

SUMMARY OF PhD THESIS

**Psychoanalytic, phenomenological and hermeneutic analysis of  
perception and expression in the creative process of surrealist  
paintwork**

**Henrietta Horváth**

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Zoltán Gyenge  
university professor  
dean, head of department

University of Szeged  
Málnási Bartók György Doctoral School of Philosophy  
Theory of Art Programme

Szeged

2018

## **I. Defining the topic**

- In this dissertation, I analyse the creative process through categories of binary oppositions like conscious and non-conscious which categories can be traced back to the Platonic tradition. I have chosen the surrealist painters as they can manifest in their work the tension between the concepts of conscious and unconscious, reality and imagination and image and word (thought). The basic assumption of my thesis that the creative process includes an inner dialogue will be supported through this analysis.
- The reality and the artistic representation of the real as experienced through perception, imagination, vision and phantasy are interrelated constituents of the creative process surrealist artist. Creating “super-reality” was the main objective of the surrealist painters/movement in which realm the comprehensible and the hidden realities are united. I preliminary suppose that a dialogic situation can be traced back to the merging of the unconscious contents/materials only accessible through dreams, free associations, visions and daydreaming and the reality as their fundamental source material.
- Perception of the surrealist painters is defined by two convergent forces: one is the continuously emerging but suppressed or forgotten materials or affections (emotions, memories) hidden and inaccessible to the artist and the second is the realistic perception of the world as foreground for the imagination.

## **II. Preliminary notes**

- We can find that the distinction between conscious and unconscious constituents of the creative process has a long tradition in the history of philosophy and art. Plato’s divine madness and the notion of “*petites perceptions*” from Leibniz are all the same expressions of the similar concept that *vague and turbid* sensations rooted in the unconscious enters the everyday life and through art and imagination rises into the realm of conscious. The unconscious has two fundamental definition where one tries to paint the unconscious as an inaccessible and somehow mysterious thing while the other advocates a position where the realm of unconscious in some cases is accessible.

- Taking into consideration the visual and lingual/poetic representations of the unconscious through works of art, I scrutinise the artwork and the creative process calling into play the psychoanalytic (Freud, Jung, Lacan, Kristeva), phenomenological (Husserl and Merleau-Ponty) and hermeneutic (Gadamer and Wittgenstein) tradition.

### **III. Hypotheses of the Dissertation**

- The dissertation has only one main thesis I want to prove which divided into further sub-theses.
- My thesis is that the surrealist artist is involved in an internal dialogue with himself through the creative process which involves binary categories like reality/imagination, conscious/unconscious and image/word. This dialogic monologue can happen when the known contents of the conscious and the new and now emerging unconscious forces in the artist and his self-reflection starts to interact. The ongoing hermeneutic process of interactive re-emerging thoughts which creates new images and the reimagination of already known experiences moves the creative process forward. The inner monologue is dialogic in the form of question and answer.
- The sub-theses support the main hypothesis and examine the possibilities and circumstances of this dialogic relation according to its subjects, subject-matter/topic and means:
  1. The unconscious part of the surrealist painter`s mind exist as a separate mind. As to the theories of Freud and Lacan, I argue that the artist going through experiences/sensations/perceptions in the creative process tries to fill a void that continuously is.
  2. Perception of the surrealist painter is unique in its way by on the one hand shifting between natural and transcendental attitudes and on the other hand, stems from the image consciousness that defines the dichotomy of the concept of phantasy and memory. These circumstances can lead us to believe in the divided nature of the artist psyche that communicate with itself through the creative process in the form of internal monologue.
  3. The creative process of the surrealist painter is a communicative act/interaction between the artist and his work as a specific dialogue of verbal and imaginative forms.

#### **IV. Methodology of the Dissertation**

- My analysis focuses on the psychological aspects of the creative process and the thorough examination of the artwork and the phantasy that plays a crucial part in the creative process.
- I apply the required psychoanalytic, phenomenological and hermeneutic theories to the investigation of the surrealist creative process, that is, the characteristics and features of the artistic work.

My analysis merits from utilising the following theories:

- Psychoanalytic research into the nature of the relation of art and unconscious
- Husserl's conception of perception and "inner monologue" and Merleau-Ponty's "artistic" representation and perception of the world
- Gadamer and the concept of work of art and process of the recipient's constant self-realisation and reception of all art as play
- And finally, searching for the subjective possibilities and means of the hypothesised inner dialogue in the surrealist creative process I turn to Wittgenstein's language-game concept and the aspect change that emphasises the importance of language use and actions.

#### **V. Summary of the Thesis Arguments**

##### **I. Introduction into the history of unconscious**

The dissertation has three main parts which represent the three main theories of my investigation, namely, the psychological, phenomenological and hermeneutical. After the short introduction, but before the main body of the dissertation, I give a short account of some of the art theories that touches on the question of unconscious, say, Plato (divine madness), Leibniz ("*petites perceptions*"), Schiller (naïve and sentimental poet), Schopenhauer (unconscious and the irrational will), Schelling (genius as gift from nature), Kant (dream, productive imagination), Nietzsche (Dionysian art) and Sartre (magic and conscious experience).

### Conclusions:

- To reach the objectivity of the artwork, artistic creativity as genius forms a unique relation with the unconscious where the latest plays a crucial role generally in every art and artform.
- The analysis of the relationship of art and unconscious often opens the door to the comparison of the artistic expressions and dream and insanity. (Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche). Dream and insanity have relationship with associative and schema building capacities; the latest are also important categories in phenomenology and psychoanalysis.
- Art can mean escapism from reality: finding a way out of the reality and doing so it can unveil this reality as simulacrum like a Nietzschean act of replacing old metaphors with new ones.
- The artistic expression is creating, moving and productive imagination and as such it is to prime the imagination of the recipient as well.

## **II. Surrealist situation – psychological, phenomenological, hermeneutic level**

The analysis of the three level of my research follows the history of the surrealist movement and the introduction of its ars poetica. Members of the surrealist movement tried to genuinely express contents of the unconscious mind as visions and phantasmas and doing so they practiced the Freudian method of automatic or hypnagogic writing and automatic drawing. They truly believed in the power of unconscious and in artistic expressions characteristic mostly of the insane. Some artist was not convinced in the limitless freedom of the unconscious believing it leads only to anarchy and chaos in art but rather admitted the importance and necessity of rationality over the unconscious.

### **1. Psychological level**

- I first want to introduce the theory of the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, and his theory about the relationship between the unconscious and art. In Freud's theory the unique skills of the artist can channel the repressed/suppressed unconscious mental contents. The result of the mechanism of the "soft suppression" causes the pre-cognitive contents temporarily fell under the influence of unconscious processes:

despite the conviction of the surrealist artists, the visions they paint are not rooted in the unconscious.

As for Carl Gustav Jung, I want to pay attention to his theory of collective unconscious, the “active imagination” that serves to resolve the mental conflicts by phantasies and the conception of “autonomous complex” as creative process. Moreover, I investigate the artistic attitudes in accordance to their part they play in conscious or unconscious creative processes.

- Thoughts of Jacques Lacan are fundamental to my analysis. Drawing upon his theory of three orders – imaginary, symbolic and real – I try to show the possibility of a dialogic relationship and the subjects of this dialogue. My theory is that the surrealist artist (painter) is not only the unconscious subject of the language usage to decipher the “Other” but with foreclosure (*forclusion*) tries to reach the traumatic signifiers invading the order of “real”.

Lacan often uses works of art as example to make his complex reasoning more accessible. His analysis of James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* is an exemplary work of supporting his Freudian concept of artistic work as self-protective act to avoid facing the reality and so preventing the emergence of the symptoms of a psychosis. This thought can be traced back to the intimate relationship between unconscious and language (*langage*). In Lacan’s Saussurean theory of language the relationship between the dyadic components of a sign - the signifier and the signified - are not fixed. The creation of meaning is a process since the signifiers are constantly being shifted to the signified. Separation of the signifier from the signified can create the unfixed nature of meanings which does not mean free creation of meaninglessness.

“Button ties” (*points de capiton*) determine the framework of metaphor creation. Moreover, meanings are part of an integral union and meanings only achievable through their relation to other meanings. Those surrealist artists I analyse, as a matter of fact, break the rule of the “symbolic” order and cross its border, however they do know these rules or, let’s say, put them in brackets and so the newly freed signifiers after set new rules become the subjects of meaning creation in the inner dialogue of the surrealist artist.

Other important Lacanian thoughts on art, like anamorphism, gaze or the emptiness stems from the conditions of the existence of the split human psyche. The main cause of this condition is the yearning for the eternally lost object, the *Thing* or *objet petit a*,

the lost Other: the unconscious itself. The phantasy that holds the reality together. controls the desire (*désir*) for the lost object, that is, the desire to fill the emptiness. The unconscious phantasy renders this desire as painful pleasure (*jouissance*) that always cause tragic experience to the subject. In fact, it is not the desire that motivates the creative process but rather this *jouissance* that force the subject to face the “real” again and again.

Some surrealist technique shows similarity to the wrong metaphor creation practice of the psychotic patients. In this practice, the transcendent, the “real” that resists the symbolic meaning creation and becomes apparent in the “symbolic” through the inner dialogue of the artist.

- Julia Kristeva is the last psychoanalytic thinker I like to mention at the psychological level of my analysis. The most important concepts of Julia Kristeva are the “marginal discourse”, the semiotic and the symbolic, and lastly the abject and abjection. Kristeva says that the language of everyday communication has the origin in the suppression of certain elements of the pre-verbal stage (*chora*). She states that in some “marginal discourse” the so-called signifying (*signifiance*) play crucial part. The semiotic is only a modality of the signifying process providing the possibility of lingual expressions not directly referring to the signified by setting the conditions of meaning for communication. The language of poetry also is an example including the works of the surrealist poets. In her opinion, some writer and poet is capable of reaching into a level that forego the preverbal and tetic mind/psyche, however the *abjection* (projection) – result of the *abject* of the artist: the feeling of complete groundless – also does not lead to psychosis, but rather the artwork can be considered as symptom of this psychosis.

## **2. Phenomenological level**

- I analyse Edmund Husserl first to understand the circumstances and possibilities of the techniques and methods of the hypothetical inner dialogue of the artist. I mention and touch upon the conception of perception – relating to phantasy and memory, theory of normal and abnormal, retroactive awakening, image consciousness and inner monologue.

The change of perspective makes it possible to compare experiences of the normal and the phenomenological attitudes that can be seen as a unique dialogue between the parts of the split ego (*Ichspaltung*).

My thesis is that two kind of perception and two kinds of phantasy come into play according to Husserl. The unjudgmental phantasy helps the artist in the discursive and in the neutral attitude. The painter perceives his own phantasmas and artwork in progress as images and replies to them meanwhile due to coming and going affections it becomes an ongoing self-analysis too. In the creative process, the symbolic images and latticework of new associations might appear strange even to the artist, interrupts the train of reflection and makes the artist reinterpret them.

As part of this interpretation, the phenomenon of normal/abnormal and the retroactive waking come to existence. According to my thesis (similarly to attitude change) in the creative process new meaning-connections emerge as contradictory to the known experiences. The painter willingly holds onto these abnormalities in the creative process. The intensity of affections during the interpretative process erupts at a level that brings about the contents of the threshold consciousness. Becoming conscious goes hand in hand with the change and reimagining of the past and present. This retro-activity in the creative process is the fundamentum of this dialogic relationship. The technique of dealing with the reality and its contradictory representations, perceptions exaggerate the retroactivity – as can be seen with the conception of “meaning more” at Husserl. The foundation of this dualistic reality of the artist is that he never cuts the umbilical cord from the reality that implies the presence of the Husserlian perceptive phantasy: phantasy that reimagines the reality.

According to Husserl’s comments on the inner monologue the lone conversation is not a real communication: it lacks information. Since the speaker and the listener are the same person he cannot say anything new to himself. What he is saying he is already aware of. My hypothesis that conveying new information for the surrealist painter is possible through the medium of artwork – presenting meaning through images.

- I emphasise some thoughts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, namely, the “wild” perception and the theory of its expressions. Merleau-Ponty stresses the continuous, coming-to-being nature of perception. One example of this perception is the “wild” perception of the artist; like the art of *Cézanne* who, by dissipating the boundaries between perspectives and eliminating the sharp contrasts, eliminated the distance between the different elements of the painting. This representation is in accordance with the theory of Merleau-Ponty that all objects and meaning are here simultaneously.



For Merleau-Ponty the meanings are “mute” waiting to be unfolded in the conversation. Painting is somehow talking, but unlike talking it is without words (mute). Our analysis focuses on the communication in the creative process. According to Merleau-Ponty the meanings become real through the understanding of the other. Since the everyday communication under rigid rules (*langue*) and the language as its foundation (*parole*) adhere to different rules it can create new meanings in the creative process. In communication new categories are in the making without concrete meaning: the new meaning is created in the hiatus between language (*langue*) and speaking (*parole*). In the surrealist speaking a similar conversion occurs with the artwork acting as mediator. The work growing out of the “wild” perception talks to the painter, the painter in return tries to understand this pre-verbal meaning. Beyond the evident meanings of the imagery there always a surplus that in this context we can consider as expressions of the unconscious as indirect language.

### **3. Hermeneutic level**

After short introductory notes on the theories of Schleiermacher, Panofsky, Gombrich and Goodman on art and literary text I turn my attention to Hans-Georg Gadamer and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

- Gadamer sees the reception of an artwork as a play between the work of art and the recipient to unfold the very own meaning of the artwork. This ongoing game of question and answer results in new understandings that carry forward the self-understanding of the recipient as result of these novelties. The recipient can thanks to this re-cognition (*Wiedererkennung*) comprehend the work of art as it is and understand “what it means or says”. The work of art stands there as puzzle before the recipient; no answer to this puzzle can be final due to the creative process of the recipient.

The poetry has an important status in Gadamer`s hermeneutics for the work of art (text) can not only make the meaning more picturesque but provide more precise understanding. My thesis that the artist is in dialogue with his work and himself, but this is inner dialogue in the creative process manifested in the creation of the work of art. The artwork and the artist face each other in the inner dialogue. The questions and answers emerging in the dialogue participate in the creation of the new artefact.

Suppressed traumas expressed in the creative process can be revelation to the artist and ask for further answers.

- Analysing the late Wittgenstein “language-game concept” I conclude that the inner monologue of the surrealist painter is some sort of language-game. Its uniqueness lies in the mutually provocative usage of images and words together. I hypothesise that the painter and his artefact express themselves through differing language-game that is got interpreted in the inner dialogue. The language of the painter has the characteristics of the private language: its incomprehensible to others. I argue that the language of the artwork inherently consists of an incomprehensible surplus that resist interpretation. Other significant conception from Wittgenstein is the “aspect change”. In this phenomenon a word or image shows itself from another angle (duck-rabbit image) while maintain its original form. Wittgenstein stresses that this new aspect does not require interpretation: `I simply see it different` or recognise a new meaning in the word. For the surrealist painter not only sees these changes but part of this creative process. New aspects can erupt in the creative process calling for interpretation and as artistic *techné* can create new aspects. In this case it can be considered as remedy to mitigate the tension between reality and the images of phantasy.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Summarising my analysis, I suggest that in the surrealist creative process there is an opportunity of an inner dialogue that can convey new information. The unique nature of the creative process of the surrealist artist is the fundamental basis for this dialogic relationship maintaining the tension between real and transcendental, conscious and unconscious, word and image.

## VII. Publications related to the subject

MTMT: 10035623

- Horváth Henrietta, Horváth Lajos: Az imagináció határmezsgyéin.  
*Imágó Budapest.* 23:(1), pp. 63-76. (2012)
- Horváth Henrietta: A szabadság megjelenése az alkotófolyamatban. Dalí forma nélküli szabadsága: illúzió és valóság határán.  
*Nagyerdei Almanach: Bölcséleti évkönyv.* 3:(5), pp. 25-52. (2012)
- Horváth Henrietta: A szándék szerepe az alkotói és a befogadói tevékenységben.  
*Különbség.* 13:(1), pp. 189-204. (2013)
- Horváth Henrietta: Láthatatlan a vásznon: A festői művészi világ kifejezései.  
*Kellék.* 51. pp. 87-105. (2014)
- Horváth Henrietta: Festménybe zárt hazugságok mint a művészi valóság pillanatképei. In Laczkó Sándor (szerk.): *Lábjegyzetek Platónhoz. A hazugság.* Szeged, Pro Philosophia Szegediensi Alapítvány, 2014, 194-203.
- Horváth Henrietta: A prerefektív észlelés megnyilvánulásai a festői alkotófolyamatban.  
*Korunk (Kolozsvar).* 3:(11), pp. 84-90. (2014)
- Horváth Henrietta: Szimbólum és reprezentáció René Magritte művészetében.  
*Korunk (Kolozsvar).* 26:(9), pp. 98-104. (2015)
- Horváth Henrietta: A többlet megragadása a szürrealista festészetben.  
*Alföld: Irodalmi, művészeti és kritikai folyóirat.* 68:(8), pp. 50-57. (2017)
- Horváth Henrietta: A szürrealista festészet mint nyelvjáték.  
*Korunk (Kolozsvar).* 29:(3), pp. 86-96. (2018)

### Other publication:

- Horváth Lajos, Gáspár László Ervin, Horváth Henrietta: Idegenség és idegen nyelv az *Érkezés* című filmben  
*Lege Artis Medicinae.* 27:(06-07), pp. 273-282. (2017)