

The semiotic muddle of contemporary culture

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Recently, a call for the “return of the subject” has gained increasing influence. This article argues that today’s search for cultural identity, in the context of the rise of new forms of the spirituality derived from a new metaphysical faith, is a risky enterprise for us, the contemporaries. This is the crucial moment of our present time that experience of the world is divided and subordinated to two modes of intentionality: *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*. The paper clarifies the distinction between *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua* as the modes of the organization of consciousness and searches for the most privileged form of experience of the reality in the context of each. The conclusion is that neither hermeneutics, even the most radical, nor other modern philosophy can bring this experience to justice and tell us which is the common place of our common sense. The point is that the experience of the world subordinated to *intentio recta* has no common place with the common sense mediated by *intentio obliqua*. There is a kind of mixture or peculiar coil in the modern “words” and “things”. As the result participation in culture show no preferences to the centrality of a subject and discourse. Rather, we are producers of symptoms and symbols as the media of desynchronized communication.

Key words: awareness organization, *intentio recta*, *intentio obliqua*, metaphysical and non-metaphysical belief

“[...] – what is most puzzling and terrifying is the fact that the mystery exists after all, the fact that we are, as if ultimately and eternally, cut off the sources and beginnings of life. Among anything that we can observe on the earth, this is the most absurd and nonsensical issue, the most horrifying one, almost against Nature, inevitably bringing you to a thought that there must be something wrong in the very structure of the world, that our search for the truth and the requirements we pose to it have been struck in their heart with some vice”.

L. SHESTOV

THE TOPOLOGY OF THOUGHT AND THE DYNAMICS OF SENSE

“The place”, “the presence” and “the memory” are to me the categories determining the points of focus for the thought that is trying to handle the contemporariness. And what thought is able to handle it? Which properties of the thought make the contemporariness receptive to it? Is it a thought which takes its claims to understand the contemporary times from the effort to remain contemporary as well, or on the contrary – is it only such a thought which determines itself through memory that can choose its own place circled by the horizon of contemporaneity?

The above questions arise from the need to determine the relationships that occur between two forms of experiencing the reality, or two forms of constituting senses.

On the one hand, this is an organization of the awareness carried out in *intentio recta*. It is characteristic of cognitive acts whose object is self-present, without any mediation:

A thing can be self-present only when it is no longer given by means of a symbol only; in other words, when it is not "understood" as merely the "filling" of a sign which has been earlier defined one way or another (Scheler 1957: 384).

The object of such an act is not represented in it by something else, but it presents itself distinctly, forcing thus the subject to accept its self-presence¹ (Dąmbska 1975: 163; Krokiewicz 1995: 446). A characteristic feature of *intentio recta* is the fact that it gives priority to the currency of experience in relation to the knowledge already present there, making thus the latter prone to any corrections resulting from the presence of the act's and subject's co-presence presumed by *intentio recta*.

On the other hand, this is an organization of the awareness in the acts which have the *intentio obliqua* mode. The cognitive acts performed in this way are defined by mediation, i. e. a relationship between the act and the subject in which the latter is represented by a third item not being an effective moment of either the act or the subject. The third item is a sign:

A sign is an arbitrary direct viewing which presents a certain content, quite different from that it possesses when taken for itself – it is a *pyramid* into which some strange soul is brought and stored. [...] The viewing, being first of all something directly given and spatial, assumes, as long as it is used as a sign, such a substantial definition that it can exist only when it is abolished. Its negativity is the intelligence. In this way a more real form of the viewing which is a sign is the existence in time – disappearance of the existence during the existence and in conformity with its further psychic specificity, the complexity (*Gesetzsein*) which is a definition of intelligence derived from its own (anthropological) naturalness (Hegel 1990: 470–471).

The organization of awareness in *intentio obliqua* privileges the symbolic structure of knowledge in relation to the act-like form of experiencing, it assumes the non-coexistence of the act and the object.

Yet *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua* have consequences not only for understanding the relationships between knowledge and experience; they also co-determine the position of the subject – inside or outside of what is intended in acts:

For example, a street can be observed through a window pane. Then the noise is muffled, and the movement becomes unreal. The street itself, behind the transparent yet solid barrier separating us, is revealed as some isolated reality pulsating on "the other side". You can also open the door. Then you leave the closed indoors, you immerse in that reality, become active and experience its pulsation with all your senses. The street noise, changing its intensity and rhythm continuously, sucks you into its whirl, going up or down in a sudden weakness (Kandinsky 1986: 12).

Being out there and being inside are shaped by two different types of sensitivity to the timeliness of experience. One, subordinated to *intentio obliqua*, wants to make a current experience adjacent to the thought which precedes it – this is a sensitivity motivated by memory. Thinking is to it a continuation of something that is available only in the structure of symbols,

¹ It was already the Stoics who used the idea of *phantasia kataleptike* (grasping image) to design such acts. On the one hand, they could directly "grasp" their object; on the other hand, they "grasped" the subject, without leaving any doubts concerning the cognitive status of the representation.

something that exists as a text; it is an attempt to extend the semiotically organised world, a repetition of the motives of thought, which took the form of knowledge. The sensitivity of this kind reduces the area of meanings to the field of items which are semiotically organised.² The closed world of signs (a text) is opposed to opening the experiencing towards the objectivity which is external in relation to the thought. From this perspective, contemporaneity is seen as an obstacle for the thought, its external limitation, and memory is its major organizing centre.

The other type of sensitivity, on the contrary, perceives the non-coexisting thought, mediated by the symbol as an obstacle, a curtain separating it from what is here and now. Texts are thus an alien body in the world whose recognition is ruled by *intentio recta*. With such understanding, semiotically organised items do not possess, either in themselves or outside themselves, any rule stating how to choose the senses. They are useless, as the sense can be constituted only in a direct confrontation with the world, in its presence.

The awarenesses organised in *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua* will be valuating their own timeliness and the co-presence of the experienced reality in two different ways. They will also differently determine their functions to constitute the senses. Since for the awareness, being in the world has the sense of not only the necessity of time coordination (through memory, current experience or predicting the future) of its own activity in relation to the objects of experience. To exist in the world assumes some sensitivity which enables us to resolve the issue of the methods of sense existence, i. e. a metaphysical sensitivity. To sum it up, the awarenesses organised in *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua* must cope not only with the ways of the meanings *revealing themselves*, but also with the issue of the ways of their *existence*.

The awareness that defines itself topologically – as being inside or outside the world – and being at the same time sensitive to the temporal modalities of meanings must have at its disposal some models which will enable it to solve satisfactorily the problem of the ways in which the meanings reveal themselves and exist. For the awareness organized in *intentio recta*, the starting point for its presumptions is the timeliness as a constituting condition for a sense to exist and for what turns up to be accepted in the existence. All kinds of semiotic structuralisations of meanings will have a derivative character in relation to timeliness. Their role will be reduced to expressing meanings. Thus, they do not fulfil a cognitive function, they may be merely communicative. Whereas to the awareness organized in *intentio obliqua*, the timeliness of an experience is only a random place in which a meaning appears being preceded by the act itself. Here, on the contrary, the current experience plays a secondary role in relation to the knowledge constituted in the form of signs. As a consequence, the activity of thinking is performed either on the side of the current experience or on the side of memory; it is either the contemporaneity or the past that delivers the motives, mechanisms and forms determining the senses and conditions under which they become available to the subject.

Both types of awareness organization (in *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*) play therefore a significant role in the topological and temporal self-identification of the subject in

² Then there is a situation like in a story by J. Borges, *Averroes' Investigations*, where the philological and philosophical problem "What is the meaning of the words "tragedy" and "comedy" in Aristotle's texts?" is solved by Averroes in a very indirect way – by reading *The Poetics* through *The Koran*. "Aristu [Aristotle] names panegyrics a tragedy, and satires and anathema a comedy. The pages of *The Koran* and the muallakas of the Temple are full of most wonderful tragedies and comedies". At the same time, Borges's Averroes, who is writing these words, is unable to catch sight of a theatrical play improvised behind the window of his study.

the universe. since they determine the subject as a universe or a "site" where some initiation of a change or sustaining the existence of some sense may occur, and regulate the privileged position of the memory or forgetfulness as some foundations which motivate the attitude to the currently experienced actuality.

It should not be suggested, however, that the subject has absolute freedom in choosing the way of experiencing the world. What is taken into account is all cultural pre-determinations, since culture always possesses a degree of cohesion which it determined, among others, by the preferences towards *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*. I mean here at least three types of such pre-determinations.

The first type of pre-determination is the global ordering of the spheres of existence, depending on the ways of sense existence and sense manifestations attributed to them. The second is the assumed kind of relationship between the temporality of the real world and the forms of sense constitution. The third type is the type of (hermeneutical or genealogical) suspiciousness in relation to the objects whose existence and way of manifestation have been culturally accepted.

The cultural order that is present is, among other things, the order which determines the spheres of being, within which both types of sensitivity to the appearance and existence of the sense can function legitimately. *Intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua* are therefore not only a form of organizing the awareness penetrating the universe and making cognitive and existential choices in concord with its own sensitivity. They are also cultural forms of organizing the basic spheres of existence.

Thus, the fundamental opposition between "nature" and "culture", developed in the culture of the modern world, assumes that nature is an unambiguously ascribed internal organization which excludes a symbolic status of the existence of its objects. Nature is a world of objects which cannot be understood in conformity with their sense in the categories of motivational (semiotic) relationships. Nature's being in itself, as independent from the way it can be given to a subject, is a type of being which excludes the symbolic character of its objects. On the other hand, the modern idea of culture assumes such a type of being of its objects that they become equipped with sense due to *intentio obliqua*. The foundation of their being is their being signs.

We can find a different organization of the reality and, consequently, different preferences towards the types of the existence of sense in the cultures of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. There, the natural world is a Book which should be read, interpreted, explained and philologically commented on, since, as Eriugena states,

there is not a single item among the visible and bodily things that wouldn't denote something unbodily or invisible (Gilson 1987: 111).

The world which is accessible for cognition and accepted in its existence is a Text, "*oceanum misteriosum Dei, ut sic loquar labyrinthum*", "*quasi liber scriptus digito Dei*" that is being read. Just like in the West, where the authority of the Book determined for centuries the solution of the problem of the ways in which the senses of nature exist, the Byzantine East, relying on the doctrine of the First Icon, "an image of Christ, not done by a human hand" (*acheiropoietos*), established the theological and cultural authority of images, making thus new foundations for the ancient doctrine of *mimesis* (Uspienski 1993: 23).

Another great division of the world, into what is psychic and what is off-psychic, is also subordinated to specifications depending on *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*. A structure was

maintained here for many centuries (from Augustine to Proust), which gave the psyche the organisation in *intentio recta*, an unlimited power of the subject in making the content of awareness be present, giving thus the off-psychic sphere the organisation receptive to *intentio obliqua*³.

Culture, marking the borders between different spheres of existence, makes thus a particular distribution of *intentio obliqua* and *intentio recta* within the universe. Therefore the possibilities of an individual choice concerning the way of experiencing the reality become limited. To exist in the world means to experience it in conformity with its sense, to understand your own situation, to restrict different types of the presumed sense to the areas in which those meanings have their own specific form of existence and manifestation. Going beyond this principle means an (voluntary or not) exclusion from the community of meanings which are shared inter-subjectively and inter-actively maintained.

The next type of pre-determination refers to the model of the relationship between the temporality of the real world and the way of the existence of the sense and its manifestation, preferred by the culture. In other words, what is meant here is the model of the dynamics of senses, assumed by the culture: their creation and disappearance, lasting and changeability, appearing and hiding within the real world. Can the temporality of the real world make the constituted senses receptive to a change, or, on the contrary, does it make them permanent? In what way are *intentio obliqua* and *intentio recta* engaged in the dynamics of senses?

To resolve such issues means to reconstruct the models in which *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua* have opposite functions in arranging the complex bundle of relationships between the opposing pairs of the categories of “event–meaning”, “a being–being”, “a being–a phenomenon”.

The first type of orientating the meanings in relation to the temporality of the real world is determining them on the plane marked by the couple of categories: “a being–being”. Relating the dynamics of senses to the relationship “a being–being” has one basic consequence: it privileges the timeliness in such a way that it describes the latter as a modality of the *existence* of senses. The dynamics of senses is their creation in the act-and-object structure of *intentio recta* and their disappearance in the mediations of *intentio obliqua*.

They obtain a status of events in the temporality of the real world. In other words, to exist for a sense due to its temporality is to be an event. At the same time, however, all senses inherit the fundamental property of the events in the real world, which is transitoriness. Hence, the privileged character of timeliness as a type of sense existence determines the sphere of *intentio obliqua* as the area of inefficiency, a domain of breaking down the act-and-object structure of a current experience. The inefficiency of *intentio obliqua* is its inability to regain the meaning from the event, i. e. an inability to regain the existential moment, the co-existence of the act and the object, in a presentation accessible to *intentio obliqua* which constitutes the sense of *intentio recta*. That moment is effectively present only in a current experience, it is beyond the presentation. Time is here something that levels any differences in the way of existence within the act already performed. The tension (*in-tensio*) between the act and the object is thus removed. The telenomic structure of the act is blurred, and the senses become petrified. Therefore, maintaining any sense becomes here a fight against forgetting, an attempt to recreate the act-and-object tension. As long as it can be reconstructed (repeated) as an event, the senses are subjected to the personalization which saves them.

The second choice limits the dynamics of senses on another plane – that of “a being” and “a phenomenon”. It is defined by the *appearance* and *concealing* (latence) of senses. The

³ Hence the revelatory power of psychoanalysis and behaviourism in the domain of psychology. Both of these trends, each in its own way, questioned the plausibility of the traditional division into the “inside” and the “outside” of the psyche.

engagement of *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua* into this dynamics assumes a form opposite to the intuitions determined by the pair “a being–being”. The relativisation of a sense to an opposition between “a being” and “a phenomenon” gives *intentio recta* a status of the area of latence⁴, the ineffectiveness of their appearing and, on the contrary, *intentio obliqua* creates the character of the modality of becoming revealed. This time the directness of experience as a way of an object becoming present gives timeliness a function responsible for the impairment of the presentation. *Intentio recta* is characterized here by the mode of presuming the sense in which the meaning cannot be regained from the event, because the sense will always make timeliness transcendent and its intention is directed towards what is transitory. The contemporaneity of an experience as an event becomes something that hides or limits the complete image of what is appearing. This time transitoriness will become an ally of the truth, hidden in the deposit of texts, understood as *aletheia*, the non-secretiveness of existence. Revealing the sense will each time contribute here to its solidification. Always original, a repetition will reveal its discovering power, activating a presumption of unveiling or revealing an *apocalypse* or a *parousia* of the sense. An impairment of any presentation, which always incompletely and aspectually reveals the essence, will be levelled in the never-ending retro-spect of the re-presentation aiming at its original, source presentation.

Both models decide in what way the cultural *locus communis sensu* should be identified, and also where to find the source of the sense-creating activity. Sometimes their centre is an event of the real world, optically belonging to the contemporaneity, and on another occasion it could be the reality which is transient in existence and revealing itself in the real world as a meaning.

The dynamics of senses has yet another aspect. The above models may function in culture in two ways: either they complement each other and then operate in their relevant domains, or they compete with each other in the same area and then are in conflict. Hence, what we face is not only the dynamics of the sense within the models, but also the dynamics determining their relationship. This happens because both models reach the level of ineffectiveness exactly at this place where it becomes possible to activate the opposite mode of the presumption of the sense.

Thus, the case of the conflict determines a cultural situation in which one of the models reveals its ability to impose its own mode of interpretation and the ineffectiveness of the other model. In this way, two types of suspiciousness are formed towards the structures organized as meaningful, and at the same time two types of sensitivity to the sense which can be activated in a situation of its disintegration:

First, a suspicion that the language does not communicate exactly what it communicates. The sense that can be grasped and revealed directly may be only some inferior sense which unveils, restricts and still transmits another sense; it would be thus most complete and “abyssal”. The Greeks called this *allegoria* and *hyponoia*. On the other hand, the language raises another suspicion: that somehow it goes beyond its purely verbal form and that there are other things in the universe which can speak, though they are not from the language. All in all, it is impossible that nature, the sea, rustling trees, animals, faces, masks or crossed knives can speak; maybe there is a language which can articulate itself in a way different than verbal. That would be, if you want, in a rough outline, the *semainon* of the Greeks (Foucault 1988: 252–253).

The first type of sensitivity is based on the presumption that semiotically organised objects *exist* in a way which is different from how they *manifest* themselves, i. e. their existence

⁴ Origenes defines the world as *latissim*, a thicket which gives all senses two basic dimensions: the depth as a way of their revealing themselves, and concealing as a way of their existence.

conceals a *pretence*⁵. It is only reaching the existential foundation of an object – an event, which is manifested as a pretence – that makes it possible to grasp its hidden sense in a way that makes it accessible to *intentio recta*. So, wherever *intentio obliqua* breaks down, we do not cross the threshold of nonsense. On the contrary, the sense can be regained here in its different, concealed form. The sense lost, used out in *intentio obliqua*, can be recovered or revalorised (i. e. “unmasked”), if there is a current force which will possess that object and express its existence in the latter. From this viewpoint, any meaningful structures separated from their current, existential foundation are merely “a cementary of evidence”:

What is then the truth? A moving army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms or, in brief, a sum of human relationships which were poetically and rhetorically intensified, transported and improved, and after a long-term use they seem canonical and binding to the folk: the truths are illusions whose surface has become smooth and which are now treated like metal, no more like coins (Nietzsche 1993: 189).

The suspiciousness of this type is the *genealogical* suspiciousness looking for a confirmation of the presence of sense in a text – event not in what it reveals in its textual existence, but in what makes it a manifestation, a *symptom*, of the force currently expressing itself. The text-event is not the cause or the source of the *appearance* of the sense but it is the *result*, the final product of the action of forces which appropriated it.

On the other hand, we have to do with the *hermeneutic* suspiciousness based on the opposite presumption that a being which currently and directly manifests itself in a way receptive to *intentio recta* transmits in the depth of its essence some absent senses, and it is a witness to the presence *per procura*. Since what exists is indeed (*transcendens*) permanently absent in the real world, a thing whose being is accessible only in the *symbolic* mode of *intentio obliqua*:

Actually, I have a right to interpret only when I receive a sign from the power which manifests itself through this sign. Interpretation is allowed only when it is necessary. This necessity refers exclusively to the signs included in the space of the revelation, that is *sacrum*. [...] If we do not make a clear distinction into the spheres of *sacrum* and *profanum*, we will inevitably drive ourselves mad, since any sign will become to us a revelation of anything (Descombes 1988: 331–332).

The contemporary thought seen from this perspective can define itself only in reference to the source, through making with it a bond of communication and solidarity. Such can be a brief characteristic of an alternative to the sensitivity, to the sense whose foundation is the experience of breaking the bond with linking the contemporary man the thought whose source is absent.

Hermeneutics is trying to find a solution of the situation which dooms the contemporariness to the arbitrariness of any presumptions of senses whose source is not current. Thus, it does not mean marking a border between sense and nonsense. Hermeneutics assumes a different situation of choice: between one sense and another, according to the rule which makes one specific sense privileged in relation to another, on the basis of the former's relation to the

⁵ F. Nietzsche puts it as follows: “Final judgements, conclusions about the value of life, any “for” or “against” can be never true: their only value is that they are signs and they have a significance as signs only – judgements in themselves are a trifle”.

source. The privilege of having the source – wherever it should be found – determines the choice which makes the thought become contemporary.

Staying distant to the source, repetition, absorbing the sense, making the source present – these are the stages of a reflection which is capable of making choices and determining its own identity.

And yet hermeneutics, even the most radical in its striving for revealing the sources of thought, is primarily their reconstruction. Its value is determined not so much by the possibility of recreating the conditions in which the thought was born, but rather by the ability to make the choice legitimate between one sense and another, or one interpretation and another; the adequate one (contemporary) and the one whose sense cannot be updated any more. Hence, hermeneutic interpretations of the beginnings have a mythological sense – they are arbitrary and anachronistic, like a myth. *Mythos* and *logos* meet in hermeneutics in such a way that it constructs a mythological (beyond the presumed horizon of contemporaneity) source of a theoretical situation which recognizes itself as contemporary. Thus, going backwards to the sources of the problem, hoping that it can reveal the proper, relevant sense of what we are asking today is not an innocent procedure. The mythological aspect of hermeneutics, bringing the sources of sense beyond the sphere in which they are communicated and lost, any attempts of saving them from corrosion have two consequences for the thought. The first one is faking the sources of thought which require interpretation, whereas the other one is obliterating the sources of the interpreting, current thought.

Traduttore traditori – this is a formula of the art of suspicions, which suggests an alternative orientation in interpreting the experience of breaking the bond between the sense and its source. The question of how to limit the arbitrariness of the interpretation by referring its sense to the source is no longer a problem. What becomes a problem is the question: how to grasp the sense of an arbitrary decision on the basis of which the sense becomes appropriated, in order to express the current force, the power dominating the meaning?

Both types of suspiciousness are specific reservoirs which culture has at its disposal in case some strategy of deriving the sense breaks down. They are also the models of its self-criticism. They can be used to identify and hierarchize possible sources (internal or external) of threats to the inter-subjectively shared order of the senses of “our world”.

“The site”, “memory” and “presence” imply thus some topology of thought and the dynamics of senses; their idea of defining them is determined by the incessant game played by the “common sites” of the thought and the way of understanding their significance in the culture, taking into consideration the horizon marked by the presence and/or absence of meanings.

How does the contemporary man make contact with reality? How do we experience the border separating “our times” from what is non-coexistent? Where do we outline such a border line? On which side of the border do we put ourselves? What is the basic experience of human beings who define their existence through contemporariness?

METAPHYSICAL BELIEF

For the last two centuries, “experience” has been a category around which different philosophical orientations have been arranged. Such a specific situation of “experience” in philosophy justifies something that is not accepted by the contemporary thought and what can be called a metaphysical belief in the source-based and universal sense of experience.

Metaphysical belief, the belief of philosophers, can be expressed in a conviction that the basic metaphysical categories (a being–existence, a being–a phenomenon, form–matter, etc.) used by philosophy to explain existence are all in one structure, i. e. the structure of experience. Metaphysical belief is a belief in experience as the ultimate instance validating any sense and any truth. It is only experience that has a source-like character, since only experience can determine a common domain for man and the world, science and common-sense knowledge, and only experience makes it possible to understand their co-existence and at the same time their mutual non-reducibility. Finally, experience guarantees that the thought does not deviate from the being. Hence, the source is the “common site” for people, words, objects, representations, desires and forces, which make them so close to each other that they all become opposed to something that goes beyond them. The source is a place where man is still not involved in the play of representations which precede it; this is a place where words are nothing more than making things double, and desires have not activated the imagination yet; this is a place where any sense and truth are born. The thought without the source is empty, the word is insignificant, the existence is forgotten, the desire becomes pointless, presentation is illusory and forces are dispersed.

The contemporariness is characterised by the loss of such a belief. It is not that we do not experience or think any longer, but experience is not given the privilege of being at the source and having the power validating the knowledge, being, community, attitude to the past, i. e. everything that keeps metaphysics ready, that stimulates it and activates the power of shaping the universal and legitimate knowledge as a method for the humanity to exist. The philosophical, reserved and at the same time critical strategies of extracting the sense and the truth from experience were not able to give the former a status of the universal instance which would validate some metaphysics. The process of destruction of the metaphysical belief began earliest where it played the most vital role – in the philosophy of knowledge. Analytical philosophy, neo-positivism or phenomenology are in this sense border-line formations of thought of the contemporariness. They make borders since they revealed the most radical and ambitious programmes based on the metaphysical belief and, simultaneously, it is within their frames that the process of destruction started. Hence the repeated dichotomies: early and late Wittgenstein, early and late Husserl, Popper the neo-positivist and Popper the gravedigger for neo-positivism.

The most self-aware person in that metaphysical belief was Husserl. It is he who coined the principle of all principles: “any source-like presenting evidence is the source of the legitimacy of cognition” (Husserl 1967: 78–79). Let us, however, read from *The Crisis of the European Humanity*, i. e. quote late Husserl: “*Philosophy as science*, as a serious and imperious item among the sciences – *that dream has finished*” (Husserl 1993: 99). What a disappointment! But, on the other hand, maybe there is some hope of the awakening? But out of what dream? What was the dream and what is the awakening? If the contemporary time rejects the past and makes us believe that today all things are different than they used to be, then which of our human experience lies behind?

This is the *experience* which annuls or cancels metaphysical belief, making the search for the original, universal quality of the noetic sphere hopeless, the experience of breaking bonds with the source of the sense.

How to define the nature of such experience? What is its scope? How do we enter its area? All these questions refer us to the crisis-bearing situation which destroys the presumption of the sense and in which the dynamics of sense is broken, facing a loss of the homogeneity of the thought’s “common sites”.

NON-METAPHYSICAL BELIEF OR METAPHYSICAL DISBELIEF?

The experience meant here is not the experience that is hoped for or expected by metaphysics. Consequently, the choice of a philosophical interpretation, motivated with strong metaphysical belief, leads in two directions of its ineffective interpretation. The first one is such that the source of interpretation is inaccessible. Then metaphysical belief develops into the metaphysics of a being and a phenomenon, after which we can say: *there is as much appearance as the truth hidden behind it*. The other possibility is the interpretation based on a belief that the source does not exist at all. Then the metaphysical belief unveils the horror of non-existence or the non-authenticity of existence. This is the strategy of the metaphysics of a being and existence.

Both of the philosophers fail on the ground of existence which *points at its own lack of source*. It does not bother that what is going to appear (a phenomenon) will not guarantee its own existence and that with one broad gesture it is possible to carry out a procedure known as transcendental reduction. It does not bother, either, that what exists does not guarantee that it has its own being at all, and thus the onto-ontological difference should be hermeneutically probed in order to give back homogeneity to experience. What is meant here is rather that on the ground of such experience the oppositions of a being and existence, a being and a phenomenon are broken, and the experience is exactly the experience of such a break-down. It denies itself the sense of metaphysical distinctions, i. e. it does not allow to define any relationship with the source and keeps us in metaphysical ambivalence.

The question about the scope of such experience is thus the question about the area in which metaphysical distinctions break, which excludes the search for some sense-bearing homogeneity of experience, founded on the relationship to the source. That area is the experience of the sign-like character of all meaningful structures. In other words, this is the experience which becomes the basis for problematization of the ontic status of what is meant. Therefore, it is not an experience on which the hermeneutics of the sense and the truth are built up, which is made accessible, covered, preceded, activated, etc. by signs, or an experience which provokes genealogical suspiciousness unmasking the senses ruled by the powers of this world. It is the experience of the signness, as if on behalf of *intentio recta*, the experience which presumes some being in the sign. To ask about this experience means to ask about the way of the manifestation and existence of such a being which is a sign, putting a question mark at the point whether it is a being at all. Hence, if we take at face value the concepts trying to find semiotic forms, the question becomes a question about the ontic foundations of culture.

Metaphysics, putting the above question *ad acta*, treats the presence of a sign as a pyramid, a tomb of the sense whose "existence disappears during the existence". Following such metaphysics, we reach contemporarily the ghostly characters of our cultural environment. So, experiencing the signness by asking questions like "What is the being of a sign? What is its existence?" leads us astray. Questions of this type lead us each time to the sign of halving: into what is its subject matter recognized in the source and by evidence form, and what is its presumed meaning, into what makes an expression and what is being expressed, into what is the message and what is being communicated. Grasping the sign in *intentio recta* is a negation of its essence, whereas grasping it in *intentio obliqua* deprives it of its existence. A cultural prefiguration of such a state of affairs is the biblical story about Moses losing the original tables with God's commandments, a loss of the source-like contact with the sense.

From the perspective of the metaphysical tradition, a sign is a heteroexistential being: something that is a meaning exists in a different way than something that is an expression, and still differently something that makes the object of its reference. Briefly speaking, a semi-

otic-and-metaphysical muddle is created as a result of being unable to grasp the being of that being which is a sign. Heteroexistentiality is a metaphysical horror, a basic categorical error.

Does that metaphysical horror have any cultural foundations? I do think so. It is difficult to experience reality in the awareness of this error's inevitability. So if the classical version of the definition of a sign can be expressed by the formula: *aliquid stat pro aliquo*, the non-classical and contemporary version could be as follows: *quid pro quo*. This is obviously a metaphysical *quidi pro quo*. This is why, being involved in different types of semiosis, we supersede metaphysics from our thinking.

A question arises here about the conditions which generate such a mode of experience which leads us astray. This is the question concerning the arrangement of cultural conditions which lead to the break-down of the dynamics of the sense, on the one hand, and on the other hand to the break-down of the topological unanimity of "common sites". In other words, what makes us activate *intentio recta* towards signs and what makes it repeatedly ineffective? What are the reasons why the intention which we attribute as evident to signs, that is *intentio obliqua*, fails? On the other hand, the question refers to the reasons which activate the opposite process, when *intentio recta*, grasping a sign at its presence, leads to the "explosion" of the sign.

I suppose that the contemporary culture has reached a state in which "common sites" have been filled in to such an extent that absorbing a new element generates unprofitable costs of a change within their topological organisation. Thus, each time the dynamics of the sense and all types of suspiciousness towards it must lead to the destruction of one of its forms' disappearance. The only solution here is probably a pluralisation of those "sites", a particularisation and limiting the scope of the activity of the dynamics of the sense. Such a solution, however, makes any universalistic claims, and especially the metaphysical ones, unnecessary.

Hence, the muddle in question is a weird translocation of "words" and "things", a particular chain of intentionalities which abolish and immobilise one another. It is always possible to ask in this area: Is something that presents itself to me a sign through which some truth is shining, or is it rather a thing which demands that its truth should be differentiated in the language which we do not know yet?

The objects of such experience are therefore present and absent at the same time, situated in the pragmatic space of cause-and-effect relationships and the semiotic space of motivational connections. They are, on the one hand, degenerated signs whose presence is a symptom of merely thoughts, orders of meanings that are already absent and, on the other hand, this is the "making-itself-absent" (disappearing?) world of things, which imposes meanings that cannot be grasped.

The presumption of the sense and the truth, following the metaphysical belief, probing into the experience in which the source is absent, leads to the marginalisation of the discourse and its culture-creating role. The participation in the culture moves to the extreme regions of semiotics: towards symptomatic – the area of "meaningfulness", where the sense is still missing, or towards symbolism – the sphere of semantic pre-determination. Consequently, the area of the discourse becomes a place where the restless armies of metaphors practice their strategies and tactics, a place where some lack the sense, whereas the others have it enough event to spare.

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PAWEŁ BYTNIIEWSKI

Šiuolaikinės kultūros semiotinė painiava

Santrauka

Straipsnyje teigiama, kad šiuolaikinė kultūros tapatumo ieška, daugėjant naujoms dvasinio gyvenimo formoms, yra rizikinga. Pasak autoriaus, pasaulis patiriamas dviem intencionaliais būdais: *intentio recta* ir *intentio obliqua*. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama skirtis tarp *intentio recta* ir *intentio obliqua* kaip sąmonės sąrangos būdų, ieškant pirmenybinių patyrimo formų. Daroma išvada, kad nei hermeneutika, nei kitokia moderni filosofija negali vertinti patyrimo ir nustatyti sveiko proto bendro pamato. Iškeliama tezė: pasaulio patyrimas, subordinuotas *intentio recta*, neturi bendro pamato su sveiku protu, įtarpintu *intentio obliqua*. Taip susidaro tam tikra „žodžių“ ir „daiktų“ painiava. Todėl dalyvavimas kultūroje neteikia jokiam subjektui ar diskursui pirmenybės. Mes dauginaime simptomus ir simbolius kaip desinchronizuotos komunikacijos tarpininkus.

Raktažodžiai: sąmonė, *intentio recta*, *intentio obliqua*, metafizinis ir nemetafizinis tikėjimas