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## “None’s Reflex”: Enactivism and Observational Philosophy on Consciousness and Observation\*

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### **Abstract**

The paper is dedicated to the reconstruction of Alexander Piatigorsky’s observational philosophy within the context of the confrontation between two versions of the transcendental project of man-in-the-world. The first project accentuates the invariant functional organization of cognitive systems by abstracting from bodily, affective and phenomenological realization of this organization. On the contrary, the second project emphasizes the phenomenological perspective of the experience of givenness, always already dependent on whose experience this is and how the cognitive system living this experience is organized. The first project can be called functionalist, and the second – phenomenological. Ontological and epistemological positions of these projects are specified in the problem of the observer, its status in the world and cognitive practice. The observational philosophy possesses an intermediate position between these two programs since, aiming to disclose the invariant structure of observation, it proceeds from the factual experience of the embodied subject placed into the situation of self-observation and observation of the other subject. It is concluded that Piatigorsky’s philosophy borrows from the functionalist project the commitment to self-objectivation (observation of thinking is always the

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observation of the other thinking) and rejection from the spatiotemporal localization of cognitive activity (thinking is always “none’s” and does not belong to any kind of individual). With the phenomenological project of enactivism Piatigorsky shares the aspiration to disclose the invariant cognitive structures during the empirical observation of the real enactment of cognitive agency (the organization of cognitive systems is the same while its structural realizations are multiple), abandonment of substantialization of the self (“none’s” thinking is considered as the emergent effect of interaction among two or several observers – the autopoietic systems) as well as the refusal from theoretical formulation of the problem of consciousness (observational philosophy develops metatheoretical prolegomena to theory of consciousness, which in turn is considered as lived and essentially practical in phenomenology).

**Keywords:** observation, consciousness, phenomenology, functionalism, enactivism, cognitive science, systems theory.

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## **«Ничей рефлекс»: энактивизм и обсервационная философия о сознании и наблюдении\***

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### Аннотация

Статья посвящена реконструкции наблюдательной философии Александра Пятигорского в контексте противостояния двух версий трансцендентального проекта человека в мире. Первый проект акцентирует внимание на инвариантной, функциональной организации познающих систем, абстрагируясь от телесной, аффективной и феноменологической реализаций этой организации. Второй, напротив, делает основную ставку на феноменологическую перспективу опыта данности, всегда зависящего от того, чей это опыт и как устроена переживающая его познающая система. Первый проект можно назвать функционалистским, а второй – феноменологическим. Онтологические и эпистемологические позиции данных проектов конкретизируются в контексте проблемы наблюдателя, его статуса в мире и практике познания. Наблюдательная философия занимает промежуточное положение между двумя этими программами, поскольку, стремясь вскрыть инвариантную структуру наблюдения, отправляется от фактического опыта воплощенного субъекта, помещенного в ситуацию самонаблюдения и наблюдения за другим субъектом. Делается вывод, что с функционалистским проектом философия Пятигорского разделяет стремление к самообъективации (наблюдение за мышлением всегда есть наблюдение за другим мышлением) и отказ от пространственно-временной локализации познавательной способности (мышление всегда «ничье», оно не принадлежит конкретному индивиду). С феноменологическим проектом энактивизма Пятигорского роднит стремление вскрывать инвариантные структуры познания в ходе наблюдения за действительным осуществлением познавательных актов (организация познающих систем едина, а ее структурные реализации множественны), отказ от субстанционализации «Я» («ничье» мышление есть скорее эмерджентный эффект взаимодействия двух и более наблюдателей – аутопоэтических систем) и отказ от теоретической постановки проблемы сознания (поскольку наблюдательная философия представляет собой скорее метаэпистемологические подступы к теории сознания, которое для феноменологии по определению является практическим).

**Ключевые слова:** наблюдение, сознание, феноменология, функционализм, энактивизм, когнитивная наука, теория систем.

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### **Introduction. Observer – from a human in the world to abstraction**

Who is an observer and what is he observing? The observer can be represented as an abstract pole of pure contemplation not involved in the processes he observes, or, on the contrary, can be considered as an integral element of the observational situation itself<sup>1</sup>. However, it seems that the observer, as abstractly detached from observation or specifically involved in it, alternately replace one another in the actual practice of cognition, being, in fact, two sides of the same observer. This observer is a human in the world, inseparable from his immediate environment and constituting an inextricable unity with it.

It can be argued that the figure of an abstract observer emerged from the concrete actions of observing people as a regulatory idea, a normative ideal of disengaged knowledge. The newly emerged abstract observer fully expressed the desire of human cognition to highlight the universal invariant structures of cognizable reality, and the transition of mankind to total abstraction, pure algorithmic procedures and computational contingency is the next step in this emancipation [Negarestani 2014; Parisi 2014]. From this perspective, the upcoming epistemological situation will be the release of a pure observing subject, devoid of spatio-temporal localization and free from physicality, affects, and finitude.

The roots of such an understanding of cognition can be traced, for example, in transcendental philosophy: behind each cognitive act of subjectivity lies an abstract principle that unites and organizes these acts, making it appear as a holistic reflective “Self” and simultaneously not being an element of a series of acts ordered by it. The observer who is co-present at every act of my consciousness, an impersonal place “from” which and “in” which the thought process takes place is rather

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, the observer figure is introduced as that by the very act of observation makes changes to what is observed, and in the theory of systems, any system in the environment as such arises only as observed by another system.

the principle of functional organization and temporal ordering of discrete episodes, “glimpses” of thinking, concerning which phenomenal, affective processes turn out to be contingent, unnecessary, for thinking is capable of living without a body and exists as pure reflexivity, self-closure through observation of other thinking, which, in turn, is always already closed on itself through another.

Consequently, the real subjectivity hidden behind the acts of a phenomenally transparent self is functional and does not depend on the sensually experienced content, which acquires significance only through the categorical processing of sensory data that it provides. It is not the phenomenal “Self” that observes, but that which provides the latter with access to the field of observation and that is beyond its immediate access.

This ambivalent understanding of the observer is largely consistent with the difference between the two images of a man in the world [Sellars 1991, 4]. We can imagine ourselves as subjects with an inner phenomenological life, understanding each other with the help of everyday language tools, in which each of us, by necessity, has a perspective on a world saturated with meaning. At the same time, we can think of ourselves, from the point of view of science, as physical automata, by-products of the development of the central nervous system, or, more broadly, the abstract ability to think conceptually, hypothetically, discursively.

However, such a strict contrast is fraught with internal difficulties: the world of everyday perception is continuous, fluid, and unpredictable, while the world of science fits into the ordered patterns of discrete entities, many of which are not visible to the naked eye<sup>2</sup>. As will be shown later, the boundary between these two images and two representations of the observer is permeable since both visions speak of a human observer in the world he perceives.

In order to show the permeability of this boundary, I will turn to a philosophical program related to the problematization of the figure of the observer. This is a project of observational philosophy of Alexander Piatigorsky. Observational philosophy develops one of the varieties of what the scholars call the *transcendental project* of a human being in the world [Tengelyi 2013], focusing on the functional organization of

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<sup>2</sup> At the same time, I am aware that this thesis can be criticized from the point of view of the history or sociology of scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, I propose to interpret these two images of a person as “ideal types,” following Wilfried Sellars, the author of this distinction,

the observer subject, and not on the variety of its anthropological or psychological realizations.

In this regard, Piatigorsky finds himself inside the antagonism of two versions of modern transcendental philosophy<sup>3</sup>. One side is the position that can be described as *pragmatic functionalism* [Negarestani 2014, 455], which emphasizes the *formal*, organizational aspect of cognitive activity, which is associated with the call for the universalization of knowledge, independent of how such a cognitive subject is structured. What is important is that it produces the phenomenal experience of the subject, and not how he actually experiences the world.

This position is opposed by a different view, which can be called *phenomenological*<sup>4</sup>. It emphasizes that in order to study the cognitive organization of subjects, it is important to examine how they experience the coupling with the perceived reality, depending on how these subjects are structured and in what sense they produce the world through their actions. Therefore, it is important not so much the universal (transcendental) organization as its implementation in the empirical structures of specific, embodied entities.

These images of the human in the world refer to two understandings of the observer and his role in observation [Sellars 1991]. Next, I will turn to the phenomenological project to highlight the main features of observational philosophy more clearly in its background. Phenomenology, or rather, its branch in the framework of cognitive science – enactivism – distinguishes the rejection of the possibility of constructing a *theory of consciousness*. Ultimately, this is because theoretical abstract thinking always involves the alienation of a human from who he is, objectification, which turns out to be unattainable.

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<sup>3</sup> This article is the first to present such a positioning of the philosophy of Piatigorsky. In part, it was inspired by the problematization of the observer's figure from the perspective of a constructivist approach to the question of consciousness [Gasparyan 2015].

<sup>4</sup> Hereinafter, by "phenomenology" I mean a philosophical program that gives the onto-epistemological priority to experience, subjectivity and consciousness, which are endowed with a constitutive role. In this sense, the transcendental phenomenological reflection, in its emphasis on the "pure content" of experience, is opposed to pragmatic functionalism, which is interested in the abstract mechanisms of production of conscious experiences, but not themselves in the aspect of their subjective givenness (see: [Tengelyi 2013; Varela 1996]).

I am not able to imagine myself as an object *in* the world, for I am a subject *for* the world.

### Consciousness in the world and for the world

I will begin by explaining why phenomenology emphasizes the constitutive role of subjectivity in the emergence of the world. The central idea here is the concept of *phenomenologization*, that is, the substitution of a self-enclosed nature, reflected in subjective representations, by nature in which (and for which) consciousness is a fundamental concept. This consideration cannot be understood as a form of panpsychism; rather, it means that nature without a “scene” on which it manifests itself, i.e., without consciousness, simply does not exist [Varela 1997]. And this does not imply the subjective idealism for, despite the obvious dependence of consciousness on nature (in the form of physiology, evolutionarily arising neural architecture, etc.), this does not allow us to reduce the fact of consciousness to structures external to it.

The latter also means that when placing phenomenology inside the opposition “internalism – externalism,” it takes the position of externalism. Consciousness is “distributed” in networks of discourses, practices, and material artifacts and is therefore devoid of spatial localization. This refers not to the immediate intentions of the founder of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, but to general section of recent adherents of the transcendental understanding of consciousness in phenomenology and phenomenologically tuned cognitive science.

The world in phenomenology is the result of the constitution, which, however, does not entail Kantian conclusions that a deduction of a formal categorical apparatus, purified from empirical accretions, is required, whose work with “sensory data” seems to “produce” the world. Consciousness really has access to the world, the intentional object is not something “internal,” and my experience of the world is the experience of direct contact with the world. It is important to understand that this experience of the world is neither a subjective projection nor an illusory construct. If my experience were only a passive mirroring of reality in my mind, then in order to correlate this reflection with the reflected, I would have to go beyond my own experience, “from outside” correlating the elements of representation with the represented objects “in themselves.”

The phenomenological maxim of the primacy of givenness means that we must take into account the genetic relations of the idea of objec-



tive (in particular, scientific) knowledge and the immanent experience of consciousness. Thus, we can consider abstract geometrical space as a derivative of the initial experience of the spatiality of our body, the location of its parts, the formation of the body schema, etc. One can trace the origins of high-level abstractions that natural science works with and find that they are "conserved" processes for the formation of abstractions from gestures of sensorimotor experience. Therefore, they turn out to be "rooted" in the structure of subjectivity. Concerning the problems of the philosophy of science, this means a transition from a realistic to an instrumentalist position that is aware of the dependence of cognition of the world on the structure of the knowing subject [Hansen 2017, 86]. There is no cognition outside the material practices embodying it, which, in turn, "betray" the inevitable presence of the knower in the world.

The fullest expression of this idea of the dependence of objectivity and abstraction on the life of specific cognitive beings is found in the program of enactivism in cognitive science. Its foundation is the theory of autopoiesis, elaborated in the early 1970s. Being a part of the neo-cybernetic movement, it develops a systematic approach to determining what is life's relation to knowledge. Enactivism, developed by Francisco Varela and his like-minded people in the 1990s, is the application of the theory of autopoiesis to the knowing person himself, who, "from the inside" of his knowable world, comprehends his experience and its internal limitations.

For the theory of autopoiesis, cognition reflects the structure of the knower, which means: there is a mutual dependence between the world that was given to us in experience and the way we are structured. What phenomenology considers as the intentional correlation of noesis (thinking) and noema (conceivable content) is transferred to the register of scientific theorization as a *structural coupling* of a living system and its environment. Varela wrote:

It should be clear that the first cut, the most elementary distinction we can make, may be the intuitively satisfactory cut between oneself *qua* experiencing on the one side, and one's experience on the other. But this cut can under no circumstances be a cut between oneself and an independently existing world of objective objects. Our "knowledge," whatever rational meaning we give that term, must begin with experience, and with cuts *within* our experience – such as, for instance, the cut we make between the part of our experience that we come to call "ourselves" and all the rest of our experience, which we then call the "world." Hence, this world of ours, no



matter how we structure it, no matter how well we manage to keep it stable with permanent objects and recurrent interactions, is by definition a world codependent with our experience [Varela 1980, 274].

Enactivism seeks to reorient the scientific study of consciousness from the analysis of neuronal processes to the consideration of the lived human experience. In this sense, enactivism is an *empirical-scientific phenomenological* version of the transcendental project [Varela 1996]. The idea of self-alienation, with which, according to some authors, the cognitive revolution began [Dupuy 2009], should be abolished: a person is not a thinking machine, but a living embodied being, not an object, but a subject equipped with a body, community, artifacts, and symbolic systems. Therefore, the main and only reality to which we have access is a *human* reality.

However, the superficial interest in human reality, recognized as the only one available to our perception and as if becoming a measure of all things as they move away from the human scope, is far from an unambiguous interpretation: the impossibility of going beyond the limits of human perception, the inability to occupy the perspective “from nowhere” and “from nowhen” in the same sense in which we possess our biologically, historically, socially and culturally determined position, can be understood as a sign of the closure of the epistemological capabilities of human beings.

Thus, for neurophilosophy, the inability of the phenomenal “Self”-model, the brain-bound interface for interacting with the world, to recognize the processes as a result of which it emerged as a model, is explained by the brain’s intention to minimize the cost of computing resources. Otherwise, the “Self”-model with access to the processes generating it would ask about the processes that led to the existence of these neural computing processes, and this regression would have no end. So, here we are faced with what neurophilosophy prefers to call “auto-epistemic closure” [Metzinger 2003, 57], that is, a necessary denial of consciousness to access the processes that led to its emergence.

Such a closure at the basic level of reality without additional ontological strata places the “Self”-model in the “window” of its presence in the world – an instant impression of reality becoming the “zero” reality of direct perception.

Therefore, the enactivist autopoietic observer may turn out to be an illusion, a model produced by a genuine observer – the brain. But the brain itself, with its network organization, can turn out to be only

an artifact of even more abstract principles, which themselves do not depend on how they can be embodied – cerebrally, bodily, by machine, etc. [Parisi 2014, 173].

### **The observer and his shadow**

Here we are again confronted with the figure of an observer who shies away from naturalization. Thus, the observer does not depend on his empirical realizations and, in this sense, assumes a kind of “subjectivity without selfhood,” close to the abstract understanding of observation in the above sense. Observation, consequently, does not come down to the actual structure of the biologically given and requires an analysis of the functional operations of the self-closure of the observation act on itself, regardless of the structural specificity of the observer who performs these acts. It can be assumed that this is precisely what interests the observational philosophy of the Russian philosopher Alexander Piatigorsky (1929–2009).

The situation of observation in observational philosophy initiates with a distinction between the observer and what he observes. Piatigorsky formulates the “postulate of observation”: *something is designed so that it is observed and observes* [Piatigorsky 2002b, 9]. Therefore, in the field of observation, something is recognized in its certainty by distinguishing it from what it is not. At the same time, Piatigorsky stipulates that in the observed object itself there are no “traces” of the observer, his presence is not revealed by anything – which means the observer is unable to become observable through the object he thinks.

The observation process has a certain localization, which Piatigorsky marks as “the place from which I think.” To trace the origin of observation “wherein” and “through” which it is carried out, he delimits the operations of thinking, reflection, and consciousness. Thinking – observing *par excellence* – is neither a reflexive process of identifying the self with itself nor a feeling of oneself in the subjective consciousness. Having thematized thinking as a meeting with “other,” *never* “my” thinking, Piatigorsky deduces a “place,” from which observational philosophy is expressed, considering thinking as an object of thought. It is clear that the observing subject is not a human because the observational philosophy “by definition is not anthropocentric since at the center of its observation is not a human, but thinking – whose, in principle, is indifferent. Or, in other words, for it the ‘human phenomenon’ itself is only one of the instances of observed thinking” [Piatigorsky 2002b, 17].

Non-anthropism can develop only from within philosophy in the order of perfection and development of the reflexive processes of philosophical thinking. I am fully aware that while the concept of non-anthropism itself seems somewhat exotic, primarily because a new phenomenological reduction has not yet been invented, but not a reduction of anthropism to non-anthropism, but a reduction of anthropism and non-anthropism to some third more general concept, in relation to which anthropism and non-anthropism would appear as special cases [Piatigorsky 2002a].

Observation is “none’s,” impersonal, and it exists as an effect of correlation of several observation positions. But how many observations are required to construct an observer? In the theory of autopoiesis, reasoning begins with the introduction of an observer figure. However, here we are talking about a cybernetic observer: autopoiesis considers not only the observed systems but also the observing system, recursively applying its own epistemological positions to the one who expresses them. *Everything said is said by the observer* [Maturana & Varela 1980, 8]. The basic cognitive operation conducted by the observer is the operation of distinction, which distinguishes “something” as a holistic formation in the environment, against a certain “background.”

What is recognized and distinguished by such a self-referential observer is a system that is “implanted” in its immediate environment. Being a unity other than the environment, it is an intermediate result of the integration of its constituent components. The set of observed relations between the components of the system, which defines it as a unit and does not depend on the material properties of the components, forms the *organization* of the system. The organization is invariant, although it can be embodied in various components. Concretization of the organization in the set of actual relationships between the components of the system constituting it as a spatial unit forms the *structure* of the system.

It follows that the organization of the system can be realized through several possible structures, and as an embodied invariant among the many structural realizations of the system, it is determined by the observer who sees the system in the environment. Thus, *autopoiesis* is such an organization: it is defined as a network of processes for the production of components that are used as resources for the production of these components in the homeostasis of the system. The autopoietic system has a circular organization that allows it to maintain its integrity in interaction with the environment [Maturana & Varela 1980, 78–79]. It is generally accepted that autopoiesis can give a minimal definition

of life and cognition that binds them together: living systems are cognitive systems, and life is a process of cognition.

Cognition is understood both by observational philosophy and by enactivism as an articulation of an established organization, which ontologically is more than just a complex or combination of separate components. It is assumed that the organization of the observer is unchanged during its interaction with the elements of the environment, while the structural embodiment of the organization undergoes partial modifications. It preserves and maintains the distinction between the system and its environment in the eyes of the observer. This supported distinction, which does not prevent the system from effectively interacting with the environment, is called *structural coupling*<sup>5</sup>.

System theorists believed that the coupling between the system and the environment produces what a qualitatively experienced world will be "from the standpoint" of the system. Moreover, there is a congruence between how the system is cognitively structured and what world it perceives as "its own." Moreover, "my" world, in reality, turns out to be only a *portion* of reality, limited by my cognitive apparatus, a niche in the environment.

The *niche* is a class of interactions into which a living system, observed from the outside, is capable of entering. This is only a section of the environment, the inhabitant of which is an observer, fixing the behavior of the observed system. The *environment* is a class of interactions into which the observer can enter and which he recognizes as the context of his interaction with the observed system. For the observer, a niche is a fragment, a portion of (his) environment, while for an observed system, its niche completely exhausts its world [Maturana & Varela 1980, 134]. In other words, the environment may include many niches, but, taken from the perspective of another observer, it may turn out to be a niche.

The niche of the observed system and the environment of the observer intersect to the extent that the observer and the observed system have compatible organizations, while there are always areas of the observer's environment beyond the cognitive access of the observed system, and, conversely, there are parts of the niche that do not overlap with the configuration interaction of the observer.

The world observed by man is a world that is viewed "through" his perceptual apparatus. I can only observe what is the result of discriminating operations, which can be carried out differently, by observers

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<sup>5</sup> The system and its environment; two or more systems among themselves.

organized in a different way. Consequently, the observer can distinguish between the system and its environment only “from within” his own environment, in which, in terms of observational philosophy, something is observed. Therefore, in a certain sense, all structures and relationships recognized by the observer in the observed system may not be constitutive for the observed system from its environment.

Since the theory of autopoiesis “articulates” the “point of view” of a human being as a living system, an objective look at ourselves is possible only as comparing us to other living beings. Autopoiesis as a neo-cybernetic theory suggests the possibility of transferring descriptive categories from the observed system to the observing one. The latter turns out to be not a design engineer of the artifact, but a living creature involved in the interaction with the observed. The observer and the observed are capable of mutual exchange of reflective positions, although the latter is not necessarily human, realizing autopoiesis differently.

### **“Reflex Z” and the metatheory of consciousness**

The problem, however, is that when accepting the view that everything said by the observer is true about himself, it is assumed: his environment is a niche in the environment of another observer. The self-applicability of these epistemological considerations, which has not been properly developed within the framework of the theory of autopoiesis, has a similar expression in Piatigorsky in the form of an “axiom of observability”: the observer observes only those objects that he *can* observe [Piatigorsky 2002b, 74]. Here the emphasis is placed on observational ability: a “highlighted” space is required in which something is given *as* an observable object. “Only that thinking can be observed which itself observes; only the thinking that can observe can be observed” – this is what Piatigorsky proposes to call the “postulate of limited anthropism” [Piatigorsky 2002b, 78].

Therefore, human knowledge is not a goal, but an object of philosophical observation. In this sense, observational philosophy is closer to the abstract functionalist understanding of subjectivity in its oscillation between psychism / anthropism and the impersonal observer that arises at the intersection of my observation of other thinking and the observation of my thinking by another thinking. Anthropism and other situational methods for the structural embodiment of a unified reflexive organization of observation are particular cases of the general situation of functionally organized thinking – while the invariants of

such an organization are still "read" and recognized only from the actual activity of the "Self" that thinks "from" this abstract "locus", devoid of spatial and temporary localization.

This, at first glance, makes Piatigorsky related to the enactivists, who claimed that consciousness neither exists nor does not exist, because it emerges spontaneously due to the integration of local subsystems of various levels of complexity [Varela 2002, 76]. It is important, however, that these subsystems turn out to be retroactively "embraced" by what they have produced – the mental activity that can interpret itself as an emergent effect of processes beyond its control, which is not so close to Piatigorsky.

Here it can be pointed out that the specific status of consciousness, subjectivity, observer does not allow to "grasp" it through abstract theoretical thinking. In enactivism and observational philosophy, the impossibility of constructing a theory of consciousness is affirmed: in Piatigorsky this entails a rejection of "theory" in favor of a methodological analysis of approaches to the "pure contentfulness" of consciousness about something [Piatigorsky 2002b, 61], which, as a result, means a transition to methodological struggle with it.

The struggle with consciousness means that with the desire of the human, consciousness ceases to be something spontaneous, natural, automatically functioning. Consciousness becomes knowledge and *over this time* (the term "time" here does not have a physical meaning) ceases to be consciousness and, as it were, becomes *meta-consciousness* – and then we would call the terms and statements of this latter the *metatheory*. In other words, the fact that we are urged to build a theory of metaconsciousness is a necessity to struggle consciousness [Mamardashvili & Piatigorsky 1971, 346].

Although enactivism maintains abstinence from the theoretical formulation of the question of consciousness (which, essentially, performs a phenomenological *epoché*), it nevertheless seeks to develop a dissolution of the "hard problem" of consciousness [Vörös & Bitbol 2017] through experimental first-person experience studies. Moreover, for enactivism, consciousness is fundamentally unobjectifiable, being a stream of experience and an autoepistemically closed process of interaction between the system and the environment.

Since the experience of consciousness is not reducible to the private experience of "qualia" and includes a whole host of various manifestations, the theory of consciousness, which could explain why it is to us, is impossible. *The theory of consciousness from a phenomenological*

*point of view is a contradiction in terms – it is impossible to build a “theory of practice” without reconsidering the relations between theoretical and practical in our daily life.* Consciousness for enactivism initially implies not only cognitive openness to the world, but also correlation with other subjects – inhabitants of the world that is common to us (the human, but also the animal world, i.e., the natural world). This shows its discrepancy with observational self-observation:

Consciousness *per se* (and not its understanding) cannot be lively experienced by us, it cannot be a phenomenon of life for us and therefore it cannot be an object of positive knowledge. And the point is not only that it cannot be an object of personal experience, although this is also very important, but that we simply catch on, that for us it can be *any kind of object*. We say that we elaborate with consciousness, that we are engaged in understanding of consciousness precisely because it is impossible to describe consciousness itself, to work with consciousness itself and not with its understanding [Mamardashvili & Piatigorsky 1971, 348].

In this regard, it turns out that in Piatigorsky the transcendental motives turn out to be much stronger than among the enactivists, because the internal observer, the “*reflex Z*” [Piatigorsky 2002b, 142], which is hidden behind any act of human consciousness, is very similar to the impersonal mechanism of transcendental unity of apperception in Kantian philosophy. Piatigorsky indicates the fallacy of reification of the observed cognitive act when the latter is attributed to a certain substantial agent seemingly executing it.

It is important to note that an internal observer can be detected when taking an “external” position relative to one’s thinking, when it is observed as “other.” This means going through the stages of “alienation” of the human subject with his mental specificity, revealing the “place from which I think.” As a result, the self-discovery of the “*reflex Z*” requires the discipline of working with thinking concentrated in a particular human being.

Quite similar motifs can be found in the later works of Varela and his co-authors: no organizational invariants of the cognitive activity of living beings (which were discussed in the theory of autopoiesis) can be given objectively, outside of their givenness in experience to someone who observes living systems and recognizes these invariants.

“Life can be known only by life” – this is the maxim of “biophilosophy” of Hans Jonas, which became the starting point for the later works of Varela [Weber & Varela 2002]. The observer of a living system, being an animate body, can recognize life in the environment only



because it is a living being *per se*. The assumption that the observed system has an "internal" perspective is based on the observer's possession of the subjective dimension. This indicates: the observer and what he observes have a common (or at least minimally compatible) organization that makes them knowable to each other.

Just as observation of a living system is possible only because the observer himself is also a living system with an autopoietic organization that constitutes the meaningful world, an observer of observational philosophy is not an abstract model, but a necessary principle for organizing the observation process. Therefore, the human is but one of the instantiations of thinking or one of the many realizations of an autopoietic organization. Since we have no other access to thinking and autopoiesis than that observed by us, humans, the starting point for considering cognition should be the human experience<sup>6</sup>.

For enactivism, there is no organization of life outside its structural incarnations in systems that "enact" their worlds, nor is there an invariant of the "reflex Z" outside the instantiations of thinking that are observed by it and observe it. The multiplicity of constituted worlds, partially overlapping and co-evolving with the world of the observer, as well as the exchange of observational positions, suggest the conclusion: there is no single reality for all living beings, just as there is no single omniscient observer of this reality that would not be observed.

The "none" of observational philosophy, observing the "distribution of nothing," becomes a relevant plot for enactivism: in both projects, we are talking about an unnaturalizable residue, an adequate understanding of which remains unattainable for reductionist natural science. And while Piatigorsky's consciousness is defined as an unattainable object of observation, to which the nonhuman observer can only approach asymptotically, then among enactivists consciousness cannot be observed theoretically, since it is always an existential practice of the life of consciousness.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that the observational philosophy of Alexander Piatigorsky fluctuates between two versions of a transcen-

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<sup>6</sup> At the same time, I will once again point out the non-identity of consciousness to life, emphasized by observational philosophy: "at some points in my life I clearly feel that I have such a life that is not consciousness and that this life can exist, it can gain some fullness – not only because consciousness stops in order to *be conscious*, but insofar as it stops in order to *be absent*" [Mamardashvili & Piatigorsky 1971, 347].

dental project – abstract functionalist and phenomenological. At the same time, abstractly theming the figure of an observer, Piatigorsky comes to conclusions very close to the phenomenological program of enactivism.

Observational philosophy and enactivism offer their own versions of *abandoning the category of consciousness*: the former in connection with the unformalizable “contentfulness” of conscious phenomena, and the latter in virtue of the unobjectifiable nature of human experience.

The recognition of the inseparability of the observer and the field of observation contemplated by him is combined in observational philosophy and enactivism with criticism of objectification and reification of this figure. It is not me who is observing, but a certain “place” that arises at the crossroads of reflexive positions because it cannot be localized in space and time, being disseminated in the system of the body, environment, and their relationships<sup>7</sup>.

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