

Hungarian Fine Art University Doctorate School

# **THE CLOCK MOTIF AND ESCHATOLOGY**

*The Representation of the Measurable and the Immeasurable*

DLA dissertation's thesis

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## 1. Theses

### The double interpretation of Time

Within all human communities, whether primitive or within highly developed civilisations, the consciousness of Time is determined by the duality of the interpretation of Time, as measurable and immeasurable Time, sacred and profane Time, or cyclical and linear Time. From the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the European Christian society, has gradually been transformed to a clock-Time directed secularised society. Within the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, democratic or totalitarian societies' have been directed by linear, clock-Time, but we can also trace the continuity of immeasurable Time; *pseudo-cyclical* or *quasi-sacred*.

## 2. Theses

### Changing Time interpretation from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Western Christian Art, until the end of the medieval period, was in the service of religion, therefore it's Time interpretation is inseparable from it's sacred system.

The biblical narrative used in medieval sacred art, represented a special Time, where figures from the distant past or from the distant future appear at the *same Time*, with figures from the present – or rather at the same *Timelessness*.<sup>1</sup>

From the 16<sup>th</sup> Century the representation of Time has been affected by the loss of the sacred function of art. This art was born in a dual concept of Time: on the one hand in the metaphysical Time of the Christian tradition, and on the other hand in the scientific Time of the concept of perspective. This dual concept of Time hides a fundamental contradiction. The qualitative, immeasurable, religious-collective aspect of Time comes into conflict with the momentary, individual and measurable Time. The perspectival representation, the reconstruction of the space, stand together with the reconstruction of Time as well. The empirical space concept of the individual is in fact the perception's subjective present-Time. Putting the Time of the perception above everything, liquidates the possibility of the representation of the past and the future, therefore the perspectival representation represents the *phenomenon* instead of the *essence*.<sup>2</sup>

The western societies' religious *common Time* concept were popularised by the *Memento Mori* from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and by the *Vanitas* from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. However in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century they become empty symbols, which were unable to represent the changing idea of Time in the society.

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the counter-reformation makes an attempt to direct back art from the *phenomenon* to the *essence*, but instead of that it resulted in the illusionism of the Baroque style.

In the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Romantic period was looking for the eternal in the visible, the transcendent dimension of cognition and existence. The Romantic artist tried to reconcile the conflict between phenomenon (measured Time) and essence (immeasurable Time). Therefore

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<sup>1</sup> Panofsky, Erwin: *Die Perspektive als "symbolische Form"* Vortrage der Bibliothek Warburg, 1924-1925

<sup>2</sup>I.m.

the subject of the painting, like the landscape, was transformed to a metaphysical chronometer, which shows the cyclical Time of nature and the eternal Time of God.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the clock directed industrial society emerged, along with this signs of a crises of the common consciousness of Time. This was manifest in the state supported religious-historical style which can be interpreted as the art of the falsified Time' structures.

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the beginning of the struggle for autonomy in art. This movement can be interpreted as a reaction against the false Time representation, aiming to restore and purify the authenticity of Time.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the individuals' experience of Time was affected fundamentally by the technical representation of Reality. Not only is the *aura* of the artefact liquidated by the *mechanical reproduction*, but also the experience of authentic Time, the "Here and Now", is affected as well. As Walter Benjamin wrote: „*The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology*”<sup>3</sup>.

The avant-garde movement attempted to find connection between the mechanical Time of the modernity with the Time of the individual. But World War I unveiled the irrationality of the *progress orientated Time* concept and the Dada and the Surrealist movement turned against the clock directed society. These avant-garde movements aimed to open up the realm of the immeasurable Time, the subconscious, the imagination and dreams.

World War II's traumas and the beginnings of the consumerist society marked a fundamental effect on the representation of Time at the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The authentic experience of the individual Time confronted with the consummation of Time, when Time became a commodity. As Guy Debord wrote: “*The spectator's consciousness, immobilized in the falsified center of the movement of its world, no longer experiences its life as a passage toward self-realization and toward death. One who has renounced using his life can no longer admit his death.*”<sup>4</sup> So the representation of Time by autonomous art could not fulfil any other task than purifying the “*Presence*”<sup>5</sup>, the Time of the organic existence of the human being from the falsified Times' structures.

### 3. Theses Work of Art as Chronometer

The specific artwork always informs us about the consciousness of the Time of its age. Every artwork is an unrepeatable, identical formation of the cosmic, social and individual Time concept. That is why we can call the work of art a sensitive chronometer. But this complex representation of Time is also affected by the actual time of the interpreter. According to George Kubler the works of art create gravitational fields<sup>6</sup>, where even the destructed artwork can be traced, by its influence over other works of art.

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin, Walter: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Page 226

<sup>4</sup> Debord, Guy: *The Society of the Spectacle*, <http://library.Nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/pub-contents/4>

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze, Gilles: *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. (English translation: Daniel W. Smith) Continuum, London, New York, 2005. Page 36.

<sup>6</sup> I.m. 38.

#### 4. Theses

##### Connection between Eschatology and the Representation of Time

The criteria of the artworks chosen in the DLA dissertation for analyses are:

1. The work of art is autonomous, not fulfilling any function in the religious cult.
2. The work of art was created in a critical period of the European History.
3. The work of art directly or figuratively represents a Time measuring instrument.

These works of art belong to the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. They are not only representing the chronometer, however this representation also determines the visual structure of the art piece. This structure shows a special duality of motifs, which refer to definitive and infinitive aspects of Time.

These works of art show a continuity of a specific representation of Time in the history of the Western Art. I call this an *eschatological representation*, although this representation of Time has moved away from the strict Christian meaning of *eschatology*; which seeks the contact between the definitiveness of our world with the infinitiveness of the divine world of perpetuity. From the 16<sup>th</sup> Century the *common consciousness of Time* concept, step by step lost it's ability to make the passage between the measurable and immensurable Time, and the collective symbolism of Time become empty. That is why the special task of the eschatological Time representation is to reconstruct this passage. This task has always been followed by the continual reinvention of artistic expressions, because no agreed authentic symbols exist in the society any more.

The special characteristics of the eschatological Time representation are:

- 1, Desire for self-determination,
- 2, Reconstruction of the “*Presence*”<sup>7</sup>,
- 3, Metaphysical homelessness,<sup>8</sup>
- 4, Eschatological waiting in the *in-between Time*.

The eschatological artistic attitude could be illustrated by Shakespeare's protagonist; Hamlet, who experienced the “*The Time is out of ioynt*” and the aim of his existence is nothing else, than „*to set it right*”.

#### 5. Theses

##### Specific representation of Time in Hungarian Art

For political and geographical reasons the Hungarian identity has been shaped by the difficulty of harmonizing modernity with tradition. The Hungarian relationship with the Past, Present and Future is complicated. The past has had to be forgotten or reinvented, as a consequence the future is the hope of compensation for the past. Therefore the present is a captured victim of its own unresolved past and unimaginable future.

Hungary hasn't had a long tradition of Fine Art. The Hungarian artist has had to fulfil a difficult task when confronting with their national context. They have had to try on the one hand, to participate in the International dialogue of art and culture, and yet on the other hand

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<sup>7</sup> Using Gilles Deleuze' expression from Deleuze, Gilles: *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. (angol ford. Daniel W. Smith) Continuum, London, New York, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Using László Földényi F. expression from. Földényi F. László: *Melankólia*. Akadémiai, Budapest, 1992

they have had to adjust themselves to the specific Time of the Hungarian society, to dissolve it's collective Time-confusion.