STATIC AND DYNAMIC

Or on the understanding of the human being and the human situation

Bogdan Bogdanov

The scholarly essay I would like to present is an attempt at exploring the dynamic interpretative model of culture, a point of concern in Umberto Eco's work, and, in a marked, albeit different way, of Eero Tarasti's project of existential semiotics. Within this view, both developed a form of philosophical semiotics. Although for Tarasti, the existential understanding appears only at certain points, following Eco's train of thought on the principles of existence, I believe that when considered more broadly, that is, as an ongoing change, the existential can be found in all manifestations of the human and in any human understanding of anything as well.

A peculiar instance of this semiotically understood existentialism is the traditional essence/existence dilemma, which guides every type of speech and thought. Many 20th century philosophers solve this to an extent by questioning the viewpoint of essence. In this perspective, starting with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, we have also Sartre with his formula of existence preceding essence, as well as Popper the epistemologist who reveals the ideology of thinking through essences. It is not a minor problem for modern science that the philosophical disregard for the idea of essence does not affect considerably the objectivist scientific discourse, which is still based on this idea and continues using it as a major tool of cognition. This is the pragmatic reason behind the framing of the present work's thesis, *the assumption that essence and existence are two ideas of different order, and that the dilemma going on between them cannot be solved simply by choosing one or the other*. They are expression of interrelated aspects of the understanding of the human phenomenon, which is only effective when its elements fit together.

In order to support this claim, I comment on the essence/existence relationship within the theses of three interrelated issues: 1. On the static/dynamic quality of every talking/thinking/understanding; 2. On the static/dynamic nature of the human phenomenon, and 3. On the static/dynamic structure of the major modern symbol used in the understanding of the human phenomenon: the individual/social relationship.

The intradialogical connectedness of all three issues results in a similar structure of their respective theses. Each of these is an 'is'-statement, semiotically related to a 'must'-statement. This relation has been explored by English analytical philosophy. Here it seems effective to me because the realization of the difference between 'is' and 'must' questions the approach of the objectivist scientific discourse, which relies on their non-differentiation. It is this manner of speaking towards which postmodern criticism is aimed. The latter however disregards not only objectivist talking but each talking which relies on rationally connected arguments. In the spirit of Eco's semiotics I am convinced that rationally organized talking can be effective both scholarly and practically, if only it uses a flexible method of interpretation. Which means two things: distinguishing the notions it applies both from each other and from the things in the real world, but also allowing these to fuse whenever required. Hence the need for speech, not only to avoid the fusings of everyday speech, but also to consciously imitate them. The best means for

achieving this is the synonymous displacement of notions used and issues discussed as practiced mostly by everyday speech. And this is just what the intradialogical combining of the three aforementioned issues boils down to.

This combining definitely takes into account the old pattern of two binary opposed ways of understanding: the realistic overlapping of reality and thought, and the nominalistic separation of one from the other. The present work is an attempt at restricting the radical nature of this opposition. This is why it speaks not of thinking, but of understanding/thinking/talking, which, as a point within human reality does not overlap with it, but realizes at the same time the schematism which separates it from reality, without avoiding the linguistic notion of overlapping with the latter, and without exploiting furtively this fusion like objectivist talking does. The attitude towards this so-called fusion is dual: on the one hand, it is considered indispensable; on the other, it is also used as an instrument of cognition.

Hence the identical theses of the first and the second issues mentioned, the working assumption that human understanding/thinking/talking imitates, and in this sense, overlaps with the dynamics of the human phenomenon, and that both the phenomenon itself and its manifestation as thinking/talking are reduced to a continuous coupling of the standpoints of essence and existence. These are exactly the ones expressed synonymously with the figurative ideas of static and dynamic. When the human is being considered as based on the idea of essence, the way it is commonly thought of, then this idea is represented in a closed and static way and, consequently, the human is understood as an identity which coincides with itself. The human phenomenon, for its part, is well-defined and ready, but is also a non-identity in the process of formation, aimed at an entire complex of other. Hence the need to understand the human also as flux and transition, the way it is generally manifested in the acts of human understanding and human activity. Or, if we are to put it the other way round, on the level of its existence both the human and its two major manifestations are in a certain way dynamic.

This overlapping of the dynamics of the human phenomenon with the dynamics of human understanding/thinking/talking does not eliminate the opportunity of considering them as differentiated. In terms of the reality-in-becoming of human existence, human understanding/thinking is marked by a peculiarity which is known to Aristotle. Thinking represents things essentially in two ways: as in 'is'-situations, of statically truthful cases formed according to the principle of essence; and as in 'I make/it happens'-situations - dynamic cases of change formed according to the principle of existence. Both of these develop claims about things that seem to be equally real, of which it is predicated either that they are specific, or that, being specific, they change partially or completely as a result of being subjected to this, or of being themselves active, or both.

There is a difference, however, between the realities of 'is'-situations and 'I make/it happens'-situations. The former are real in a figurative sense, while the latter are more often real in the literal sense. In the first case we have a, so to say, pure subject, of whom something is predicated in an ideal environment, so that from a pure subject it turns into an object with specific contents. Correspondingly, a pure subject of understanding develops as well, which refers to an object independent of it, and in view of its understanding results in an 'is'-situation of predication. This happens in a static and

ideal environment/world, which does not allow for complications coming from the interference of particular environments, which might disturb the act of cognition with their contents. The relations both in the act of this understanding, and in the 'is' - propositions resulting from it are ideally schematic. Something is said to be the way it is per se, just like the understanding subject is per se, as well. Neither the thing becomes more complicated through participating in other things and specific contexts, with aspects of other entities, nor is the understanding subject considered related to an external or internal set of subjects, which make it dynamic and changeable.

While in the second case, the context of understanding is sophisticatedly composed as a here-and-now world of contents, related to an entire world. This composedness is modularly movable both in its elements and in its entirety. Therefore, the subject of understanding is also, so to say, impure, complicatedly dependent on certain contents, which change in the act of understanding. Something happens with the one who understands, just like, as a consequence of understanding, the environment/world itself changes. Or, in other words, the subject exists also as an object, its becoming having to do with a change in contents and relations. The propositions developed in this environment of understanding are of the same type, formed according to the principle of existence. Their subject, too, is full of contents, transformable and passing into other subjects.

Corresponding to this is the complication that the internal environment within the propositions, which represent a change, does not coincide with the external environment of understanding, as this happens with the ideal statics of the so-called 'is'-propositions. This results in distinguishing between meaning and sense. The things talked about have meanings that change in the course of claiming due to internal, but also external reasons and purposes. Imposed by the environment of understanding, these external reasons and purposes 'deform' the meanings formed within a proposition of this type by covering them with sense. It is this complex relationship between static meanings, dynamic re-significations and interfering senses in the proposition which structures a change in the principle of existence, resulting in the formation of the so-called *semiotic units* within the proposition. Roughly speaking, semiotic units are fusions. And this is true for all sign uses - both in speech and in the practice of cultural existence. This undoubtedly is one of the most fertile ideas in the semiotics of Charles Peirce: the sign in use is the dynamics of sign combination. It can be observed both in the Peircean term 'semiosis' and in the sophisticated Peircean classification of signs. After Peirce, this idea is mostly followed and developed in the semiotics of Umberto Eco.

In trying to formulate the proper grounds for this fusion which is constitutive of the sign in use, these grounds can be reduced to the following four reasons. The first one indicates that every single thing is related to other things and, therefore, naturally fuses with them. The second refers to the natural mismatch between the thing and the word that stands for it, due to which the word entails connotations of other things as well. The third reason is rooted in the quality of speech, viz to present things as similarly existent, while they exist in different ways. Thus, the non-existent and the existent in different ways easily come together in semiotic terms. The fourth and, probably, most important reason for this so-called fusion lies in the relationship between the message of speech about the thing in question, and the use of this message by someone. These two sides are fused, for

apart from dealing with an existent thing, every understanding/talking serves yet another purpose: a specific speaker's attitude of this or that type.

In the spirit of synonymous intradialogical speech, we can express the said four reasons in a dichotomous manner, too. The first reason for semiotic fusions is that the thing, which is the subject of understanding, is not a well-outlined reality and, therefore, its signified does not match with it. To this we can add the second reason, viz that when both static and visible, things continue their formation regardless of human understanding, and even when they seem not to be forming, their understanding represents them as being formed; they are of many aspects, really, but also ideally, due to being used by understanding subjects for the purposes, to which understanding serves.

To speek in the 'is'-propositions is the ideal of science and of a certain type of philosophy, also forming the basis of objectivist.speech. Speeking in the 'I make/it happens'-propositions, in its own turn, results in a multitude of discourses in the fields of philosophy and fiction. In both cases, however, there is a non-achievement of the ideal. Because in using 'is'-propositions connotations of 'I make/it happens'-relations would doubtlessly interfere. And this interference results in the formation of semiotic units regardless whether it has to do with a mythological symbol or a scientific notion. In both cases the use of speech, the dependence on context, speaker and understanding individuals of certain attitude, turns these into signs in use, into oscillating units of continuous internal replacement between signifier and signified, of signifieds which become the signifiers of other signifieds.

The same holds true .as well for the other type of speech, which claims to be dynamic, to present things on the principle of existence and to construct 'I make/it happens'-situations. As far as this speech, too, is about something, that is, it relates this something to others of the same type and, hence, responds according to the principle of essence, it cannot avoid attaching to its 'I make/it happens' dynamic situations connotations of essence. Finally, imitating the actual dynamics of existence, coming out as only a model of dynamics, i.e., of statics under a dynamic cover. Therefore, there are no pure 'is' and 'I make/it happens' modes of talking, but only fused utterances for the analytical disentanglement of which science so far lacks the specific tools.

If we are to observe the principle of similarity, we can easily transpose the said quality of human understanding/thinking/talking upon the human phenomenon itself. Of all the abstract definitions of the human, one seemingly most appropriate statement for handling it would be that it is non-identical to itself. Due to the aforementioned dependence, however, such definition would immediately provoke the objection of a whole set of assumptions along the line of identity, or, if we are to put this in a more traditional way, along the line of immanence. In the logic of essence and of static truthfulness, the human is a datum, which can be understood as such. The course of understanding, however, is dynamic, bi-essential and bi-principled, leading away to the other, which the human being is not, to a set of transcendental states, both inside and outside the human being, as far as it develops and is intentionally predisposed. Therefore, good thinking of the human being is of an immanent/transcendent type, static/dynamic and identical/non-identical.

This sounds convincingly as a general methodological assumption, but is hard to apply to specific matter, mainly because, although enumerable, the levels which are present in the real human are difficult to present as relatedness. It is this relatedness

which is the big referential cause for breeding the so-called semiotic units in the course of each and every human understanding. Here is one example: given the high genetic identity between the human being and the chimpanzee, modern science of the apes is facing the problem of whether to refer the chimpanzee to the human species. More examples can be provided. Present-day traditional science experiences the same difficulties in fixing the borders between certain species and genuses, which were also faced by Aristotle's speculative metaphysics.

For it is not just a matter of drawing the line between the chimp and the human being. In the eventual unit which might incorporate the human being and the apes, the viewpoints of other units are involved as well. Thus, for example, is the volumetric unit for the biological thing, which links all plants, animals and microorganisms. This unit is something real: among the many other things a human being is, it is also a biological being. It would have been too easy if generic features were not mixed with those of the species, but they are intermingled and Aristotle's principle that essence is determined only by the species is incapable of solving this. No matter how we distinguish between man and animals, modern empirical knowledge clearly indicates that man is an animal, too, and that in animal existence some of the most important manifestations of human existence are revealed, without it being easy to say whether these refer to the man/animal unit, or to the larger unit of the so-called biological thing.

This way or the other, however, both of them exhibit the following features, which are important for the understanding of the human being: existence is both individual and group, individual mobility is transformed into group mobility and can be manifested in two ways: as linking to, and separation from, other groups and a given environment. This mobility is exposed in terms of subject in a very peculiar way - in the dual relationship of the 'is' and 'it happens'-situations already discussed. Hence, according to the individual/group/environment indicator, between the human being and the biological thing assumed a quite apparent similarity can be observed. One addition to this is that biological existence cultivates the supplementary environment which is typical of man and which comes as extension of his natural environment.

Accordingly, based on this similarity, a general understanding of the fundamentals of every existence comes forth. Provisionally, we call it a biological one. It is exhibited in the dynamics of the linking between at least three units: individual, group and group-to-environment. The dynamic identity/non-identity relation between these units is the common of a coefficient which should never be overlooked when discussing human existence. This coefficient is, so to say, a transcendence of the human which is present within the human itself. Or, in other words, man as a biological being and man as a social being both fall into a common coefficient pool, where they are in a certain way undifferentiated. This undifferentiatedness is an important aspect of the effective knowledge about them. Saying effective, I mean knowledge to be used, a temporary immanent understanding, ready to open towards one or another transcendence, or towards another immanence.

Or, if we are to put this in yet another way, a human being is just a human being, but also an animal, and a biological thing, and God, whatever this may mean. Man is an ongoing attempt at an entity, and therefore, is many entities at once. Like many other things, he is an object, too. There is nothing so bad in treating sometimes both the others and ourselves like objects. It would be bad, however, to profess this as a static situation,

just like it would be equally bad to approach in the same way the assumption that man is a superior and reasonable being. And not only because the ideologically stabilized meaning of this assumption has lead to so much outrage in human history. What is bad, too, is its very 'deceitfulness', the fact that the front of its 'is'-assumption presents its back to the 'must'-assumption that man is not as reasonable as he is expected to be.

It would be difficult to list all manifestations of the human. The possibility of doing so depends on what is being discussed and on the task to be solved, the eye turning towards some of these manifestations, after being negotiated, and presenting them according to the principle of existence - as transition from one to the other. But since, because of speech, this too can be represented only in general terms, and on the other hand it would be an utopia to consider it only generally, in the ideal proposition of a general metaphysics, then there is no other effective way of expression, except for the provisional usage, by compromise, of this or that small metaphysics of existence, which the one who chooses applies in order to have his work done. Metaphysics is useless as a secure method for the understanding and doing of everything, but is indispensable as a kind of coefficient knowledge.

This formulation of the human phenomenon and human understanding casts a peculiar light also on the two specific manifestations of the human: the individual and the social, this, so to say, binary symbol for treating the human phenomenon, around which the objectivist-minded modern humanities are centered. The social and the individual are the signifieds of actual conditions of the human, but they are something else, too: interdependent terms for expressing the dual inner otherness in the area of the human. Each of them is like an inner transcendence to the other, and each can be regarded as being more immanently human than the other. Opportunities for static decision and choice lie not only between the individual and the social, but also among their subspecies. For the social can be split into a hierarchical social, of a closed nature, and a communal one, which is open according to the principle of individual equality, this in its turn being subdivided into real communities of equal individuals, and virtual communities of all those who are not there. The same subspecific sophistication is valid for the individual as well.

Such subspecific multiplicity should have resulted in a huge number of combinations in the specific situations of choice. But neither practical, nor objectivist thinking is inclined to produce refined differentiations. The ideal of clarity, dictated by the context of what has to be done and the need for it to be easily shareable, does not allow for that. The choice usually is between social and individual in principle. But this is also the paradox of static utterances. They are seemingly unequivocal, but their claims are semiotic units, 'polluted' with connotations. Whichever social ideal we take, considered in the context of its utterance or understanding, it is inevitably polluted. Its front part is a signifier, dragging behind connotation for some other social, and for some individual as well. This is how speech provides essence-related utterances with a kind of hidden potential assumptions, which are to serve, in case anyone decided to take them out of the semiotic unit, for rejecting the utterance developed according to the principle of essence, and setting off along the line of existence.

This solution is better: it connects openly two situations and their dynamic representation as a transition. Which means that the social and the individual, or, even better, certain specific manifestations of these, should be represented in a state of change,

as the realization of a subject to whom something happens and who acts, being driven towards something. By using subject, I mean not only the subject of an individual, but also the subject of a human group. Present-day humanities do not have a method for the effective subject-like representation of all that happens with a human community. Thanks to Freudian psychoanalysis, dynamic speeking about the individual has become much more developed than dynamic talking about what happens with human collectivities. This way or the other, however, in both cases - the identity-in-becoming of the individual, and the identity-in-becoming of human communities - everything is carried out through subjects of complex composition.

The becoming, the making of identity in view of the well-being of a given unit is, perhaps, the other synonymous phrase, which expresses more thoroughly the notion of existence. Individual and social are the cognitive symbols of two grosser unit types within the boundaries of the human. Behind them, the more general cognitive term of the subject flashes. This is why my assertion is that in order to think of the individual and the social as of existence, we need to think of them in terms of the subject, and further, picturing this subject as being internally and externally complex, shifting to the subjects of other units. Hence, existence is an ongoing transition from individual forms to social forms, in view of the intricately linked well-beings of the numerous units, in which the human is revealed and which we simplify by reducing them to the social and the individual.

But the least we must do, given what is implied in the pattern of the existence of the biological, is add a third structural unit which is usually overlooked: the environment-related social, the one, which is regarded as culture in objectivist terms. Just as the social human being is rooted in its biological body, so is human society rooted in the environment of the world, attainable through the agency of the human world, constructed as an extension. There are two intentions here: the individual strives to disconnect himself, if possible, even from his body, but at the same time he develops roots and connections in order to become more powerful and other. He is rooted into, and connected with, land, possessions, other people, society and what not, in order to surpass his biological determinacy and mortality. What he actually does, however, is to continue observing its own principle of surpassing and supplementing through transcendence.

The third issue covered by the present work is directly related to the objectivist style of contemporary social science, which considers social existence in an ineffective and closed way. This is true both of the purely objectivist talk along the line of essence, and of the seemingly dynamic talk, which regards social existence as becoming, but with the idea of a static subject. This is the poor form of history and historicism, whose denouncer is Carl Popper. By accounting of what is happening with such a static subject, of some kind of 'us' or 'them' related to a country, nation, ethnic group or society, such histories are no less objectivist than sociological or political-science talk which constructs permanent 'is'-situations for and abstract and motionless subject. The same holds true when dealing with the individual. It is enough to fix him into one permanent and unchangeable subject, and here comes the ideology of objectivism, implemented be it in some idea of firmly given qualities and complexes, be it in a fatal history which predetermines the individual.

With the idea of the complex dynamic subject, available as much to the individual as to the human community, the present work claims that in both cases the viewpoint of

becoming requires that we regard this subject as a procedure of becoming and referring to the subjects of other units. Hence the necessity, whenever stories are told of the fate of huge communities, to single out, within their 'he' or 'them', the smaller 'he's of their representative heroes. Because of the level of existence, no community has an objectivistically given history with the simple subject given of a clear-cut 'us' or 'them'. At best, this subject will be semiotically connected to one or another actual representative subject, which will also be a formation brimming with sub-subjects, related to, and within, it in a most complicated way. Hence, the human community and the individual are opposed to each other only in the perspective of static objectvist consideration. On the dynamic level of existence and becoming, these interfere to a peculiar dual result: society is always expressed individually and in terms of a subject, while the individual, in his turn, is always multiple on the inside.

One of the points of intersection of this interference is represented by the heroes of the social-in-becoming. The histories of societies and communities are in a certain way present in the stories of their heroes - these representative individuals who have been raised to power, an area for the complex intermingling of social and individual. Not that the so-called ordinary people fail to be such interminglings as well. The division of people into public heroes and common folk is only a classification, not reality. Hence the conviction that if the purpose of present-day social science is to present societies according to the principle of existence, it surely will need a realistic unsimplified model of the dynamic social/individual relationship, and, in its turn, an instrumental idea of a changeable dynamic subject.

These were the pragmatic implication and the purpose, which, very much like a surreptitious 'must', guided my argumentation in the present essay.