

Hungarian University of Fine Art Doctoral School

Kledon

The experience of altering meaning and significance in fine art

Theses for a DLA dissertation

György Szász

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Motto: "We need lines which cannot be drawn according to a rule, but only from one point to another." (Dürer)¹

Introduction

The Kledon as an artistic and theoretical proposition

In the course of creative work I have often experienced that previous plans take on a new direction while a work is in progress. The changes are brought by the sum of the alternative ideas for alteration which arise during its execution. Directions and opportunities emerged which took the original conception down a different path, and had a stronger influence than did the intended outcome. The nature of the work changed. The subject to be introduced became richer, or gave way to a different subject. It was this that evoked questions of how a work of art being created can be transformed.

Arthur C. Danto mentions the ancient Greek prophesy *dia kledon* (διὰ κλεδον) based on people's potential statements.² Anyone who wanted their fortune told would put money in the hand of the *Hermes* statue. They would whisper their request into the statue's ear, then put their hands over their own ears. When they took them away, the first words they heard people speaking would represent the answer, and it would be the prophets who would interpret them. Thus the situation created three participants – the person seeking prophecy, the prophet, and the person inadvertently saying the kledon. The duality lying in the word kledon can be applied to artistic, creative processes.

When explaining kledon, I made use of substitutions. The person who says the kledon is a participant in a certain situation, but this can be an everyday situation, or an inspiring circumstance. The person who interprets the kledon is the one initiated, the intuitive prophet, the artist, someone who on a number of planes of knowledge can illuminate the deeper meaning of simple expressions and statements. Those searching for the secrets of the kledon we can refer to as the viewer, or reader of the work, who demands from the artist-prophet that the secrets of the phenomenon be unlocked. If we leave the viewer in their given situation – as around a fixed point – then we can swap the tasks of the other two figures, giving us an unusual scheme of artistic interpretation.

Thus it is the viewer who establishes the state in which the context is interpreted. The artist is moved from the position of the initiated prophet to that of the person saying the

¹ Tarján, 2005.

² Danto, 1997, p. 67.

kledon, well aware that their statements can be embedded in countless new contexts. The prophet is replaced by life situations and artistic instances, providing numerous alternatives and solutions for the interpretative space. Thus it is the viewer who creates the state in which the context is interpreted. The kledon statements can be expressed in artistic acts and attitudes. Thus the artist can create not only conclusions and explanations, but kledons – phenomena awaiting interpretation and embedding. We can quote the observation of Jacques Derrida that “both the viewer and the work of art conceal the inventory of opportunities.”³

Personal artistic experience brought a recognition of the way that particular works changed – what we could call the Kledon effect. Artistic openness can be one method, but it can be extended to other memories of art. The values and judgments which influence art and thereby artistic processes will often develop, alter, and exist in parallel. Examples form a giant arc in the antique approach of the Renaissance (*Botticelli: The Calumny of Apelles*), the clarification of art historical terms (*Michelangelo's* use of colour in the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel) or even the interpretation of deconstruction (the destruction of the New York *WTC towers*). Ideological shifts also appear in the form of the physical transfer of works. The *Little Warsaw artists' group* (András Gálik and Bálint Havas) sculpted a body for the bust of Nefertiti, and for a little while were able to have the latter removed from its showcase. The Budapest Statue Park (architect *Ákos Eleőd*, 1992-1993) is a new collage of a collection of works of art from the previous political era. When the temples of Abu-Simbel were moved (1964-1968), the context given by the alignment of the larger temple was preserved. Fake ruins have become mementos of the enthusiasm of the period (*Charles Moreau*, 1801, Tata). The outline of the cave niche in which the Buddha statue was blown up in Bamijan, Afghanistan (2001) only serves further to radiate the visual strength of the lost work [Figure 6].

We can also observe artists reusing their own works (*Auguste Rodin's* addition to the portrait of *Pierre de Wiessant*). In 1985, Gyula Pauer “found” the figural plastic statues he had made in 1966 (*Box of Statues*) in a box covered with artificial spider’s webs. “He was able precisely to display the powerlessness of the forms he had made his own, and the problem raised by the statue was no longer relevant.”⁴

In the theory of *Umberto Eco*, the theme of information is turned into that of communication. In his opinion, “...we have to refocus our attention from the message as the objective system of potential pieces of information to the communicative connection between message and viewer: to the connection in which the interpretative decision of the viewer plays a role in the development of the real value of the potential information.”⁵ *Joseph Beuys* thinks of art as a living thing, which in certain circumstances is only a “fragmented impulse” which can represent some kind of value for progress.⁶

³ Fowkes, 2005, p. 32.

⁴ Szőke – Beke, 2005, p. 4.

⁵ Eco, 2006, p. 70.

⁶ Harlan, 2001, p. 20.

Thesis 1

Open values, alterations to meaning (starting point)

Perhaps in the case of all artists there is a memorable intuitive, condensed moment which can be seen as the birth of the work. The energies – both internal and external – affecting the process of creation and its creator make it clear that the work has a certain “time”. This time can be identified on the basis of the result. Its precedents and effects show that we can assume complex and almost unfathomable interdependencies in the way that the thinking process and external opportunities develop. A knowledge of the starting point can generate the approach which results in a Kledon awareness for the artist. The results of his expression can branch off, develop different meaning, can remain open. All that is certain is the moment at which the decisions are born. Their consequent life, just like that of the works themselves, is subject to endless modification. (The Laokoón group, or the experiments to reconstruct the shrine to Aphaia in Aegina.) One of *George Kubler's* introductory thoughts on the subject of interpreting duration is as follows: “Saint Thomas Aquinas, speculating in the 13th century upon the nature of the time of angels, followed a neoplatonic tradition to revive the old notion of *aevum* as the duration of human souls and other divine beings. This duration is intermediate, between time and eternity, having a beginning but no end.”⁷ The threads of the fragment solutions of *Rodin* or *Maillol* can be traced back to the “nonfinito” solutions of *Michelangelo* (Slave statues, the Rondanini Pietà), or, even earlier, to the torso of the Belvederi (Apollonius, middle of 1st century BC). In *Balzac's* novella *The Unknown Masterpiece* (1832), the fictional character of *Frenhofer* sinks into his own invisible paintings.

Nicolai Hartmann designates the different types of temporality of a work of art with the philosophical terminology of “simultaneity”, “succession” and “duration”. For *Bergson*, duration means: the continuation of what is no longer into what is. By art historical “duration” we can refer to the objectivity of different works, which not only endures afterwards, but materially continues to exist alongside them, forming a successively expanding community of simultaneity.⁸ *Sedelmayr's* phenomenological principle holds that the work, in terms of its material existence, is some kind of material, but one that has the capacity and opportunity to come to life as a constant work, entering superhistorical time and becoming an art historical paradox. It reaches the real present time through a process of intellectual recreation.⁹ According to *Heidegger*, historicity takes places in accidental “pretence time”, and, as such, is ephemeral.¹⁰

The experimental nature and effect of the artistic choices, that appear when creating a work is not to be ignored. According to philosopher of science *Ian Hacking*, experimental work has a life of its own. Experiment is an important yet overlooked part of the philosophy of science, “Experimenters bring into being phenomena that do not naturally exist in a pure state. These phenomena are the touchstones of physics, the keys to nature,

⁷ Kubler, 1992, p. 84.

⁸ Németh, 1992, p. 199.

⁹ Németh, 1992, p. 200.

¹⁰ Németh, 1992, p. 201.

and the source of much modern technology.”¹¹ *Paul Feyerabend* describes the way that science does not recognize “bare facts”. We all see the facts in a certain way, and so there are “essentially ideational”. The history of science is as “complex”, “chaotic”, “full of mistakes” and “entertaining” as the ideas present in it, or the people who discovered them.¹²

According to *Umberto Eco*, “Contemporary poetics offer artistic structures that demand extraordinary self-reliance from the connoisseur of art. Moreover, in many cases they require that the material offered be reconstructed in a different way on each occasion, [...] which urges a different operational or interpretational choice at every turn.”¹³

In the “open work” concept of *Peter Weibel*: “The work has become transient, process-like, flexible, variable... Its art generates an artistic scheme which can be altered, varied via another scheme... The medium is not just the recording of reality, but is itself part, that is the construction, of that reality.”¹⁴

From 1959, *George Brecht* took part in *John Cage’s* experimental music course, and joined the flux movement. Since 1964 he has grouped a part of his work under the title *The Book of the Tumbler on Fire* (New York, Gallery Fischback, 1965, Galleria Schwarz, Milan, 1969): “As the result of my awe for *Raymond Queneau’s* *Exercises in Style*, I have associated certain pages of the book with objects that have nothing to do with the text, just to see what would come out of it.”¹⁵

Thesis 2

Parallels, bifurcations (movement)

I completed my work entitled *Kledon* in 2003. I made visible one of the drawers of the frame for a postbox, the opening door of which forms a space characterized by planes. I connected this space with other places using a slightly transposed door of similar size. With the depiction of the latter, I projected onto an everyday phenomenon a different state, which we can say does not exist, but is imaginable. Thus the hypothesis represented broadened content.

Jorge Luis Borges’ *Sand Book* (1975) concerns a volume whose pages seem to have been mixed up. It leads us all the way through *Borges’* own novella *The Garden of Forking Paths* through the eyes of a German spy of Chinese origin, *Yu Chun*.¹⁶ The spy is the great-grandson of *Chui Pen*, who is even busier than *Hung Lu Meng*¹⁷ in writing his novel, and who worked on creating a labyrinth in which everyone gets lost. So, in the novel, if someone is confronted with a choice, they choose all the available options.¹⁸ The solution to the novel is time. The garden of forking paths is the world-

¹¹ Hacking, 1999, p. 71.

¹² Feyerabend, 2002, p. 11.

¹³ Eco, 2006, p. 44.

¹⁴ Weibel, 2005

¹⁵ Lengyel - Tolvaly, 1995, pp. 200-201.

¹⁶ Borges, 1988, pp. 342-353.

¹⁷ Xuejin’s *The Story of the Stone* (middle of the 18th century) is an unfinished family saga, involving the appearance of more than seven hundred characters.”

¹⁸ Borges, 1988, pp. 342-353.

view of Chui Pen, which is “imperfect, but not fake”.¹⁹ It concerns the infinite sequence of times. In the novella *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, also by Borges, the world according to the Tlön is a chaotic series of independent acts. One Tlön school of thought is in denial of time: it considers the present to be undefined, and that the future only has a basis as the hope of the present, and the past only as the memory of the present.

In many works we see the multiplicity of the notion of the present or that of reality. *Karinthy Frigyes* (*Five o'clock Closing Time*, 1918): “I dreamed I was two cats and that I played with myself.” In *Parallel Stories* (2005), *Péter Nádas'* novel inspired by *Plutarch's* *Parallel Lives*, the narrative perspective varies along with the ephemeral and changing events. In the Matrix trilogy, a class of people who have been thrown to the edge of a machine world and its virtual programmes form the resistance to this machine world. The resistance and its underground city have been repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, as the hero of that resistance was defeated in his previous lives and battles.²⁰ The summary of a changing reality is provided by Alfred Jarry (*Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, pataphysician*, 1898): “the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments”²¹ Following this, the absurd, the rules governing exceptions, became the components making up the “other universe contributing to our world”.

The examination of existence in the Eleatic School “...led to the abstract investigation of *abstract existence* (on) and the order behind the chaos [...] to the establishment of *ontology*. The world is divided in two: *unchanging* abstract existence and the *changing* world of those in direct existence. This was first announced by the *Eleatic* (Southern Italian) school. It put the teaching of Xenophanes (c. 580-485) into the system of Parmenides (c. 520-450): only the unmoving One (the essence) exists; the world of the changing Many (the phenomena) is merely an illusion [...] Xenon (c. 490-430) tried to prove the teachings of his master by solving ‘aporias’ (difficult problems). Examples of these are the ‘Achilles and the tortoise’ or the ‘moving arrow stands still’ aporias.” Photography represented a unique response to aporias.

On the subject of parallels, we should mention *Eadweard Muybridge*, who in 1877 began to record²³ the movement of objects passing in front of a cameras placed alongside each other. His results were used by Bertalan Székely in his studies of movement. *András Koncz's* work (*Lépcsőn lemenő akt*, 1978) is a paraphrase of *Marcel Duchamp's* work of the same title, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912). In the photodynamism of *Anton Giulio Bragaglia*, movement is condensed into a single image. The practical solution of the photo-finish picture places those finishing a race at different times on the same image, measuring the time as distance. In the case of *Miklós Erdély's* *Time Travel I-V* (1976), Erdély looked to montage²⁴ theory for the possibility of continuous depiction within discontinuous depiction.

¹⁹ Borges, 1988, p. 352.

²⁰ Wachowski, 2003.

²¹ Jarry, 2006.

²² Lendvai – Nyíri, 1995.

²³ Szőke, 1992.

²⁴ Szőke, 2007.

Thesis 3 Synthesis (arrival)

The awareness of a work being created in the future is essentially the same as the Kledon awareness. We can create in the knowledge of a system which concerns works and theories constantly exposed to change. It is possible to have a creative attitude which, in the course of the creation of the work, accepts deep-rooted changes, even ones which affect its theme. Examining art as a whole, we see that the changes are constant, and a recognition of this can be extended to greater events and interdependencies.

The Kledon system I have substituted (person saying the Kledon, person awaiting an answer, the situation that provides the answer) can be turned around, together with its participants. It is this "turning around" which establishes that which is then "up and running", and which is best expressed by Dezső Tandori's graffiti: "What tips over can't be standing up", a reference to the futility of completeness. Matters of importance are condensed into a small space in which time becomes space and turns into a work of art. For me, it is significant that creation can equally mean an object or a process in time. In Taoism, or the Indian Jainist world-view, in a notion of reality which provides a number of contemporaneous and parallel meanings, 'everything' is only referred to in a certain sense. The latter, heterodox system can be found in Umasviti's Tattvarthadhigama sutra (Siddhasena, 7C). The three primary values of truth are the "true", the "fake" and the "indeterminable". A further four values are derived from these: "true and fake", "true and indeterminable", "fake and indeterminable", and finally "true, fake and indeterminable".²⁵

Menyhért Palágyi (1859 – 1924): "...announced the unity of the emotional and conceptual world, the relation between rationalism and empiricism, and the merging of essence and phenomenon. In contrast to *Kant*, he announced the both *a priori* and *a posteriori* nature of knowledge, and the simultaneous inductive and deductive sides of thought. The considerations of his studies on the question of space and time – established in 1896 and developed in 1901 (*Neue Theorie des Raumes und der Zeit*, 1901) – were years ahead of relativity theory (1904). In contrast to *Kant*, he elaborated the unity of space and time, according to which the two concepts could not exist without each other. Time is world space, born in space, while space flows, exists, that is for every moment there is a world space, and every point in space corresponds to a timeline. In this unity, space and time mean polarity, but not identity, as they did in the theories of *Einstein* and *Minkowski*, who he would later criticize for just this reason. *Palágyi* claimed that part of the essence of space is the simultaneity of its elements; as in relativity theory the concept of simultaneity loses its meaning, the concept of space is also a victim of this. He emphasized that natural changes and life processes are continuous, while – at odds with *Descartes* and the rationalist approach – cognitive processes are discontinuous (intermittent, pulsating). A consequence of this is the distinction between life and consciousness (spirit), and the view that a human being has to be encapsulated with the completeness of life as the starting-point. The framing of the distinction between life and consciousness paved the way for vitalist philosophy, and had a great influence on

²⁵ Schmidt, 1923.

Ludwig Klages, whose teaching directly mentioned the opposition of the soul and the spirit obstructing it."²⁶

According to the chaos theory of *Henri Poincaré*, non-linear dynamic system display not continuity but an instable series of points.²⁷ Linear models are not able to explain complicated forms of non-periodic behaviour. In 1961 *Edward N. Lorenz* fed data from air flows in the atmosphere, rounded down, back into a computer that had been stopped. The newly running flow model gave a different result (butterfly effect).²⁸ This mathematical-physical theory transformed investigations into astronomy, geometry (fractal dimensions), economics, sociology, biology, and game structures. It had an effect on the intellectual exploration of the process of artistic creation. *Arthur Koestler* (*The Act of Creation*, 1964) sees the root of intuitive initiatives in creative reorganization, "which is produced by bisociation. This bisociation is formed when moth thinking and meaning are in an unstable state."²⁹ Instead of the routine act of thinking, the play on words becomes accentuated, as does coincidence, deceit, incompetence and cryptamnesia (unplaced memories).

Joseph Beuys said of his experiences of executing a work that it always demands a sort of presence as a planner ("I always have to prepare by planning"). According to *Beuys*, the work often exceeds the bounds of the surrogate, and later it is provocation rather than perfection that is justified.³⁰ There is a thought-provokingly fruitful strength to the alternatives arising in the period of creation. The question is how to deal with the dilemma raised by this period, and whether we accept the practice of placing the alternatives arising during the creative process before that of planning.

²⁶ Kollega, 2000.

²⁷ Biró, 2006, p. 13.

²⁸ Götz, 1993, p. 487.

²⁹ Érdi, 2004.

³⁰ Harlan, 2001, pp. 19-20.

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