Theses of PhD Dissertation

Images of multiplicity –
Complementarity of art and philosophy

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Aims and the Subject Matter of the Dissertation

The topic of my thesis was outlined in the intersection of philosophy and art, the source of it stemming from the articulation of the argumentative problems of those. According to the most typical scheme this means particularly the following: Art(history) theoreticians regard philosopher’s insights on art as lacking concrete description of works of art, while philosophers accuse the former of lacking thinking.¹

In this thesis I am after possibilities to clarify and solve this dilemma. My assumption is that investigating the complementary features of art and history might bring one closer to the surplus that those two per se could apprehend less effectively. To achieve this I rely on the means of philosophical trends emerging in the 20th century which do not consider their foundations as lying in the conscious, reflective and representing thinking. As a consequence of their methodological principle they are open towards whatever sort of appearing possible forms of reason, and according to their ground their founding relation towards the world is not pervaded by the reflective thinking. Consequently, they do not seek for the qualitative dimension of the manifestation of the appearing and extant reasons, much rather they strive towards a descriptive analysis of them, thus resulting in a better articulation of the actually appearing reason’s conditions. I assume that examining the process of the reception of works of arts might bring one closer to the thinking which attempts to return to the things.

By analyzing the complementarity of art and history the occurrence of reason could not be separated from the process-like functioning of the experience, moreover, there is no use of discussing one without the other. I found these expectations – besides hermeneutics – chiefly in particular aspirations of two contemporary philosophical trends, namely in poststructuralism (most prominently in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) and in phenomenology (mostly in the later works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty). In this thesis I do not attempt to undertake a comprehensive examination of these movements. Rather, I aim to concentrate on those segments which contribute to explore the process of art-experience, thus, at the same time, making those map of thoughts richer by means of analyzing such instances from the field of art. Phenomenology’s idea and method of turning towards the analysis of every thing occurring could bring much fruitful results in the interpretation of works of art – in the investigation of the experience of process-like thinking, particularly. I find it important to emphasize that, in accordance with the above mentioned authors’ insights, the

phenomenological perspective I rely on in my thesis prefers the multiplicities of forms of reasons non-hierarchically articulated, at the same time setting aside to follow the idea of the primary experience. The tendency of poststructuralism – which could be linked to Gilles Deleuze – criticizes phenomenology’s such original subjective perspective which assumes the philosophical tradition merely as a totality of already known and bethought forms of reasons – enmeshing our actual ways of thinking.

The tendency of poststructuralism – which could be linked to Gilles Deleuze – criticizes phenomenology’s such original subjective perspective which assumes the philosophical tradition merely as a totality of already known and bethought forms of reasons – enmeshing our actual ways of thinking. Deleuze does not regard the philosophical tradition appearing on the stage of history as containing schemes simultaneously excluding each other. His metaphilosophy not only takes into consideration the diversity of philosophy, its different trends and aspirations, but even tries to find revolutionizing pathways between those. I believe that – parallel with applying the above mentioned phenomenological perspective – the postructuralist trend which possesses the knowledge of the philosophical tradition and aims to find harmony in that by not attempting to summarize it in a merely collection-like way, at the same time – for instance, in order to justify a philosophical perspective – by refraining from conducting a selection of the existing knowledge, could be aligned with the attempt to articulate the surplus reason stemming from the meeting of art and philosophy.

Besides, I rely in my analyses on the late, unfinished manuscript of Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, in which he approached the root of experience and our grasping of the differenciations happening there on an ontological level. His focus is pulled on the modus of the operation of experience transcending philosophical reflection. He considered description, rather than explanation as the task of philosophy. This view, regarding the description of art-experience amounts to being capable of seeing each work of art as an act of perception. Accordingly, mapping the modus of the thus experienced art-work serves as the backbone of the thesis.

I attempt to track the border that is the place both for experiencing and the occurrence, where things actually do happen, acquire their meaning, even if they lose their significance instantaneously so to create place for other content and durations. I seek for this in the milieu of art’s and philosophy’s peculiar mutual interdependence, where these two fields do not exclude, but rather presuppose each other to the extent that through their encounter one might
notice a novel kind of surplus. I am discovering such a plane, a horizon, a border-land whose both side actually contain no reason – one side is for the mere things, bodies, actions, processes, the other is for the linguistic statements. In the terrain of art – as I see it – the reason is constructed align with such subtle differences. In my thesis in the examination of the creation of reason bodily expression, the depth of the body as the invisible, whose surface is the visible, the reason and the linguistic expression are all play an important role. These do not perfectly overlap each other, for both sides contain its particular surplus reason.

I pull my philosophical focus on such works of arts in which the notion of representation – which, according to its original meaning, substitutes something remote in virtue of the similarity of the present and the remote one – is replaced by autorepresentation (containing self-display and the act of becoming), in which, though not vanishing completely, the principles of mimesis and the representing (based on the metaphoric and metonymic connections) lose their emphasis. In autorepresentation things do not happen in substitute of or with reference to something else, but rather as “displaying itself”. Important to not, though, that autorepresentation could not be realized in its absolute sense, since one is not able to perceive the work of art as such without the mind’s paradoxical trick and ability, viz. as perceiving something simultaneously as being “there”, i.e. as real and as “not” being “there”, i.e. as art.

In this sense artists committed towards the program of non-mimetic art – since and after the rebellious art-trends of avant-garde and neoavant-garde chiefly had contributed to the overcoming of mimetic art – put effort in crafting such works of arts and happenings which – though not intentionally, but – constantly allow for the possibility of an error: Namely, that the subject might mistook the occurrences, imitations within the frames of the work of art or happening for the reality they signify (thus confusing the ontology of Platonic art-understanding, which is based on hierarchy). The cessation or loosening of the frames, signifiers of conventions between the spectator, the artist and the work of art largely contributes to this phenomenon: The abolishment of such quotation marks and parentheses of these relations which grant for the subject of reception that they do not have to react to what they experience within the boundaries of those as if they were real. Consequently, non-mimetic art – by means of gestures, from the position of mimesis, sufficiently similar to, and identical with reality from its non-mimetic position – is often experiencing also right with the audience’s trust in the conventional parentheses of mimetic art and their discursive faculty. I
assume that both the non-mimetic and non-representational art – keeping in mind the inherent surplus reason – bear an ontological role.

According to Friedrich Nietzsche’s critique in his *The Birth of Tragedy* over the aesthetic socratism and the euripidian tragedy’s apprehension of art – according to which “In order to be beautiful, everything must be reasonable” – art is authentic only if it resists the moral reason and all sorts of rational explanations, and if its meaning is somewhat ungraspable. Viewed through the hermeneutic lenses of Hans-Georg Gadamer, the mimesis’s authentic sense could be understood as presuming comprehension through art. Both conceptions dismiss appreciating the work of art as sheer duplicate, and rather regards it as a possibility of an occurrence which in the domain of art allows one the opportunity of – by overcoming mere contemplation over and reflection on it – creation, of perceiving the non-communicable, non-subjective, but singular, invisible.

For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, philosophy, art and science alike are forms of thinking creating consistent order out of disorganization. Art creates *inter alia* in the domain of feelings and affects: like philosophy creating new concepts, so does art constantly creating novel percepts and affects, and by such means art might have the capacity of teaching one to experience and perceive in new ways. Philosophical notions, in turn – following the Nietzschean trail – might disclose the generalities inherent in our thinking, and teach us otherwise to think.

The creators of the artworks I am later to analyze pay closer attention to examine method and idea, the conditions of possibility defining the final form of the object. The space of the work of art is no longer different from the field which is of identical extension with the real space, it is no longer existing as a separated *object*. The space of the illusion is changing, it fuses with the real space of the world – however, as a consequence of this, it loses its objective, traditional character and becomes subjective, which could only be apprehended through the individual’s perception. The different branches of art are more and more fused, as well as it is ever harder to define the different media in a particular, separate manner. Focusing on these conditions they arrive at an open protest against a system of institution that is work-of-art centered and based on the trade of those. In the making of a work of art often the method and

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the theory became determinant, creativity emerging as a result of it. Some art trends – such as American action painting or the European informel, both which share features of the performance-art (– accentuated expressive subjectivism, while minimalism, similarly to pop art’s strive to ‘keep a distance’ – quasi as a forerunner of land art or nature art – aimed more towards objectivity. Autorepresentation, the positioning of the borders between art trends and branches, the work of art and the spectator, the direct perception without a fixed focal point, the direct identity of art and reality – and thus, the intention of dispositioning the mind – all accentuated the issues of mobilizing creator and perceivers alike, to make both sides more participatory. According to their functioning, they attempt to alter our habits related to our thinking: They offer a possibility to recognize our perceiving not external, closed, objective things and objects, and placing the mind confronted with those into an invisible, merely conceptual space. As a result, the enhancement of perception and the bodily experience become emphasized.

The human body as the locus of the work of art played a central role, demanding the reception, or coming into existence during the art event to become an organic part of the work of art. Photos and video-recordings documented the art aiming to break on through the museum walls – should it be works of art of the land art or performance art –, thus those had not necessarily resulted in ‘lasting’ pieces. Within or through those often the whole reality, the whole life becomes a performance; moreover, it becomes so according to the necessities of pure optical and acoustic perception. As a consequence, it is hardly (if at all) possible to tell the spectator from the spectacle, her traditional position erodes, and, e.g. during a performance, the hand-holds traditionally signifying the frames of such performance also vanish: the ‘exit’, the scenery and the stage. For instance, the simple, almost invisible works – consisting of walks, lacking monumental artistic conceptions whatsoever, using its material, the landscape, freely, made out of almost nothing – of land art artist Richard Long’s demonstrate similarities with regard to de-materialization with conceptual art. Besides these works, however, he created such pieces as well in which he used natural materials – mood and stone – as brush, and drew to gallery walls with them. Such gesture positions him on the edge of painting, sculpture and performance-art, since pivotal segments of the work of art are the action and the objects as well.

I regard the pictures – that is a part of the diverse and different phenomena labelled ‘representation’ –, in accordance with W. J. T. Mitchell’s ‘family tree model’, as a diversified,
big family, wandering throughout time and space in a dissipated, yet interdependent manner, and undergoes substantial alterations during her ‘path’5. “Reading” these pictures in such a way the conclusion could be drawn: similarity and sign rely on each other in a novel manner in those. The borderlines between different types of pictures in the majority of the cases are drawn by the particular disciplines by examining the nature of the pictures belonging to the ‘neighbor’ domains, the foundations of the presuppositions is similarity, which, however, always relies on the imagination resting on the edge of knowledge. Thus the meanings of the pictures – physical, mental or verbal ones alike – could never be conceived as static.

Methods applied in the dissertation

My thesis, on the one hand, attempts to approximate works of arts through the optic of Gilles Deleuze’s concept of art; on the other, to map and demonstrate how the perspective brought about by the attention payed to the movement of differenciation and to the dynamic differences appearing in the philosophical thinking could occur in such works of art I described in the above sections. According to my work hypothesis, the emergence, development, and functioning of these art movements could be interpreted as analogous to Deleuze’s concept of art. I find it important to emphasize that I indeed was able to get closer, to get a better, more comprehensive understanding of his philosophical and art-conceptual net of notions by means of applying these very notions to analyze my selected works of arts – and vice versa.

The Deleuzeian notion of multiplicity is the main organizing principle of my thesis: my assumption is that the works of art I examine could be apprehended much well by such means. This (re)interpreted notion appears in many contexts throughout his oeuvre – it is in a foundational relation with, e.g., the notions or rhizome, assemblage, devenir). Multiplicity is such a complex structure – and this, from the perspective of my thesis, is one cardinal feature of this notion – which does not takes as its reference a preliminary unity: It should not be understood as an expression of a unity torn into pieces, or as parts of a fragmented whole. This notion transcends the opposing relation of the ‘one’ and the ‘many’, neither it refers to a part of a transcendent world containing structure or universal laws of existence. Accordingly,

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I use it throughout my thesis in such a substantive manner, and not as an attribute. Through the optic of this notion, every situation is composed by different multiplicities, which could be understood as an assemblage-like composition – not organizing into a totality. Describing a work of art its inherent matters, attributes could be enumerated in the form of a check-list, however, it is insufficient to define its essence – which, in turn, is often an aim of the representationalist approach. Once an attempt is made to sum this essence up, nothing but the work of art itself could be pointed towards as such a ‘thing’.

Most of my instances were such works of art which – in many regards – are challenging the spectators, stemming from experiencing the vents and subtle slips resulting from the border-crossing that manifest themselves within those. For example, all of them call into doubt the previous schemes of apprehension and thinking, and ideals of knowledge, and invite us in the terrain and domain of creating, formation and differenciation, which is pure, free of pre-given concepts. In one way or another, in my reading, all of them exhibit a phenomenon which could be understood in Deleuze’s terms as analogous to the processes of differenciation and actualization.

My recent research’s investigational focus is directed towards the intersection of art and philosophy – towards examining the milieu of their peculiar interdependence. Along the side of Deleuze, I am relying on the related works of such philosophers (inter alia Gottfried Boehm, Jacques Rancière, Roland Barthes), who place the surplus resulting from the encounter of these two fields into a prioritized position (for different reasons); who, at the same time, pursue to articulate this surplus from an evidently productive aesthetical/art-philosophical aspect. One opportunity to demonstrate this sense-surplus might be brought about by means of the art-experience. In the investigation of the sense-creation that takes place in the process of this experience, the focus is pulled on the bodily expression, on the perception (both on the side of the artist and the spectator), on the chiastic movement of the visible and the invisible, and on the problem of representation.

**Theses of the dissertation**

One main insight of my thesis asserts that through the encounters with the works of art I am examining a possibility opens up, allowing us – by means of them – to recognize the representation (similarly to the XXth century philosophies in question) as a relation of
signifying that exceeds those schemes typical of the modern era which treats the consciousness as a sphere of immanent and evident certainties given to itself by itself, and the objects as beings that are in a transcendental relation with it, that are not directly given for the consciousness/sense, but indirectly, through the idea and the images. It becomes evident, that the representations within the inner sphere of consciousness/sense no longer re-present the real objects. They allow for the possibility of the formation of a direct relation within the field of experience, where something is no longer happening by reference to or instead of something else, but by showing itself up.

My assumption is that my selected works of art demonstrate that in the artistic tendencies similar movements have taken place, for instance concerning the shift of the conventional signs and frames between the artist, the spectators and the works of arts By making analogies between my chosen works of arts and philosophers I am attempting to approach such aesthetic insights which are fueled by the experience of vents and slopes stemming from the differences between the representational and the antirepresentational traditions.

The process of receiving/experiencing a work of art could be related to the attributes of the intensive multiplicities. No work of art could be divided into its elements without changing its nature (contrary to the extensive multiplicities, which could be divided into parts.) In the lights of the philosophies I rely on in my thesis, the existence of a work of art and of the pictures of it is exhibited as combinations of movements of actual and virtual multiplicities. Through contemplating a work of art we are always organized according to multiplicities – we are its parts, constituents and creators. Thus apprehended, not only art, but philosophy also becomes practical. This position quite overwrites the representational conception of art – it is not working in accordance with a universal law or causal relation. Instead, it inherently allows for the potential of the surplus-sense’s – that results from the possibility of ambiguity – disclosure.

This sort of renunciation from logical panels in order to form a more direct relation towards the works of art is typical of the philosophers mentioned above: In the reading of Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy and art are defined as particular forms of thinking – when their plains converge, in the reception of the work of art – lighted by the shine of Logos from different angles, hinging on the position of the spectator – chiefly the logic of sense becomes dominant. In my understanding of the subject matter the act of art-reception makes the priority of the processes of experience and sense-creation, and the movement of their exciting interplay
evident. This renders manifest that the work of art is not representing the sense or the affection, however, it manifests itself as the expression of an affection. As a consequence, it might open up the possibility and direct the audience towards new modes of perception, experience, and comprehension.

All works of arts and art trends offer newer and newer perspectives for the possible ways of seeing, perceiving and apprehension. In a similar vein as Deleuze’s philosophy, they much often the schemes we regard as evident as a consequence of our cultural imprints – however, in such a way that does not simply reject, but rather disclose and discover those and their consequences: That is how the multiplicity – both in philosophy and in art – could become a form of thinking.

An immanent content of this philosophical position is that any statements about or description of a work of art reproduces the reality as a particular aspect of it, nevertheless, it is incapable of stating anything about the harmony of the two levels – the most it might show it up. The examinations of this thesis permanently ponder around the following statement: The work of art could show what cannot be said. I consider the philosophical and aesthetic concepts I rely on as viable means of elaborating this insight and also of examining the works of art in process. One such place of this expressive process could be the interpretations of works of arts – written on the borderline of thinking speech and speaking thinking. Description serves as a means of recording the process and motion of the differenciation at the intersection of artistic (i.e. regarding the experiencing of works of arts) and philosophical thinking.

My research horizon simultaneously relies both on the mechanism of reception – grounded in the indubitable certainty of our experience and merely experiencing the function and process of things –, and on the apparatus purposing to record these experiences along the schematic constructions of the reason. In this sense, in one way or another the possible descriptions of a work of art and of its experience, occurrence are always in a complementary relation: Two descriptions or approximations will be opposite without either one being true and false the other.

As a result, I draw the conclusion that the work of art and the subject are “illuminated” in and depending on their relation: That is, in an artistic occurrence the work of art could “be illuminated” on its own, and simultaneously being “illuminated” by the Logos. From such vantage point, art is not a manner of representing experiences and recognizable memories. Instead of showing what the world is, it permanently purports to imagine a possible world,
into which we might or might not will be able to get immersed. The road leading there might stem from recognizing the excursions caused by the subtle interplay of the process of perception and of the intelligible, the recognizable. Worthy to note, that in virtue of the philosophical position I decided to follow here, I do not presume a constituting subject in the experiences, much rather I operate with an I, drawn as a consequence of the totality of impacts stemming from events, occurrences and their respective circumstance – all which constitute a life. So could the experience of art become such an occurrence in which spectator and the spectacle is not distinct, and in which such a space could open of for the receiving subject, that is not totally real(istic), but not subjective either. Contingency instead of similarities, diversity, newer and newer connections of multiplicities are brought into the foreground. Such elimination of the I significantly contributes to the rephrasement of oppositions based on the dichotomy of subject and object (also, in my reading this is a meeting point of Deleuze’s and the late Merleu Ponty’s philosophy.)

In the conclusion of the thesis I argue that from this respect the concepts of Affect and Percept are adequate and relevant means, which overcame the organizing reprezentationalist frames of perceiving individuals and offer insight instead into the singularities’ preindividual world – where the work of art could become capable of disclosing the surplus inherent in the invisible contained by the visible / into what is undepictable directly. This is brought about by the method of passive synthesis (happening under the surface of actual synthesis). I thus arrived at the conclusion that a work of art is capable of demonstrating the sense-surplus in virtue of its created-ness and functioning. And investigating this created-ness of the work of art from the perspective of multiplicity, something might be said about what the work of art is capable of showing. Thus contemplated, each work of art has several layers of sense/meaning, viz. it could be grasped as a multiplicity of many senses accommodating one signifier. This allows room in the process of sense-creation for the process of differenciation, entailing that not the modus of the perception’s, the form’s and the concept’s finding each other – and consequently, not not the distinct parts’ synthesis –, but the differenciation (emerging from the motion of experience) is placed in the foreground. As a result of accommodating the diacritic position stemming from the concept of multiplicity, when perceiving works of arts it is always the detection and recognition of newer and newer differences which becomes more and more emphasized – and not the integration of those.
In Chapter 5 my purpose is to investigate the relation of my previously analysed notions (e.g. sense, flesh, diagram, gestalt, body without organs) in relation to performativity: My enquiry chiefly concerns by analyzing these works of art the question of what sense-surplus could we achieve resulting from the difference of the forms and the content of reception, how those contribute to a re-evaluation of the concept of subjectivity. In these pieces the body is no longer presented as a shell of the mind, but in its identity with the subject. In the process of experiencing the radical occurrences both in Günter Brus ’Zerreißprobe’ or in the Kleist short novel, each moment and element is a part of the I. From a philosophical point of view as well, the issue of how the relation of the performer and the spectators, the process of reception is shaping and evolving - keeping in mind the singularity of each performance - raises numerous exciting questions. Based on this idea I am to articulate the above-mentioned insights regarding the photographic- and video-documentations of the performance-art, and to answer the question of how the absence of the performance-related presence alters the reception of an art in case of such documentations. The examination of the Image-noise chapter’s works of arts could demonstrate the formerly mentioned philosophical insights about the non-preliminary-given nature of reality and senses discovered in works of arts’ closer, at the same time, consequently making clear experience’s inability to be the medium of such disclosure (of sense and reality). According to this insight, too, we rather become aware of a totality of open, permanently changing and evolving processes. According to their created-ness they demonstrate that reality is not interpreted in accordance with preliminary given, ready-made facts. Instead, it is revealed as a set of ever-changing horizons. Thus – and especially in these instances – it is always an unfinished experience (always being in the process of creation) which is revealed. Such perspective makes evident the inseparableness of reality and experience – both are parts of the differentiation, the perpetually flowing motion.

I concentrate on such works of arts whose existence is not set into action by the self-centered contemplation, rather it is built up by composition and contraction of sensations. I purpose to unfold – within the aesthetic discourse – those receptive and spontaneous elements (out of perception) that somewhat separates from the perceiver, but instead of reification they – transcending themselves – allow for a particular invisible surplus. The works of arts of this chapter are particularly capable of providing the spectator with the opportunity of recognizing the functioning of binary thinking all too typical of the Western philosophical and aesthetical canon. The opportunity of placing in the foreground multiplicities instead of unified systematic philosophies; of pulling the focus of observation onto the concreated instead of
exclusively intellectual thinking; and of allowing room for diversity, plasticity and
temporality. In this regards I rely on such works of art all of whose subject matter is – this or
that way – the nature, yet each relate differently to the theme of representation and mimesis
(inter alia). For instance, the much ephemeral nature art pieces have no purpose of
representation, nor of memises, moreover, they have no utter purpose at all.

In chapter 4 I explore and argue that in the pieces of nature art are more focused on the
autopoetic semiosis, on recording impressions and perceptions in a minute, superficial, not
quite artistic manner – instead of the mimesis of the outer environment. Autorepresentation
such achieved inclines the spectator much more to recoil than to explore the illustration. Such
works of arts might demonstrate the advantages of a signifier-centered sign-world devoid of
its significates. For in many instances – prominently the more ephemeral – works of arts mean
nothing concrete, consequentially, the spectator might be inspired by them to furnish the
spaces she considers devoid with meanings quickly. In the same way as these pieces, the
spectator simply let the actual signifies through herself without preservation. More, in the
lights of the thesis’s preferred philosophical positions these works of art are particularly
interesting because they suspend sense in a way that everything still remain seeable and
interpretable. In my reading this provides creative conditions to get a better understanding of
and approach to the Deleuzeian notions (transcendental empiricism, affect, percept, rhizome,
haptic vision).

My assumption is that these works of art contribute to comprehend such a conception of art –
in virtue of and through changing the space of thinking by their very essence – that is ‘no less
thinking’ than philosophy does. From such perspective the planes of philosophy and art slip
and merge into each other despite their differences through a change fertile for both sides,
moreover, in such intensity defining them in their interrelatedness: Not in a synthesis, but by
preserving their divergences, risomatic movements in the perpetual creation.
List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (5)

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   *Performa.* 2015 (2), 12-29, 2015. EI ISSN: 2498-731X.

Hungarian scientific articles in international journals (1)

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