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A Philosophical view of the Problem of Symbolic Form

Abstract

Even if it is a tangible, symbol belongs to the domain of the image because we experience it with sight. It is precisely this original domain that is the link that completes communication, because after all, before language there was an image provided to us by the organ of sight, the eye. We first saw, and only later adopted the language which proves the analogy of the connection of these two forms of communication. What we cannot say with language, we try to convey with a picture. Every culture complemented this communication problem with a symbol that sought to touch the sacred, the unspeakable. At first glance sometimes by a different form, but with a common essence.

The course of the development of the symbolic form, what it represented and how man used it in the past and how it is used now, seeks to show within the opinions and research of individual authors who have dealt with the problem of symbolic form.

This is also the introductory part of the doctoral thesis "Sculpture as a symbolic form in the artistic-ritual act - Nexus" which sought to prove the universality of the individual creative process as a form that allows man to self-knowledge.

Key words: *symbol, symbolic form, communication, forms of communication, form, philosophical view.*

1. Symbolic form as a consequence of the theogonical process: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling

The first part of the dissertation presents my reflections on symbolic forms as ideas used by consciousness on its cyclical journey, which Wilhem Joseph Schelling incorporated in his two-volume work *The Philosophy of Mythology*. Due to the topic, universal symbols, the focus will be on the simple and unifying perceptions of consciousness, which Schelling believes to have existed in humankind before the completion of the ancient Greek mythology. Aided by the rational mind, consciousness perceives more details, thus moving away from the source. The aim is to tackle the first part of the Schelling's analysis, where consciousness is at the very beginning of creating mythology, that is, closer to the source, the origin. Consciousness that is closer to the origin senses the entirety, the unity.

Schelling argues that it is a fallacy to separate, forcibly and ignorantly, monotheism from polytheism, as god is in existence, and what exist is the essence of that god, which need not be himself, which means that god is like a spirit that may or may not be in essence. The laws of nature that are manifest and active in essence are, like in ancient Greek times, personalised gods that man interacts with while existing in essence. The aim of the man's journey is therefore to surpass essence and reach god himself, the oneness. It is precisely the function of mythology to bring awareness to what exists, established relationships and possibilities for action within essence. These possibilities are potencies that Schelling terms the universe, meaning a 'reversal of unity',¹⁵⁴ which is not the material world, but still the world of 'pure potencies', a purely spiritual world. Schelling notes that the theogonical process in consciousness has an objective meaning, but then this term also has to have a meaning irrespective of human conscience. God exists in all potencies, a double will that creates tension without entering it, seeking only unity, which is his aim. Schelling emphasises that in the Greek use of language mythology and theogony have the same meaning.

In the first volume of *The Philosophy of Mythology*, Schelling assigns mythology the value of objective truth. This objectivity is of a completely different kind from any scientific or religious system.¹⁵⁵ It abides by the cosmic law, has a general content and truly objective character. In the theogonical process of developing mythology, the first assumption is potential monotheism, coupled with the essence of man, which lays the foundation for the theogonical movement of consciousness. Monotheism is justified by using the term the highest cause and by considering that god is one and that there are no other gods besides him. However, Schelling remarks that there is a creative force and a disintegrative force, so that God seems to have a twofold character, embracing the one who creates and keeps order and the one who disintegrates and returns everything to the potential state, the state of chaos. He goes on to emphasise that polytheism does not actually exist, because

¹⁵⁴ '...universe (as this word means nothing else but a reversal of unity)', F.W.J. Schelling, *Filozofija mitologije [The Philosophy of Mythology]*, Vol. I, Demetra, Zagreb, 1997, p.76.

¹⁵⁵ In his lectures Schelling refers to the objectivity of mythology that is substantially different from religious or scientific systems, *Filozofija mitologije, Vol. I, Demetra, Zagreb, 1997.*

pagan gods acquired meaning inadvertently and are not real gods, but personified natural forces. He defines god as essence, the very existence, while also stating the need for philosophy to extract this god from essence that is identical to substance and introduce him to essence that is different from substance. This essence still returns to substance, which is its vital, but not real essence. Therefore, the very essence, which is claimed to be god, is not what it already is or can be. 'God is, in this sense, outside or beyond essence, but he is not only by himself free from essence, pure substance, he is also free with regard to essence, that is, he is a pure freedom to be or not to be, to accept or not to accept essence, as expressed by the phrase 'I will be present as the one who will be there'.¹⁵⁶ Accordingly, the whole essence is just the essence of god, which is, Schelling argues, usually termed pantheism. True pantheism means nothing else but to overcome it and reach god, the unity. Schelling, accordingly, concludes that the principle of pantheism is only an element of monotheism.

If god really exists, he can only exist as all-one, argues Schelling.

Schelling wonders whether monotheism is in any original way related to human consciousness. In the theogonical process, which is the divine universe, the absolute spirit is materialised through lively concatenation. This spirit does not need such materialisation for itself and such movement is useless for it. Something outside itself has to be willing to undertake the process, so that it is also the process of creation, where potencies are considered as 'the causes of the potential genesis of previously non-existent things'.

Schelling explains that the process begins with the divine will that places that which need not be, as a means. This means, which is the first to enter essence influences pure existence by excluding it and placing it as that which needs to be; returning to non-essence the means leaves a void, which must be filled by the third. According to the Pythagoreans, 1 – *causa materialis* (that out of which a thing comes to be) is in the process altered, transformed into non-essence, pure possibility. This happens in 2 – *causa efficiens* (that which brings about the effect), and in 3 – *causa finalis* becomes, ends or comes to standing. In order to function harmoniously, these three causes are determined by *causa causarum*, the cause of the causes.¹⁵⁷ Schelling affirms that the deity and that which makes up these three potencies are one and the same. He calls these potencies causes or principles, as the possibilities of a future essence different from god and, in the process after putting into operation, essence equal to god, which needs yet to be produced. Schelling demonstrates by this process that the theogonical process is essentially a creative process, concluding that true monotheism evidently comprises free creation. This process determines human consciousness as the aim and purpose of the whole natural process, where it reaches the moment when potencies have again achieved unity. This unity will be achieved as a consequence of the process in which the means that

¹⁵⁶ Schelling understands god as the spirit 'which can be or cannot be, which can be externalised or not externalised.', *Filozofija mitologije, Volume I*, Demetra, Zagreb, 1997, p. 28.

¹⁵⁷ *Causa causarum*, the cause of the causes, is a Pythagorean term for god. F.W.J. Schelling, *Filozofija mitologije*, Demetra, Zagreb, 1997, p. 95.

abolishes god has again been transformed into god. Schelling emphasises that what is important in man is consciousness that returns to god through the process. This constant movement of human consciousness is not accidental, as it is conditioned on some power of force, with the original state of consciousness being the source of explanation for mythology. Furthermore, Schelling explains mythology as 'the outcome of a process that man's consciousness becomes entangled with in the first transfer to reality, a process that is only the repetition of the general theogonical movement.'¹⁵⁸ The process takes place only in human consciousness and manifests itself through its changes that are considered as ideas, while it is real and objective towards its causes. A complete understanding of mythology depends on a higher stage of development of human consciousness. Blessedness is not given to humans, but the divinity intentionally puts a human being into duality to achieve that blessedness or to lose it. This view can also be found in the prehistory of the Old Testament and in the legends of ancient civilisations. It is necessary to use the will to come out of the ostensible possibility and enter the possibility of being.

Schelling emphasises that the Greek mythology is the end of the mythology origination process. Mythological concepts emerge from inner consciousness, having been derived from the same source as the revelation of biblical truths, therefore from the source of the thing itself. He quotes the example of the myth of Persephone, which hides the keys to the mythology and its origins in the deepest meaning of human survival and consciousness.¹⁵⁹ This is the potential of pre-consciousness, innocence that does not recognise sexual duality. This assigns meaning to Greek mysteries as the science of gods, albeit the esoteric, secret science of mythology itself, communicated only to the initiated, which is disclosed at the end of the consciousness development process. At the end of the process, consciousness is returned to potency, its latency, spirituality.

Astral religion, as the first phase of the mythological process and the first polytheism, was the oldest religion based on realistic foundations, rather than on subjective notions, concludes Schelling. Gods were believed to be stars. Man worshipped celestial bodies, especially the sun and the moon, because he was aware that he depended on them. Rather than the outer body of a star, its internal principle was worshipped, its true self, purely astral, the true star. It was not nature that was worshipped in them, but that which was beyond nature. Therefore, the gods that emerged to enable consciousness to visualise its speculations actually constituted one god divided into multitude. This means that the worship comprised a single true essence, rather than the one manifest in multitude. What matters here is the relation of consciousness to the principle. Astral religion, which Schelling designates as Zabism, was the religion of the part of humanity that at the time did not yet transition to the

158 F.W.J. Schelling, *Filozofija mitologije*, Demetra, Zagreb, 1997.

159 '...Persephone is nothing else but a possibility to be different, which has not yet shown itself to the will and is not even aware of itself as the opposite, that is, female – while it is potency in the state of self-unawareness, it is, as is usually put, in the state of innocence, as the male and the female are not separated (they are indistinguishable). The innocence that does not know anything about sexual duality is virginity – virginity is not specifically feminine (on the contrary, it can be attributed to the male gender, too), but denotes sexual indecisiveness.' F.W.J. Schelling, *Filozofija mitologije, Volume II*, Demetra, Zagreb, 1997, p. 131.

historical life and the oldest system of the yet undivided humankind. **Being with consciousness focused on pure essence, the one, left no room for divisions within humanity.**

The further development of mythology involved presenting the powers of certain natural phenomena as personal. The personification started from the most familiar phenomena and forces, primarily the sky.¹⁶⁰ Schelling emphasises that the first religion of humanity, the worship of the sky, reflected religious conscientiousness as a whole. In addition to the worship of celestial bodies, serving the elements also had a spiritual meaning and they were not personified, just like the stars.¹⁶¹ The Persians later tried to reach the god and the unity through Mithra, but that was no longer an astral religion, and, especially after the dualist concept of good and evil, the wholeness was left too far behind and breeding ground created for the further development of mythology. Consciousness continued to create the whole constellations of deities, which one notices by comparing the theological symbolism of ancient civilisations. The same principles were given different names, the most illustrative example being the relation between the Greek and the Roman mythology: Zeus – Jupiter, Hermes – Mercury, Athens – Minerva, Afrodite – Venus. This leads to the conclusion that the whole civilisations based their cultures on elaborate symbolic and theological systems (Egyptians, Persians, Chinese, Indians, Greeks, Romans, Aztecs, Mayas, Incas ...). Schelling notes that the theogonical movement was brought from its origin, astral religion, to the peak of mythology: the Hellenic mythology and its esoteric birth of gods. He considers the Hellenic polytheism to be the necessary transition to a higher, purer cognition.

The continuation of this process can be observed in science, where the rational mind had to continue its journey after the experiment of Christianity as a religion that tried to bring back man closer to god, the origin, through faith. It seems that, setting aside individual journeys, the collective journey of humankind has last until awareness is raised of the consequences, the final boundaries of the purely rational comprehension and attempt to establish control over man and his world. It remains to be seen whether this civilizational journey will end by harmonising with the big organism of universe or the wish for power that is in disbalance with consciousness will lead us to the end owing to an error with major consequences. This collective journey is currently materialised in the need to produce the technology that uses and analyses principles – laws in order to create an alternative virtual world supervised by artificial intelligence. Therefore, we are still on the same path of the rational mind leading our conscientiousness into the individual. On the other hand, the control of the positions of power happens by means of the technological apparatus, which provides for a virtual community that continues to have a magical impact on consciousness as it is of the

160 'However, even if we suppose that this personification could have accidentally started from the sky, whether by representing as gods the celestial bodies or forces that move and impel them, there would be no stopping there.' Druga knjiga: Mitologija, F.W.J. Schelling, *Filozofija mitologije*, Demetra, Zagreb, 1997, p.157.

161 Schelling cites Herodotus who sees that which is not yet mythological in the Persians' religion and says: '...at mountain peaks they make sacrifices to the celestial revolution, without any knowledge of temples, altars, images of gods and, in general, god sin a human way...' Druga knjiga: Mitologija, F.W.J. Schelling, *Filozofija mitologije*, Demetra, Zagreb, 1997, p.167.

archetypal origin. Subversive action is also possible in the virtual community if control is avoided. However, without an intuitive insight in the unity of the world, which would connect all knowledge and amalgamate it in action in accordance with that knowledge, a qualitative step forward for humankind cannot be made.

2. Philosophy of the symbolic and mythical: Ernst Cassirer

The world of symbols and symbolic forms was also explored by another philosopher, Ernst Cassirer. In his work *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, he explores the possibilities and role of language as well as its powerlessness as regards experience. In the second volume of his work, entitled *Mythical Thinking*, Cassirer seeks to demonstrate the role of symbolic language in human cognition.

In the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer alleges that Plato's theory of ideas is the first explicit form of expressing the fundamental spiritual assumption of the overall philosophical understanding and explanation of the world. Plato was the first to interpret the notion of ideas and the meaning of it, although explanations to this effect were sought from the Eleatics, Pythagoreans and Democritus. In contrast with the mythical pre-Socratic understanding, Plato offers a dialectical conception of existence. From that point on, each new movement and observation in the historical development of idealism generates a new moment, new intellectual symbols are created as the fundamental terms of each science that asks new questions and formulates new solutions. In addition to intellectual synthesis through a system of scientific notions, the entirety of spiritual life comprises other methods of formation. Their aim is not logically determined and they are not subject to the laws of logic. Symbolic creations as the own perception of reality create art, science, myth and religion (Cassirer). Spirit achieves self-awareness in various ways. It is expressed through language, science, myth and art components of the culture, with the result that the passive world of beliefs becomes spirit expressed in the world.

Language that enables reflection gives rise to philosophical reasoning. The meaning of words is not a consequence of the free activity of spirit. The word is not a spiritual symbol of essence, but its real part. In the mythical perception of language, the name of a thing is also its essence, so that the word has magical characteristics. The one who knows the name owns the thing.

The Greek philosophy aims to explain rationally the knowledge of the mythical world: the term 'logos' is akin to the mythical concept of the 'dignity and omnipotence of the celestial word'¹⁶². The word limits the object it denotes and defines it unilaterally. In order to achieve better understanding, the term comprised by the word needs to be juxtaposed with the opposite term. One recognises here the Heraclitus' interpretation of the harmony of the cosmos as the unity of opposites: 'God is

162 Ernst Cassirer, *Filozofija simboličkih oblika, Jezik [The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Language], Volume I*, Dnevnik, Književna zajednica Novog sada, Novi Sad, 1985, p. 63.

day-night, winter-summer, war-peace, plenty and hunger: but he changes like fire, which, when mixed with incense smoke, can be called whatever one pleases, one way or another.¹⁶³

Cassirer perceives the Heraclitus' metaphysics as the unity that taught about the identity and contrast between the word and essence. 'The identity that, according to Heraclitus, exists between the wholeness of the language and the wholeness of the mind, Plato applies to the relationship of a single word to its intellectual content.'¹⁶⁴

The arbitrariness typical of the use of words calls into question the objective exactness and necessity of reasoning and its content. This is very convenient for sophism, which relativizes all knowledge. The Socratic induction referred to the constant identical conceptual form as the original form hiding behind the indefinite form of the word – *eidos*, which established the possibility of verbal communication as thought. Cassirer points out that in the Seventh Letter Plato acknowledges the cognitive value of language in the methodological sense and its value as the starting point of cognition, but nothing more than that. He believes that language has a more changeable character and encompasses less of the actual content of the idea than sensory perceptions. Plato understands language as the 'representation', the rendition of a specific meaning by a sensuous sign. Philosophy cannot find an analogy for the relationship between the 'word' and the 'sense', for the relationship between the 'sign' and the 'meaning' it denotes. The central idea of the Plato's theory of ideas is the one of 'participation'. In 'participation' the content is, in fact, both the moment of identity and the moment without identity, it comprises the necessary connection and unity of elements, but also their sharp principled separation and differentiation. The ideal meaning, which Plato considers to have the physical-sensory form of the word, cannot exist within the boundaries of language.

Cassirer also emphasises that his process of the education of language shows how we clarify and organise the chaos of immediate impressions by 'naming' it and thus imbuing it with the function of linguistic expression and linguistic reasoning. In the world of linguistic laws, the world of impressions acquires a new content because it obtains a new spiritual articulation. Because of their contemplative quality, they are placed above the sensory. In this way language becomes a fundamental spiritual means, facilitating progress from the mere world of emotions to the world of perceptions and representation.

However, if we believe that the real and important task of language is to express reality in individual feelings and perceptions in the medium of verbal communication, we will realise that every speech is incapable of performing this task. When language attempts to compete with emotions and perceptions in this sense, it is immediately proven powerless.

163 Ernst Cassirer, *Filozofija simboličkih oblika, Jezik, I dio*, Dnevnik, Književna zajednica Novog sada, Novi Sad, 1985, p. 64.

164 Ernst Cassirer, *Filozofija simboličkih oblika, Jezik, I dio*, Dnevnik, Književna zajednica Novog sada, Novi Sad, 1985, p. 66.

Cassirer maintains that that language develops through three stages: the mimetic, analogical and purely symbolic. The beginnings of verbal communication are related to the sphere of mimetic representation and denotation, like the roots of the language of expressive movements. The voice is, logically, in the vicinity of a sensory perception, so that language is not satisfied with a general denotation, but each nuance of the phenomenon is accompanied by a specific vocal nuance. The assumption that the denoted perception is related to the oldest words is vital for the explanation of the genesis of language, states Cassirer. The analogy of forms achieved in the interaction of sounds and the denoted content enables the coordination of sequences whose content significantly varies. Irrespective of whether language starts from the mimetic or analogical expression, it constantly strives to broaden the boundaries of the particular expression and achieve a universal meaning. In this way, it gets rid of the mimetic and analogical expression and transitions to the symbolic sphere as the bearer of a new and deeper spiritual content.

As regards culture, Cassirer asserts that in the process of formation and education it increasingly removes us from primeval life. The words of language, the images of myth, art in the intellectual symbols of cognition as the products of spirit also confine it. Cassirer proposes distancing from mere designation and recording and returning to the original sphere of intuitive viewing. He assigns the philosophy of culture with the task of proving the unity of spirit as opposed to its multiple manifestations. This is another reference to the Heraclitus' metaphysics and the assumption of the harmony of the cosmos as the 'unity of opposites'.

In Volume 2 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, titled *Mythical Thinking*, Cassirer inseparably associates the issue of the origin of myth with the issue of the origin of language, positioning them together and interrelated in the unity of mythical consciousness. He explains the magical worldview as 'the translation and transposition of the realm of subjective emotions and instincts to sensory-objective existence'.¹⁶⁵ The soul, rather than being a substance separate from the body, is life equal to the body and inseparably linked with it. The phenomenon of death does not break the link between the body and the soul, having all authority over the physical existence it is involved in its destiny. The boundary between life and death remains fluid for mythical thinking. Death is in terms of myth only a transition to another form of existence. This existence is the prolonged existence on the sensory-earthly plane. The soul, with all its characteristics, remains linked to the material world.

Cassirer notices the precise systematic differentiation of individual souls and their functions in the Egyptian religion. 'In addition to the elements constituting the body – the flesh, bones, blood and muscles – there are other, finer elements, also still imagined as material, which constitute various souls of a man. In addition to *ka*, which is the spiritual double that resides in a man's living body and remains with his corpse as a kind of guardian spirit after his death, there is another 'soul', *ba*,

165 Ernst Cassirer, *Filozofija simboličkih oblika, Mitsko mišljenje, II dio*, Dnevnik, Književna zajednica Novog sada, Novi Sad, 1985, p. 155.

which has a different meaning and form of existence, and flies from the body at the moment of death shaped as a bird, wandering freely and only occasionally visiting *ka* and the corpse in the grave. The literature also mentions the third 'soul', *akh*, which is depicted as indestructible and immortal, the closest in meaning to our idea of 'spirit'¹⁶⁶.

As regards the birth of the soul through initiation, an interesting example is the initiation of boys into manhood practised by a tribe in the hinterland of Liberia. There is a belief that boys are killed by the forest spirit as soon as they enter the holy grove in which the initiation takes place. By this act, they are awoken to their new life and reborn in spirit. These initiations are believed to be mythical events and are separated from life by magical customs. These events are not part of the evolutionary development, but mark the obtaining of a new 'soul'. The Egyptian texts contain the oldest historical evidence of such initiations as transitions to a new ethical form of the self. The Egyptian belief in the soul assumes the continued existence of its material part. The care for the soul of a dead man is manifested in caring for the mummy. As there are three souls, the Egyptians express this moment in the form of its cult. The religious idea rises from the material concrete corporeality, with which the cut was originally connected, to the pure form of the image. Besides the mummy, which guarantees preservation, the sculpture also proved to be a successful instrument to achieve immortality. The Egyptian visual art arose from this religious perception.

As regards the mythic time, Cassirer believes it to be defined by 'sacred days', feasts that deliver the 'self' to the present, past and future through co-belonging and interdependence. In the mythical consciousness there is no limit between the image and the thing, the demonstrated and the real, the sphere of death and the sphere of life, essence and non-essence, everything is fused in one common essence. Nature and truth are merged.

The man's ascension from the sphere of magic to the sphere of religion, from fear of demons to faith in gods enables him to understand both his external and his internal world in a new spiritual form. The Greeks invested strong efforts into the rationalisation of the ancient mythical knowledge. Plato in *Phaedo* views the soul as the harmony of the body. The soul begins to be viewed in the idea of measure, logical and ethical order. The number thus becomes the master of cosmic existence and, consequently, of the divine and the demonic. This was an attempt at overcoming the mythical-demonic through the law expressed in the number. In the Greek philosophy, ethics supplements this theoretical overcoming of the mythical. 'Starting with the Heraclitus' attitude that the man's demon is his character, this development continued to the times of Democritus and Socrates. This relation may be the one that completely illustrates a special meaning and sound characteristic of Socrates' *daeimonium* and his term *eudaimonia*'.¹⁶⁷ *Eudaimonia* is based on a new form of knowledge discovered by Socrates. 'It is attained once the soul is no longer only a natural potency, when it

¹⁶⁶ Ernst Cassirer, *Filozofija simboličkih oblika, Mitsko mišljenje*, II dio, Dnevnik, Književna zajednica Novog sada, Novi Sad, 1985, p. 161.

¹⁶⁷ Ernst Cassirer, *Filozofija simboličkih oblika, Mitsko mišljenje*, II dio, Dnevnik, Književna zajednica Novog sada, Novi Sad, 1985, p. 168.

is understood as a moral subject'.¹⁶⁸ Man is released of his fear of demons, of the unknown; he is no longer ruled by the dark force, but capable of shaping his existence based on a clear insight, by knowledge and volition. Through the idea of self-responsibility, man acquires his true self. 'The self feels and knows itself only if it sees itself as a member of a community, connected with others in the unity of one group, one tribe. It is only in this unity and by means of it that the self owns itself; its own existence and life in all its manifestations is connected, as if with some invisible magical ties, with the life of the collectivity encompassing it'.¹⁶⁹

Upon reading Cassirer's three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, one finds it easy to distinguish the contemporary 'ideological mythologisation' from the prehistoric times of the mythical consciousness. The first thing we notice is that the mythical conscience requires a community that a subject feels connected as one with, breathing along the rhythms of the universe. The contemporary society is divided into various vested interest groups. Certain ideas are lived as lifestyles, changing with the change of worldviews or fashion. Subcultures emerge in response to the shallowness of culture, which is fragmented in its essential components (philosophy, religion, science and art). Art is becoming elitist and turning into a technical-estheticized support to science. By limitless denotation, science is trying to control nature, but fails to reach the original causes and seeks the formula for eternal life through the 'cyborgisation' of human body. The fear of death has been increasing. The subversive thought of philosophers, writers and social theorists, having exhausted political ideologies, is re-examining the issue of human soul and, in terms of ideas, often seeks them in a period much earlier than that pre-Socrates era. Since the development of the civil society and the emergence of sophists, the subject has been less and less perceived as part of the cosmos; while affirming its ideas and striving to individual power, the subject abuses language, manipulating the masses. There is neither collective consciousness nor will for original life, which calls for focus on individual intuitive cognition. This intuitive cognition would presume the linguistic and corporal speech as the openness of the subject, 'testifying'. The 'testifying' could be perceived as 'the memory of the soul', as discussed by Plato, the striving of the soul to return to the origin. This idea creates a possibility for intuitive cognition to open a new chapter for perception, which would renew the language and therefore also the 'cosmic event' in the human key.

168 Ernst Cassirer, *Filozofija simboličkih oblika, Mitsko mišljenje*, II dio, Dnevnik, Književna zajednica Novog sada, Novi Sad, 1985, p. 168.

169 Ernst Cassirer, *Filozofija simboličkih oblika, Mitsko mišljenje*, II dio, Dnevnik, Književna zajednica Novog Sada, Novi Sad, 1985, p. 171.

3. Work of art as a symbol and the opening of the being as truth: Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger's collection of papers *Forest Paths*, published in 1949, contains an essay on the origin of the work of art. Heidegger concludes at the very beginning of the essay that art no longer has any connection with reality.¹⁷⁰ He goes on to state that the essence of art shows what the work of art is. In addition to being an objectified thing, the work of art is an allegory, a symbol. It is a thing with its core of collected features. It has the characteristics of 'presence'¹⁷¹, the essence of the being. He explains and elaborates that the thing consists of the substance necessary for artistic formation. He seeks the material presence of the thing whose essence must be unconcealed.¹⁷² The work of art must allow for the opening of the essence in its truth 'into what and how it is', which leads to the conclusion that the essence of art is : 'the self-positioning of the truth of the being into the work of art'.¹⁷³ He considers such art to be beautiful because it creates beauty while not being beautiful itself, explaining his thesis by the conclusion that beauty is related to esthetics and truth to logic. Placing the truth of the being into the work of art signifies the emergence of reality through art. The work of art discloses the truth of the being, opens the essence of the being.

Heidegger concludes that artworks exhibited in museums have been removed from their real space and time in which they were created. Heidegger terms the time-space in which the truth of the being was being uncovered through the work of art the work's essence. The artistic drive does not reach the work's essence, but only the object's essence. The positioning of the work as a sculpture or a piece of architecture in its place differs from the positioning as consecration. Consecration is an act of making something sacred, disclosing the sacred and inviting the presence of god. This is the event of the opening of the world in which the work's essence is precisely the establishment of a world. This world cannot be seen as an object, but rather represents putting everything created into a living relationship, an arrangement.¹⁷⁴ In establishing one world and producing the ground, Heidegger sees two important features in the work's essence. This happening is the unconcealedness of the being, the play of the being where truth must be obtained as a whole, that is, pass from its concealedness to unconcealedness. The existence of truth as unconcealedness is a way of the manifestation of beauty.¹⁷⁵ Heidegger reflects on the nature of truth and its potential or even necessary manifestation through art. Creation is production. It is important for the work of art to express the unconcealedness

170 'Art – this is now a mere word to which nothing real corresponds any longer.', Martin Heidegger, *Izvor umjetničkog djela (The Origin of the Work of Art)*, AGM, Zagreb, 2010, p. 9.

171 Heidegger explains: '...the Greek fundamental experience of the essence of the being in terms of presence', Martin Heidegger, *Izvor umjetničkog djela*, AGM, Zagreb, 2010, p. 21.

172 'The unconcealedness of the being was termed *aletheia* by the Greeks.', Martin Heidegger, *Izvor umjetničkog djela*, AGM, Zagreb, 2010, p. 49.

173 Martin Heidegger, *Izvor umjetničkog djela*, AGM, Zagreb, 2010, p. 49.

174 'The world is always that which is non-objective, to which we are subjected as long as the path of the birth and death, blessing and curse keeps us removed in essence. If the world is opened, all things obtain their moment of delay and urgency, their distance and closeness, their width and tightness.' Martin Heidegger, *Izvor umjetničkog djela*, AGM, Zagreb, 2010, p. 67.

175 'Beauty is a way for truth to exist as unconcealedness.', Martin Heidegger, *Izvor umjetničkog djela*, AGM, Zagreb, 2010, p. 91.

of the being and not that the artist is a great master. The circumstances, the artist and the course of creation must remain unknown, what matters is the impact of unconcealedness, truth being discovered. The more of essence is disclosed in the work of art, the more amazing and lonesome it is. Therefore, in order for it to reach the openness, a creator is required. The creator also protects the work, because it must live in the openness through which the essential is manifested. Such life is volition, resulting from the experience of reasoning in essence and time, alleges Heidegger. This volition resulting from experience places man in abandoning immersion in the purity of essence. This means the overcoming of the own self, by putting in the position of openness of the being by the work that is thus brought into law. This knowledge gained by experience of a man is thus manifested in the truth of the work. Therefore, the definition of art is placing truth in the work, which is why it is the source and man the creator of the work, artist. Furthermore, the work of art and the artist are together in the essence of art, which is then 'the self-putting of truth in the work.'¹⁷⁶

Therefore, based on the Heidegger's elaboration, one could conclude that the work of art is a symbol of a condition. This condition is the openness of the being in essence, of the man who testifies to the truth of that condition as a consequence of life in openness. The consciousness of man records the perception of that which emerges as truth by image or script, or, in a simpler geometrical form, as a symbol.

4. Art and cult: Alois Halder

At one point in his search for the meaning of art, Alois Halder concludes: 'Art is a successful revelation of that which is presence, where this revelation is neither reality itself, nor essence itself. Presence is an essential reality or real essence. Art is a successful fight for real essence or essential reality.'¹⁷⁷ The subject aims to disclose that perception, but the subject is always part of a community. This community has its beliefs, religion and cult. The artist's perception is therefore realised within the community and its cult plays, feasts and celebrations. According to Halder, if historical sciences claim that art in early communities was almost identical with religion and its cult component, there has to be a link between modern art and religious cult.¹⁷⁸

In the the early history art, myth was not a pattern, but 'a perceptive performance, the action of the mythical word', mythical event, sacred play, that is, the real condition of what historically is the condition of the world. In the beginning, art was cult, the celebration of transforming the profane reality into mythical reality, states Halder. Dance, drama, music and visual arts are part of the mythical cult that tries to imitate the cosmic order, its play. Halder asks the following question:

176 Martin Heidegger, *Izvor umjetničkog djela*, AGM, Zagreb, 2010, p. 125.

177 Alois Halder, *Umjetnost i kult [Art and Cult]*, AGM, Zagreb, 2011, p. 71.

178 '... and only with regard to how and why esthetics and the philosophy of art at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries addressed the issue of the relationship between art and cult.', Alois Halder, *Umjetnost i kult*, AGM, Zagreb, 2011, p. 74.

‘What does art as a product of perception produce at present time?’¹⁷⁹

Art is the product of perception, but the work of art depends on what perception and its essence are. ‘Perception is presence.’¹⁸⁰ The essence of perception in the art of the ancient peoples is myth. The mythical reality is the sacred reality, the true reality, truth beyond the profane reality. Myth is the ‘law of reality’, the sacred reality in the sacred word. Art performs myth in the celebration of pre-occurrence as the law of that reality, states Halder. The word is not a ‘pure acoustic signal’, but the presence of pre-occurrence in its truth. Halder wonders whether myth is the original poetry and poetic language the earliest art.

Myth and cult are closely connected, inseparable. Myth is, therefore, as pre-occurrence, fulfilled in the man’s cult activity. The human activity is the event of pre-exemplary cosmic occurrence. This is a symbolic action of the penetration of truth into reality, the meeting of the sacred and the profane. The symbol enables the transfer of the sacred, the truth. The cult places then enable the symbolic transformation of time and space into the eternal present, cosmic event. This world needs to be replicated and is repeatedly invoked in the cult event of the community. The mythical event that is embodied by the cult is called memory. Finally, the cult assigns meaning to the profane reality.

Ethnology and the science of religion, as modern scientific disciplines, are aware both of the analogy and the difference between art and religion. In the beginning, there was a unity of art and cult.

The philosophy of art claims that art is historical because it constantly manifests ‘perception in its essence’, creating a world based on this perception.¹⁸¹ Examples to this effect can be found in the whole history of civilisations: Persia, Egypt, Greece, and Central America. The early art is therefore the manifestation of the mythical reality, cult. However, Halder notes that the essence of art depends on the type of myth. Myth is every time a different ‘reality’. And this reality influences ‘perception’. If art is originally a mythical cult of the emergence of truth through ‘feast and celebration’¹⁸², as a sacred play, what is its today’s relation to its source, wonders Halder.

Today art is ‘profaned’; for Halder, important questions are whether it has the characteristics of cult and what its community is like. What is art and what does it represent if the presence as essential reality is *demystified*? This remains to be seen.

179 Alois Halder, *Umjetnost i kult*, AGM, Zagreb, 2011, p. 76.

180 Alois Halder, *Umjetnost i kult*, AGM, Zagreb, 2011, p. 124.

181 Alois Halder, *Umjetnost i kult*, AGM, Zagreb, 2011, p. 131.

182 Alois Halder, *Umjetnost i kult*, AGM, Zagreb, 2011, p.. 132.

5. Myth as a communication system in the contemporary world: Roland Barthes

Mythical structures can enter everyday phenomena and objects through the act of naturalisation, where the historical turns into the natural, alleges Barthes in his work *Mythologies*. Conformist politics and mass culture media are tools that create myth in the contemporary world. If we are not familiar with the essence of things, we are always subject to manipulation by way of mystification. In order to gain a real insight, one needs to penetrate below superficial acceptance and undertake research by comparing everyday phenomena and their consequences. The result will always be some kind of manipulation by statement, which is an interest-based message.

The specificity of conditions has a role in turning a statement into myth. It is a message, communication system, labelling method, shape, and most certainly not an object, term or idea, concludes Barthes. Naturally, everything can be myth because the world itself is suggestive. When an object starts to be discussed, the message may be appropriated. It is important who speaks, but also who listens and in which context the object is mentioned, because the result may be either its superficial reading as a communication sign or a symbol connoting a wider essence. He also emphasises that the image and the letter do not address the same type of consciousness. The image imposes the meaning at once, without dispersing it, but as soon as it acquires meaning, it becomes the letter. For Barthes, mythology is part of the science of signs, semiology, established by Saussure in the first part of the 20th century. From him onwards, all contemporary research emphasises the issue of meaning.

The role of the signifier is ambiguous, because it is at the same time the form and the meaning. 'As meaning, the signifier already postulates a reading, I grasp it through my eyes, it has a sensory reality (unlike the linguistic signifier, which is purely mental). As a total of linguistic signs, the meaning of the myth has its own value, it belongs to history. The meaning is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas decisions. When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, history evaporates, only the letter remains.'¹⁸³

Mythical terms are in constant flux, they arise, decompose, change, and disappear. Precisely because they are historical, they are subject to annulment. Myths can be deciphered only by naming concepts. Goodness, mercy, health, humaneness, these are terms from a dictionary, but precisely because of that they are not historical. Myth is a statement chosen by history.¹⁸⁴

Myth transforms meaning into form, thus committing a language-robbery, claims Barthes. Myth never imposes the whole meaning due to the abstractness of its concept.¹⁸⁵ Myth always opens various

¹⁸³ Roland Barthes, *Mitologije [Mythologies]*, Naklada Pelago, Zagreb, 2009, p. 149.

¹⁸⁴ 'Mythical statement is a message. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as a support to mythical speech.', Roland Barthes, *Mitologije*, Naklada Pelago, Zagreb, 2009, p. 143.

¹⁸⁵ Barthes offers the example of the concept of a tree, saying that it is vague and lends itself to multiple contingencies.

meanings. Poetry and the mathematical language put up resistance and are therefore an easy prey for myth. Each myth can include its history and geography, and it matures by spreading.

Myth bases its historical intention in nature, a process that Barthes equates with a process of bourgeois ideology.¹⁸⁶ He points out that the world supplies to myth a historical reality and myth gives in return a natural image of this reality. Myth constituted by the loss of the memory of the origin of things, the loss of the historical character of things. In a dialectical relation between human activities, the world enters language and 'comes out of myth as a harmonious display of essences.'¹⁸⁷

Barthes determines the function of myth is to turn reality inside out, to create sensory absence. It is emptied of history and filled it with nature, which removes from things their human meaning making them signify a human insignificance. Myth makes things innocent, basing them on nature and eternity, without any contradictions. Myth is therefore depoliticized speech, where political is understood as 'the whole of human relations in their whole, social structure, in their power of making the world.'¹⁸⁸

Men depoliticise myth according to their needs, treating it with regard to habit, rather than truth.

Barthes, therefore, concludes that reality is impenetrable and irreducible, and therefore poeticised, while the reality is penetrable for consciousness and therefore ideologised, He does not see a synthesis between ideology and poetry, while he understands poetry as the search for the inalienable meaning of things. .

However, Barthes sees present human alienation as the result of failure to achieve more than an unstable grasp of reality. He emphasises the powerlessness to render the wholeness of the object, because it is both liberated and destroyed when we penetrate it. On the other hand, if we acknowledge its full weight, we mystify it. He considers it necessary to reconcile reality and men, description and explanation, objects and knowledge.

Barthes designates myth as a form of naturalised communication in the contemporary world. In contrast with Schelling and Cassirer, who associate symbol with myth and mythical, Barthes understands myth as a manipulation of signs. Unlike symbols, which are the ideas of human consciousness on its path towards recognising the laws of essence until its return to the origin, signs are used for communication in a technologically objectified world of complicated human

186 'If our society is objectively the privileged field of mythical significations, it is because formally myth is the most appropriate instrument for the ideological inversion which defines this society: at all the levels of human communication, myth operates the inversion of *anti-physis* into *pseudo-physis*. What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality.' Roland Barthes, *Mitologije*, Zagreb, 2009. Naklada Pelago, Zagreb, 2009, p. 168.

187 Roland Barthes, *Mitologije*, Naklada Pelago, Zagreb, 2009, p. 168.

188 Roland Barthes, *Mitologije*, Naklada Pelago, Zagreb, 2009, p. 169.

relationships. This is a major difference in the function between symbol and sign, and, in turn, in the function of myth for the mythical psyche and contemporary psyche. The power of myth is strong in both senses, because it speaks about the archetypal, about what man finds important in relation to the origin or, in the case of contemporary myth, it represents, or assigns the sign the power of a symbol and the archetypal role in the contemporary consumer society. To a man, object or ideology ... so that the sign (with the power of a symbol) as an instrument of myth, provides an aura. Due to the auraticity, the power that an object gains over us, we become worshippers of contemporary myths and enter into a mystifying relationship with people, things and phenomena. The problem lies with the corruption of essence into which we have been drawn, ... the civilizational position in meeting the requirement for the development of the technosphere¹⁸⁹, where free human creativity in the creation of thought and things disappears. It is possible to get elevated, but consciousness must be focused on the essential, common, binding, in order to overcome various manifestations of the individual. This will lead to the reconciliation of reality and men, description and explanation, objects and knowledge, everything that Barthes emphasises as important. There will no longer be any need for the creation of myths, because a proper relation of human essence will be achieved and intuitive life will return.

6. Symbolic form in art as a cultural project: Hans Belting

The way in which cultures incorporate the world into the picture defines their way of thinking. The revolution in the history of viewing was brought about by the discovery of the picture that simulated the view of the spectator, a view in perspective. The painter suggested a worldview, by means of the technique, and this worldview was in fact a scientific conclusion. The real view was considered to be analogous with the picture depicted in perspective. The picture thus started to copy perception.¹⁹⁰ That picture was a cultural technique, with a decisive impact, argues Belting. The view was put into the picture, although this is actually impossible.¹⁹¹ We cannot get rid of that Western

189 'This is not only about the breakup of the until recently existing world of metaphysics. The focus is, on the contrary, on the disintegration of its categories in the process of technogenesis of new worlds. The transformation of the subject into the project causes the whole contemporary history to develop in the sign of projecting the world as a technical matrix. All the stated components of the conceptual framework of completing the essence of contemporary technique denote, therefore, a transfer from the analogous to the digital era. The force, power and rule of the non-material event of 'essence' and 'time' as experience (of the subject as a project) and illusion (of reality as virtuality) now define events in the so-called real life ... This is, on the contrary, about the immanence of posthuman control of the system over its systems.' Žarko Paić, *Treća zemlja (The Third Country)*, Litteris, Zagreb, 2014, p. 19.

190 "...the perspective painting already put forward a requirement that perception be reflected or copied. The iconic view created by perspective is not the view-icon, but the view that became the picture.' Hans Belting, *Firenza i Bagdad: Zapadno-istočna povijest pogleda [Florence and Baghdad: The Western-Eastern History of the View]*, Fraktura, Zagreb, 2010, p. 22.

191 'A picture in perspective, paradoxically, depicts a three-dimensional space on the surface that does not exist in nature. However, that space cannot be separated and placed above the view, because it is in our case the function of the view and not the other way round. The space in perspective is created only in the view and for the view, since it exists only on the surface, which is originally not a space and has no space. Our view sees the physical and spatial, but the perspective symbolises it two-dimensionally, using the screen as a symbol.' Hans Belting, *Firenza i Bagdad: Zapadno-istočna povijest pogleda*, Fraktura, Zagreb, 2010, p. 23.

invention, notwithstanding the criticism. The perspective picture is thus a symbolic form through which the contemporary culture is presented. It is precisely based on Cassirer and its concept of symbolic form as myth and language that Erwin Panofsky establishes the same term in art, with the result that the contemporary art became a symbolic form through perspective. Belting wonders why Panofsky focused on the space, rather than on the view, which had already been discussed in debates on perspective. He claims that the answer again lies with Cassirer, who starts each chapter of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* with an analysis of space and time, following the example of Kant. Cassirer discusses space as the 'world of pure perception' and the necessity for it to be created all over again. However, Panofsky admits, states Belting, that perspective geometry neglects the impact of consciousness on our visual image, in contrast with 'pure image on the retina'. Accordingly, geometrical perspective is the symbol of the view, rather than a means of perception. The culture of Renaissance emphasises the importance of the view of an individual, whose view is placed in the picture like his portrait on the other side, which is also a symbolic form.

The Western man of the New World wanted a new image of himself and his world, which he started to look for, like in reality, in the picture. This is the man who abandons the 'collective condition' of the Middle Ages and seeks new directions.

The narcissistic perspective was also justified by the change of the myth of Narcissus, to whom Belting refers too. The forms and contents from the antiquity were used to as the drivers of the engine to create something new in the Renaissance. Where the form from the antiquity was used, it changed content, and vice versa. The same happened with the myth of Narcissus, which Alberti used for the theory of perspective. By means of the technique of perspective, the new painting establishes our view to the painting, the view of the new Narcissus. From the Renaissance onwards, we analyse our mask, our unconscious, letting it into the world and back to us in the painting that we have painted or through the consequences of the world we have created. The new view of the world and ourselves, as well as of ourselves within the world, leads to the new Narcissus. This new Narcissus likes his reflection in the mirror.¹⁹²

Belting also notices the opposed use of the term window in the Western and Islamic culture. While the view within the painting is in the West suggested as realistic and yet very personal, the Islamic culture sets up a grid that is impermeable to the view, but permeable to light. Light penetrates the geometrical pattern of *mashrabiya* and creates a play of light and shade. This arabesque made of light and shade has a symbolic character because light shapes it into simple geometrical forms. Light acquires the formation of a geometrical form that stimulates imagination, but towards cleaner, more abstract ideas. In the West, the perspective view of the painting places man in a historical context by the visualisation of a fashion detail, architecture, a form of social relationship. The perspective

192 'The reflection and narcissism are connected, because narcissism is realised in the view. The reflection will create a distance and the realisation that man cannot see himself the way others see him. We cannot see ourselves in our own bodies, but only in the mirror'. - Hans Belting, *Firenza i Bagdad: Zapadno-istočna povijest pogleda*, Fraktura, Zagreb, 2010, p. 235.

picture thus allows man's consciousness to move within particularities in a given historical moment, thereby encouraging a rational view of things. In the Islamic culture, on the other hand, the symbolism and function of the Islamic *mashrabiya* creates a potential for imagination to move in more abstract spheres. Geometrical light forms in the negative of a tree facilitate the passage of light, thus shaping it into a geometrical, symmetrically harmonised mosaic.¹⁹³ In addition to the awakening of imagination, there is also the function of letting in air, which can also be symbolically understood in terms of the airiness of space, facilitating rhythmical breathing that is essential for meditation, which may be stimulated by such ambient. Such a meditative moment in the Islamic culture can be achieved in a private home, whereas in the Western culture this may be possible in Christian cathedrals, churches and chapels, as an effect of monumental architecture and stained-glass windows. Stained-glass windows in cathedrals and churches also enter into a dialogue with light, but in terms of illumination, reviving the colours and contours in the picture of a stained-glass window. It is only when light reaches the walls or the floor that one can see the opaque marks of pictures on stained-glass windows, which then release imagination and lead to a meditative state by reducing the possibility of rational understanding.

The different pictures of the world, of various cultures, create symbolic forms, each of which in its own way places man in an active position. In the Western context, according to Belting, this can be 'curiosity looking for pictures in the world', while in the Islamic world, *mashrabiya* purifies the view from the outside pictures by the geometry of light forms.

Belting concludes that it is only with a historical distance that we see the function, the project of the symbolic form of a culture. The meaning of the picture is to speak to the view, but not necessarily to depict views. If the view was depicted, the spectator would have a mirror effect. The symbolic places in the form of mirrors and windows were worldviews. These symbolic forms are culturally codified and gave the West 'an incentive to control the world by its own view'.¹⁹⁴

Consciousness creates an image of the world by perceptions, but there is a difference between the one that the subject intimately presents to itself and the one it represents to the outside world in the form of a public picture. Public pictures can also become our own, they can be and very often are a means of manipulation of various interests. The world is today created by the pictures of various personal interests. Depending on what consciousness notices, an idea is formed about that, and depending on the position of power and interest, this idea may be manipulated and, in the form of the picture, fill our own world, the world of someone else or the common world.

The Western perspective is a symbolic form of the view, but not the space, which, according to Cassirer and Belting, needs to be created every time all over again. Creating from scratch and constant activity in terms of *poiesis* put man in an active relation with the world. Through a full experience

193 'This is a stage for the "scenography of light", a favourite discussion point. The scenography of light has a special meaning here. Light as a cosmic force "comes into light", when in the rhythm of seasonal changes it starts to move in the inner space.' Hans Belting, *Firenza i Bagdad: Zapadno-istočna povijest pogleda*, Fraktura, Zagreb, 2010, p. 261.

194 Hans Belting, *Firenza i Bagdad, Zapadno-istočna povijest pogleda*, Fraktura, Zagreb, 2010, p. 265.

of the world, using the body and all other perceptory tools in a constant dialogue with this world, consciousness is brought to the state of awakesness. In the state of awakesness, consciousness will create symbolic forms as ideas of the being in an active relation with the world, the universe.

Filozofijski pogled na problem simboličke forme

Sažetak

Čak i ako je opipljiv simbol spada u domenu slike jer ga doživljavamo vidom. Upravo je ta prvotna domena karika koja upotpunjuje komunikaciju jer, ipak, prije jezika postojala je slika koju nam je omogućio organ vida, oko. Prvo smo gledali, a tek kasnije usvojili jezik što dokazuje analogiju povezanosti tih dviju komunikacijskih formi. Ono što jezikom ne možemo izreći, slikom nastojimo dočarati. Taj komunikacijski problem svaka je kultura nadopunjavala simbolom koji je nastojao dotaknuti sveto, neizrecivo. Na prvi pogled ponekad različitom formom, ali zajedničkom biti.

Tijek razvoja simboličke forme, što je ona predstavljala te kako se čovjek njome služio nekada i kako se služi sada, nastoji se prikazati kroz mišljenja i istraživanja pojedinih autora koji su se bavili problemom simboličke forme.

To je ujedno i uvodni dio doktorskog rada „Skulptura kao simbolička forma u umjetničko-ritualnom činu - Spona“ koji je nastojao dokazati univerzalnost individualnog kreativnog procesa kao forme koja čovjeku omogućuje samospoznaju.

Ključne riječi: *simbol, simbolička forma, komunikacija, komunikacijska forma, forma, filozofijski pogled.*



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