

# Freedom and Abundance: Dialogical Philosophy of Style

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# Freedom and Abundance: Dialogical Philosophy of Style

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# Freedom and Abundance: Dialogical Philosophy of Style

**Katarzyna Gan-Krzywoszyńska**



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# Introduction

ON THE 8TH OF JULY 1916, LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN wrote in his *Notebooks (1914–1916)* “Fear in face of death is a best sign of a false, i.e. a bad, life” (Wittgenstein 1961: 75e). Certainly a good life requires good style, but usually the concept of style (and of a good style) is primarily linked with art. However, in thesis 6.421 of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein stated that ethics and aesthetics are one. Style is therefore considered here as a specific human activity which simply constitutes a manner of doing or presenting things but also as a mode of living with Others, i.e. with other people.

This book presents an outline of dialogical philosophy of style, and it consists of three chapters.

The first chapter, *Literature and Style*, starts with a reflection on the contemporary philosophy of dialogue – also called philosophy of the Other – and it consequently calls for rethinking culture from the point of view of relations with Others. The basic metaprinciple of the thought of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Lévinas

(i.e. classic dialogical thinkers) says that a true encounter is the fundamental experience.

The concept of philosophy as a story is introduced, since many dialogical thinkers based their teachings in the form of storytelling and every culture preserves their wisdom in some literary form. I follow the description of dialogical and non-dialogical situations set out in the Buber's canonic book *I and Thou*.

Additionally, in this chapter I show the importance of the analogical approach within dialogue, which is based on Enrique Dussel's analectics, which is applied in subsequent parts of the book.

When we consider the art of life, then a style is again a fundamental topic. Going back to Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Joyful Wisdom* we present style as a result of the whole, coherent outlook on life, living in harmony with oneself and the world. Then, above all, Oscar Wilde and Jorge Luis Borges have helped me to develop my thoughts on literary style. Their brilliant minds and erudition helps us discover this fascinating approach to literature and life as intertwined domains with multiple mutual influences.

In the following sections, I present the discussion between signature and meaning-expressing conceptions of style, according to Judith Genova, taking into consideration the domain, origins and significance of style. Then I briefly analyze Susan Sontag's approach to style and propose interpreting it from a dialogical point of view, since she advocated for a much more participatory approach to art in general and style in particular.

The last subsection of the first chapter contains a very broad description of style as editing, which embraces the whole dialogical universe and may be applied to create new configurations in literature, art, personal style, design, social structures etc. I use the concept of attention in the sense of Simone Weil, and examine oppositions such as presence/absence, lack/void, memory/oblivion to fully show the extension of the dialogical philosophy of style.

The second chapter focuses on the fundamental attitude and requirements for style elaboration, namely freedom and flexibility. As we are dealing with the problem from a dialogical perspective, dialogical relations call for establishing harmony with both oneself and others (including the world of nature, other people and the spiritual world, as we are following the Buberian approach). The notion of harmony – as opposed to the notion of balance – is presented according to Gustave Thibon and Alessandro Pronzato. To address harmony within social context, in this chapter I briefly consider styles of education, following Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz and Paulo Freire which can be divided into two main categories: dialogical (emancipatory, pragmatic, liberating) and antidiological (the so-called “banking” system of education).

I subsequently introduce an important contribution to the dialogical approach to style that was proposed by the great Ernesto Sabato, when he referred to the “man of integrity,” (Spanish “hombre íntegro”). Integrity as a criterion of a refined style takes on a moral dimension. The characteristics of coherence and clarity are also presented.

From a dialogical perspective, a fundamental feature of style is emphasized, namely the fact that individuality paradoxically excludes competition. Moreover, win-win-win situations can be considered, when not only both participants of a dialogical situation profit from the development of an authentic style, but every third party can additionally fully enjoy it.

The issue of spontaneity, originality and even improvisation are presented in the following subsection, which is inspired by incomparable style icons such as Iris Apfel and Henri Matisse, and in this context I also cover jazz. These life stories and works of art provides us with a colorful and delicious outlook on style.

I propose considering the final question of flexibility from the perspective of a special part of the art of life, namely the art of war. It may seem that this is quite a non- or even anti-dialogical approach, yet it can be viewed as a good, successful fight for one's style. Very often this is a battle our biggest enemy – ourselves. It is no coincidence that I talk about martial arts – *eristics* is defined by Arthur Schopenhauer as an art of being right – every fighting style requires great flexibility; Sun-Tzu, Carl von Clausewitz and Schopenhauer are certainly in agreement on this point. Similarly, it was Oscar Wilde and Ayn Rand who wrote that nobody is able to hurt us as badly as we are able to hurt ourselves. Therefore, elaboration of one's own style is considered here to be the greatest victory.

The central point of the third chapter, entitled *Abundance and Joy*, is pluralism. Firstly, I talk about creativity

from a dialogical perspective, with special emphasis on Paulo Freire's ingenious notion of "untested feasibilities." Creativity, as opposed to imitation, is considered as an act of resistance and – in a natural way – of hope and openness.

The fundamental question of this fresh (out)look, combined with appreciation instead of appropriation, gives us much needed sincere, humble and careful awareness to elaborate, develop and cultivate style. This issue is inspired by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, Albert Camus, and Vercors (i.e. Jean Bruller).

The question of abundance is crucial to the proposed dialogical concept of style, as it is at the same time a condition and result of the search for harmony. This special type of generosity is linked with Simone Weil's conception of attention. Obviously, I regard joy as a prize for elaborating, developing and cultivating an original style.

Subsequently, using Joseph M. Bocheński's conception, I propose regarding style as an important contribution to wisdom as a technology of a good life. This approach is in some sense related to the classical Greek term "techne," but I am focusing on the profoundly experimental character of style.

The third chapter ends with some wonderful examples of contemporary applications of the dialogical philosophy of style, such as the global, multidisciplinary movements of permaculture and biophilic design, or smaller yet equally great and hopeful ideas like radical gardening or concepts such as Japanese "wabi-sabi".

In the conclusions, I propose considering the dialogical philosophy of style as an heuristic theory, in the sense of Ryszard Wójcicki, and I briefly outline the main obstacles/enemies of freedom, abundance and style, both at the individual and communitarian levels.



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# Literature and Style

*‘Toi’, premier mot d’amour, dit un texte égyptien.  
Oui, et dernier mot de la philosophie.  
‘Toi’, gage de la connaissance,  
pont jeté par-dessus le monde apparent vers la substance,  
vers la substance qui répond.  
Aimer, c’est connaître avec profondeur;  
connaître, c’est aimer avec clarté et de façon définitive.*  
(Dietrich, del Vasto 1943: 175)

*[M]an is in his actions and practice,  
as well as in his fictions,  
essentially a story-telling animal*  
(MacIntyre 2007: 216)

## 1.1. Philosophy as a story

AMONGST THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS that can be identified in broadly-conceived Western philosophy, i.e. philosophical currents that call for starting over, as in the case of “The Linguistic Turn” or phenomenology, the contemporary philosophy of dialogue stands out as a revolt based on experiences of extreme violence and



moral catastrophes, like World War I and World War II. The former two were related to the new methods, however they were all opposed to German idealism, at the time a pervasive theory that dominated all academic centers in Europe and the Americas. The philosophy of dialogue is an anti-idealistic philosophy. It is going back to reality, in a strong sense. It is not only assumed that the world exists independently of me (independently of a subject in other words). In addition, I (a subject) exist and/or become only in relation to the Other who is, like me, a living, breathing, feeling person. The accent is put on relations, encounter, and obviously the Other. One may say that in the heart of dialogical investigations is the question of a manner, of a way how we relate to Others.

The philosophical revolution postulated by the philosophy of dialogue (Buber, Rosenzweig, Lévinas) was directed, among others, against idealism and speculative philosophy, which ignored not only the fundamental role of the Other, but also temporal and geographical context. Rosenzweig, in his famous introduction to *The Star of Redemption*, entitled precisely “New Thinking” calls for a rejection of the whole Western philosophical tradition from “Ionia to Jena,” i.e. from the ancient Greeks to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. This philosophical tradition did not need the Other. Moreover, as many thinkers pointed out, there is a much bigger risk, namely that there is a link between idealism (sometimes also in general the ideals of the Enlightenment era) and totalitarianism. Therefore, the contemporary philosophy of dialogue calls for

a revolution, to start from square one, similarly to analytic philosophy and phenomenology. However, in the words of Lévinas, ethics is considered as a first philosophy and put in the very center of dialogical investigations. Therefore, it was not only about the method, but about profound reflection on the catastrophic consequences of the ideals, philosophies, and values of Western civilization that became corrupted.

The new method of thinking requires the Other, cannot be speculative, and must take concrete space and time into serious consideration. Jorge Luis Borges – who I count as dialogical thinker – once famously stated that geography is more important than psychology. Moreover, Latin American dialogical (including pre- and post-dialogical) reflection is characterized as “pensamiento situado,” i.e. “situated thinking” that should always respect the concrete context, especially geographical, but also historical.

Dialogical wisdom, besides being transmitted and exchanged during face to face encounters, is also present in literature in the form of stories. The most important moral teachings of Christianity are presented in the parables of the New Testament, and in Islam – for instance within the Sufi tradition there are stories, proverbs, and even anecdotes, yet though the main spiritual teachers preferred oral to written stories. In the Judaic tradition, “Hasidic Tales” constitute such a collection of stories. They were compiled and edited by Buber.

One could give many more examples, but let me quote Alasdair MacIntyre, who in *After Virtue* wrote that the

human being is a “story-telling animal.” He pointed out that conversation – in other words dialogue – was systematically ignored by philosophers, although it is one of the most important features of the human world. He wrote:

The most familiar type of context in and by reference to which speech-acts and purposes are rendered intelligible is the conversation. Conversation is so all-pervasive a feature of the human world that it tends to escape philosophical attention. Yet remove conversation from human life and what would be left? Consider then what is involved in following a conversation and finding it intelligible or unintelligible. (To find a conversation intelligible is not the same as to understand it; for a conversation which I overhear may be intelligible, but I may fail to understand it.) If I listen to a conversation between two other people my ability to grasp the thread of the conversation will involve an ability to bring it under some one out of a set of descriptions in which the degree and kind of coherence in the conversation is brought out: ‘a drunken, rambling quarrel’, ‘a serious intellectual disagreement’, ‘a tragic misunderstanding of each other’, ‘a comic,’ even farcical misconstrual of each other’s motives,’ ‘a penetrating interchange of views,’ ‘a struggle to dominate each other’, ‘a trivial exchange of gossip’ (MacIntyre 2007: 210–211).

MacIntyre emphasizes the dramatic character of dialogue and the relation between interlocutors. The influence is mutual, the participants of dialogue are co-authors of this special literary form. MacIntyre said:

We allocate conversations to genres, just as we do literary narratives. Indeed a conversation is **a dramatic work**, even if a very short one, in which the participants are not only the actors, but also **the joint authors**, working out in agreement or disagreement the mode of their production. For it is not just that conversations belong to genres in just the way that plays and novels do; but they have beginnings, middles and endings just as do literary works.

They embody reversals and recognitions; they move towards and away from climaxes. There may within a longer conversation be digressions and subplots, indeed digressions within digressions and subplots within subplots (...). I am presenting both conversations in particular then and human actions in general as enacted narratives. Narrative is not the work of poets, dramatists and novelists reflecting upon events which had no narrative order before one was imposed by the singer or the writer; narrative form is neither disguise nor decoration (MacIntyre 2007: 211, emphasis added).

Moreover, MacIntyre explicitly says that it is impossible to understand any society, even our own, without knowing all the stories which constitute “its initial dramatic resources”:

Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things. Vico was right and so was Joyce. And so too of course is that moral tradition from heroic society to its medieval heirs according to which the telling of stories has a key part in educating us into the virtues (MacIntyre 2007: 216).

A similar idea was stated by Nora Ephron, the famous American writer and director, a daughter of writers who in an interview recalled her parents’ original – “literary” – way of upbringing. She said that no matter what had happened to her, her parents on the one hand only wanted to hear good stories, on the other tried to teach her – in a kind a harsh way – that many experiences only seem to be unique or dramatic, when in reality they quickly become simply funny stories. She quoted her parents saying “Don’t come back until you make a good story of it” and “Someday it will be a great story and I am not interested

until it is” (Ephron 2010).<sup>1</sup> This is compatible with MacIntyre’s above-mentioned statement that we need stories in order to understand others and ourselves.

Bruno Schulz, one of the greatest and the most original Polish writers, in the short text “The Mythologization of Reality” describes the importance of the word in a beautiful, poetic way. This extremely beautiful yet enigmatic and profound text expresses many complex ideas, but let me focus on three dialogical questions. The text has been translated into English by John M. Bates.

Firstly Bruno Schulz, as we will soon see, stands for a hermeneutical view of the world and the essential role of the word. Like MacIntyre, he also believes that “mythology (...) is in the heart of things,” interestingly enough he considers the wholeness of the vision when he writes: “all-encompassing, integral mythology.” Therefore, in order to understand ourselves, we need to get back to this original meaning through poetry. Schulz (1936: 1) stated:

The essence of reality is meaning. That which has no meaning is not real for us. Every fragment of reality lives due to the fact that it partakes of some sort of universal meaning. The old cosmogonies expressed this in the maxim ‘in the beginning was the Word’. **The unnamed does not exist for us.** To name something means to include it in some universal meaning. The isolated, mosaic-type word is a later product, is the result of technique. The original word was an hallucination circling the light of meaning, was the great universal totality. **The word in its colloquial, present-day meaning is now only a fragment, a rudiment of some former, all-encompassing,**

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<sup>1</sup> Retrived from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPHHelpkpEY>.

**integral mythology.** For that reason, it retains within it a tendency to grow again, to regenerate, to become complete in its full meaning. The life of the word resides in the fact that it tenses and strains to produce a thousand associations, like the quartered body of the snake of legend, whose separate pieces sought each other in the dark. The thousandfold yet integral organism of the word was torn into individual phrases, into letters, into colloquial speech and in this new form, applied to practical needs, it has come down to us as an organ of understanding. The life of the word and its development have been set on new tracks, on the tracks of practical life, and subjected to new notions of correctness. But when in some way the injunctions of practice relax their strictures, when the word, released from such coercion, is left to its own devices and restored to its own laws, then a regression takes place within it, a backflow, and the word then returns to its former connections and becomes again complete in meaning – and this tendency of the word to return to its nursery, its yearning to revert to its origins, to its verbal homeland, we term poetry. **Poetry is the short-circuiting of meaning between words, the impetuous regeneration of primordial myth. When we employ commonplace words, we forget that they are fragments of ancient and eternal stories, that, like barbarians, we are building our homes out of fragments of sculptures and the statues of the gods. Our most sober concepts and definitions are distant offshoots of myths and ancient stories. There is not even one of our ideas that is not derived from mythology, a mythology that has been transformed, mutilated, remoulded. The spirit's first and foremost function is to tell stories and to make up 'tales'** (Schulz 1936: 1, emphasis added).

Here one can clearly see that Schulz – like Buber, MacIntyre, Ephron and many other authors – can be considered as a partisan of understanding philosophy as a story. Moreover, according to Schulz, we cannot escape myth, and even knowledge is a construction of myth. He wrote:

The driving force of human knowledge is the conviction that at the end of its investigations, it will discover the ultimate

meaning of the world. It seeks this meaning on the heights and scaffolding of its artificial mounds. But the elements which it uses in construction have been used once before, have come from forgotten and shattered 'stories'. Poetry re-cognizes the lost meanings, restores words to their proper place, and links them according to their ancient denotations. In the hands of the poet, the word, as it were, comes to its senses about its essential meaning, it flourishes and develops spontaneously in keeping with its own laws, and regains its integrity. **For that reason, every kind of poetry is an act of mythologization and tends to create myths about the world. The mythologization of the world has not yet ended.** The process has merely been restrained by the development of knowledge, has been pushed into a side channel, where it lives without understanding its true meaning. **But knowledge, too, is nothing more than the construction of myths about the world, since myth resides in its very foundations and we cannot escape beyond myth.** Poetry arrives at the meaning of the world anticipating, deductively, on the basis of great and daring short-cuts and approximations. Knowledge tends to the same inductively, methodically, taking the entire material of experience into account. At bottom, both one and the other have the same aim. The human spirit is tireless in its glossing of life with the aid of myths, in its 'making sense' of reality (Schulz 1936: 1, emphasis added).

One may say that according to Schulz – similarly to the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* – speech, like language, is a part of the human organism. Nevertheless, Schulz reduces philosophy to philology, since for him its goal is “the creative exploration of the word.” Let me focus on the creative aspect of this approach. It is important to point out that, following Schulz, where there are myths and stories, there are not yet signs. He wrote:

The word itself, left to its own devices, gravitates towards meaning. Meaning is the element which bears humanity into the



process of reality. It is an absolute given. It cannot be derived from other givens. Why something should appear meaningful to us is impossible to define. The process of making sense of the world is closely connected with the word. **Speech is the metaphysical organ of man.** And yet over time the word grows rigid, becomes immobilized, ceases to be the conductor of new meanings. The poet restores conductivity to words through new short-circuits, which arise out of their fusions. The image is also an offshoot of the original word, the word which was not yet a sign, but a myth, a story, or a meaning. **At present we consider the word to be merely a shadow of reality, its reflection. But the reverse would be more accurate: reality is but a shadow of the word. Philosophy is really philology, the creative exploration of the word** (Schulz 1936: 1, emphasis added).

Humor in stories adds a special flavor, and an even deeper therapeutic effect. As is well known, telling, sharing one's story is essential in many forms of therapy, and when we are dealing with trauma and difficult experiences. A very special case of this phenomenon is represented by the life story and legacy of Germaine Tillion. Former *résistante*, prisoner of Ravensbrück, she wrote about her horrific experience in a paradoxically humoristic way. She claimed that making fun of the most tragic reality helped her and her friends who shared this fatal destiny to save their dignity, become human again and to a certain very special extent control this overwhelming situation. Becoming an agent was almost revolutionary act. Laughter is free, spontaneous; while it is relatively easy to scare someone, it is much more difficult to make somebody laugh. You cannot force it, while scaring someone, traumatizing them, is predictable and almost automatic. Tillion also mentions that writing about her story made her face the situation

and somehow overcome it. Which is impossible when you are in denial.

## 1.2. Martin Buber on dialogical relations

ACCORDING TO BUBER, THERE ARE TWO MAIN APPROACHES to reality, to the world, expressed by two basic pairs of words that Buber distinguished: *I-It* (also called *I-He/She*) and *I-Thou* (that means *I-You*). They symbolize the twofold attitude of a human being towards the world. There is no other alternative: either we are engaged in a non-dialogical relation which is described by the basic word pair *I-It*, or in a dialogical relation that corresponds to *I-Thou*. The *I-It* attitude refers to experience, represents the perception of discrete objects from a defined set. For instance, when we perceive any work of art, let us say a painting, from the *I-It* perspective, we may consider its dimensions, colors, composition; we may consider the techniques used, try to think about how it would look in our apartment, etc. We analyze it as a discrete object among other objects, easily comparable with others; maybe we have an agenda, for example, we are here to discuss its value, the artistic movement it represents, its position in the author's legacy, moment of creation. We can measure many of its features, we may have very precise feelings about it; it is like an object of a study. Saying the word pair *I-It* never engages our essence, our whole being, while in the dialogical approach, when we I say

*I-Thou* it is always with my undivided attention, I meet *Thou* and it fulfills my horizon. I am in a sort of awe and spontaneous amazement. It is the kind of situation when a work of art, let us say, the same painting, captures all my attention and transforms me for the first time. It is very different from the moment when I think about its price or the type of perspective which belongs to the *I-It* attitude, where I use and experience it from the third person perspective only. In the *I-Thou* world (or kingdom as Buber says) there is no separation; there is a relationship, mutuality, connection, a genuine encounter is life. Of course, it is not possible to be in this kind of relation all the time; moreover, they cannot be planned nor prepared.

The Buberian dialogical principle says: "Through the *Thou* a man becomes *I*" (Buber 1937: 28). One may say that he/she becomes a self in relation to the Other. Moreover: "All real living is meeting" (Buber 1937: 11). And relation is in the beginning (Buber 1937: 18). He wrote: "The aim of relation is relation's own being, that is contact with the *Thou*" (Buber 1937: 63). According to Buber, there are three spheres "in which of world of relation arises": (1) life with nature, (2) life with men, and (3) life with intelligible forms. In my opinion, we can extend the domain of dialogical relations to the "world of art," be it towards a particular work of art, its author (alive or dead) or a character from a given work of art, such as a novel. True life is an encounter, consists of "being-in-relation" – even if it is not permanently possible – as much as possible in dialogue, in a profound *I-Thou* relationship.

Every instrumental relationship (as within the world of *I-It*) introduces hierarchy and vertical order. However, it is not automatically about abuse and violence, but in *I-Thou* relationships harm is simply impossible. Dialogue may reveal an unpleasant or difficult truth, but at the same time it will be a transformative experience, in the end necessary for development and benefit of both sides.

As I mentioned, dialogical encounter should be considered as a gift, since it cannot be precisely planned and scheduled. However, it certainly requires an open-minded mentality, lack of agenda; for instance, a seriously narcissistic personality seems to be unable to engage in a real dialogue. Moreover, a person completely consumed by some troubles in life may also, at least for certain period of time, be exclusively submerged in the *I-It* world, since one is focused on searching for a solution or on overcoming some existential difficulty.

One of the fundamental elements of the *I-Thou* relationship is a loving attitude; one must be open to truly learn more and more. In the same way if you love yourself it means you know yourself, you pay attention to yourself, you deal with ugly truths, and you try to understand yourself. In order to love, one must embrace knowing and again it is about this attitude of openness to learning, understanding, not imposing your vision on the other. There should be something like co-discovery, mutual revealing without any pretense to appropriating. Maybe one of the most painful elements of rejection is when your partner refuses to acknowledge you, or to know you; when

a partner claims to already know you without interacting with you.

It is worth pointing out in this context that José Ortega y Gasset calls philosophy the “general science of love” (Spanish “la ciencia general del amor”) (Ortega y Gasset 1963: 38).<sup>2</sup> According to him, we are able to have these two fundamental approaches to the world: one inspired by love, and one by hate. Ortega y Gasset emphasizes that only love produces and expands our knowledge, by creating brand new net of data, since only love motivates us to enthusiastically, continuously and joyfully collect every possible piece of information concerning the beloved object, person, idea, work of art etc. Moreover, we care a lot, therefore we make an effort to understand our love object, and this learning process has our full attention and gives us great joy. A loving attitude is open to truly learning more and more. In the same way, if you love yourself, it means you know yourself, you pay attention to yourself, you deal with ugly truths you try to understand yourself. To love must embrace knowing, and again it is about this attitude of openness to learning, understanding, not imposing your vision on the other. In dialogue, there should be something like *co-discovery*, *mutual revealing* without any pretense to appropriating.

Nevertheless, as Ortega y Gasset noted, it would be hard to give a specific answer, to enumerate the reasons

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<sup>2</sup> An approach to relationships involving love and rational (and non-rational) actions is presented in (Gan-Krzywoszyńska, Leśniewski 2015: 174–177).

why we love something or someone. We may even feel offended, if someone we deeply care about gave us a finite list of such reasons. However, when we hate someone or something, we know the precise reason why, the list is always there and its usually very specific. He explains that very often we do not see how blinded we are, since we are not at all interested in acquiring any positive information.

There is a beautiful Hasidic tale about this correlation between loving and knowing. It tells a story of two friends and a moment when one of them is very sad. The friend notices the sadness, asks about the reason, and hears the question: do you love me? His positive answer is met with disbelief, because the miserable friend replies: "If you loved me, you would know why I am crying."

To pick up the thread again, let me specify why, from all the dialogical thinkers, I chose to follow the Buberian approach. Firstly, because the distinction between a dialogical relation and a non-dialogical relation is clear and can be – in my opinion – universally applied. One of the fundamental categories of this outlook is mutuality – not symmetry, or asymmetry (as in the case of Lévinas) but mutuality, true dialogue transforms both sides. Buber said explicitly: "Relation is mutual" (Buber 1937: 16). If we talk about responsibility, all persons participating in the dialogue are taking responsibility, and I believe that without mutuality it is very hard to consider the development and dynamics of dialogical relation. Consequently, I greatly appreciate the horizontal structure it produces: any hierarchy is considered as an element of the

*I-It* world. Moreover, more importantly, these horizontal relations exclude harm, abuse and violence.

Last but not least, in my opinion the Buberian approach is compatible, as I hope to prove it in the following pages, with many interesting dialogical traditions from very diverse cultural contexts. For this purpose, let me recall here the quotation from the motto of this chapter, the beautiful words of Lanza del Vasto from the text *Dialogue on Friendship*:

‘Toi,’ premier mot d’amour, dit un texte égyptien. Oui, et dernier mot de la philosophie. ‘Toi,’ gage de la connaissance, pont jeté par-dessus le monde apparent vers la substance, vers la substance qui répond. Aimer, c’est connaître avec profondeur; connaître, c’est aimer avec clarté et de façon définitive (Dietrich, del Vasto 1943: 175).

Lanza del Vasto says that You (or Thou) is the first word of love, but the last word of philosophy. He points out, as did Buber and Ortega y Gasset, that to love is to deeply know, and to know is to love with clarity, and definitively.

### 1.3. Dialogue and analogy

ANALOGY IS A VERY COMPLEX AND COMPLICATED TERM – there are analogical concepts, analogical reasonings, analogical models etc. The use of the term “analogy” I am proposing mainly concerns semantic issues in the context of the phenomenon of polysemy,



which is omnipresent in the humanities. Admittedly, it seems trivial to say that concepts such as “justice,” “democracy” or “crisis” are ambiguous, however, in practice they are often treated as unambiguous. These are analogical concepts and, moreover, following Dussel, I believe that any dialogue depends on the recognition of analogy as an appropriate solution to the problem of polysemy.

Dussel distinguishes three basic models of approaches to the issue of polysemy: (1) the univocal (Spanish “unívoco”), (2) the equivocal (Spanish “equivoco”), and (3) the analogical one.

The first, univocal approach is characterized by two main categories, namely identity and difference. It is worth emphasizing that Dussel puts totalizing thought here, since it is assumed that there is only one legitimate meaning and any, even slightly other is considered erroneous, incorrect etc. This is why all dialogue is impossible – for there are only radical dichotomies: for/against, identical/different, with us/against us. Interestingly, Dussel includes examples of a univocal position not only within positivist thinking, but also the entire Western philosophical tradition – “from Ionia to Jena” (in the above-mentioned sense of Rosenzweig). Within univocal thinking we find every totalizing reflection whose aim is the mental reconstruction of the Whole, i.e. metaphysical universes and/or unifying reflection, in other words those reductionistic philosophical projects in which the explanation of the elements of the whole metaphysical universe consists in reducing them to one principle.

When we consider the fundamental role of analogy in dialogue, we must point out that Dussel also includes the philosophy of Lévinas in the tradition of totalizing thinking. His fundamental opposition of “I/Other” would show signs of the univocal dichotomy “identity/difference.” According to Lévinas the Other is a radical exteriority, i.e. is completely different and is put within univocal thinking.

The Dusselian approach sheds new light on the concept of “consensus,” which usually has very positive connotations, yet we should consider its serious totalizing aspect. Consensual procedures lead to the one valid meaning of the given concept, for example. It turns out that the concept of consensus leads to a division of the set of all the definitions of the term into at least two non-empty subsets. The first of these subsets would contain exactly one element (the current definition of a term), while the second – all the other definitions (considered as incorrect or even prohibited by law). Hence, the univocal position is a radical (extreme) and dangerous one that entails the reduction of all meanings to exactly one.

At the opposite end, Dussel places the equivocal model, which allows for all the possible interpretations of a given cultural object that are at the same time completely incommensurable. However, just as in the case of the univocal position, the equivocal approach makes dialogue impossible, since there is no common ground for any encounter and communication. It is an extremely relativistic approach where every person has his/her own

“truth,” possibly formulated in his/her own untranslatable language and lives in his/her own world.” The extreme idiosyncrasy of some postmodern positions can serve as an illustration of this approach.

Following Dussel, we should choose the third, moderate stance, which is much closer to the “golden mean,” namely the analogical one. It is based on a similarity (not to be confused with identity) accompanied by any number of distinctions (Spanish “distinciones”) and – this should be highlighted – not by differences.

After all, the condition for any dialogue is the existence of any common ground, even a minimal one. Such a common platform enables the optimal understanding of every nuance of meaning. Moreover, such a structure of analogy may be subjected to change and the study of such transformations constitutes an equally important subject of analectical inquiry.

What should be emphasized is that the concepts of “transparency” and “clarity,” usually associated with a specific univocal approach (as in logical positivism, for instance) are characteristic precisely for the analogical position. Only the analogical paradigm guarantees the fullest and the most specific, i.e. the most nuanced, semantic characteristics of a given cultural object (for instance, some linguistic expression). Additionally, the analogical perspective provides us with tools and space where we can compare various meanings and interpretations, and/or where we can also attribute both positive and negative values.

Dussel writes:

The analectical moment of the dialectical method (ana-dialectical method) gives absolute priority to the *proyecto* of liberation of the other as new, as other, as distinct (and not only as different within the identity of the whole). In the final analysis, it can be affirmed that the analectical moment of dialectics is founded on the absolute anteriority of exteriority over totality, even to affirming the priority of the Absolute Other as creative origin over creation as a work, as a finite and therefore perfectible totality (Dussel 1985: 192).

Let me just mention here that Dussel illustrates the above situation – which I propose to consider as honoring the authority of suffering, following Reyes Mate – with a brilliant analogy about the difference between a mouse and a cat. The cat here represents a predator who is in a privileged center, has the advantage of power and strength, and dominates, but at the same time knows less about the entire system, in the sense that it can afford to be ignorant or perceive mice only as food. The mouse, on the other hand, must be smarter than the cat, since it must be fully aware of his situation and know everything about the cat in order to survive. The mouse cannot afford to be ignorant, must be focused all the time and is obliged to assess own abilities perfectly, especially in relation to the cat.

I will analyze this issue in more detail, when the approach to style as editing will be presented. The issue here is the notion of invisibilization. I would like to point out in this context that a cover of one of Dussel's books contains a drawing that shows a tree in the roots of which the figure of an adult indigenous inhabitant is hidden, in

a fetal position. It symbolizes the fundamental issue of feeding at someone else's expense, bearing fruit and flowers without noticing the sources – the roots. This will be extremely important, and we will come back to it when discussing invisibilization (Spanish “invizibilización”), hermeneutic violence as defined by Reyes Mate.

Referring to the concepts of Dussel and Reyes Mate, among others, I am currently working on the analogical paradigm. It should be noted here that in 2015 (November 4–6) The First World Congress on Analogy took place in Puebla, Mexico, in 2017 (May 24–26) The Second World Congress on Analogy was organized in Poznań, Poland<sup>3</sup>. The proposed paradigm is compatible with, among others, John L. Austin's warning against a dangerous assumption within the framework of semantic investigations on key terms, especially moral ones:

It seems to be too readily assumed that if we can only discover the true meanings of each of a cluster of key terms, usually historic terms, that we use in some particular field (as, for example, ‘right,’ ‘good’ and the rest in morals), then it must without question transpire that each will fit into parts in some single, interlocking, consistent, conceptual scheme (Austin 1961: 151).

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Project, please visit the website of the Congress: [www.analogycongress.com](http://www.analogycongress.com). A full text of the handbooks is available, along with the special issue of *Methodological Studies* (*Studia Metodologiczne* 37/2016) with a selection of papers from the first edition of the Congress and the special issue of *Philosophies on Analogy*, see: [www.mdpi.com/journal/philosophies/special\\_issues/Philosophies\\_Analogy](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/philosophies/special_issues/Philosophies_Analogy).

According to the univocal standpoint, there is exactly one model of the so-called Good Life for a Person, any different one is wrong and should be rejected or even fought against. From the equivocal point of view, there is a multitude of models which are incommensurate and incomparable with each other. Following the analogical approach, we are interested in the distinctions and similarities between many distinct models of the Good Life for a Person, in other words, in all the nuances (equally positive as negative), we are able to discover the full range of possible answers and rationally discuss the respective versions. It is worth emphasizing that univocity leads to dichotomy, where we have the most tension between two options, which usually and immediately translates into a conflict “with or against.” Nowadays, I believe we can add that the so-called “cancel culture” can be easily considered as a representation of the univocal approach. In contrast, within the analogical approach, the more options the better, i.e. we are aiming at abundance, and free choice is only limited by the possibility of defining similarities and distinctions. Hence it provides a platform for creativity, dialogue and consequently an open-minded attitude.

Following the paper (Gan-Krzywoszyńska, Leśniewski 2019), let me reiterate that the three models of human relations according to Kapuściński (2005), namely conflict, encounter and isolation, can be translated into Dusselian notions describing polysemy: (1) the univocal approach would correspond to conflict and violence, (2) the

analogical approach to one where dialogue is possible, and (3) the equivocal approach, where, because of lack of communication, we have the case of isolation.

From the outset, it should be assumed that each participant of a real dialogue must just accept at least the following two statements, which are closely connected to freedom and abundance. Firstly, there is no univocal approach to life, there is no single model of good life and even cannot be, just as there is no single correct style of anything. It follows from the very definition of style that there are many styles, many good and many bad, with everything in between. Secondly, dialogue is not about the correct answer, it is always a kind of a project and/or even an adventure. Therefore the goal of an analogical paradigm consists in the creation of an honest situation, of conscience of full choice, of the fullest possible spectrum of possibilities. The analogical paradigm is “antireductionistic” in the sense of excluding the possibility of reduction to one version/model of anything.

In the Polish dialogical tradition, Józef Tischner, who was closely connected with the Solidarity movement, elaborated conceptions of a dialogical and monological society. He presented this mostly positive view of any difference and diversity by saying that we can be different in a beautiful way. Although he strongly advocated for a dialogical solidary society, he also set some limits. On the one hand, solidarity and dialogue must always be focused on reducing unnecessary, unjust suffering without any restrictions. However, Tischner explicitly stated that we



cannot be solidary with people without conscience, that do not revolt against injustice and unnecessary suffering. Although he did not use the term analogy, his characterization of a dialogical society includes an element of the analogical paradigm. He wrote that each of the main social groups of a given society – i.e. rulers (authorities) and their subjects – has the right to construct its own version of the “truth” about this society and at the same time their own illusions; in other words, its vision and/or (idealized) model of the society. It should be noted here that, according to Tischner, in a monological society (for instance in countries of so-called real socialism, i.e. the countries of the Eastern Bloc) the rulers attributed themselves the only right point of view concerning the truth about society (Tischner 1991: 5).

It is worth mentioning that especially Latin-American dialogical thinkers, who are strongly connected with philosophy of liberation, emphasize the fundamental role of analogy and dialogue. For instance, according to Freire any positive change is possible only thanks to dialogue. Dussel likewise sees a way out of the crisis only through a global dialogue that should begin with a South-South encounter, i.e. a dialogue between the victims of oppression and other victims of oppression, usually from the peripheral regions of our planet.

In this context let me recall the famous Sartrean definition of freedom: “Freedom is what we do with what is done to us.” (French: “La liberté, c’est ce que nous arrivons à faire avec ce qu’on nous a fait”). In Spanish there

is another fundamental statement that says “Yo no quiero ser esto,” which means “I do not want to be that.” Therefore the most important dialogue – and all dialogical thinkers agree on this point – is about reducing unnecessary suffering. In other words, we suffer when we are not living the way we would want to, when we are not able to discover, develop and cultivate our style. This leads us to the following point: the conception of style as a human attribute and the goal of life.

#### **1.4. Style as a human attribute and the goal of life**

IT SEEMS THAT ANY REFLECTION on the style should be preceded by an indication of the old formula of Western philosophy “Nosce te ipsum” [“Know thyself”] and that an implementation of this postulate naturally coincides with attempts to develop one’s own style. This principle is presented by many classical thinkers, and is epitomized in this beautiful phrase from Cervantes: “Cuida de conocerte bien a ti mismo, pues ésa es la lección más difícil de este mundo” [“Take care to know yourself well, because that is the most difficult lesson in this world”], or in another formulation “Haz que tu negocio sea conocerte a ti mismo, que es la lección más difícil del mundo” [“Make your business to know yourself, which is the hardest lesson in the world”]. This message underlines the two most important aspects of self-knowledge: that it is our best

interest to know ourselves, that this should be the goal of our life, yet it also stresses the extremely difficult character of this endeavor.

Despite the many controversies concerning style, there is no doubt that this is a human phenomenon, a sort of aspect exclusive to people; however, not everyone develops a style – since there are people without style – or, if not dialogical, according to my approach it can also be a style that represents poor or even bad taste.

I would like to highlight a passage from Nietzsche concerning one's own style. He makes a few essential remarks that are compatible with the dialogical approach to style, despite some differences. First of all, again he emphasizes the fundamental value of finding a style, and that there are no rules, since it is an art, moreover “a grand and a rare art.” Additionally, he points out that it is about decisiveness, one cannot develop a style without taking a stand and constantly striving. Nietzsche advocates for taste, be it good or bad, and highlights the conflicts between people who dare to be themselves and have a distinct style and character, and those who do not achieve this and are therefore bitter and resentful. This point is particularly compatible with proposed dialogical philosophy of style, since I believe that people who elaborated their own style do indeed appreciate and sincerely enjoy other styles – and without jealousy. Nietzsche's exact words:

**One Thing is Needful. – To “give style” to one's character – that is a grand and a rare art!** He who surveys all that his nature presents in its strength and in its weakness, and then fashions

it into an ingenious plan, until everything appears artistic and rational, and even the weaknesses enchant the eye-exercises that admirable art. Here there has been a great amount of second nature added, there a portion of first nature has been taken away: – In both cases with long exercise and daily labour at the task. Here the ugly, which does not permit of being taken away, has been concealed, there it has been re-interpreted into the sublime. Much of the vague, which refuses to take form, has been reserved and utilised for the perspectives: – it is meant to give a hint of the remote and immeasurable. In the end, when the work has been completed, it is revealed how it was the constraint of the same taste that organised and fashioned it in whole and in part: whether the taste was good or bad is of less importance than one thinks, – it is sufficient that it was *a taste!* – It will be the strong imperious natures which experience their most refined joy in such constraint, in such confinement and perfection under their own law; the passion of their violent volition lessens at the sight of all disciplined nature, all conquered and ministering nature: even when they have palaces to build and gardens to lay out, it is not to their taste to allow nature to be free. – It is the reverse with weak characters who have not power over themselves, and *hate* the restriction of style: they feel that if this repugnant constraint were laid upon them, they would necessarily become *vulgarised* under it: they become slaves as soon as they serve, they hate service. Such intellects – they may be intellects of the first rank – are always concerned with fashioning and interpreting themselves and their surroundings as *free* nature – wild, arbitrary, fantastic, confused and surprising; and it is well for them to do so, because only in this manner can they please themselves! For one thing is needful: namely, that man should *attain to* satisfaction with himself – be it but through this or that fable and artifice: it is only then that man's aspect is at all endurable! He who is dissatisfied with himself is ever ready to avenge himself on that account: we others will be his victims, if only in having always to endure his ugly aspect. For the aspect of the ugly makes one mean and sad (Nietzsche 1924: 223-225, emphasis added).

Style is also something that makes life enjoyable, both for us and others, as the title of John Kekes' book (2008)

says: *Enjoyment. The Moral Significance of Styles of Life*. He underlines that the main characteristic of a style of life is how we deal with adversity. Hence, again the manner of doing things – not what we do – is the focal point of a particular lifestyle. It does not depend on our situation; it entirely depends on our attitude. Kekes writes: “It is an expression of individuality that guides how one wants to live particular circumstances that constitute the context of one’s life” (Kekes 2008: 5). According to him, the criteria of evaluating any given style of life are quite simple and transparent. He says:

If the attitude is realistic, the manner appropriate, and the pattern of action successful, and if the attitude, manner and pattern of action cohere and form a mutually reinforcing whole, then the resulting style of life is admirable. A style of life, of course, can also be deficient if its attitude is in some way unrealistic, if its manner is inappropriate, if its pattern of action is unsuccessful, or if an attitude, manner, and pattern of action are incoherent. But if nothing goes wrong and the style of life reflects one’s individuality, then one will find life enjoyable because one lives successfully and on one’s own terms (Kekes 2008: 5).

It is worth noting that in his conception of style, while I agree with many characteristics, like coherence, attitude, the general manner of doing things, I believe he almost entirely lacks the dialogical aspect, i.e. this is still a very individualistic and, I would even say, monological approach to style. However, his analyses already provide a “dialogical twist,” in the sense that he switches his attention from purely aesthetic style, which is almost canonic for this phenomenon, to moral style. Of course, this is something

very important within dialogics, where we consider ethics as a first philosophy which at the same time gives back to individuals a sense of responsibility for their style of life. Moreover his approach to creativity, independence and wholeheartedness can easily be adapted to the dialogical perspective on style proposed in this book. Hence, his emphasis on authenticity – a genuine way of life and not merely a need to stand out – as well as on profound joy from living in harmony with oneself could be a great inspiration for dialogical style. Let me quote the fragment where Kekes describes the titular enjoyment:

The chief reason, however, why individuals should make an effort is not to distinguish themselves from others, nor to take advantage of their possibilities, but to make their lives enjoyable. For having a style of life means that individuals are to some extent in control of their lives, direct how they go, and reduce the extent to which they are at mercy and necessity and contingency. The achievement of this mastery is intrinsically enjoyable. Those who are progressing toward it do (...) live their lives more fully than others who lack this mastery because they have not tried to achieve it or have tried and failed (Kekes 2008: 9).

It should be noted, however, that while Kekes shifts the focus on style of life from the purely aesthetic one to the moral style, he strongly opposed the moralistic view of it. In this matter, I fully support him, in the sense that the dialogical conception of style also rejects general moral rules and, moreover, the analogical approach calls for freedom and abundance, nuances and concrete analysis of a particular style of life. We will see many common points with Kekes when it comes to his critique of

moralists and his proposed alternative. He wrote: “an acceptable view of morality must be objective, fallible, anthropocentric, particular and concrete,” and he added that the central point of his approach to morality, which distinguishes him from moralists is precisely “the enjoyment of life” (Kekes 2008: 15).

### 1.5. Jorge Luis Borges and Oscar Wilde: people as literary styles

*It is absurd to divide people into good and bad.  
People are either charming or tedious.*

Oscar Wilde

THIS EPIGRAPH CONSTITUTES one of the meta-principles of the dialogical philosophy of style. As usual, Wilde brilliantly captured the core of the human character. From a dialogical perspective, style must be charming, but there are abundant charming styles and there is no ready, general recipe, except for some guidelines that come from Buberian description of the *I-Thou* kingdom.

I have already mentioned the conception of “philosophy as a story,” so the literary references are quite obvious, nevertheless now I would like to point out that literary characters serve as concrete models of style of life, as Kekes described:

If literature is understood to include drama, autobiography, biography, poetry, novels and some history, ethnography, religion,

and philosophy as well, then literature is a great and necessary aid to moral thought. (...) If the central concern of morality is with how one should live, then living enjoyably is surely part of the answer. If styles of life lead to enjoyment, then styles of life are or should be central to morality. The importance of literature for moral thought is that it provides the concreteness and particularity that should replace the futile search for the general and the dreary aridity of so much moral dogmatizing (Kekes 2008: 17).

He adds that the very aim of his book is:

to show that the willful or ignorant disregard of literature is one of the chief reasons for the failure of much moral thought and that good reasons in moral thought are most often concrete and particular, not universally and impersonally applicable to everyone, always, everywhere, but none the worse than that (Kekes 2008: 17).

Borges and Wilde can be, in my opinion, considered as dialogical thinkers and particularly insightful when it comes to analysis of style, especially from a dialogical perspective. Let me point out that in an incomparable collection of conversations – originally regular radio broadcasts – between Borges and Osvaldo Ferrari, entitled *En Diálogo* (Borges, Ferrari 2005) and finished just one year before Borges' death, we may learn that he considered the discovery of dialogue as the most important event of universal history (*sic!*). In the short prologue written on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1985, he wrote that this discovery had taken place in Ancient Greece and that our culture is simply inconceivable without recognizing this monumental turning point. Moreover, he added that dialogue – and in this he follows Buber – cannot have an agenda, or a fixed



goal, other than certain pleasure and/or enjoyment as Kekes would say.

When recalling the experience of these dialogues, Ferrari pointed out that Borges' wish was for ethics not only to reach, but to preside over life in Argentina. Since the history of his country was perceived as the unconcluded search for dialogue, he proposed supposing that the other, even an antagonist, may be right, that this first step is truly fundamental. Borges himself gave an example, talking cordially about Uruguay.

Concerning his approach to style, literary style in particular, he had – as usual – a very original point of view. He considered that people themselves may be treated as literary styles, and at the same time, when learning new language – be it contemporary or a dead one, like Old English – he had impression of getting to know a person, since he learned about a particular world vision through the language. For instance, although he was not a Christian, he believed in Jesus Christ as a perfect, truly extraordinary literary style. As some may find it offensive, in my opinion this is almost an avant-garde proof of the existence of God, since Borges claimed that only Christ's words and metaphors are timeless and perfect. There is no place for any improvement in the images such as “cast pearls before swine” or “throw the first stone”<sup>4</sup> and their profound and universal meaning is unbeatable. Similarly, an example of an original yet not intentionally

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<sup>4</sup> See also (Wilde 2001: 21).

extravagant opinion is when Borges described the Apocalypse as “a masterpiece of science-fiction.” Again, it can be used as a “shade” when in fact it is the greatest compliment, especially from such erudite polyglot who believed in the world (and even imagined paradise) as a kind of library.

With regard to James Joyce, Borges said that his style presupposes all of English literature, hence he spoke similarly regarding Schulz, about something one may call the concept of an always present style.

Borges also had a very interesting opinion on the problem of authenticity and originality. On the one hand, he claimed that he did not believe in authorship, since every writer is inspired by what they have read or heard, we cannot say who was first to invent a type of character, an epic event, a rhyme or a metaphor. Indeed, Borges never claimed to be a proprietor, an author – he considered himself to be a mere medium, that he is just a craftsman who received a gift, and his only role is to transmit it in an accurate way. Additionally, he always claimed to be a better reader than writer, and even that he was prouder of what he read than wrote. Hence, again we see that it is not about “what” but rather “how” one writes.

On the other hand he repeated many times, that we have no other choice than to be contemporary and original, there is absolutely no point in making an effort, since everybody is unique, and we cannot escape our times. Borges, when asked about style, used to quote Shaw and

he mentioned “le ton juste,” which again refers to the way, the manner of expression, a special taste that is recognizable from the very first verses.

**Alfredo Barnechea García: De usted se ha dicho que es “un escritor de escritores,” un maestro del estilo. ¿Cómo definiría usted eso, el estilo?** [It has been said of you that you are “a writer of writers,” a master of style. How would you define that, style?].

*JLB:* Bueno, voy a plagiar otra vez a Bernard Shaw. Él dijo que un autor puede tener el estilo que le da su convicción. Yo creo que lo importante cuando se escribe es dar con la entonación adecuada a lo que uno quiere decir. Si uno está escribiendo un poema, lo más importante son los dos o tres primeros versos, y si está escribiendo prosa, las dos o tres primeras líneas. Esas líneas dan el tono. Uno puede equivocarse y hacerlo demasiado llano, o puede también equivocarse y hacerlo demasiado enfático. Hay que encontrar *le ton juste*. Yo creí, al principio, que podría escribir una frase perfecta, escribiendo una frase y, luego, intentando dos clases de variaciones sobre los adjetivos, pero ahora no creo que se escriba así, por medio de un acto combinatorio. [*JLB:* Well, I’m going to plagiarize Bernard Shaw again. He said that an author can have the style that gives him the conviction of him. I think the important thing when writing is to find the right intonation for what you want to say. If you are writing a poem, the most important thing is the first two or three lines, and if you are writing prose, the first two or three lines. Those lines set the tone. One can make a mistake and make it too flat, or one can also make a mistake and make it too emphatic. You have to find *the right ton*. I thought, at first, that I could write a perfect phrase, writing a phrase and then trying two kinds of variations on the adjectives, but now I don’t think it is written that way, by means of a combinatorial act (Barnechea García 1997: 34).

Borges also cherished the James Abbott McNeill Whistler’s saying “Art happens”, and was famous for believing in the

gift of inspiration.<sup>5</sup> He strongly defended the pleasures of a good lecture, a beautiful view, art and let nobody underestimate it. I feel we may also consider this as a dialogical aspect of his approach to style, since for him any moment when we are not fighting, not attacking each other, but sharing beauty, a profound thought, the most precious wisdoms have to provide us with great pleasure and joy. He used to repeat the phrase “la rosa es sin porqué” [“the rose is without why” or “there is no reason for the rose”], so here again the enjoyment is reason enough, requiring no commentary or justification. It is worth mentioning that this statement comes from the man who famously said about himself: “I have committed the worst sin that can be committed.” “I have not been happy.” He added in *El Aleph* that the role of the poet does not consist in poetry, but in inventing the reasons why poetry should be admirable (Spanish: “Comprendí que el trabajo del poeta no estaba en la poesía; estaba en la invención de razones para que la poesía fuera admirable”).

From dialogical perspective, it is necessary to mention that Borges believed in an analogical approach, i.e. in a special connection through reading (or art in general), which again finds its most profound meaning when someone is amazed and delighted when he/she is confronted with a work of art created by an Other. Borges

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<sup>5</sup> He was not worried whether one calls it the Holy Ghost, or the muse, or the great memory, or the subconscious <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/ill-be-in-another-world-a-rediscovered-interview-with-jorge-luis-borges/>.

agreed with Schopenhauer's formula "reading is thinking with someone else's head." He was even more radical when he said that when a person reads any author (be it Gilbert Keith Chesterton, William Shakespeare or Robert Louis Stevenson) for this time that person becomes Chesterton, Shakespeare or Stevenson. (Of course, it is an exclusive "or" here.)

Finally, he loved the following Gustave Flaubert quote: "Quand un vers est bon, il perd son style" ["When a verse is good it loses its style"], which means that when something is really good, we connect to it without any regard for the particular style. In general, Borges considered artists as a true rebels, as they cannot have any goal, any program or worst of all, any cause to promote. In another famous series of conversations with Ernesto Sabato, they both, rightfully ridiculed all "programs" and "pseudo-revolutionary" art.

Borges was a huge fan of another giant of literature, namely Wilde, who also had some brilliant thoughts on style in a very broad and profound context. I would like to point out that in his famous late text written in prison, *De Profundis*, he expressed some remarks concerning style of life which seem to be compatible with the dialogical philosophy of style since they essentially take into consideration relations with others. Moreover, Wilde mentions all three levels of relations, which we can easily interpret as corresponding to the Buberian approach, namely relations with other people, with nature, and with spiritual being.

First of all, when he is talking about the prison style, he seems to have in mind mostly the attitude in society

towards prisoners. However, in prison he claims to have discovered the “shadow side of the garden” and the true compassion. Borges shared the opinion that Wilde could escape imprisonment but also wanted to personally experience misery (Borges, Ferrari 2005: 238–245). Wilde wrote:

**The prison style is absolutely and entirely wrong.** I would give anything to be able to alter it when I go out. I intend to try. But there is nothing in the world so wrong but that the spirit of humanity, which is the spirit of love, the spirit of the Christ who is not in churches, may make it, if not right, at least possible to be borne without too much bitterness of heart. (...) But while to propose to be a better man is a piece of unscientific cant, to have become a deeper man is the privilege of those who have suffered. And such I think I have become. If after I am free a friend of mine gave a feast, and did not invite me to it, I should not mind a bit. I can be perfectly happy by myself. With freedom, flowers, books, and the moon, who could not be perfectly happy? Besides, feasts are not for me any more. I have given too many to care about them. That side of life is over for me, very fortunately, I dare say. But if after I am free a friend of mine had a sorrow and refused to allow me to share it, I should feel it most bitterly. If he shut the doors of the house of mourning against me, I would come back again and again and beg to be admitted, so that I might share in what I was entitled to share in. If he thought me unworthy, unfit to weep with him, I should feel it as the most poignant humiliation, as the most terrible mode in which disgrace could be inflicted on me (Wilde 2001: 24, emphasis added).

The entire text of *De Profundis* may be considered as a study on self-discovery. From the perspective of the dialogical philosophy of style, one of the most poignant ideas expressed by Wilde is the unification of art and life. Of course, we know that he was a dandy, who used to treat himself as a work of art, but here he is truly encountering

himself profoundly, sincerely and intensely. At the same time, this self-discovery led him to unravel the superficial social structures he belonged to before. The need for authentic self-expression is the fundamental urge he was concerned about. He noted:

Perhaps there may come into my art also, no less than into my life, a still deeper note, one of greater unity of passion, and directness of impulse. **Not width but intensity is the true aim of modern art. We are no longer in art concerned with the type. It is with the exception that we have to do. I cannot put my sufferings into any form they took, I need hardly say. Art only begins where Imitation ends, but something must come into my work, of fuller memory of words perhaps, of richer cadences, of more curious effects, of simpler architectural order, of some aesthetic quality at any rate.** (...) Expression is as necessary to me as leaf and blossoms are to the black branches of the trees that show themselves above the prison walls and are so restless in the wind. **Between my art and the world there is now a wide gulf, but between art and myself there is none.** I hope at least that there is none (Wilde 2001: 25, emphasis added).

Let me also point out that Wilde uses the expression “lacking in style” as one of the most cutting insults. Therefore, again being styleless is the worse fate possible, and discovering one’s own style is a priority. We are not surprised that for him “lack of style” is an abomination, however, this genius author, known for his very decorative style is now talking about moral judgment, injustice and relationship between people when he considers the question of style. Moreover, he seems to condemn the vertical structures of society, especially putting people on pedestals. In this fragment we see that – like

Wittgenstein, to go back to thesis 6.421 of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* – Wilde seems to see no difference between aesthetic and ethical ugliness. Nevertheless, the most important thing from the dialogical approach to style is that he shows there is an organic connection between style and compassion. Similarly, it is bad taste, or lack of imagination, not to understand one's sorrow and humiliation. Here is another passage from Wilde's work:

I remember that I used to say that I thought I could bear a real tragedy if it came to me with purple pall and a mask of noble sorrow, **but that the dreadful thing about modernity was that it put tragedy into the raiment of comedy, so that the great realities seemed commonplace or grotesque or lacking in style.** It is quite true about modernity. It has probably always been true about actual life. It is said that all martyrdoms seemed mean to the looker on. The nineteenth century is no exception to the rule. **Everything about my tragedy has been hideous, mean, repellent, lacking in style;** our very dress makes us grotesque. (...) Well, now I am really beginning to feel more regret for the people who laughed than for myself. Of course when they saw me I was not on my pedestal, I was in the pillory. **But it is a very unimaginative nature that only cares for people on their pedestals. A pedestal may be a very unreal thing. A pillory is a terrific reality. They should have known also how to interpret sorrow better. I have said that behind sorrow there is always sorrow. It were wiser still to say that behind sorrow there is always a soul. And to mock at a soul in pain is a dreadful thing** (Wilde 2001: 25–26, emphasis added).

Another crucial dialogical issue presented in *De Profundis* is this belief that “the artistic life is simply self-development. Humility in the artist is his frank acceptance of all experiences, just as love in the artist is simply the sense of beauty that reveals to the world its body and its



soul” (Wilde 2001: 13). I will explore humility in more detail in the second chapter, but as we know, dialogue is simply impossible without admitting first that the other may be right, that we do not have a monopoly on truth. Additionally, Wilde emphasizes here both “sides of the garden,” which people seem to ignore. Interestingly, in the following fragment he indicates that humility, or even humiliation, leads us to a profound, healthy individualism. I would say: individualism understood as being in harmony with yourself, knowing yourself, hence discovering, developing and cultivating your style.

So perhaps whatever beauty of life still remains to me is contained in some moment of surrender, abasement, and humiliation. I can, at any rate, merely proceed on the lines of my own development, and, accepting all that has happened to me, make myself worthy of it. People used to say of me that I was too individualistic. **I must be far more of an individualist than ever I was.** I must get far more out of myself than ever I got, and ask far less of the world than ever I asked. **Indeed, my ruin came not from too great individualism of life, but from too little. The one disgraceful, unpardonable, and to all time contemptible action of my life was to allow myself to appeal to society for help and protection.** To have made such an appeal would have been from the individualist point of view bad enough, but what excuse can there ever be put forward for having made it? (...) **There is no error more common than that of thinking that those who are the causes or occasions of great tragedies share in the feelings suitable to the tragic mood: no error more fatal than expecting it of them. (...) Great passions are for the great of soul, and great events can be seen only by those who are on a level with them** (Wilde 2001: 26–27, emphasis added).

Wilde, like Borges, refers to Christ from an artistic point of view, obviously here we are talking about the art of life.

He wrote: “I see a far more intimate and immediate connection between the true life of Christ and the true life of the artist” (Wilde 2001: 13). Furthermore, in my opinion, he points out, in a dialogical way point, the profound imagination characteristic for the artist, but following the beautiful definition of compassion provided by Wisława Szymborska – it was an imagination of the heart. Wilde described Christ as a supreme artist:

He realised in the entire sphere of human relations that imaginative sympathy which in the sphere of Art is the sole secret of creation. He understood the leprosy of the leper, the darkness of the blind, the fierce misery of those who live for pleasure, the strange poverty of the rich (Wilde 2001: 13).

Later, he added that Christ is a poet, since “[h]is whole conception of Humanity sprang right out of the imagination and can only be realised by it. (...) He was the first to conceive the divided races as a unity” (Wilde 2001: 14). Wilde wrote that the entire life of Christ was in fact the most wonderful poem, and he quoted Renan, that “Christ’s great achievement was that he made himself as much loved after his death as he had been during his lifetime” (Wilde 2001: 15).

For Wilde, Christ is the first and the most supreme individualist, who is always looking for man’s soul. Once more, we see that it is an art – and difficult one – to know and to be yourself. Wilde agrees with Ralph Waldo Emerson that is this the rarest thing among people, those who possess their souls and act on their own, since he wrote: “Most people are

other people. Their thoughts are some one else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation" (Wilde 2001: 16). In my opinion, Wilde perfectly understood the difference between Christ and a philanthropist or an altruist, because all the advice he gave was at the same time best for one's own sake and for the other, even if the other is the enemy. Simply because love is more beautiful than hate we should forgive our enemies, we should give to the poor, because we wealth can be dangerous. He pointed out the similarities – I would say analogies – between the lives of people, for love is a universal remedy (Wilde 2001: 16–17).

Christ is for Wilde like a supreme artist mainly due to his compassion:

To the artist, expression is the only mode under which he can conceive life at all. To him what is dumb is dead. But to Christ it was not so. With a width and wonder of imagination that fills one almost with awe, he took the entire world of the inarticulate, the voiceless world of pain, as his kingdom, and made of himself its eternal mouthpiece. Those of whom I have spoken, who are dumb under oppression, and "whose silence is heard only of God," he chose as his brothers. (...) And feeling, with the artistic nature of one to whom suffering and sorrow were modes through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful, that an idea is of no value till it becomes incarnate and is made an image, he made of himself the image of the Man of Sorrows, and as such has fascinated and dominated art as no Greek god ever succeeded in doing (Wilde 2001: 17).

The last dialogical point from *De Profundis* I want to emphasize is the declaration made by Wilde about his further work. After the tremendous prison experience he declared that there only two subject he is interested in as an artist

(in this broadest sense) “one is «Christ as the precursor of the romantic movement in life»: the other is «The artistic life considered in its relation to conduct»” (Wilde 2001: 20). He was fascinated by Christ’s morality, because it was based on sympathy, as morality should, his justice is poetical justice. He highlights what today we would call a sort of moral particularism: that there are no moral universal rules or laws and cannot be, there are only exceptions, since nobody in fact deserves love, and moreover “Probably no one deserved anything” (Wilde 2001: 21).

## 1.6. Signature or meaning-expressing conception of style

IN ORDER TO PRESENT THE DIALOGICAL PHILOSOPHY OF STYLE, I believe it is worth analyzing in detail one of the central controversies within the general theory of style, namely the signature conception and meaning-expressing approach. I will follow Judith Genova’s paper (1979), where she synthesizes the main differences between both these style theories, taking into consideration the domain (questions like: What is qualified by style?), origins (for instance: Is style an entirely unconscious manifestation of character?) and the significance of style (among others, the question: Is style symbolic of the meaning of the work?).

Genova argues against what she calls the “signature view” of style, which is usually linked to Georges-Louis

Leclerc, Comte de Buffon's famous aphorism "The style is the man." It defines style and covers such approaches as: an artistic way that comes from the psychological make-up of personality, that is characteristic for one's life; a way of expressing one's mind, of revealing epistemic beliefs and choices, affective states, feelings that inform us about the identity of author.

Genova believes it is an entirely misguided view that ignores the important question of significance of style (hence the title of the paper 1979), instead focusing on the issue of the origins of style. She advocates for the vital role of style that "is creating and discovering meaning," which at the same constitutes the interest of literary and philosophical inquiry (Genova 1979: 315). She wrote:

if style is interpreted as the idiosyncratic machinations of character – I shall use "character" in the Aristotelian sense to cover everything from psychological predicates to epistemic ones – as ways of writing, painting or composing which do not reflect the artistry or craftsmanship of the artist, then I see no reason to treat style very seriously. It would have minor cognitive import and little aesthetic value. Psychoanalysts and insurance agents might make important use of stylistic studies, but aesthetics and criticism stand little to gain (Genova 1979: 315–316).

More precisely, the signature view is defined by subsequent nine theses, following Genova (1979):

1. Style is characteristic of human artifacts only, nature is styleless.
2. Style qualifies persons first, and artifacts only secondarily.
3. Style originates in character: it is an expression of individuality and subjectivity.

4. Styles are not chosen: they are unconscious manifestations of character.
5. Style is symbolic of the maker; it functions to identify the work in terms of either the epistemic beliefs, affective states, or psychological dispositions or attributes of the maker.
6. Style is not symbolic of the meaning of the work.
7. Style symbolizes by means of expression.
8. Stylistic features are functionally defined, e.g. any recurrent feature which serves to identify the maker is a stylistic feature.
9. Style offers a ground external to the work or corpus of works, which explains its predictable characteristics.

In the Polish tradition Władysław Tatarkiewicz also represented the signature view of style and since he is not mentioned in Genova's paper, let me quote his opinion, which seems to be quite orthodox in terms of this position. Especially if we take into consideration his stance on thesis (3) and (4). Interestingly, he also believed that style, even as an inherent phenomenon and manifestation of the way of perceiving reality, cannot be hereditary. He wrote:

Apart from these constant orders, categories and varieties, the history of the arts shows yet another multiplicity: the multiplicity of styles. These are not permanent forms from among which the artist may choose, and are unintentional with him; they are a necessity, for they correspond to the way of seeing, imagining and thinking of his times and milieu. They are not, for the most part, conscious with him; the critic, and especially the historian, is better aware of them than is the artist. Nor are they passed down from generation to generation; they change together with life and culture, under the influence of social, economic and psychological factors, and are an expression of the times. Often they change radically, shifting from one extreme to another (Tatarkiewicz 1980: 274).

At the end of her paper (1979) Genova formulated nine analogous theses defining the meaning-expressing model of style. As we will see, theses (1) and (8) are common to both approaches. Sometimes, as in the case of theses (2) and (4) the difference consists in proportion and/or emphasis, they are not mutually exclusive:

1. Style is characteristic of human artifacts only; nature is styleless.
2. Style qualifies artifacts first and persons only secondarily.
3. Style originates from a variety of sources ranging from psychological to cultural and aesthetic ones.
4. Style is not entirely the result of conscious choices; unconscious factors of a wide variety play a role.
5. Style is symbolic of meaning.
6. Style symbolizes by means of expression, i.e., metaphorical exemplification.
7. Style can individuate; a stylistic analysis will often answer the questions: who? where? when?
8. Style features are functionally defined; any recurrent feature which expresses meaning is a style feature.
9. Style offers a description of the work in terms of its formally functioning features (Genova 1979: 324).

Now, in order to consider the dialogical view of style in relation to the two presented conceptions, first of all, of course, the first thesis states that style is a purely human phenomenon, since nature is styleless. However, it seems to be the only thesis we agree upon. Hence, thesis (2) already emphasizes the difference between the approaches. According to the dialogical view, style qualifies the way in which persons relate to the world of nature, to other people, to the spiritual world, artifacts. It is about attitude

and relationships. Therefore regarding thesis (3), when following the dialogical view we may say that style originates from the dialogical attitude, which requires humility, openness, courage and self-discovery; in Freire's words, it comes from "conscientização."<sup>6</sup> According to thesis (4), style is at the same time the result of a person's unconscious endowment and that person's conscious dialogical relationship, in other words style is at the same time style is a condition of dialogical relation and a result of such a relation. On the topic of symbolism, i.e. theses (5), (6) and (7), according to the dialogical view style is symbolic of relations. It functions to describe the relations between a person and his/her surroundings, be it nature, other people, spiritual beings, artifacts, etc. This answer may be better understood with an anecdote from Weil. She said that in order to evaluate the state of given society we have to see if people on the street smile. Moreover, following the dialogical view, a stylistic analysis would begin with answering the question: Whether the *I* of a given man is a dialogical *I* (that is, it is the *I* of the *I-Thou* pair), or is this man's *I* a non-dialogical one (that is, it is a *I* from the pair *I-It*)? The next question is: how does the person relate to *x*? Thesis (8), which states that style features are functionally defined e.g., any recurrent feature which serves to identify the maker is a style feature, is compatible with the dialogical view. However, when we turn to thesis (9), especially in comparison with

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<sup>6</sup> This term will be explained in detail in subsection 2.2.



the signature view, it is worth noting that since dialogue cannot be predictable, the dialogical view of style must also be dynamic and “fresh.” It must represent a genuine reaction to the here and now, i.e. to the instant, to changing – hopefully evolving – relationships, and since abundance is one of the fundamental categories in this approach, predictability leads to boredom and a true dialogical attitude is original and keeps our interest. Additionally, as was mentioned, the analogical paradigm enables us to deepen our insight, to see more in more detail, to grasp more and more nuances, therefore nothing is ever fixed within the dialogical view of style.

Apropos of nuances, Genova highlights the importance of the distinctiveness of style, writing: “style need not originate in character in order to serve its identificatory function. All one requires is that a work or corpus of works be distinctive. One need not go on to hypostatize a distinctive personality behind the distinctive work” (Genova 1979: 316). Let me recall that “distinction/similarity” is the basic opposition of the analogical paradigm, which is characteristic for the dialogical view – or more generally – for the philosophy of style.

## 1.7. Susan Sontag: erotics of style

IN HER FAMOUS WORK *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag wrote that we do not need hermeneutics, but an erotics of art. Therefore she would not agree with the

meaning-expressing view of style, as for her the point of art is how things are presented, and we should be able to make it our own experience – interestingly enough, by analogy.

The aim of all commentary of art now should be to make work of art – and, by analogy, our own experience – more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means* (Sontag 2013: 17).

Her essay “On Style” contains certain opinions that are compatible with the dialogical view of style. First of all, she points out that “the notion of style-less, transparent art is one of the most tenacious fantasies of modern culture.” Hence, the neutral attitude is impossible, we would say that we always relate to others, to the world even when we ignore them. Sontag rejects other erroneous opinions concerning style that come from misleading metaphors. One of them is Whitman’s “curtain” metaphor for style, conceived as a purely decorative encumbrance, which is “just as wrong as the fancy that an artist possesses the genuine option to have or not to have a style.” Sontag agrees with Cocteau – that in fact decorative style does not exist, since our manner of appearing is our manner of being (Sontag 2013: 19). Furthermore, she indicates the general antipathy to “style” is in fact an antipathy to a given style and consequently the notion of “style” should be approached historically.

From dialogical view of style, this passage from Sontag is particularly interesting: “A work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not a statement or an

answer to a question. Art is not only about something, it is something. A work of art is a thin in a world, not just a text or commentary to the world.” Of course, she did not claim that works of art are entirely self-referential, they do present information and evaluation, but it is not about conceptual knowledge, it is about expressiveness, i.e. style. She explains: “the knowledge we gain through art is an experience of the form or style of knowing something, rather than a knowledge of something (like a fact or moral judgment) in itself” (Sontag 2013: 22). And from the dialogical perspective one may say that she emphasizes the seductive character of art, in the sense that when one is uninterested or does not want to participate in the process, there is nothing to be done. Similarly, just as dialogue cannot be forced, any kind of violence or imposition excludes the possibility of true encounter.

Furthermore, Sontag – like Wittgenstein and Wilde – seems also to disagree with the distinction between moral and aesthetic pleasures. She wrote: “The moral pleasure in art, as well as the moral service that art performs, consists in the intelligent gratification of consciousness (...) Morality is a form of acting and not a particular repertoire of choice” (Sontag 2013: 24). Therefore, there is no conflict between morality as a form of consciousness aimed at action and aesthetic experience understood as the nourishment of consciousness. “For it is sensibility that nourishes our capacity for moral choice, and prompts our readiness to act, assuming that we do choose, which is a prerequisite for calling an act moral,

and are not just blindly and unreflectively obeying” (Sontag 2013: 24).

Hence on the one hand Sontag strongly connects ethics and aesthetics, on the other hand it may seem paradoxical that she believes that a work of art, regardless of artist’s personal intentions, cannot advocate, support anything at all. She wrote explicitly: “The greatest artist attains a sublime neutrality. (...) All great art induces contemplation, a dynamic contemplation” (Sontag 2013: 25). This question is in fact perfectly compatible with the dialogical view of style, since dialogue must be spontaneous and without any hidden agenda. The only goal is to know; when somebody has a plan, it is pure rhetoric. The whole point of dialogue is to absorb the other point of view, it is also transformative but not didactic. In this context it is worth recalling the opinion of Borges and Sabato concerning artist as a true rebel, and their brilliant critique of any kind of “program art.”

From this point of view, Sontag’s view of a work of art as an experience of the qualities or forms of consciousness seem to be very Buberian. In general, when she talks about the totality of this experience, I would compare it with the “full horizon” and the *I-Thou* relation. When she talks about a work of art as nourishment that transforms us in some way, since we become more open and enriched, it is really hard for me not to see a dialogical encounter. Moreover, when she points out the singularity of every work of art, one should also think about the fundamental dialogical category of concreteness. Sontag wrote: “What a work of art does is to make us see or comprehend something singular,

not to judge or generalize. This act of comprehension accompanied by voluptuousness is the only valid end, and sole sufficient justification, of a work of art” (Sontag 2013: 27).

Another common point with the dialogical view of style is comparing style to the notion of “distance” from the lived reality represented in the work of art. Sontag wrote:

all great art is founded on distance, on artificiality, on style, on what Ortega calls dehumanization. However, she added crucial remarks in this context, namely that we have to remember that the movement is not just away from but toward the world. The overcoming or transcending of the world in art is also a way of encountering the world, and of training or educating the will to be in the world (Sontag 2013: 28).

Sontag’s following opinion seems to express the signature view of style. She wrote: “Style is the principle of decision in a work of art, the signature of the artist’s will. As the human will is capable of an indefinite number of stances, there are an indefinite number of possible styles for works of art” (Sontag 2013: 29).

However, again she – like Buber and the proposed dialogical view of style – believes that style is seen only when we encounter the whole, the totality of the work of art, not when we analyze it and consider it part by part. Moreover, style is inevitable, should appear as natural, not constructed (Sontag 2013: 30).

Another aspect, especially interesting from the perspective of the culture of memory, is that style can also be seen as a mnemonic device that preserves against oblivion. However nowadays it seems to be an almost

impossible luxury, both for the artist and the public, to have the time and attention to slowly develop a memorable style (Sontag 2013: 31).

From the dialogical view of style, connected with the approach to style as an editing process, the following remarks of Sontag are truly important. She indicates that style as distinctive or even signature of an artist is simply “a means of insisting in something,” since it reflect one’s hierarchy of values, the way of perceiving the reality, the focusing points. Sontag wrote:

It will be seen that stylistic decisions, by focusing our attention on some things, are also narrowing our attention, a refusal to see others. But the greater interestingness of one work of art over another does not rest on the greater number of things the stylistic decisions in that work allow us to attend to, but rather the intensity and authority and wisdom of that attention, however narrow its focus (...). In the strictest sense, all of the contents of consciousness are ineffable. Even the simplest sensation is, in its totality, indescribable. Every work of art, therefore, needs to be understood not only as something rendered, but also as a certain handling of the ineffable. In the greatest art, one is always aware of things that cannot be said (...). Stylistic devices are also techniques of avoidance. The most potent elements in a work of art are, often, its silences (Sontag 2013: 32).

Therefore, style can accentuate some elements or ignore them, this is the author’s decision. Sometimes even by ignoring or omitting something we make it more visible, as in a painting when we apply the negative space technique. Sontag seems to particularly appreciate this paradoxical way of emphasizing or making some aspect or messages more poignant and even clearer. It is like in the case of

humor, when non-literal jokes are the usually the funniest, or when “le grand absent” is usually someone everybody talks about. This is the question that I will discuss in the following subsection.

Last but not least, let me point out that Sontag emphasizes that the notion of style can be applied to all experiences which are at the same time autonomous and exemplary, which in my opinion is again perfectly compatible with the dialogical view of style, since in this approach style characterizes all human relationships.

### 1.8. Style as editing

AS I MENTIONED, the dialogical perspective is about *how* we relate to others, other people, nature, the world of art, spiritual being or even God. Therefore, certain aspects of this understanding of style can be analyzed when we consider style as editing, a reflection of a certain manner of configuring elements. Similarly to Sontag, who wrote about focusing or narrowing attention, the dialogical view of style adopts Weil’s philosophical category, in the sense that attention, the way of editing our relation, already says a lot.

Editing is usually linked with a text, but if we think about the word “texture,” we can see spaces, ways of configuring elements, be they people or relations, thereby establishing distances and hierarchies and structures. Editing also requires taking maximum context into consideration, and it is a powerful process since it can lead to

making visible elements, be they people, the oppressed, or hidden groups, historical events, may contribute essentially to the fight against invisibilization.

It is necessary to have an integral vision, since when something crucial is hidden or cut out, ignored, then the style is false. Like in fair trade we have to take into consideration the production process, honest wages, workplace conditions, the impact of the used method on the community and the environment, the quality of the product, but also its “afterlife” – i.e. issues such as whether the packaging is recyclable, biodegradable, minimal, effective, easy to transport and store etc.

Editing is powerful, since we can relate to the dead, to the silenced, to those with no name, the dialogical style makes room for everybody, at least potentially. This where I agree with Sontag when she says that already seeing, in other words showing an element never seen before, or never emphasized, is already both morally and aesthetically beneficial.

Style is a dynamic and evolving editing process without moralizing: just by sharp focus makes, see more, feel more, acknowledge more, respect more, represent more. It happens, of course, to those who wish to see more, feel more, etc. It is simply about abundance: nobody's style should be denied, and nobody's style has to disappear. At the same time we should feel free to edit the way we want, some components can be derived from memory, therefore in fact, justice plays a fundamental role when we consider style as a way of editing, adding invisibilized elements,



lost configurations; a way of expanding one's vision, of developing openness and awareness of omitted elements.

In order to analyze the editing process as style, on the one hand, the dialogical philosophy of style is focused on making things present, visible and emphasized, while, on the other hand, non-dialogical approaches tend to omit, ignore, silence and reduce some of them. Let me start with a negative approach, since before understanding what presence means, we need a profound reflection on absence. There are several types of absence; it seems that there are even different degrees of how one can be absent: imagine a person being treated without the respect that is due to that person, humiliated, nameless, voiceless, without papers, silenced, invisible, etc. All these cases concern those who want to participate in the present, but cannot, so it is not about those who simply do not want to participate. There is a fundamental difference between lack and emptiness/void. Lack refers to previous presence, while emptiness/void concerns absence. When we miss someone, it seems that this person is somehow present – thanks to memory, which is very powerful, even at times almost corporeally palpable, with a very strong image, voice and scent, while emptiness/void has no reference, it is like nothingness. Let me just also recall here the powerful notion of “lack of style” used by Wilde (see section 1.5.).

The most atrocious way to deprive someone of their presence is hermeneutical death. This term comes from Reyes Mate. It seems that after corporeal death a more serious crime cannot be committed, but hermeneutical

death consists in erasing any trace of the existence of a person or an entire group of people, as in the case of the Holocaust. The Nazis not only wanted to exterminate the Jewish people, but also to destroy every element of their culture and rewrite history without them, as if they had never existed. The aim then is absolute oblivion, which is much more shocking than the mere act of hiding the crime.

In contrast, memory in Mate's conception emerges as the foundation of justice and a whole project for a new culture: the culture of memory. Analogously to Freire, Mate shows that there are several ways to silence, censor and make victims invisible, but a serious and profound theory and practice is needed in order to recover the voice, the gaze, the presence and the dignity of the victims. Freire said in the last part of his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: all our effort in this essay was to speak of a truism: just as the oppressor, in order to oppress, requires a theory of oppressive action, the oppressed, in order to liberate themselves, also require a theory of their action. It is also worth highlighting the dedication in *Tratado de la injusticia* by Mate: "To the nameless, and in the Freire's work: To the ragged people of the world and those who, discovering themselves in them, suffer with them and fight with them."

So, if the dialogical style is about choice of relation, the focal point concerning a style should be a question. As is well known (since Hans-Georg Gadamer and R.G. Collingwood) the logic of humanities is a logic of

questions. According to Reyes Mate, the issue of unthinkable crimes that marked history, such as Auschwitz, is a fundamental philosophical problem. The unthinkable happened and only memory is capable of opening files that science closes, and in addition memory allows a critical update of the old general justice. Interpellation or questioning is the fundamental issue of dialogue and the culture of memory. At the same time, Freire postulates a pedagogy of question (I propose to use the term “erotic pedagogy” as a synonym here) as the basis of a non-violent revolution that takes place through dialogue.

Therefore the dialogical philosophy of style follows just one rule that is expressed by many thinkers, from Augustine’s “love and do what you will” to Tadeusz Borowski’s statement: “There can be no beauty if it is paid for by human injustice, nor truth that passes over injustice in silence, nor moral virtue that condones it.” What is interesting is that Freire and Mate, both speak of the primacy of the victims; their perspectives, voices and views being *sine qua non* conditions of the new culture. Freire wrote that the oppressed can liberate themselves, and then also that only the oppressed can save their oppressors. This process is asymmetrical and can happen in this particular order. In the same way, Mate states that justice must be focused on the victims, also for the reason that only the victims can help to recover everyone in new social relationships. Freire points out that the tragedy of the most pervasive oppressed-oppressor opposition consists in the fact that the two sides of the conflict represent two

dehumanized versions of the human being. Therefore, he postulates creation and the search for social relationships where there is no place for victims or for oppressors; it is necessary to overcome this tremendous opposition. The tragedy is that in most cases the opposition remains because only the positions are changed: the oppressed become oppressors and the oppressors become the victims. This is the case if the victim finally realizes his position, which is not easy according to Freire, very often he considers that he has only two options: to be a victim or to be an oppressor. Obviously, hardly anyone wants to stay in the position of victim.

Questions and interpellation constitute the foundation of creative education, with mutual respect and trust as fundamental elements that benefit all those who participate in this dialogical process. Without questions there is no dialogue, there are no spontaneous and horizontal, deep and meaningful relationships. The interesting thing is that in the dialogic tradition (since Rosenzweig and Buber) in many languages (Spanish, Polish) the word relation means at the same time relationship and recounting/story. So the philosophy of dialogue, also called the philosophy of the encounter, the philosophy of the other, speaks of what happens here and now. It is about the presence that fills the entire horizon, that requires our full attention and profoundly transforms us. We need openness and spontaneity, because a meeting cannot be planned, it is a good, a gift, and according to some dialogical thinkers, even a grace.

Let me remind that Buber states that there is no isolated *I* but only either *I* coupled with *Thou* or *I* coupled with *It*. Consequently, the world is twofold for everyone. True life consists of encounters: each of us do truly exist only in relationships, we need *Thou* to become *I*. It can be said that there is some correspondence: Freire and Mate seem to agree with Buber, in the sense that each superficial, instrumental relationship (as within the world of *I-It*) introduces hierarchy and vertical order: such a relationship, i.e. a relation between elements arranged in a vertical order excludes dialogical symmetry. However, it is not automatically about violence, but in an *I-Thou* relationship, harm is impossible. Honest dialogue can be difficult, but it is always fruitful and beneficial and can never cause harm.

The difference between the two Buberian attitudes – and the resulted twofoldness (duplexity) of the world – can be compared to Gabriel Marcel's distinction between problem and mystery. You participate in a mystery, you live within it, you must be present to be involved in even partial elucidation of mystery, while a problem is an objective difficulty, solving a problem requires a distance, an outside perspective.

Hence, if style from the dialogical perspective is something dynamic, an on-going process, it requires constant attention and permanent commitment.

According to various dialogic thinkers, we are capable of meeting with people from the past, who have already died, or with fictional characters (as Borges said about

Don Quixote – which would be the happiest encounter of his life) or with spiritual beings, and finally with God as the eternal Thou. In short, it is the realm of our life with intelligible forms, i.e. according to the original German text “das Leben mit den geistigen Wesenheiten” in Buberian sense.

In this sense, memory helps us to find the victims who lost their lives, to realize the enormous lack, to make them present in our daily lives. According to Mate, a commemoration is the act of justice that is absolutely necessary, for several reasons. First of all, it is the only thing we can do when damage can no longer be repaired. Furthermore, it is also an act that helps prevent a continuation of the crime. We cannot continue living as if the victims had never existed, since this attitude constitutes a support or even an accomplice of the crime. Memory and dialogue then introduce a category of the ever-current present, as in the case of the conception of circular time (or at least non-linear), as in, for example, so many masterpieces of the Latin American boom, such as: *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo, *A Solid Home* (*Un hogar sólido*), *Memories of the Future* (*Los recuerdos del porvenir*) by Elena Garro, and Alejo Carpentier's *Lost Steps* (*Los pasos perdidos*). At the same time, it is worth remembering an opinion of Borges, who said in a delightful phrase: “Only what is gone is what belongs to us.”

On the other hand, there is a noteworthy opposition between the present of the dialogical situation and the past of the non-dialogical situation. A dialogue is

spontaneous, unplanned and has no intention or pre-determined purpose, except meeting itself. Therefore, in genuine face-to-face encounters we focus on what is present in front of us, here and now, while in non-dialogic situations we concentrate inevitably on fragmented information that comes from the past, like all prejudices, superstitions, etc. When we say in everyday life that we know someone, we actually have (some) data on their past version, not just the current one that we meet face to face. Therefore, the importance of attention (Weil), awareness (“conscientização” de Freire), compassion, empathy, commitment or even delight and joy is so frequently stressed in my approach.

Dialogical style cannot be idealistic – it is irreducible to one element/principle, i.e. it cannot be predictable: participants of a dialogue need to be alert, pay attention and respect each other. Consequently, dialogical style must always be interesting, original, informative; we cannot know where it will lead us as Rosenzweig said about real dialogue.

Furthermore, damage can only occur in non-dialogical situations, here we also see the connection postulated by critical thinkers of the ideals of the Enlightenment and idealism between instrumental attitude and totalitarianism. Mate also includes critics of the cult of progress, such as Walter Benjamin, Franz Kafka, Giorgio Agamben and many more. At the same time, we must mention/recall the great Sabato, who commented on the difference between a whole man (Spanish: “hombre íntegro”) and a man as a cog (Spanish: “hombre engranaje”). It seems

that the non-dialogic relationship characterizes the man as a cog (the man-cog in other words), i.e. the man who is the result of a banking education, who only imitates, reproduces; the bureaucrat who is in fact absent and near-dead. It represents elements of the necrophilic system, according to Freire. In contrast, life – biophilia – is free, spontaneous, creative, in harmony with others, without competition, dialogic, pulsating and integral. That is why people of integrity are present, they are authentic, active, conscious, they can flourish and change the world, they are in fact rebellious, as each dialogue constitutes a revolutionary act – of course non-violent – according to Freire.

The words of Octavio Paz's Nobel speech:

It may seem paradoxical to say that we have been expelled from the present, but it is a feeling we have all had at some moment. Some of us experienced it first as a condemnation, later transformed into consciousness and action. The search for the present is neither the pursuit of an earthly paradise nor that of a timeless eternity: it is the search for a real reality.



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## Attitude: Freedom and Flexibility

### 2.1. Style as radical harmony

STYLE CAN BE CONSIDERED AS A RADICAL HARMONY. I propose using the term “harmony,” following Alessandro Pronzato and Gustave Thibon, since they present the opposition balance-harmony in similar ways. Pronzato (1982) understands that harmony is an art, a never-ending process, and a work in progress. Searching for harmony is essentially different from balancing, and moreover, according to him, being out of balance signifies life and movement. In one interview, David Bowie said that the role of an artist is to be dysfunctional. While Camus said that utopian goals are like stars that show the directions in which one should go. Similarly, Thibon (1976) – as we know, harmony was one of the fundamental categories of his philosophy – also emphasized that harmony is a qualitative phenomenon. I would propose that harmony can also be described as a dialogical phenomenon – based

on convergent points of view, pursuing a common goal together, although in different ways; following a similar hierarchy of values, and therefore gladly accepting any contribution to solving a given problem. In contrast, according to Pronzato and Thibon, balance is quantitative, since it involves measuring the same amount to unify and eradicate all distinctions. The opposition harmony/balance is fundamental, since it results in conflicting outcomes: harmony is alive, vibrant, and based on abundance; whereas, balance leads to a total lack of creativity, and stagnation annihilates any distinctive traits, i.e., homogenization, unification, and univocity. In a sense, the harmony/balance opposition corresponds to what Freire calls the biophilic and necrophilic approaches, respectively. In the following subsection (2.2.), I will present this opposition from the general educational point of view.

Style as radical harmony is an art based on honoring authentic distinctiveness; it saves everyone's uniqueness and promotes acceptance of pluralism. Pronzato explicitly said that harmony is freedom, and let me recall Bertrand Russell, who believed that "freedom is the basis of everything" (Russell 2009: 286). Therefore, if style can be understood as radical harmony and being responsible, it means being free to decide and choose between options; style is an ongoing creative process that cannot be reduced to adapting in other words balancing differences. Instead, it saves true diversity *par excellence*, i.e., leads to abundance.

In this context, it is worth recalling the crucial role of analogy in dialogue and non-reductionistic harmony.

The uniqueness of style is recognized thanks to similarities and distinctions. Through dialogue, one becomes more and more aware of the dynamic character of analogies – what is similar is not the same, what is distinct is not completely different – which requires acknowledging a presence and certain distance, i.e., the fundamental margin of the unknown and humility. Hence, a true encounter, a true dialogical situation, does not lead to unification; when two distinct human beings representing two different styles meet, they remain two separate persons, not one. In the same way, the goal of reconciliation is cohabitation, cooperation; there is a plurality, an abundance presumed from the start.

Humility is usually not the first thing that comes to mind when talking about something radical; however, when I propose considering style as a radical harmony, it follows that humility, as a dynamic process involving self-awareness and acceptance of imperfections, is essential. It seems evident that style is never perfect, in the sense of a finished, fixed outcome, but is rather harmonious – i.e., relative to a particular, concrete person, situation – and original. Paraphrasing the title of Grace Jones' song *I'm Not Perfect (But I'm Perfect for You)*,<sup>1</sup> I would say a style is never perfect, but maybe perfect for somebody.

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<sup>1</sup> The first single from *Inside Story* album (1986) with a great video (directed by Grace Jones with, among others, Keith Haring and Timothy Leary).

In order to deepen the idea of style as a radical harmony, let me refer to the very old account of the problem of beauty and the conception of human relations presented by Leszek Nowak. According to Aquinas, beauty includes three conditions, namely (1) integrity (perfection) [Latin “*integritas sive perfectio*”], (2) proportion (harmony) [“*proportio sive consonantia*”], and (3) brightness (clarity) [“*claritas*”] (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 39, a. 8).

Let us consider some of the relations between people: imagine three situations, in other words, three models of encounters. The first type of situation is when two people meet, and each of them responds with equal kindness to the kindness of the other. Or, in turn, the hostility expressed by one person is reciprocated by the other person’s hostility. In the other two situations – or simply encounter models – this adequacy of reactions is absent. The first model involves enslavement. In this case, one of the individuals, namely the enslaved, subjugated person, fails to pursue their own goals – in which case this person’s decisions are consistent with the other person’s preferences. What is more, this person responds with kindness even to the hostility expressed by the other person. It should be noted that one can be enslaved of one’s own will. In the third situation – exasperation – one of the persons, exasperated, intends to cause harm to the other person. In this case, the first person responds with hostility even to the kindness expressed by the other.

Suppose one agrees that the reciprocity in the responses to kindness and hostility typical of the first situation

is the most desired element of human relationships. In that case, the main question – and a practical problem – related to these two encounter models is to find a way out of enslavement or exasperation. For the enslaved or exasperated person, this is also the first step to regaining freedom. Following Wilde, I would say that enslavement and exasperation are “lacking in style,” while the first step to regaining freedom is at the same time the first step to discovering/looking for one’s authentic style.

It appears that an accurate (or maybe just metaphorical) term that reflects the essence of the first condition for regaining lost freedom is the word “clarity” (this notion will be analyzed in 2.3.). First, one has to see, recognize one’s position. To see, one needs the light, which brings clarity. This clarity also makes reconciliation possible, as “living in agreement” (harmonious life) constitutes our ultimate goal, according to the famous work entitled *Epitome of Stoic Ethics* by Arius Didymus. In this sense, I propose calling style a radical harmony. However, there is also a dialogical aspect of style as harmony. By “reconciliation,” I mean not only an act of being reconciled or the state of being reconciled but also the process of making consistent or compatible. Such an act, or state, may occur between two persons. It is worth noting that the reconciliation process can take place not only between two different persons – I am also talking about reconciliation with oneself.

The dialogical character of style as a radical harmony can be observed in this beautiful quote from Pronzato:

“Evil cannot be balanced by any other evil.” He emphasizes what I present in more detail in the following subsection (2.2.), namely that the balancing that amounts to just leveling is never an improvement, that any dialogical, i.e., non-violent, response requires creative effort since it is not about switching positions in the tragic yet pervasive opposition between oppressor/oppressed, but the whole point is rather to overcome it and create such structures i.e., relations, where there is no place for either oppressors or the oppressed.

## 2.2. Freedom is the only style: education

WITHIN THE DIALOGICAL CONCEPTION OF STYLE, on the one hand, it is presumed that elaborating style requires one’s own work and honest searching. Nobody can present you with a ready style; finding it is a lifelong process; however, this process is dialogical. Nevertheless, analogically to Freire’s principle from *Pedagogy of Liberation*, which states that only liberated teachers can liberate students, or, more generally, that only liberated people can liberate others, only someone with style can help you discover yours. Of course, we should remember that the dialogical process requires freedom; nothing here can be forced. In this sense, liberated people can be considered to be those who have found their style, who have accepted it, and live by it, as well as those who are open to developing it.

Therefore, here I would like to focus on styles of education to show that we have only two basic/main styles: dialogical and anti-dialogical. One of the first assumptions must be that there is not just one good way of life; there are numerous similar and distinct ways of dealing with basic problems like cooking, cleaning, hygiene, taking care of oneself, decorating, teaching, and preserving the environment, etc. In every case, this abundance concerns the diversity of living conditions, but there is a wide variety of choices for doing and organizing something, even within one context.

In general, style refers to *how* to do something instead of *what* to do. Education should be about discovering your individual style, which is internally connected with independent thinking, and there is absolutely no need for authority, as John Corcoran wrote:

Education is something that is done by the student. Indoctrination is something that is done by the teacher. Education has to do with how to think; indoctrination has to do with what to think. Education brings something out of the student; indoctrination puts something into the student (Corcoran 1999: 114).

Dialogical education is about creativity and is, in fact, an art. Let me quote Corcoran's brilliant analogy between "licencia pedagógica" and "licencia poética." Likewise, in style, there cannot be fixed rules and recipes, in fact, that which is stylish is irregular, in the sense of lack of balance, according to Pronzato. More importantly, it is never about reproducing, imitating, and blindly following the rules.

A pedagogical license is like poetic license. Poetic license, as you know, is them to use otherwise illicit means to achieve artistic effects. Common examples involve violating rules of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, grammar, coherence, fact, mathematics, or even logic. Society values artistic effects so highly that it is willing to condone otherwise reproachable means that produce them. Poetic license has been taken to be a prime example of the end justifying the means. It is the same with pedagogical license, the authorization accorded to teachers permitting them to use otherwise illicit means to achieve pedagogical goals (Corcoran 1999: 114).

Gil Scott-Heron said something similar about his work which, paradoxically, many people considered as primarily focused on a strong political message. “My songs were always about the tone of voice rather than the words.” Moreover, his most famous song *Revolution Will Not Be Televised* also talks about the inner revolution that takes place in one’s head; this kind of revolution cannot be televised, but it is crucial to keep learning.

In general, then – like Tischner, the Polish dialogical philosopher, said – the best thing that a person can do for another is to awaken in them a sense of dignity and a sense of freedom, I would add that these two things also imply one’s style. The main goal of dialogical education is to encourage freedom, free-thinking, independence, freedom from authority and false fashions, prejudices, and ideologies. These were the metarules of very different styles of education in the humanities; here we can focus on some fascinating figures, namely Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz (and Kazimierz Twardowski, the Founder of Lvov-Warsaw School) and Freire, the creator of the



pedagogy of liberation. The fundamental feature of their approaches is the anti-irrational standpoint, which helps strengthen a person's autonomy and independent thinking. I posit that a style must also be anti-irrational since one of the basic tenets of rationalism is that the universe is a cosmos rather than chaos. This fundamental assumption of order – even if it is extremely complex and dynamic – is necessary for any reflection on style.

Anti-irrationalism is also founded on respect, trust, a dialogical student-teacher relation, and an individual approach. This is one of the characteristics of the Lvov-Warsaw School and, later, of the logical empire created by Ajdukiewicz. Usually, these two remarkable phenomena from the history of Polish philosophy are said to be hard to define, since it was not about following the leader, but rather an attitude that consisted above all in intellectual honesty, clarity of language, and philosophical analysis, as well as a sense of mission and the importance of philosophical endeavors. Neither Twardowski nor Ajdukiewicz ever forced his disciples to follow their interests, ideas, or conceptions; they encouraged every one of them to develop their talents, skills, and opportunities. I would say their own styles of work. This may explain why the members of the Lvov-Warsaw School and Ajdukiewicz's pupils included logicians, methodologists, historians of philosophy, ethicists, and phenomenologists, as well as people of different backgrounds, religious beliefs, genders, and specialties.

In general, the Polish style of philosophy (if we consider the legacy of these two eminent representatives) can be

characterized as applying formal methods to solving philosophical problems. It is worth mentioning that Twardowski considered philosophy a collection of philosophical disciplines, such as ethics, metaphysics, esthetics, epistemology, and logic, but not as a system. Franz Brentano, Twardowski, and later Ajdukiewicz, adopted a meta-philosophical style characterized by an anti-skeptical attitude, anti-naturalism, realism within epistemology and axiology, empiricism, and philosophical minimalism.

When Freire described the “banking” system of education as opposed to a dialogical, liberating one, he emphasized the fact that the former treats students as empty bank accounts, i.e., homogenous, empty vessels that teachers fill with information that only has to be copied, remembered and reproduced without any regard for individual talents, personality, skills, or preferences. The goal of the banking system of education is to produce perfect gears that cannot even question the machine’s functioning. Authority is of the utmost importance and is never doubted. The dialogical system is considered by Freire to be not only radical but even revolutionary, and he pointed out that sectarians (both on the left and right-wings) suffer from an absence of doubt and are unable to appreciate it. Liberation is based on love, trust, respect for the other and their concrete situations, and particular life conditions; it is an education. Therefore, within a liberating, dialogical educational system, personal style is encouraged and cherished. According to Freire, these two systems, i.e., banking and liberation

education, represent, respectively, the necrophilic (love of death) and biophilic (love of life) attitudes and views of the world (Freire 1996: 40–43). I will use this opposition when commenting on some examples of the dialogical style in subsection (3.6).

It is worth mentioning that the critic of authority is associated with a biophilic attitude, since dialogue can only happen between two equal partners. Moreover, strongly rationalistic philosophers, like Bocheński or Russell, spoke against authority while advocating for the courage to engage in independent thinking, and I would say implicitly for developing original and creative style. Bocheński and Corcoran's recommendation for younger philosophers is to be true to oneself, courageous, and uninfluenced by trends, statistics, popular opinions, and authorities. Nevertheless, of course, one must keep up with the research since self-educating is a lifelong process and moral obligation; however, they firmly believed that, at the same time, it is a fascinating experience when you are considered a maverick.

Many logicians and philosophers believed in a close correlation between logic and ethics; in fact, Jan Łukasiewicz said that logic is the ethics of thinking, and my friend Piotr Leśniewski even calls logic a "hygiene of thinking." Similarly, Corcoran postulated that logic and ethics are inseparable, and pointed out the experimental nature of individual critical thinking: "critical thinking is applying tests; more specifically, it is applying tests or criteria in one's own thinking" (Corcoran 1999: 110).

All the above-mentioned thinkers highlighted the pragmatic, concrete context of education that defined any rational and dialogical organization of education, work, and social life. Freire wrote:

It is to the reality which mediates men and to the perception of that reality held by educators and people that we must go find the program content of education. The investigation of what I have termed the people's "thematic universe" – the complex of their "generative themes" – inaugurates the dialogue of education as the practice of freedom. The methodology of that investigation must likewise be dialogical, affording the opportunity both to discover generative themes and to stimulate people's awareness in regard to these themes (Freire 1996: 77–78).

Freire also placed strong emphasis on the fact that in dialogical theory investigation requires a climate of creative enthusiasm, free from alienation and prescribed strategies. This enthusiasm encourages experimentation, freely taking creative risks, and the enrichment of both sides, in fact, the enrichment of every participant of the process. He wrote:

Cultural synthesis does not deny the differences between two views; indeed, it is based on these differences. It does deny the invasion of one by the other, but affirms the undeniable support each gives to the other. (...) Cultural synthesis is the only way (Freire 1996: 162–163).

## 2.3. On coherence and clarity: style as integrity

COHERENCE AND CLARITY REGARDING STYLE can be considered natural elements of the above-mentioned

anti-irrational attitude; however, at this point, I would like to present these notions as elements of the concept of style as integrity.

Let me start with the quote from the last paragraph of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's letter (dated January 21st, 1905) from Lovran to his son, the avant-garde Polish artist. He wrote: "My dear! Kisses – be healthy, **clear**, and good" (emphasis added).

By coherence and clarity of style, my conception is of a certain distinctiveness or sharpness of style. In order to exist, the style must be recognizable, hence the distinct, signature approach to style. However, I would like to point out another feature: sharpness, a sort of decisiveness, and there are no "blurry" styles. Style requires, on the one hand, making decisions, taking a stand, making a choice, and on the other hand, responsibility, since no ambiguity is possible. Naturally, I as mentioned beforehand; a style may change, it requires dynamics, experimentation, and is cultivated by trial-and-error methods. Hence one should always be ready to modify and improve one's style. At the same time, one must be cohesive in introducing changes to maintain a sense of integrity.

Richard Wollheim uses another excellent word for the integrity associated with style, namely overallness, and he emphasized that an achieved style "bleeds" into many domains of life. He wrote:

Every person has a life of his own, his one and only life, and that life he leads. But some more so than others... My point is... concerns the varying degrees to which people... manage to give

to their lives a pattern, an overallness, or the different degrees of success they have in making their lives a piece... **Such integration of life [is] something that in many ages, for many cultures, has been in the nature of ideal – a grace to be cultivated or a triumph to be won** (Wollheim 1980, also in Kekes 2008: 3, emphasis added).

Let me recall Sabato's definition of "a man with integrity" (Spanish "hombre íntegro"). This definition of integrity is opposed to "cog man" (Spanish "hombre engranaje"). Following Freire, we would say that integrity is a fruit of the pedagogy of liberation. At the same time, a "fragmented person" is only a passive cog in the massive system due to the banking system of education. Of course, this is about overallness, since integrity refers to coherence, a correspondence between what one says and does. Sabato did not explicitly refer to style, but in my opinion, this definition perfectly fits the dialogical concept of style, since a style of life should manifest itself in every aspect of personality, way of doing things, expressing oneself etc.

Moreover, Sabato explained that he came up with this opposition after a massive disappointment with the scientific community and political life. He considered Buber and other dialogical thinkers "new utopians" who rightfully focused on the proper perspective of small communities instead of capitalist hyper-individualism and communist hyper-collectivism. He conducted a thorough investigation of relations on the examples of the Kibbutz and communitarian groups organized by Lanza del Vasto, and again like so many of the above-mentioned

thinkers, Sabato also believed that this fundamental task – the study of human relationships and overcoming the total crisis of the 20th century can only be accomplished through art. In his opinion, science, technology, and politics had almost nothing to offer. Let us remember that he was an eminent scientist and a very devoted member of the communist party for a long time. I believe one may consider style as an attribute of a person and/or a community with integrity, of someone and/or some small group of people that live in harmony with themselves and the world. A style should then integrate every side of a person and/or community: intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Hence style as integrity, with coherence and clarity, maybe also analyzed as a certain logic, since values should manifest themselves throughout the whole one's life. Integrity also means that we should follow our preferences from beginning to end, since style can only be perceived when we see a totality. For instance, let me consider one value, such as care for the environment. A style that prioritizes such a value must consider the production process of a given item, the way it can be used and reused, the cost of waste, if any, etc. It is a complex yet coherent phenomenon. The same goes for justice, if we care about defending a law, we must protect it whether it benefits us or not. Consequently, if one achieves a style, one must also appreciate any other developed and elaborated style, with no jealousy, since we all benefit from every mature, independently thinking, self-aware, creative,

and courageous individual. When we are autonomous, anti-irrational, and full of enjoyment, integrity should always encourage and enjoy any other person with a refined style of life.

Following Sontag, one may talk about particular esthetics in the case of style; in fact, it is more about an erotics of style, since it is about seduction, voluntary participation, the art of life (also with others). A dialogical aspect of style as integrity is similar to good manners, requires self-awareness, wisdom, thoughtfulness, creativity, and spontaneity. Moreover, as was mentioned above, critical and independent thinking is needed to develop and appreciate style. At the same time, style as integrity requires humility, since it is a creative and bold yet humble standpoint on the drama between morality and wisdom. According to Bocheński, everyone faces the necessity of making certain compromises, and what should be pointed out is that rationality alone does not resolve the problem. That is why one may talk about art and style of life, since there are no clear rules or algorithms to follow. In the context of the importance of humility, let me quote the following statement from Iris Murdoch:

Art is less accessible than nature but also more edifying since it is actually a human product, and certain arts are actually ‘about’ human affairs in a direct sense. Art is a human product, and virtues, as well as talents, are required of the artist. The good artist, in relation to his art, is brave, truthful, patient, **humble**; and even in non-representational art, we may receive intuitions of these qualities (Murdoch 2014: 84; emphasis added).



## 2.4. Individuality without competition: win-win-win situations

WE ALMOST AUTOMATICALLY CONNECT STYLE WITH ART, and already in this link we see that there is on the one hand appreciation of individual, recognizable, elaborated, and original styles, and on the other hand, every new, fresh style is welcome. Additionally, within the dialogical view of style, it is assumed that everyone is potentially capable of developing a unique style which, in fact, cannot be stolen or imitated without a sort of scandal and discredit. Therefore, there is absolutely no point in comparing and ranking styles, because the goal is to make the style more sophisticated, more refined. Also, as I mentioned, when we are mature and aware enough to develop and cultivate our own style, according to the dialogical view of style, we automatically tend to sincerely admire and enjoy other people's styles, or even get inspired by their finesse. That is why I propose calling this kind of situation "a win-win-win situation", in the sense that when one develops a style, it is never at the expense of the Other, it is also for others to enjoy indirect dialogical encounter, or a long time afterwards as in the case of styles that we admire through literature, history, stories, etc. Hence any style is a triple threat, since it positively contributes to the owner, anybody with direct contact, and the whole contemporary or future community. In this sense, if following MacIntyre, I propose treating style as a virtue, then we may say that style is an internal

good and an external one in the sense that it enriches the community. Therefore in this context, when MacIntyre wrote that “De gustibus es disputandum,” I posit that we treat this statement as suggesting we may discuss whether the style is authentic or not, suits the person/community, expresses their individuality, character, etc. Likewise, in the Hasidic Tales collected and edited by Buber, the most important question that God will ask every one of us is why we were not ourselves.

The dialogical view of style is, of course, connected to the question of love; there is no dialogical relation without love, and thus no style either. In order to develop a style, one must love oneself; in order to appreciate other styles, one must love the Other. Again, we fall into the issue of an intertwined link between art and morals. Murdoch wrote:

Let me now briefly and dogmatically state what I take to be, in opposition to Kant's view, the true view of the matter. Art and morals are, with certain provisos which I shall mention in a moment, one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. **Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real.** Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality (Murdoch 1959: 11, emphasis added).

In this context of perception of the individual, one should recall the words of Weil, when she explicitly stated that culture is a formation of attention (French: “Qu'est-ce que la culture? Formation de l'attention”). Attention and focus are required to participate in a dialogical situation, but also in order to develop one's style and to perceive others.

Following Buber, in a true meeting, the Other must have our full attention and *vice versa*, and there is absolutely no place for competition or comparison. Furthermore, as I mentioned, anybody would be rather happy to discover new styles in music, architecture, literature, cuisine, sports discipline, etc. It can be considered as a gift or even grace, since it – like any real dialogical situation – cannot entail harm; on the contrary, an encounter with a new style should always be a beneficial and transformative experience.

## 2.5. Iris Apfel, Henri Matisse and Jazz

ONE OF THE ICONS OF STYLE, Iris Apfel, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday (on August 29th, 2021), represents, in my opinion, a dialogical approach to style. It is quite funny that at the same time, she is great fan of Henri Matisse and jazz. In an interview celebrating her big anniversary, when asked what the most important features of style are, she spoke about confidence, openness, and the experimental character of the style.

Oh, that's easy. It's confidence! Anybody who embraces who they are in their style, career, really any aspect of their life is a badass. I believe the old adage – you only fail if you don't try. Taking any leap, whether it's mastering a new skill, starting a new job, or embarking on an exciting new adventure, requires confidence (Ferisse 2021: 1).

Following Georges Gershwin, “Life is a lot like jazz. It's better when you improvise”; Apfel believes one is born

with a style; it is inherited, like your DNA, however, you have to know who you are in order to develop it. How you learn is a process of trial and error, and you have to do it yourself; you get inspired by no one who can offer you your style. You have to be true to yourself. Therefore, Apfel's approach to style would be somewhere between the signature and the meaning-expressing conceptions of style. She declared many times that she never had an assistant since she believes that you have to experience and feel everything yourself. Apfel explained that very often she thought that she needed, let's say, a pink satin material, if she had had an assistant, she would not have looked any more, and sometimes in searching for one color, she discovered a completely different color composition. So, style is like jazz music, improvisation; either you feel it, or you do not. The importance of gut feeling, looking for *je-ne-sais-quoi*, the courage to take risks, and a sense of humor is emphasized. Apfel often repeats her motto: in order to be interesting, you have to be interested.<sup>2</sup> According to the dialogical view, style must be unpredictable, always new and fresh, and Apfel has repeatedly declared that she follows no rules, and believes that in personal fashion style there is only one *faux-pas*, namely not to look like yourself. Improvisation and spontaneity, on the one hand, entails imperfection; on the other hand,

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<sup>2</sup> It is no wonder that she is a great fan of jazz; she even met personally many jazz legends and was immensely influenced by artists like Matisse, see her book (Apfel 2018) and (Boman 2016). See also the documentary *Iris* (2015) by the legendary Albert Maysles.

they require a great deal of preparation. That is why the maxim “overprepare and improvise” seems to sum up the proposed approach. It was, for example, applied by Miles Davis, who was known for agreeing to release most often only the first take of a given recording session, or Matisse – in the footage of him creating famous cut-outs, they are imperfect, you can see pins and torn paper, yet they are full of joy, expressiveness; they are groundbreaking, simple yet inimitable. The whole life story of both Davis and Matisse, like of course so many other great artists, may serve as fascinating illustrations of the utmost refinement of one’s style. It is slow and very quick at the same time, in the sense that the process takes a lifetime, but some iconic works of art were created very quickly.

Another aspect of the dialogical concept of style is co-operation, tuning in together, like in the case of jazz, enjoying the music, being inspired by others. It is a mutual process; Borges said that he is a better reader than a writer, while Apfel loves to collaborate in many projects with people she enjoys and “clicks” with. Matisse was also known for being an artists’ artist, like Davis and Apfel; they are all great examples of dialogical concepts of style. At the same time, they seem to achieve through creation, at least in the great part of their lives, which is the goal for the Diné (Navajo) way of life, i.e., joy, happiness, confidence, and peace. It is worth noting that one of the insults in this culture says that someone does not know him/herself.

The dialogical view of style is very physical, in the sense of visceral feeling. Just as Nietzsche compares style

to taste, it is a very important aspect of this particular perspective, since taste is honest. Nobody is able to convince anybody about the taste of food, for instance; it is also sincere as true laughter – we either find something funny or we do not, we simply cannot be convinced. It is impossible to intentionally cause or control the feeling of “goosebumps,” or amazement; in consequence, style is authentic, or it is not a style.

## 2.6. Flexibility

WITHIN DIALOGICAL PHILOSOPHY, style is regarded as a dynamic phenomenon that evolves and changes, becoming more and more sophisticated and refined. It is worth recalling the biophilic approach, following Freire: style requires flexibility. This feature of style is connected with the ability and openness to adopt new approaches, to change techniques, to use other methods; it is a never-ending process. To be stylish means to be always a student, to accept often an uncomfortable or risky challenge; however, most importantly, it means to never give up, to keep going, to keep refining one's craft, skills, and resilience. In this specific sense, we have to, above all, fight with ourselves for a style. Again, the Navajo/Diné people consider themselves warriors but not warmongers. The difference is essential: warriors keep on improving themselves in creative combat, while warmongers just keep invading, attacking, and destroying.

At the same time, even among warriors the greatest battle to fight is usually with ourselves. Many thinkers pointed out that nobody is able to hurt us as we can; for instance, Wilde in *De Profundis*, considering all the hardships he survived, still believed that he caused himself the greatest suffering, without any doubt. Moreover, Rand claimed that the fundamental difference between animals, plants, and people is precisely the ability to hurt themselves. Every animal, plant, every other living organism is unable to act against itself; only humans elaborated a true arsenal of ways to harm themselves and are able to kill themselves. Therefore it is understandable why so many war theoreticians from Ancient times (like Sun Tzu) to the more modern era (Clausewitz) believed that the greatest battle is against yourself. Consequently, in the art of war, there is this principle that you have to know your enemy, thus the injunction to ‘know yourself’ gains a new dimension in this context.

Let me also point out the fact that we talk about martial arts or the art of war, not science or theory, for the very reason that for ages we have talked about styles of fighting, and just as Schopenhauer talked about the art of arguments, there is an art of war. This means that there is an art, a craft of war, but no bulletproof recipes for success. One essential requirement for a good fighter is precisely flexibility. Even Schopenhauer considered dialectic eristics as a set of methods, tips, strategies that must be applied accordingly in the concrete situation. Hence, it is about the craft and, again, decidability, but one must

always be focused and ready to adapt to the enemy, surroundings, subject, etc. Everyone has their own style of fighting, you have to understand it, and then you have to decide what to do about it. Motivation and courage are crucial, as the saying goes: if you think you will fail, you will, and, at the same time, if you think you will succeed, you will. It depends on a personal decision – are we ready to fight, to take a challenge, to risk, to try? Because if we do not even try, we have already lost.



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## Abundance of Styles

### 3.1. Creativity and untested feasibilities

WITHIN THE DIALOGICAL PHILOSOPHY OF STYLE, special emphasis is naturally placed on creativity – understood as a sort of open attitude, a disposition to look profoundly, without prejudice, fear of authority, or resorting to standard approaches to the concrete situation, but at the same time accepting there will always be something new, that we have to constantly be alert and ready to learn, because errors are inevitable. This attitude requires humility and some craft and skills, like a trained eye, to see more details and possibilities. Moreover, creativity is impossible without hope; it is also quite a “democratic” feature since anyone can potentially come up with a new idea, everyone has a unique outlook on life, every style – if authentic – is creative and original; there is no way of exhausting creativity.

From a dialogical point of view, creativity also encourages critical, independent thinking. As a model dialogical relation, friendship is based on a free exchange of

knowledge, shared experience, deep understanding, and enjoyment of other styles of life. The Wittgensteinian advice “Think for yourself” can be interpreted as “Create for yourself.” This also means that nobody can be deprived of creativity; in a sense, someone, of course, may steal an idea, a product, a design, but not one’s voice and ability to be creative. Additionally, this way of approaching creativity also rules out competition and jealousy, since creativity is inexhaustible, as it brings focus to everyone’s distinct context, character, personality, talents, and, therefore, unique style. What is more, one person and/or community can continuously develop new styles.

On the other hand, as Freire pointed out, every oppressive system discourages critical and creative thinking, and even fights against it, since such systems usually have a ready, precise formula to follow that often covers all areas of life. Moreover, the last stage of oppression seems to be breaking the spirit, destroying hope, and ensuring people accept the uniform order. One should recall that Freire’s definition of crisis and limit-situation explicitly calls for creativity, since for him, limit-situations reveal more reality, lead to new horizons, and offer opportunities to explore more untested possibilities. Blocking, repressing creativity, and therefore imposing one style on everybody, constitutes a form of violence.

Apart from violence, another important negative aspect of creativity and originality is imitation. We seem to be quite skilled in perceiving and noticing what we call “fakeness” – any pretending, snobbery, unoriginality, especially

in opposition to, for instance, something we may describe as a “disarming charm.” This notion – to go back again to Wilde’s division between charming vs. tedious people – seems to express the vagueness of the feeling.

This tedious dullness is often a result of disingenuity, violence, the intent of standardization, algorithmically forced formulas of living that go against what is most human in us. In this sense, we may interpret Pataphysics and Boris Vian’s declaration that he is “antispecialist” as being particularly focused on exceptions as manifestations of style.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2. Appreciation over appropriation

AS I ALREADY MENTIONED, a dialogical situation is always a spontaneous encounter with only one goal: to know the Other and, at the same time, through this relation, know oneself better. This kind of meeting is engaging and exciting, since it brings new information, focuses on the moment, engages the whole human being, transforms both participants, and enriches them. However, our natural tendency is to treat the Other instrumentally, with selfish purposes, represented by the I-It relation and imposing our prejudices, suppositions, and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDiKQXRlFic> In this context it is worth noting that in German there is a word “Fachidiotismus” that would be the exact opposite of Vian’s attitude.

way of thinking, usually unconsciously, on what or who is before us. The dialogical situation requires two independent partners; recognizing the separated, autonomous existence of the Other is the key to appreciating the encounter as a gift. From a very different perspective, the issue of appropriation was brilliantly described by Tolkien. He wrote:

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a regaining – **regaining of a clear view**. I do not say “seeing things as they are” and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say “seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them” – as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; **so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness**. Of all faces those of our familiars are the ones both most difficult to play fantastic tricks with, and most difficult really **to see with fresh attention**, perceiving their likeness and unlikeness: that they are faces, and yet unique faces. **This triteness is really the penalty of “appropriation”: the things are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally**. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hand on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them (Tolkien 1939: 28, emphasis added).

Suppose we apply his analysis to the dialogical concept of style. In that case, we may also clearly see that we need first to respect others – be it individual human beings, or communities, even whole cultures – as separate, autonomous, and independent, and meet them as such to have a fruitful dialogue. What is more, very often this kind of appropriation described by Tolkien concerns our

own culture, community, or family; very often the hardest thing to see is what is in front of us all the time. It is about realizing what we know instead of what we think we know; this criteria of boredom as a punishment for appropriation is, in my opinion, simply brilliant.

Consequently, if we genuinely appreciate somebody's style, there is no possibility of appropriating it, from a dialogical point of view. We get to enjoy it, and there is always something more to learn, see, and admire. The uniqueness of any style created with a dialogical attitude leaves no room for jealousy and competition.

Developing a style is a continuously fascinating, exciting, and joyful process. However, some conditions must be fulfilled, and it requires relentless effort. In a dialogical approach, like creativity, there is the unfailing, inexhaustible, guaranteed flow of inspiration and endless process. Hence, everyone who has been able to practice the art of living, which means discovering and cultivating an original style of life, is considered an artist.

### 3.3. Abundance and joy

THE PLURALITY OR ABUNDANCE OF STYLES is considered by Pawłowski, as well as others, as a phenomenon that is characteristic and pervasive for contemporary times. He explains the methodological tendencies of the new approach towards this plurality of styles in humanities in the following way:

The uniqueness of style versus the plurality of styles: in terms of these aesthetic categories, one of the most important differences between the recent past and the present can be described. This difference manifests itself in all spheres of life - in fashion, everyday life, arts, and science. (...) its manifestations in the processes of concept formation as they occur in the humanities, broadly conceived. Here the following methodological approaches seem to dominate the scene. 1. A tendency to apply semiotic concepts in various fields of research. 2. Attempts to introduce metrical concepts and measurement, even into disciplines traditionally considered as unamenable to mathematical treatment, like aesthetics and theory of art. 3. Efforts to find ways of formulating empirically testable, operational criteria for the application of concepts, especially concepts which refer to objects directly not observable, like dispositions, attitudes, character or personality traits. Care is also taken to take advantage of the conceptual apparatus of methodology to express problems in the humanities with the highest possible degree of clarity and precision. 4. Analysis of the persuasive function of language and its possible uses in science and in everyday life (Pawłowski 1980: vii).

The compelling link between abundance and dignity was described by Carlos Fuentes, in his brief presentation of Juan Rulfo's photography. He defined dignity as "an immediately recognizable richness" (Spanish "una riqueza inmediatamente reconocible") and the abundance of possibilities. Therefore, to show respect, one must first be able to see the person and the abundance of their potential. Of course, I believe we may apply it to style as well, in the sense that the dignity of the person requires recognition of full stylistic potential. On the other hand, disrespect (and humiliation) starts from ignoring or refusing to recognize another person's possibility to change and grow, their skills and capabilities,

the possibility of them fully developing and cultivating a style of life.

If we agree that any new dialogical style is a good thing, you can never have too much. Since style is about how one does, how one performs, there is an abundance of ways to execute a given work of art, be it a composition, a song, a play – everybody brings their version. However, there is no way of establishing the rules and criteria of authenticity since we are much more likely to feel it, see it, perceive it, and analyze it and/or measure it. Authenticity resonates with us; an outstanding performance is much more than technical virtuosity and flawlessness. Interestingly, even if we identify with a complex emotion or message, at the same time it gives us the joy that comes from any non-violent act of connection, communication, and understanding, i.e., dialogue, genuine encounter.

In *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien connected joy with gratefulness and appreciation; he refers to the definition according to which it consists of the “inner consistency of reality,” also as a result of an “eucatastrophe” (Tolkien: 23). When considering the artist and the subcreation of the world, he reminds us that rejection of creation leads us to sadness or wrath (Tolkien: 23–24). This consistency or coherence can be interpreted as harmony and clarity. Wittgenstein wrote in his Notebooks on July 8, 1916: “In order to live happily I must be in agreement with the world. And that is what ‘being happy’ means” (Wittgenstein 1961: 75e). Wilde in *De Profundis* expressed a similar opinion on joy and happiness, writing: “Then I must

learn how to be happy.” He emphasized the learning process, that joy is neither innate nor encouraged by society. We find some strange or even perverse pleasure in celebrating sadness, melancholy, and even despair; that is why Wilde reminds us that “Dante places low in the Inferno those who wilfully live in sadness” (Wilde 2001: 9).

I already mentioned the importance of attention as a requirement for a dialogical attitude towards style. Here I also would like to focus on attention, which is indirectly connected with abundance. A commemorative plaque on the exterior of the apartment building on Riverside Drive in New York City, where Weil lived in 1942 from July 6 to November 10, 1942, says: “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. It is given to very few minds to notice that things and beings exist. Since my childhood I have not wanted anything else but to receive the complete revelation of this before dying.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, she believed that generosity is based on attention, in consequence, abundance is impossible without generosity. When we apply Weil’s opinion to the dialogical view on style, we may see the difference between fashion and style. Fashion imposes a limited (by force) choice, while style introduces abundance.

Moreover, following the famous saying “fashion you can buy, style you must possess,” style contributes to

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<sup>2</sup> Photo: Christopher Hickey, August 15 2020, Wikimedia Commons ChristopherHickey, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.



both abundances of styles and the potentially great joy it should bring to a given individual and a community. Firstly, since it is something you cannot buy, it does not essentially require money. We all know so many ridiculous examples of wealthy people who have terrible taste and are styleless. Therefore, it is quite a democratic phenomenon, available to everybody within the frame of reasonable conditions of life. Another prominent yet considerable aspect is that in reality, one cannot steal a good style because it is fitted to a specific person, location, community, time etc. Stealing, in this case, is imitation which is the opposite of style. Style is distinctive, recognizable, and connected with the person and/or a community that authored it. Hence, the fundamental goal – especially from a dialogical perspective – is to encourage abundance of style. We should always celebrate a new, good, authentic style in art, fashion, lifestyle, interior design, literature, music, the food industry. Moreover, the fact that we will never run out of new styles, that we should never worry about exhausting the ever-growing list should also give us joy, for there is a place for it and everybody is welcome to introduce their own, original way of life which is dialogically harmonized with others. In this context, it is worth quoting Nietzsche: “I want to teach them that which at present so few understand, and the preachers of fellowship in sorrow least of all: – namely, fellowship in joy!” (Nietzsche 1924: 268).

Finally, one of the greatest joys in life comes from simply being oneself, from not being ashamed, therefore in

my opinion from discovering and cultivating one's style. For this reason I would like to recall here Nietzsche's six fundamental questions and his short and decisive answers:

270.

*What Saith thy Conscience?*—"Thou shalt become what thou art."

271.

*Where are thy Greatest Dangers?* – In pity.

272.

*What dost thou Love in others?* – My hopes.

273.

*Whom dost thou call Bad?* – Him who always wants to put others to shame.

274.

*What dost thou think most humane?* – To spare a person shame.

275.

*What is the Seal of Attained Liberty?* – To be no longer ashamed of oneself (Nietzsche 1924: 209).

### 3.4. Style as an experimental technology of a dialogical life

I PROPOSE CONSIDERING STYLE as an element of an experimental technology of dialogical life, following Bocheński's view of wisdom as the technology of a good life. According to Bocheński, the main principle of wisdom says: "act in such a way to have a long and good life." Within the dialogical view of style, we may consider

elaborating a style as an essential part of a long and good life. Being in harmony with oneself, others and reality requires humility and an open-minded attitude, since every effective technology is achieved through trial and error, i.e. through experimenting. In my opinion, here Bocheński displays an interesting affinity with Freire, especially in terms of the notions of untested feasibility and limit-situations.

Bocheński believed that morality, ethics and wisdom are three different domains, and that the latter constitutes an empirical and experimental proto-science. Following his approach, wisdom principles are hypothetical, for they are only valid under certain conditions. That is why Bocheński considered wisdom to be a set of conditional orders, which are propositions hidden in the form of commandments. Hence, he considers wisdom to be a technology of a good life, a particular technology, as it consists of the most general and the most basic principles; in consequence, the method of wisdom is experimental, empirical, and requires critical thinking. Corcoran pointed out a similar correlation, writing: "Critical thinking is applying tests; more specifically it is applying tests or criteria in one's own thinking" (Corcoran 1999: 110).

Concerning the relation between morality and wisdom, Bocheński claimed that human life mainly compromises the two domains. Moreover, in his opinion, most people live according to this dual "morality" – one authentic and one wise. Therefore, on the one hand, we are close to the classic Greek term "techne," on the other

hand, it is worth quoting Wilde's opinion: "We call ours a utilitarian age, and we do not know the use of any single thing" (Wilde 2001: 29). At the same time, Schopenhauer used to say that sometimes progress is reactionary, and talking about technology from a dialogical perspective considers this kind of historical skepticism and distrust of the direction of technological development. For instance, Sabato said in the interview with the legendary Soler Serrano that an example of truly revolutionary and technologically advanced thought would be to forbid the building of skyscrapers. I have in mind here the dialogical view on wisdom as a technology of a good life.

In "Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española" María Zambrano points out a certain paradox, since at the same time we need awareness of dependence, of our own limitation, which is humility and boldness. She wrote that intellectual humility is the indispensable companion of every discoverer. It is necessary to dare to do everything with the awareness of our own limitations, of the particularity of our work. According to Zambrano, only this conjunction – boldness with humility – is fruitful, the unlimited amplitude of the horizon with awareness of the smallness of the step we take (Zambrano 1987: 71).

At the same time, she emphasized a notable omission: that failure is an attribute of human beings and a fundamental source of knowledge, especially in this context of wisdom. There is no experimental approach without multiple errors and humbling mistakes. Just as someone who has never been unhappily in love cannot fully understand

many masterpieces of literature, someone who has never known hunger or danger does not understand the gravity of politics, history, someone who has never been out of work may ignore the economic situation, etc. Interestingly, from a completely different position, Rand also wrote about negative experience and failure as the fundamental characteristic of human beings that separates us from other living creatures. She pointed out that each plant will always look for the best conditions for itself, each animal will always seek food and shelter, people are the only creatures who can consciously inflict pain and harm on themselves, and even invent new ways to do this, be it through stimulants or an unhealthy lifestyle. We are even capable of taking our own life or destroying our offspring; human beings have come up with plans to destroy entire nations, as well as the environment and currently even the whole planet.

Similarly, in the context of education in the broad sense, learning from errors is essential. All support groups – be it anonymous alcoholics or victims of domestic violence, are based on shared negative experiences. For instance, Juan Carlos Onetti – a representative of Latin American existentialism, a movement not very well-known in Europe – is the author of the short story “Welcome Bob” (Original title in Spanish “Bienvenido, Bob”), which presents a very strong connection between two main characters, based on jealousy and shared misery. We find ourselves drawn to such stories – something the mainstream media increasingly exploits. However, at the same time, and this would

be the focus of the dialogical philosophy of style, in reality, there are more positive similarities between us, based on universal needs, such as clean water, freedom, fulfillment, education, and healthcare, as well as a sense of security, human connection, and artistic expression. Here the proposed approach to style is based on the assumption that we are not fully aware of these similarities and universal positive goals, that we have more in common than we are divided by differences, however, there is an abundance of style that realizes these goals. Hence the opposition would be creation-appreciation-joy-dynamics-beauty vs. imitation-appropriation-jealousy (boredom/wrath)-boredom/tediousness-ugliness.

### **3.5. Manifestations of the dialogical concept of style – some examples**

FINALLY, I WOULD LIKE TO BRIEFLY PRESENT and comment on some examples of what I propose calling manifestations of the dialogical concept of style. I will focus on the work of Anupama Kundoo, the permaculture movement, biophilic design, wabi-sabi, and radical gardening. To a certain extent it is arguable that each of them is an incarnation of the dialogical style and attitude presented here, and therefore introduce a new fresh approach to very concrete situations. Moreover, they can all be inscribed into the technology of a good life, since they offer concrete solutions to problems of specific communities

and particular places. They are also especially interesting for me, since they can be analyzed on an individual and communitarian level. All these movements, ideas, initiatives, and people come from very diverse cultural backgrounds and although sometimes do not even mention the word “dialogue,” yet they represent outstanding examples of the effectiveness of the proposed attitude.

First of all, they are dialogical in the sense of Weil, i.e., of acknowledging outside circumstances, people, community, and the specificity of the local environment. Moreover, like Buber, they consider and make an effort to establish dialogical relations with the human world, the world of nature, and the spiritual world, for instance, by respecting local beliefs, traditions, crafts. This is especially true in the case of permaculture, biophilic design and the architectural work of Kundoo.

The dialogical approach would also be manifested in focusing on the instant, i.e. the here and now, on a specific, concrete situation, and in consequence becoming familiar with the circumstances, taking time to deepen our understanding of the whole complexity, and then slowly moving forward with the introduction of improvements. The perspective is to do things together; the accent is on “with” not “for”: in other words, we operate here on horizontal, not vertical structures.

Another dialogical aspect of these examples is the effort to introduce and cultivate harmony, again on both individual (with oneself) and community levels, taking into account the vast context, people, animals, plants, and

spiritual heritage. Therefore it is developed with humility and care, in an organic way. Furthermore, these examples also represent the wholeness of the dialogical approach; its coherence, clarity and integrity. For instance, in permaculture, if value is attributed to the restoration of forests, water, and ecosystems, anything that serves this purpose is implemented, obviously with regard to the specific climate, localization etc. A great example of this integrity is The Church Forests of Ethiopia, where the spiritual physical and natural aspects are all considered as a whole, with great respect and care to ensure the benefit of everybody. Forests not only protect churches, they help to keep water, provide refuge to animals, shade, jobs and occupations, food, and spiritual development. To it simply put, it is a perfect win-win-win situation.

Furthermore, these manifestations of the dialogical concept of style do not involve any competition; it is all about – much needed – cooperation (Tischnerian work as a dialogical concept), building communities, connection, inclusiveness. This is best exemplified by the project realized by Kundoo: she prioritizes local craft, simple techniques, and already produced materials, or even waste, so as to enable maximal inclusiveness. What is more, she encourages professionals like engineers to cooperate with vernacular artisans. The same occurs in the case of permaculture, biophilic design, and radical gardening, since the goal is not to increase profits, appropriation, or monopoly, but long-term complex thinking, and anyone who contributes, for example, to the restoration of soil, forests



is welcome. We may observe the beautiful collaboration of scientists and residents.

Consequently, these are initiatives that foster creativity, explore untested feasibilities, and focus on very constructive work. At the same time, there is a genuine interest and respect for beauty, which is very often neglected in impoverished areas or wastelands. Kundoo, for instance, uses waste or otherwise rather useless material in such beautiful configurations, colors, and, crucially, with great flexibility. These people show that there are so many unexplored possibilities, and there is no need for compromising beauty, human connections, the environment, or finances. Hence, it is not difficult to imagine the joyful aspect of this dialogical philosophy of style and to recognize the abundance and inexhaustible opportunities. The results, i.e., the abundance of positive consequences of realized projects, speak for themselves. It is possible to produce a win-win-win situation – something which is now hard for many people to believe.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the examples mentioned above are biophilic, that they are “alive” in Friere’s sense, as opposed to necrophilic thinking. Very often, we may observe the restoration of almost dead areas into flourishing and thriving communities. However, these limit-situations have also revealed new horizons, some of the solutions are improvised in the sense of being created on the spot as an effect of dialogical encounter. It is all very optimistic, hopeful, and, as required in the dialogical attitude, with large doses of humility and

open-mindedness. Like in the case of wabi-sabi, these styles are not perfect; they embrace imperfections, celebrate uniqueness, make beautiful what was rejected, and in this particular sense are harmonious, not fixed like any living being, but are part of a dynamic, ongoing project.

They are developed on a small scale – like private houses, eco farms, and substantial urban initiatives, such as the biophilic design of hospitals, offices, or whole cities like Auroville in India. From a dialogical point of view it is also worth mentioning that there is no set of universally valid rules or directives for these movements, i.e. they are all relativized to as extensively as possible to the context, since the crucial thing seems to be an authentic inner need to contribute, to defend and restore certain definitely positive values. These projects are designed and developed with great success and, very frequently, against all odds.

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# Conclusions

*Enjoyment is a useful and imprecise word.  
It is useful because it is imprecise.*

(Kekes 2008: 3)

FOLLOWING BOCHEŃSKI, I propose considering the dialogical philosophy of style as an element of wisdom understood as a technology of a good life. In one paper (2021), we propose Bocheński's conception of wisdom to be counted as a heuristic theory, since wisdom formulates guidelines for a good life that can only be investigated in terms such as useful or useless, applicable or inapplicable. Furthermore, the classical concept of truth can only be applied to veristic theories, and it makes no sense to analyze heuristic notions relating to the true/false dichotomy. Thus, while veristic concepts have some fixed references, the reference of a heuristic concept should be defined anew whenever the concept is used (Wójcicki: 1995/6).

I would like to sum up my presentation by recalling the main obstacles in developing and cultivating a dialogical style. First, it is uniformization, univocity, thinking

in terms of dichotomies (for/against) even if achieved *via* consensus – second, idealistic, anti-realist philosophical positions and therefore monological, unilateral perspectives. Consequently, vertical social structures, hierarchies, and competitiveness, even comparisons, are useless in encouraging dialogical styles. The same goes for any fixed and short-sighted thinking, like rigid bureaucracy, tedious regulations, and standards. Dialogical styles can be developed in an unrestricted way of “cathedral thinking” (Roman Krznaric) or *The Slow Movements*. Finally, the enemy of dialogical style is exclusiveness. Here, I believe, Camus put it perfectly: “Rien n’est vrai qui force à exclure. La beauté isolée finit par grimacer, la justice solitaire finit par opprimer. Qui veut servir l’une a l’exclusion de l’autre ne sert personne ni lui-même, et finalement, sert deux fois l’injustice” [“Nothing is true that forces one to exclude. Isolated beauty ends up wincing, solitary justice ends up oppressing. Whoever wants to serve one to the exclusion of the other serves no one or himself, and ultimately, twice serves injustice”] (Camus 1959: 159).

We should also remember from Seneca to Camus, “Il y a une fatalité unique qui est la mort et en dehors de quoi il n’y a plus de fatalité. Dans l’espace de temps qui va de la naissance à la mort, rien n’est fixé: on peut tout changer” (...); [“There is a unique fatality which is death and outside of which there is no longer any fatality. In the space of time from birth to death, nothing is fixed: we can change everything”] (Camus 1973: 171) – philosophers

emphasized that we are not in control of our lifetime, but everybody has an influence on their way of life (to be precise: in a dialogical sense). Therefore, in other words, we have almost no influence on our lifespan, but absolute control over the style. Style is what we really possess; it cannot be stolen, it is one of the very few essential elements of life that we cannot be deprived of.



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## Summary

THIS BOOK PRESENTS AN OUTLINE of the dialogical philosophy of style and it consists of three chapters. The first chapter, *Literature and style*, introduces the concept of philosophy as a story and presents an analogical approach to dialogue. According to Nietzsche's *The Joyful Wisdom*, style constitutes a comprehensive, coherent outlook on life: living in harmony with oneself and the world. Following Genova, the signature and meaning-expressing conception of style are considered in comparison with Sontag's approach to style from the dialogical point of view. The chapter ends with the concept of style as editing, and in this context I present the notion of attention in the sense employed by Weil. The second chapter, *Attitude: Freedom And Flexibility*, advocates establishing harmony with both oneself and with others, in accordance with the ideas of Thibon and Pronzato, and briefly examined styles of education. Integrity as a criterion of a refined style is based on the moral dimension. In consequence, coherence and clarity lead to an individual style that paradoxically excludes competition. The issues of spontaneity,

originality and improvisation are discussed. The final question of flexibility – within the art of life, which is the art of war – is considered, since a fight for one's style constitutes the greatest victory. The third chapter, *Abundance and Joy*, is about pluralism and presents creativity from a dialogical perspective, with special emphasis on Freire's notion of "untested feasibilities" and on appreciation instead of appropriation. The issue of abundance is crucial to the proposed dialogical concept of style. Style as an important contribution to wisdom as a technology of the good life is discussed, and some examples of contemporary applications of the dialogical philosophy of style are presented.

**Keywords:** style, philosophy of dialogue, freedom, abundance, harmony.

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# Streszczenie

## Wolność i obfitość: dialogiczna filozofia stylu

KSIĄŻKA PRZEDSTAWIA ZARYS dialogicznej filozofii stylu i składa się z trzech rozdziałów. Rozdział pierwszy *Literatura i styl* wprowadza pojęcie filozofii jako opowieści oraz pojęcie analogii jako kluczowe w dialogice. Według *Wiedzy radosnej* Nietzschego styl stanowi całościową i spójną wizję życia – w zgodzie ze sobą i ze światem. Rozdział pierwszy zawiera również omówienie dwóch podstawowych koncepcji stylu w ujęciu Genovy oraz zestawia je z podejściem Sontag w perspektywie dialogicznej. W tym kontekście przedstawione jest także pojęcie uwagi według Weil. Drugi rozdział *Postawa: wolność i elastyczność* postuluje budowanie harmonii z jednej strony ze sobą oraz z innymi według Thibona i Pronzato oraz krótką charakterystykę dwóch podstawowych stylów edukacji. Wyrafinowany i dojrzały styl opiera się na spójności i klarowności. W konsekwencji indywidualność paradoksalnie wyklucza współzawodnictwo. Omawiane są również kwestie spontaniczności, oryginalności

oraz improwizacji. W końcowej części rozdziału rozważa się zagadnienie elastyczności w kontekście sztuki życia jako sztuki wojny, gdyż walka o swój styl stanowi największe zwycięstwo. Rozdział trzeci *Obfitość i radość* dotyczy pluralizmu i przedstawia kreatywność z perspektywy dialogicznej ze szczególnym naciskiem na pojęcie „niesprawdzonych możliwości” Freirego. W takim ujęciu trafna ocena wyklucza postawę przywłaszczania stylu. W proponowanej dialogicznej koncepcji stylu kluczowe jest pojęcie obfitości, ponieważ kształtowanie stylu stanowi ważny wkład w mądrość rozumianą jako technologia dobrego życia. W tym rozdziale przedstawiono również przykłady współczesnych zastosowań dialogicznej filozofii stylu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** styl, filozofia dialogu, wolność, obfitość, harmonia.



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