

DOCTORATE SCHOOL OF THE HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF FINE ARTS

# PHENOMENON AS APPARITION

OR

THE REPRESENTABILITY OF THE INVISIBLE

DLA DISSERTATION THESES

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2010

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## Introduction

The road of my dissertation and creative activity took me from mourning and unanswered identity questions, through contemplation to optical phenomena, and then from these phenomena to iconographic analogies. I juxtapose my artworks and the results of my subjective research in such a way to picture my experiences and recognitions. The reading of the phenomena examined and presented by me is in most cases based on the associational structure of personal experiences. I reached my conclusions not by merely using scientific methods, but through intuition. The conclusions of my intuitions often suppose the same subject-matter as that of the object of my analysis; they do not give a scientific explanation to supernatural apparitions, but add to them yet another layer of meaning. The iconographic motifs that can be related to optical phenomena are to be found in the semantic realm of death and resurrection.

## Looking for Answers

I. Scientific and creative methods: in order to understand the physics of *halo* phenomena, in addition to reading Hungarian and international scholarly literature and consulting with professionals, I conducted continuous observations, which I documented with photographs; then, based on all these, I modelled the ice crystals that make up the phenomenon.

1. My research activity does not come down to pure scientific analysis: as a person engaged in art, I am motivated by the process itself of research, rather than by its result. The objective methods of scientific research do not concern reality but the world of nature. Nature and the real world are two different things. Keeping this idea in mind, I defined my program as follows: I oriented my attitude of constant search and discovery towards a volatile natural phenomenon; in other words, I turned to an optical mirage (*halo* phenomena) which is natural by origin, but its existence supposes reality to such an extent, that there is no phenomenon without an observer.

2. My photographs of atmospheric optical phenomenon do not speak for themselves. If we stereotypically take them out of their context, we find ourselves at nature photography. My picture making activity is a self-reflexive process: by analyzing the light-drawn of floating ice-crystals I am seeking answers to questions related to mourning and identity. The matter-of-fact character of photography is complemented by the subjective experiences of the observation. As we can only talk about phenomenon through an observer, we cannot say that observation is objective.

3. The main difference between my attempt to simulate the phenomenon and the already existing virtual *halo* simulator was that while the latter reconstructs the *sight* of the phenomena in a virtual-graphic mode, I wanted to model how the phenomena *arise* on the level of particles. Materiality was central, so that one can not only see the refraction of light within the ice-crystals, but also understand it by taking it into his/her hand. What my experiment facilitated was the understanding of refraction on the ice crystals acting as prisms, in the case of hexagonal plate and column crystals. Using the prisms of the simulation, I created artworks, which at the same time opened up a new episode in the imagery of the phenomenon: the one based on the particle nature and structure of the phenomenon.

II. Intuition: subjective interpretation; the apperception of relation-systems hidden within reality.

1. In many cases, I observed the *halo* phenomena during other events and this put the given event into a new context. I think that one can best define his/her place and part in the world by observing this kind of conjunctions of seemingly unrelated things. In other words, I have to be aware of the fact that the sole place of these coincidences is the space of my observation: the seemingly unrelated things converge in me. The mapping of the everyday miracles of my environment that are waiting to be discovered is an indispensable condition of my freedom. As such, my activity can be seen as the search for liveable spaces, and as an attempt to express this quest.

2. In the case of the *halo* phenomena – just like in that of the rainbow – white light breaks up into its component colours. The order of the colours however is different from that of the rainbow, thus we find the red on the inner side of the arch and the violet on the outer side. We can observe the *halo* phenomena in the direction of the Sun – it is situated between the source of light and the observer – while the rainbow can be observed in the opposite direction; in the latter case the observer is between the source of light and the phenomenon. *Cirrus* clouds often announce the coming of rainy weather. While *halo* phenomena can be observed before rain, rainbows form after the rain. In the Bible, the rainbow is the sign of the covenant made between God and Noah. In the Hungarian translation of the Holy Scripture by Gáspár Károli we find the word ‘rainbow’ for the first time in the subtitle of chapter 9 of The First Book of Moses, while in the remaining parts of the chapter we can read about God’s ‘arch on the clouds’. Because of the translation, in Hungarian popular knowledge, the arch on the clouds only refers to the rainbow, even though we can interpret it as other atmospheric optical phenomena as well (glory, fogbow etc.). The arch on the clouds might also be a *halo* phenomenon, with the message that although it is going to rain, there will be no all-encompassing flood again. As one method of

scientific research is observation-based simulation, creation is for me a method of understanding the deeper connections of reality. In both cases, method makes understanding possible not only to its inventor, but to outsiders as well. The connection between scientific modelling and the subjective creation based on biblical meaning is apparent in the Prisms-tamp. The material aspect of the artwork: the optical object prepared with standards of scientific simulation. Complementing this, the subjective thought gives symbolic meaning to the object.

3. We identify the passing of time with the movement of the Sun in the sky-scape. When observing the *halo*, the Sun is in front of me, its direction marks the future; I can observe the rainbow with my back to the Sun, looking into the “past”. The *halo* and the rainbow are “appearances”, the former on the ice crystals of the clouds, the latter on the raindrops. The ice crystal or the raindrop and the refraction of light are not yet *halos* or rainbows. They became such through our perception, within us, we perceive the light-draw of the floating ice-crystals or the raindrops, and therefore the observer is just as important a part of the phenomenon as water and light. The person standing next to me cannot see the same refraction as I do, because that person perceives another “slice” of space. The existence of the *halo* and of the rainbow is not more than an optical process, which exists solely for the subject through individual perception. Therefore, it is a picture that is intangible.

4. Taking this meaning as a starting point, I discovered another method of intuitive understanding: the subjective interpretation of the creations of other artists. In other words, the method is turned around: in this case, it is not creating an artwork based on the phenomena, but identifying the phenomena in already existing artworks. In my dissertation, I illustrate with several examples that the structure and the experience of observation of the phenomena was possibly a source of inspiration throughout the history of art. In my view, it could have been plausible for artists to use light-analogies and atmospheric optical phenomena to depict the undepictable.

I found *halo*-analogies in artworks, which, in my opinion:

- offer a theological interpretation of the phenomena or use them to illustrate complex theological questions (e.g. Master of Delft : Saint Ann - triptych, 1514; the mural paintings of Moldavian monasteries);
- others take the phenomenon as paradigm when depicting mystical visions (e.g. the visions of Hildegard von Bingen were written down and illustrated with the help of sister Richardis and the spiritual leader of the monastery, brother Volmar, who - in the absence of a vision - could only rely on the narrative of Hildegard and on already existing illustrational patterns, in this

way they built an unknown world through the knowledge that came from their faith);

- deal with the iconography related to the problem of depicting the ineffable, where again I found the structural elements of the phenomena. (e.g. Simon Usakov's icon of the Savior "not made by human hand" and Johannes Amos Comenius' engraving entitled *Anima Hominis*, from the *Orbis Pictus*. The meaning of the Vera Icon is also more accurate if we interpret the theme also as a *halo* representation).

I do not consider my methods scientific, even though I always make my statements in view of the physics of the observed phenomenon. Nevertheless, these statements do not claim to be generally valid as they remain within the borders of the subjectively perceived reality; therefore, they do not require demonstrability. However, within the line of the creative thought, I always tried to be consistent. Neither do I intend to present my observations as scientific activity in the field of atmospheric optical phenomena, nor do I treat my interpretations as facts of art history. Nonetheless, my results are evident: in the form of numerous artworks. The starting points to understanding their creation, functionality and layers of meaning I give in my dissertation.