as the depositary of fertility, the subjected factor to the male dominance;
(d) The childhood as the source of adult’s joy;
(e) The child as the symbol of regeneration and reformation – by the character of schoolboy,
reader boy and girl, and the motive of school book.

4. The topics of children’s life on the canvases. Underrepresented childhood-motifs are the learning, child-father relation, being and interactions in child-groups, and missing motifs are the playing acts, discipline, humiliation, and these rates or facts (the missing and under-representations of these motifs and themes) are not in harmony with the knowledges of the childhood-ethnographical studies and descriptions. The work activity is a well represented subject, but we can't see the boy with her father to work, and we can't see the girl child in the weaving workshop (compare with Izsák Perlmutter's paintings), and we can't see house work. So why we can't recognize these topics on the images? Because these activities are related to actions, but the hungarian painting of that era wasn't rich in plot, except for painting of Louis Deák-Ébner and Sándor Bihari. The mentioned topics are represented by genre-paintings, that are rich in acts, but a significant part of our images are meditative paintings or expressive realist pictures (especially Fényes, Koszta, Endre and Tornyai).
Nevertheless, to talk about the rates of the themes of childhood representation we can recognize three aspects of the childhood in the archaic rural society:

a. The lovable, helpless child perception: the childhood is separated the adult’s world, this is a sensitive period of life. Themes: mother-child relation, connection between siblings.

b. The childhood as the „state of creatures of lack”, and the period of the uninitiating. Themes: child in the community, mother-child relation.

c. The child as a „miniaturized adult”. Themes: work, portraits.

5. Theme, motive, style. On the analyzed pictures we often find images with one figure, and the reason of that is the next. In the painting of Alföld the meditative, concentrated pictures was frequent (e. g. Adolf Fényes’ and József Koszta’s paintings), but the genre painting is also lived in the turn of 19-20th century (e. g. Louis Deák-Ébner, Sándor Bihari) with an anecdotal, descriptive, „talkative”, eventful character, that starting from Courbet’s and Munkácsy’s realism.
4. References


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List of publications related to the dissertation

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List of other publications

Non scientific journal article(s) (1)

Samunadrág című versek ötletében.

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the IDEa Tudatákereső have been validated by DEENK on
the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

26 April, 2016