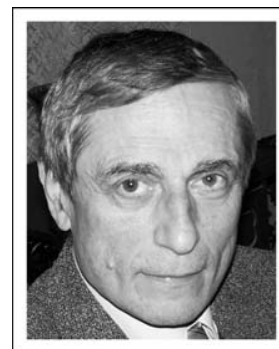


THE ARCHETYPE – VARIATIONS ON A GIVEN THEME

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According to any dictionary, the *archetype*, a word of Latin (*archetypum*) or Greek (*arkhetypon*) etymology, is an ideal type, an original model, a prototype, a standard, - more exactly a *pattern* – of a thing or of all things. Reference to Plato’s Idea is a must from the very first moment of reflection on this topic, as Plato was the first to tackle the problem of an ideal essence of the phenomenal world, as a primary, generating given. Still famous are his reflections in the tenth book of *The Republic*, with the seemingly laughable example of the three beds, based on the Socratic concept of maieutic dialogue, that “whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume them to have also a corresponding idea or form”¹ “Well then: here are three beds: one existing in nature, which is made by God, as I think that we may say (...) There is another which is the work of the carpenter. (...) And the work of the painter is a third.”² – says Plato in this passage. So, there is an archetypal “bed”, belonging to the original nature of things, to the supramundane Being, from which derives the making, in the concrete and sensible world, of material objects, imitated, in their turn, by the artistic gesture, which is often thrice removed from the truth, as it is only an imitation of the imitation of the only one authentic model, the Idea. It is a devaluation accounted for by way of reference to the Truth, as to a betrayed, altered essence, of that which the supreme Reason offers as ontological foundation of the world. For, however pleasing and delightful arts may be to our senses – and Homer’s eminent reputation does not hinder such judgment – they remain in essence, according to Plato, “untrue”, effects of an “illusion”, hence the idea that there is no place for poets in the Ideal City, and that the music players’ attempt to change the strings of the traditional lyre should be reproved. In any artistic realm, “imitation” is seen as a “a kind of play and

¹ Platon, *Opere*, V, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1986, p. 412.

² *Ibidem*, p. 413.

not something serious”¹, a tendency of man’s « irrational » and « rebellious » side, put in contradiction and conflict with what the philosopher calls the “wise and calm temperament, being always nearly equable”, which “is not easy to imitate or to appreciate when imitated, especially at a public festival when a crowd is assembled in a theatre”; in his turn, though, “the imitative poet” would rather choose “the passionate and fitful temper, which is easily imitated”².

Then Aristotle came along and, despite his severe criticism of Platonism, admitted the immanence of the essential, the former Platonic Idea, in the phenomenon itself. And there followed the history of philosophy to interpret these relationships in terms of the tradition of Plato’s *Republic* or *Timaeus*, or of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

A summary of these views on archetypology has been quite recently offered by our colleague, professor Corin Braga, who, in the preface to his book *Zece studii de arhetipologie (Ten Studies in Archetypology)*³, identifies three classes of archetypes: *metaphysical*, *psychological* and *cultural*. The first, akin to Plato’s definition which was later adopted by theology, places the archetype in a transcendent, metaphysical reality; Goethe’s « original phenomenon » or his « Mothers » belong to this category. *The psychological archetype* imbeds former models from beyond the given world into the mind of the subject whose knowledge is limited, as in Kant, by « a priori categories », while, according to the English Empiricists (such as Hume), « the laws of nature can be reduced to the laws of perception » ; C.G. Jung, in his turn, introduces and analyzes the archetypes of the so-called *collective unconscious*, overtly rooted in Romanticism, whereas in our country a version of Jungian theory can be found in Lucian Blaga’s philosophical works, where the deep realm of the being is structured according to various « abyssal categories » in a « stylistic matrix ». Another example of those who dwell on the psychological archetype is French philosopher and poetician Gaston Bachelard, with his suite of « poetics » and « reveries » built around the four fundamental physical elements: water, air, fire and earth, based on which he created a rich and suggestive « imaginary of matter », in a critical, « thematist » manner. In his landmark book, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, Gilbert Durand brings a well-articulated anthropological perspective on the imaginary configurations according to two great « regimes », diurnal and nocturnal.

Regarding the *cultural archetype*, he refers to the specificity of the creative act, which in light of the previously quoted views is too narrowly and reductively interpreted. The interpreter now turns his focus to the *concrete works*, filled with images, recurrent figures and thematic networks which are illustrative for a certain conception of the world. The points of interest when such research is conducted are always the *constants*, the *invariants* pervading the entire literature

¹ *Op.cit.*, p. 420.

² *Ibidem*, p. 424.

³ Corin Braga, *Zece studii de arhetipologie*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1999.

and culture, that which is *universal* in the *structuring patterns* of the imaginary. A repertoire of such « figures », though presented rather statically at first, was proposed by Mircea Eliade in his first *Treatise on the History of Religions*, later developed and activated in his massive *History of Religious Ideas and Beliefs* and continued by Ioan Petru Culianu, who was also very concerned about invariants and relational systems in the imaginary space. Another Romanian-born intellectual, Adrian Marino, with his “militant comparatism “, is just as receptive to *permanences, constants* and *invariants*, as he is available for the study of the dynamics of what he calls « literary ideas », concepts of poetry and literary theory explored in their contextual, historical evolution (as proven by the seven volumes of his work entitled *The Biography of the Idea of Literature*, published between 1992 and 2003). A sort of « grammar » of archetypes could therefore be framed in terms of cultural archetypology, embracing both the structuring permanences of « prototypes » and models, and the changes thereof over time and under diverse sociocultural conditions. Archetypes like Don Juan and Faust would be quite exemplary.

Even such a brief overview of the topic of the *archetype* can give a fair sense of the major significance of a long-term reflection on the relations between original patterns and the embodied derivatives of figures belonging to the universal imaginary, between the One of the beginnings of the world and the Multiple of the phenomenal unfolding, between self-sameness and the mixed alterity of the descendants. In other words, between some great, capitalized and symbolically-invested Themes, and their multiple, changeable and proliferant variations.

If, with due changes, we turn our focus to music creation, we rediscover, as in symmetry, a lot of similar aspects. There is no need for many examples of the *theme-variation* relationship to see, even as amateurs and music lovers gifted less with the eye and intelligence of a trained score reader than with an attentive and just a bit sensitive musical ear, that many important works have been conceived as variations on a theme that was either given or borrowed from more or less famous or from anonymous composers – as in musical folklore –, or even on own themes. Some of these, like Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* or, especially, *Art of the Fugue*, started from certain sonorous structures that were later developed in different scales and tonalities, aiming at a certain pedagogy of exploring the potential of the instrument – such as a harpsichord or organ – or a certain dynamics of composition, pursued in its most abstract structures. The result is, in Bach’s case, exemplary, in that the original « archetypal » pattern certifies its infinite, although somewhat disciplined, capacity for metamorphosis, subjected to rules and procedures that keep it, so to say, « within the Law », i.e. not altering its essence, but just « distributing » it in various approximations. « God » is again present, as in Plato, as first creator of the Being of that primary pattern of sounds, and so is the artisan, the musical « carpenter » and « painter », placed on the second and third step of the multiple imitations materialized in articulations of sonorous unities

which aim at the « rebellious » and « fitful » - as Plato used to put it quite contemptuously – but which, in Bach, is only relatively removed from the « wise and calm temperament » which remains « always nearly equable ». Therefore, in a way, Bach is a "Platonist" himself and - as I dared to say in a poem - "ferocious" and terrible in the cruelty with which he cleaves and carves the flesh of the sensorial or sonorous sensuality, to turn these once bleeding remnants into geometries of spiritualized stained glass. Music is therefore also reflection upon music, supreme product of a mind which equates, with harsh severity, the lyrical – or possibly lyrical - sensibility, with a non-concessive structuring reason.

A somewhat opposite example to the previous one is offered by Rachmaninov's variations on a theme of Paganini. The playful and alert initial « theme » progresses, through subtle transitions, to the exuberant final part, which diversifies the initial pattern, « making it more human », so to say, impregnating it with a profound romantic lyrical content, quite far removed from Paganini's *primum movens*. Finally, to make up a complete triad of examples, I will refer to Beethoven's « Diabelli Variations », another suggestive illustration of the leap from the Italian's modest waltz « theme » to the dramatic depths achieved by the German Maestro.

In these two examples, the concept of *archetype* becomes somewhat distorted from its original meaning, since the « patterns » it follows are hardly of the type that Platon would call capitalized Ideas. The comparison between the philosophical *archetype* and the *musical theme* on the one hand, and the diverse « imitations » or « variations » on the other, cannot be drawn in all its vastness and depth. On the other hand, one should also not ignore the fact that such relationship is not limited to the theme-variation equation, or to the strict and somewhat systematic development of an original "pattern". Not few are the musical works in which – as experts know better – references to old musical themes or structures occur in modern compositional procedures, very far removed therefrom. A Romanian example thereof would be Enescu's *Oedipus*, where elements of old Greek music suggest a certain rituality requested by the solemnity of the tragic discourse. A more recent example are Sigismund Toduță's compositions in folk « style », which are not variations proper, nor do they rely on folk quotations.

Recently, I came across some very interesting reflections on the issues here in question, in the essays of highly-praised pianist Andrei Vieru, son of the famous composer, who, significantly, is also a performer of „variations”. His discography includes, among others, the Goldberg and Diabelli Variations. Or, in Andrei Vieru's remarkable book published by Seuil (Paris), in 2006 and entitled *Le gai Ecclesiaste (The Joyous Ecclesiast)*, the central theme is also related to a kind of “variations”: the *mannerism* of expression, its secondary status always placing the original thought between quotation marks, in a maze of glosses upon glosses, often too many times removed from the first-hand utterance of the experience and of the idea.

He is interested, for instance, both in a positive way and as a pretext for critical rejection, in a sort of second-degree music, a meta-music which assumes a deep and subtle reflection on the variables of the work's inner geometry, on constantly reiterated approximations while moving to the center of the vision; and, of course, with the inevitable pendant of eccentricity and dilution. Therefore, in spite of his reluctance about the conservation of variants („variants should be proscribed”), he does, however, readily admit that „in the quest for perfection” the sense of the infinite is suggested less by the „perfection”, than by the „quest” itself. However, – an important observation –, „variants” should display a certain relative convergence in order to give true meaning to the quest and to create a balance between "concept" and "improvisation".

This issue maintains its importance throughout the entire book. An example of the above, though negative in nature, comes from the ironic commentary on art and chance as viewed by John Cages, a Neo-Avant-Garde composer practicing a musical „dice game” and claiming, nonetheless, to create according to nature's laws, but with no concern for structure whatsoever, and that, what matters to him, as to all Avant-Garde composers, - as the author justly observes -, is not so much the result, but the process leading thereto. Or, at this point, the essayist clearly separates himself from the subject of his reflections, as – we realize once more -, he is the adept of a sort of dynamic balance, in which the major line of the „vision" allows enough freedom of inventive movement, without being fundamentally affected. Therefore, Cage's mannerism appears to him – as he so expressively describes it – as nothing but a way of „beautifully wrapping up nothing”, with a sort of dilettantism of his philosophical – especially oriental – pursuits, which turn the composer here in question into an ... “artist, promoted demiurge and lecturer”! The essay on Glenn Gould, on the other hand, praises some of his interpretations and opinions, but blames the narcissism and „deliberate originality” of the egocentric „Martian” shown, for instance, in his recordings of Mozart's piano sonatas, or the occasional frivolity of his behavior.

Andrei Vieru dedicates some of his most remarkable pages – commenting on the same „mannerisms” – to E. M. Cioran (in symmetry with composer Mauricio Kagel), in the sequence entitled *Arta cuvintelor și pericolele stilului* (*The Art of Words and the Dangers of Style*). His admiration for the Frenchized Romanian and illustrious stylist did not prevent him from expressing some subtle and elegant reservations about his belonging to a „second-degree” epoch, i.e. that of mannerism, of „*that which is more sparkling than it is meaningful*”. From this perspective, the moralist-essayist makes a few fine remarks on some of Cioran's cogitations in which their author burdens himself with all the flaws, imperfections and vices. Thus, he writes that „We should be grateful to Cioran for having framed a theory of generalized imposture”. And, a little further, this eloquent passage, starting from the emphatic reverie of a „cosmic Neronism”, claimed somewhere by Cioran, who had also presumptuously written that he regretted being „a Raskolnikov without the

excuse of the murder”: „A beautiful formula, one that strengthens the idea that cynicism is less about a philosophical attitude and more about a ballet. After all, an idea is never cynical as long as it is not expressed, or *visible*, or it is not designed to astonish or outrage the bourgeois. (...) Cynicism seems to me a form of frivolous nonconformism, with no consequences and, therefore, harmless: the conformist thinker has a huge propensity to get indignant for no reason”.

His „variations” on the theme of the said mannerism are also present in his reflection on the interpretation of certain musical works based on (or not) the context they were created in. The exhaustive documentation is, in this case, a sort of counterpart to the other ”mannerisms”, for it diverts the attention from the essential line of the work, from its nontemporal features, towards minor, circumstantial details. Joining the ranks of those who used to consider our epoch as one of the „commentary”, Alexandrine in substance, the essayist believes that now „documentation and dossiers are raging”, that makeup, blush and flashiness are ruling, when, in reality, they stand for all that is insignificant and fleeting.

It is here, in the chapter entitled "Art and Interpretation”, that the „Ecclesiast” expresses himself. He knows that the past falls into oblivion and that what remains as „eternal” is only the „skeleton” of the work, the image reduced to its essence. It is its search, even without believing in only one possible interpretation, that softens the generalized skepticism and turns it into a sort of enlightened stoicism which relativizes even the idea of transience and vanity, allowing the „joyfulness” of the title of this text and book. Nietzsche's relaxed relativizing perspective, of „gay science”, must have had the meaning below: we are searching for a sort of truth of our own by relativizing the Truths, and we should appreciate what we achieve on our own, thorough our own quest for knowledge. Andrei Vieru is himself convinced that creative attention should not be split into thousands of diverse interpretations but should be synthetic and vivid instead, relying on personal sensibility and understanding, in a perspective where „logic and arbitrary are ideal pendants.”

Thus we return to the issue of the dynamic balance, searched in creation and in its interpretation alike. This is a delicate balance to achieve in a time when the moralist’s writings are often reprimanding, though without pedantry. In art, as in other social areas like politics, he bitterly observes a leveling, a sort of tiredness and exhaustion, the attempt to justify almost anything, especially in a world of consumption, where diversity becomes monotonous, while the exception from the rule and the independence of thought are placed under suspicion. Now the new Ecclesiast discovers the new vanities, writing, for instance, about the atmosphere in the consumption-based Western world he chose to live in, a couple of decades before: „But here, even stars have the mania of moving, they twinkle, wither and then die. What about our horizons and skies of today? Nothing but changing posters”...

In this context, therefore, it is not at all surprising that Andrei Vieru insists, with obvious delight and a tender feeling of solidarity, on literary works and characters such as J.D. Salinger's, in a suite of excerpts and emphatic reflections. What he admires in this writer, long retreated into an isolated and silent world, is a sort of genuine freshness, a candor left unspoiled by the culture of the commentary here in question. His preference for „loners” had already been revealed in his commentaries on the peculiar art of the likes of Miles Davis and Glenn Gould, or of Tolstoy, Soljenitsin, Greta Garbo, Vladimir Horowitz...

In the light of this often-mentioned pursuit of the balance between „improvisation” and „concept”, „variations” of all sorts and the more or less eternal „skeleton” of all things, also worth mentioning – though somewhat surprising – would be the chapter of reflections on themes related to ... mathematics, with formulas that could puzzle the ignorant reader in this matter, as is the author of these glosses. These considerations are filled with a sort of ease, a *sui generis* dexterity of someone utterly at home with abstractions and with the subtle articulation of hidden geometries, which can lead us from Bach to the symbolic orders of figures (and ciphers) from other levels of creation. Likewise, the commentaries so heartily made on the meditations on the „risks of thinking” by Terente Robert and Sorin Vieru, where the layered categories and subcategories of thought and subjectivity (Freud's and Jung's psychoanalyses are here landmarks and pretexts for subtle confrontations), demonstrate the profound unity of vision of an authentic essayist who, by his very definition, is concerned with the personal articulation of the adventure of an idea; in our case, the theme... of the theme with variations, i.e. of „mannerism”.

One reason for this reference to certain predominantly, though not exclusively, musicological reflections, is also because they nourish the meditation upon the generous sphere of the „theme with variations”, upon matters of *interpretation* of the *sui generis* „archetype” which is the musical work. Hence, in our opinion, Andrei Vieru has a balanced attitude when trying to reconcile the respect for the „pattern” of the compositions to be performed, with the individual freedom of approach, in that the latter should not come into conflict with the eternally lasting „skeleton”, i.e. the original score. So the archetype prevails, once more, in the minds of those who focus on the essential, in an age of often extreme relativizations, such as that of the “postmodernity” in which we live.