

Corneliu Dan Georgescu – The Aesthetics of Archetypal Minimalism. Theoretical Considerations

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Abstract. *Corneliu Dan Georgescu is an outstanding representative of the late 20th century Romanian composition school, whose entire musical endeavour has been centred on his original style of archetypal minimalism. His creation is a mixture of static no-evolving musical forms and archetypal features of authentic folkloric discourse. Under the influence of Eastern philosophy and the writings of German psychologist Jung, the composer has set a new direction in Romanian musicology that he himself would subsequently promote with his own musicology research. This has built into a solid fundament due to rich data and convincing argumentation, both of which underlie his studies in a remarkably cohesive manner.*

Key-words: *minimal music, archetypal, symbol, archaic, essence, atemporal, Corneliu Dan Georgescu*

1. Introduction

Corneliu Dan Georgescu is a composer preoccupied with repetitiveness and with finding its fundamentals. Viewing the archetypal layer as deeply affected by the structural intricacy of contemporary music, he resorts to simplifying the sonic features to the essence with view to recuperating the ONE archetype – a unique sound, unison, monody, static character (Anghel 2018, 114), mono-structure, along with an iterative construction that halts temporal progress due to an absence of perspective, reference and detachment from context (Tartler 1984, 71).

Furthermore, the composer resorts to folkloric elements that he employs as leitmotifs, noting that the folklore quotes inserted as obsessive motifs are nothing but micro-elements of an extremely simplified structure.

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1.1. Atemporal Music

Time is one contemporary theme, which can be generally defined in reference to space and which is irreversible – like a linear axis, unidirectional, transformational, evolving and connecting past events to the future.

Psychologically, time is perceived on two fundamental levels. One regards *the perception of sequence* and refers to the instinctive temporal set up of phenomena along a past-present-future axis, where memory plays an important part, as it enables restoration of past sequence of changes and anticipation of future change. This would not be possible without new data to enable change in a given system.

The second level regards the *perception of duration* and refers to the distance between occurrences of similar phenomena – like biological or cosmic rhythms, with view to establishing a standard measurement unit for social time. The idea of *universal or homogenous time*, a universe inclusive of all change, is itself the result of social behaviour.

Based on his ethnomusicology study and composer experience, Corneliu Dan Georgescu makes reference to a phenomenon he called *atemporal music, non-evolving, non-transformational, non-directional* type of music (Anghel 1995, 74), which is manifest in both contemporary and traditional Romanian music.

The main feature of this phenomenon is the predictability of the discourse brought on by a series of elements: the presence of monotony rendered by a uniformity of structure (non-evolving, non-directional), the iterative character (repetition with or without almost imperceptible variations), an absence of perceptible reference points (beginning, climax, ending), a flexible syntactic articulation (approach of different events, of free non-causative forms, yet without falling into total disorder), a disconnection from context (isolated events appear independent), an amplitude of progress that enables a hypnotic effect, cancelation of contrasts.

Thus the constitutive elements of atemporal music need to be quite rigid to allow an unaltered perpetuation of its essence, to enable it to tolerate the constant intervention of individual arbitrary while preserving the popular dimension. It does not attempt to annihilate the spirit of logical evolution but it deems to widen a concept which has become rigid, to consider a vast reality from multiple perspectives, to build up towards a possible new synthesis.

Considering the atemporal aspect of his music, one must notice that for the composer a non-evolving state does not feature an absence of tension, which is paradoxically cultivated and brought to a level where it expresses an anticipation of the moment of unity and reconciliation (Anghel 1995, 78). All this so that the resort

to simplicity and to minimal exploratory means to equally entail the resort to genuine archetypes.

1.2. Archetypal music

The necessity of studying those structures of the sonic Art which are rooted in human psychical coordinates is manifest in the musical life of the 20th century, in the embracing of most diverse musical products, irrespective of their geographic origins or their age, and also in the interest of contemporary composers for fundamental, original, *archetypal* aspects of music. This non-verbal consent to adhere to a unique form of communication, with vocabulary based on certain essentials which are present both in the cultivated music and also in the traditional music of various cultural communities.

Carl Gustav Jung devised the theory of archetypes, the concept of collective unconscious, which exceeded the limits of a mere psychological study to found a profound and original proposition of cultural philosophy. His view is coherent, logical, multi-significant and can be applied in diverse fields due to the vast perspectives it opens.

Jung's theory can be extended to music and a corresponding *musical archetype* is manifest within objective psychological and physical/acoustic limits. Its components can be described in structural terms as pitch, duration, intensity and timbre. They also represent a common denominator for the traditional elements of the music informational chain: creator, creative activity, creation, performer, receptor.

The keen interest in folklore can thus be explained by this attempt to identify the common human factors, noting that the idea of borrowing, of influence (which to a certain extent is a reality) gradually gives way to the idea of *polygenesis*.

The musical archetype can be defined as a *symbol*, probably a way to refer to an unconscious, intuitive content. It acts on the unconscious level of the psychic and it is communicated by way of instinct, before even the music is integrally perceived, on a semiotic level. One interesting aspect is that these archetypes never evolve, only their *image* into a concrete creation, a musical culture, etc., it is changeable.

It is possible from the very beginning to draw an arch from the simplest archetype - the *sinusoid sound* – to the most complex – the *role of music* in the life of the individual or the community (Georgescu 2018, 126). Between the two, there is an infinite number of archetypes significant of musical role models, pure or complex, combined (elements of architecture, geometry, space references, materials, natural elements, symbolic objects, binary oppositions.)

What C. D. Georgescu calls archetypal components can be identified on a structural level. They are of two types – *spatial* (concerning the fundamental physical features of the sound such as pitch (for example, ascendent or descendent melodic line), duration (includes rhythmic formulas and patterns such as iamb, spondee, dactyl, trochee, anapest, tribrach or aksak, giusto-silabic, parlando-rubato, etc.), timbre (distinguishes different types of sound production such as string instruments, wind instruments, percussion instruments or choir voices), intensity (forte, piano, crescendo, diminuendo)) and *temporal* (evolving (repetitive transformational structures) or non-evolving (the absence of surprises, repetitive structures, minimal movement, linear music, etc.); formal structures of music such as sonata, rondo, lied, etc.). To the same category of structural level (Georgescu 1983, 99-142) belong formal patterns, or the relations between segments of form, types of relations, etc.

It is notable that all art relies on an archetypal layer and any deliberate avoidance of a series of archetypes would only lead to the unconscious use of others (e.g. the chaos archetype) (Georgescu, 2018, 173). It can certainly be said that the purpose of art is to aesthetically mould (concrete, sensory, according to conventional, cultural and historical expression) some archetypes of the collective unconscious (of eternal, natural, fundamental data).

2. Musicology studies

The musical work of C.D. Georgescu is one coordinate that circumscribes his activity within the musical movement previously discussed. Another such is his research – it represents an important theoretical fundament for the contemporary musical medium and its aspiring musicians, and it presents the stylistic and creative particulars underlying the structure of his own musical work. This chapter includes important references about his musicology studies and reveals the original contribution of the composer in promoting and the development of an aesthetic that has dominated the music of the late 20th century.

2.1. Number symbolism

Numbers are arithmetic expressions but they also carry distinct personality, ideas, forces, support for symbolical elaboration. In the course of history intellectuals have assumed and expanded various ideas about their significance². Pythagoras

² The oldest testimony in this respect is The Book of Transformation (aprox.5000 BC, the Far East).

considered the number as the supreme principle of the Universe, while Plato assigns it to the highest level of knowledge, as knowledge itself, the essence of cosmic harmony.

A musical work will include symbolical expression of *numerical archetypes*, both on a vertical axis (structures) and on a horizontal one (areas), depending on the style, the musical category to which it is assigned (traditional/cultivated, oral/written, assigned to a certain genre or style, etc.).

Considering the symbolism of numbers in contemporary times and also the perspective of a creation based on a purely melodic system (the study of Alain Daniélou), the following picture emerges, which captures their main functions: ZERO as the void, ONE as that which is non-differentiated, TWO as opposition/contrast, THREE as the synthesis of opposites, gradualness, FOUR – the directional framework, form, FIVE – sensitiveness, asymmetry, dynamism, SIX- the synthesis of two symmetrically opposed dialectics, SEVEN - the complex unifying asymmetry, EIGHT – the finalized cycle, totality (Georgescu 1986, 59-78).

From a syntagmatic perspective, considering the relations between two proximal terms, there would be but few operational archetypal relations – ONE (the relation of identical terms, even if it alters in the course of time), - TWO (the contrast), - and possibly - THREE (the synthesis).

It is notable that the number is conferred symbolical values only in relation to a more general order, multi-significant, within a harmony that transcends the respective framework (the part, the music even) to be integrated into a superior, symbolic unit (Georgescu, 2018, 188).

2.2. The *iterative* architectonic principle

The iterative architectonic principle is expressed by the repetitive music born on American territory in the 60s. The return to such concepts as rhythmical pulsation, ison, tonal or modal melodic formula, chord and even tonality was brought about by the group of four representatives of repetitive music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Philip Glass, Steve Reich.

The Romanian context manifests a series of formulas (folklore-like texture, ornamental repetition – gradually presented or additive-subtractive, repetitive cycles) underlying the activity of composers such as Liviu Glodeanu, Mihai Moldovan, C. D. Georgescu, Ștefan Niculescu, Octavian Nemescu, Liana Alexandra.

In spite of repetition being connected with the static, linear, predictable aspect of the musical discourse, in this context it refers to *musical signs* that resonate in the human psychic. Repetition renders them a particular energy, as in a ritual, and it induces a specific state of focusing on detail, which unveils the most

refined features and relations. Repetition renders an anteriority which recreates itself, as in the myth of ceaseless origins (Georgescu 2018, 205).

2.3. The archetype of *birth* and *death*

Birth is open to every possibility and it signifies a disturbance of a given order by the emergence of something new which asserts itself, builds up, grows, amplifies, involving enthusiasm, ascension, direction, expectation, hope but also fear, stress, tension, etc. (Georgescu 2018, 209).

Death has to consider the series of past events, it has to restore initial unity, and so implies a fulfilment, a conclusion, even transfiguration, the perspective of *resurrection, of rebirth*.

The essential condition to discern expressions of *birth* and *death* archetypes in music is for it to be subject to an evolving musical time, and for the trajectory generated by this evolution to include *initial chaos, genesis, life* and possibly *resurrection* (Georgescu 2018, 210).

At close scrutiny of these archetypes in various musical categories, it becomes evident that while beginnings/introductory sections (feminine structures), differ in length, take a concrete form, and relate to the rest of the work, the endings/final of creation (masculine structures), seem more standardized, involving generalization, loss of individuality, reduction of expressive ambitus. In the absence of introductory or final sections their function is assumed by the first respectively the last motifs of the themes underlying the respective work (Georgescu 2018, 212).

2.4. *Yin* and *Yang*

The archetypal pairing *yin* (negativity, darkness, weakness, femininity, potential, natural) – *yang* (light that dispels darkness, change, positive energy, expansion, evolution) represents a form of symbolic expression of binary opposition; they are completely interdependent, one cannot exist without the other, they make one another complete, one seeks for the other in an endless cycle and both are absorbed in the Tao unity³.

In music manifest forms of these concepts can be identified first and foremost in elementary musical structures (the grave/acute register, the ascending/descending scale, crescendo/diminuendo, symmetrical/asymmetrical, rubato/giusto, etc) and also in musical syntax (evolving/non-evolving, open form

³ Tao is similar to the initial void, the source of ONE (the primordial breath), TWO (yin-yang pair), THREE (the pair and the void, previously named).

AB/closed form ABA, or regarding syntactical categories – mono/multi-vocal) (Georgescu 2018, 224).

2.5. The idea of *primordial substances* and the syntactical musical categories

Musical substance refers to the totality of *material* musical elements. The model of the four primordial elements - *earth, water, air, fire*, which in the Jungian terms are called *aqua, terra, aeris, ignis*⁴ can be used in association with various elements of musical structures. From a musical perspective, *aqua* (associated intuitively with lack of form, indefinite, flow, purifying, descending movement), simultaneously refers to both a static and a directional, cyclical character; it is a symbol for legato, rubato, trill, ornament, free form, lack of precise contour (Georgescu 2018, 232).

Terra (stability, solidity, massiveness, hardness) refers to chords, cluster, grave register, tutti, tempo giusto, fixed forms, the presence of precise, firm contours; *aeris* (emptiness, wind, sky, air), refers to pause, acute register, glissando, solo; *ignis* (ascending, dynamic, evolving, destructive or creative) makes reference to rapid ascending movement, scale, texture, accelerando, crescendo.

There is also a parallel with the four syntactic musical categories (as defined by Stefan Niculescu) – respectively the symbolical associations *aeris-monody, terra-omophony*, and possibly less, *aqua –aetherophony, ignis-polyphony*. Niculescu also refers to the possibility of combining these syntactic categories (as in the *accompanied monody* or in *a polyphony of omophonies*) which suggests a combination of traits of the primordial substances, which results in new substances (*lava*, for example is a combination of *aqua* and *ignis*).

3. Conclusion

Musical archetypes can be suggested by a symbol and its action is closely related to the level of the unconscious psychic roots of music that includes both psychic-acoustic and aesthetic levels; they are objective, fundamental, more “nature” than “culture” (Georgescu 2018, 156).

With a frequent reference to Carl Gustav Jung’s conception, Corneliu Dan Georgescu revealed through his musicology studies a synthetic viewpoint on music. In his opinion the meaning of art could be perceived as an aesthetic modeling (that cultural language) of the archetypes of collective unconscious (the natural dimension) (Georgescu 2018, 158).

⁴ A fifth element was taken into consideration which united and founded the other four primordial elements – *quinta essentia* or *aether*.

The musicology studies of Corneliu Dan Georgescu covers various research fields as the author's reflections on Romanian contemporary music and it is a very important component of the Romanian musicological literature.

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