

## DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? or about THE SENSE OF CULTURAL NOSTALGIA

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**SUMMARY.** The evolution of the European musical culture took place in a flagrant contradiction with the traditional image of a simple succession of *stylistic stages*. Even if the linearity of the consecution of Antiquity, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, Viennese Classicism, Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism is only too obvious, the nature and logic of the transformations are related to the determining referentiality of the *syncretic principle*. But, unlike the Enlightenment conception of linear progress, applicable rather to the technological and, in general, scientific thinking, musical art has evolved in *mirror* symmetry to a cultural history that was separated into two great “ages”, following Eliade's idea of the *sacred-profane* dichotomy. Around the year 1600, the order of the constituents of the *syncretic* principle, which are three in number: the *Sacred* (the tribal societies), the *mythological* (the Greek and Roman Antiquities) and the *ritualistic* (the Middle Ages and the Renaissance), was reversed – the *ritualistic* and the *mythological* (the Baroque, the Viennese classicism and Romanticism) and the *Sacred* (the first modernism). In postmodernity, the *syncretic principle* itself is “recycled” and thus the cycle of cultural evolution closes by returning (in an obviously distorted manner) to the original principle.

**Keywords:** syncretism, Sacred, mythological, ritualistic, three modernisms and three modernities.

Both *culture* and *art* are feminine nouns.<sup>2</sup> So are *civilization*, *religion*, *mythology*, *music*, *science*, *philosophy*, *literature*, *sculpture*, *poetry*, *painting*, *choreography*, *history*, but also more recent participants such as *musicology* and *philology*, *psychology* and *psychoanalysis*, *photography* and *cinematography*,

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*culturology* and *anthropology*, with all apparently imitating the *round dance* of the ancient muses, though one formulated in terms of the orgiastic dance of Igor Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring*. This grammatically feminine identity is also confirmed by the *maternal* function of culture and art, in whose arms we are born and grow up, to realize only later that both European culture and art encompass works that are (almost) exclusively produced by men. All of them are European, all of them are Christian, all of them are urban and all of them are... dead, yet all of them have been turned into images of cultural, artistic, religious, scientific etc. *norms* and *laws*.

Is paternal maternity a paradox, an obvious confusion with the placement of the quotation marks: masculine "maternity"? feminine "paternity"? or both together? Robert Schumann's criticisms of Frederic Chopin, allegedly guilty of "feminizing" the canon of European music, are only too well known. At the same time, while excelling in an activity relying primarily on intuition and generative capacity, men-artists assumed, in fact, the female archetypal role through the lengthy, sometimes years-long conceptual "gestation" of their works (Karlheinz Stockhausen and the cycle of operas *Licht*, Anton Bruckner and the endless rewritings of his own symphonies, Richard Wagner and the writing of *The Ring of the Nibelungs* tetralogy). In the end, it all comes down to the *pater-femininity* (by no means synonymous with androgyny) of the he/she artist/musician. It is precisely within the limits of these equally consubstantial, playful and archetypal acceptations, of *mater-masculinity* (by no means synonymous with transsexuality) as the quintessence of the human, that the European art and culture evolve up to a limit beyond which meanings *lose their meaning*, content and direction, and everything dissipates into an infinite multitude of *reflections* and *shadows*, *flashes* and *animated images*, *projections* and *snapshots*, *holograms*, substitutes posing as synonyms, analogies and metaphors, all redundant, of a *something* that is already firmly forgotten and in any case completely irretrievable by an amnesic art and culture.

The meanings of the past cannot be recovered in present terms, as the latter are obviously weaker and in no way adequate to the phenomena they describe. Recovery succumbs to mere recycling. And this conflict erupts into a panoply of anything but new and original questions, but which acquire new meanings in a world completely different from everything that culture and art describes and narrates in their traditional meanings. These are the eternal questions which at the end of this cultural cycle we are currently in acquire a completely different, inverted meaning, as a *negative* of the progressive originals: *Where have we reached?* and *Who should we think we are?* But let us take things in historical order.

Currently, the two authentic and traditional eternal questions – *Who are we?* and *Where are we headed?* – are two sentences without content. It has disappeared together with the epochs that generated it. Those were historical periods for which the future, a particular future out of several possible ones, was an objective fact, demonstrable by scholarly extrapolations. The future-oriented Enlightenment contradicting the restorative Renaissance of Antiquity.

Not at all paradoxical, but these two questions were falsely considered *the private property* of philosophy. Contrary to the confused ramble through problems related to language, nature, thought, and man in general, art has offered simple and accurate answers. Moreover, art was and is itself the embodiment of the two answers to the two questions. Dissimulated under the guise of creative “searches” and “evolutions”, with their own *personalities* and *histories*, the answers have always been in the open, signaling “stroboscopically” like transhistorical “traffic lights”, and formulated as authentic *identity nuclei* of art itself, of culture, and especially of man.

The first answer is obvious: as a cultural identity we are definable by the *canon* of European art, an evolutionary one, in a continuous paradoxical transformation of the value references and of the collective consensus, a continuous rewriting of seemingly irremovable landmarks and an eternal and utterly fruitful conceptual “conflict” between us and new generations gravitating so dramatically around this first *invariant* – the canon as norm, order and law. We are the *canon* of the culture we were born and formed in, the canon that we carry as *reference* and that defines the *identity* of our imaginary space. In the book entitled *Canonul muzicii europene: idei, ipoteze, imagini* [The European Musical Canon: Ideas, Hypothesis, Images] (Bucharest: Eikon, 2015) I have formulated a possible “response” to Harold Bloom, because *Canonul occidental* [The Western Canon] (Bucharest: Art, 2018) is not limited only to the twenty-six writers, poets and playwrights, but also includes at least five composers who have defined the identity of the three European modernities: *Palestrina* for the Renaissance, *Bach* for the Baroque, *Beethoven* for the musical classicism of the Enlightenment, *Wagner* for Romanticism and *Schoenberg* for the third and last modernity.

The answer to the second question – *Where are we headed?* – throws us into a perpetual *drama* of European cultural history precisely by virtue of this painful stringency that determined Hesiod and Ovid, already in the Greek and Roman Antiquities, to each formulate and assume an answer. Later, in the third modernity of the last century, they were followed by the French mystic and esoteric René Guénon, but also by Harold Bloom, the American philologist engaged in a revolted and equally defensive cultural “crusade”, with two other answers to this inevitably eschatological interrogation. A shocking fact is that all four, *ancients* and *moderns* alike, each in their

own terms, came to the same conclusion and gave the same answer: the historical advancement of culture, and here Fukuyama joins them, is ensured by the *dissolution* of both culture and history.

The ancients chose the image of the ages. First there was Hesiod with his *Works and Days*, an account of the five ages of man – from the peace and harmony of the golden age, through the silver, bronze, and heroic ages, and gradually diminishing their value into the falsehood, greed and evils of the iron age. Then there was Ovid with his *Metamorphoses*, resuming the scenario, but limiting himself to the image of the four metals arranged in the same order of “depreciation”.

The idea of progress invented during the Enlightenment era came to confirm the downward and debasing cultural drift of value dissolution that René Guénon emphasizes with ruthless straightforwardness and accuracy when writing about the *residual* substance of contemporary knowledge, one already long *solidified*, that is, a *false* one, if not intentionally *counterfeited*. The historical moment when the French esoteric scholar formulates his “diagnosis” is precisely the “bright future” predicted by the Enlightenment progressive thinkers.

Post-Enlightenment knowledge becomes like the white marble of the ancient statues and temples that have survived, “stripped” of the colors that had once covered them – a somewhat *parodic* and *decayed* remnant of the image of the originals. And things do not stop here, leaving us with nothing but the *white metaphors*, emptied of meaning, of the once complete things: the birth of science by expelling the gods from mythology, the transformation of mythology into a fantastic narrative – story, fairy tale, legend –, literature, poetry and drama, arts of the word, the conversion of the sacred into the profane, of the theocentric into the anthropocentric, of the spiritual into the psychological, of magic and mysticism into the rational, of the artisanal into industrial, of quality into quantity.

The perversion of the *devotional* into *vocational* is also stated by the Russian composer Vladimir Martynov when in his monograph suggestively titled *Конец времени композиторов* [The End of the Time of Composers (Moscow: Русский путь, 2002) he gives the examples of kliros singing, icon painting and church building, which, once devotional activities, are now perceived as mere *acts*, simple actions of vocal singing, painting on wood or glass and raising buildings. In addition, the emergence of the composer’s profession (between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries) along with the invention of musical notation (the 11<sup>th</sup> century) simply nullified the *art of memory*, with Giordano Bruno as its last practitioner, burned at the stake in 1600.

Borrowing the ideas and images from the Italian Enlightenment philosopher Giambattista Vico (theorized in *La Scienza Nuova*, 1725), Harold

Bloom proclaims the succession of the four historical-cultural “ages”: the *Theocratic Age* (of the *Gods*), the *Aristocratic Age* (of the *Heroes*), the *Democratic Age* (of the *People*), with all succumbing to the *Chaotic Age* (the time of the last modernity), which concludes an entire cultural cycle by returning, almost three millennia later, to the original image of the four metals – gold, silver, bronze and iron. Although covering a much shorter time span that begins at the end of the Enlightenment, the titles of the books belonging to the British historian Eric Hobsbawm seem to follow the same order and logic – *The Age of Revolution (1789-1848)*, *The Age of Capital (1848- 1875)*, *The Age of Empire (1875-1914)* and, finally, *The Age of Extremes* – the two World Wars with everything that followed. How much is then the image of Greek Antiquity worth, as formulated by a citizen of the period of *chaotic extremes*?

The content of the book entitled *Muzica și sensul sincretic al nostalgiei* [Music and the Syncretic Sense of Nostalgia] – is a possible answer to the question *Where are we headed?* It is another answer, this time not a *mythological, esoteric, philological, or historical* one, but a *musicological* one, albeit verging on *culturology*. In other words, the entire discourse is focused on the evolutionary trajectory of European musical thinking and practice, though considering the ideological and social determining factors. And although other concepts have come into play as well, the image of the evolutionary path is no different from those established and already described by Hesiod, Ovid, Vico, Guénon, Bloom or Hobsbawm.

The origins of civilization and culture can be traced, perhaps, even at the level of the ahistorical societies as a universal model of syncretism. The European acceptance, however, stemmed from the historical level of the ancient Greek society, while syncretism asserted itself even more strongly already in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods, producing Christianity as an ultimate and logical religious-institutional synthesis from which the entire Middle Ages derived. Animism and the invention of the *Sacred*. Polytheism and the formulation of *mythology*. The institutionalized theocratic Christianity and the concern with the *ritualistic*.

Born in the primordial “bath” of the *magical-religious syncretism*, the European musical culture and especially art have continuously fueled and refueled their evolutionary energies from the dissolution, dismemberment or decomposition of the original, the second *invariant*, thus “progressing” towards and through ever-new artistic (scientific, religious, philosophical, etc.) conceptions – whether personal, collective, national or period-based –, to eventually come, though only in postmodernity, to the clear realization of an already accomplished cultural collapse. Eliade’s *sacred-profane* binomial (*Sacrul și Profanul* [The Sacred and the Profane], Bucharest: Humanitas,

1995) does not serve here as a *categorical antinomy*, but as a *phenomenal succession*, splitting Europe's cultural history into two "ages" – sacred and profane –, with the latter increasingly imposing itself as a desired objective of cultural evolution.

However, in the secular image of the progress in art, the order is reversed, because the value referentiality is shifted from the past (sacred-profane) to the present (ancient-modern). The direction and content of the cultural progress is accurately indicated: Machaut is "better" than Perotinus, Dufay "better" than Machaut, Palestrina "better" than Des Prèz, Bach "better" than Palestrina, Mahler than Beethoven, Glass than Varèse.

But not even the explicit vulgarity of the Enlightenment concept manages to conceal the fact that there is progress only in the weakening by dismemberment of each previous conception, to nevertheless guarantee the historical advancement. At some point, the assault of the future (the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Wagner) borders on the nascent and ever-stronger *yearning for the past* (*neoclassical orientation*, Brahms), while Reger, Prokofiev and even Debussy along with Ravel and Shostakovich along with Schnittke and Pärt only intensify this feeling up to an explicit *nostalgia for the original*. And each new generation of musicians launches into an increasingly distant past, to recover ever-cleaner forms of lost truths. But each time the zeal for recovery turns out to be just an even more frustrating enthusiasm for reinvention.

Beginning with 1600, after the magical and humanistic Renaissance and the mutation towards the anthropocentric, the process of secular reformulation also embraces the European musical art. Something different begins. But it begins in mirror symmetry to the succession of genomes from the syncretic period – sacred, mythological, ritualistic –, and with the reformulation of the closest genome – the *ritualistic*. The opera emerges in counterpart to the mass. And the ritualistic of the liturgical service is converted into the artistic "ritualistic" of the dramatic-musical stage action.

The decomposition of the *syncretic* became possible also due to the action of *disenchantment of the world*, as described by Marcel Gauchet in his famous book (*Dezvrăjirea lumii. O istorie politică a religiei* [The Disenchantment of the World. A Political History of Religion], Bucharest: Nemira, 2006), with the milestone of the year 1700 standing firmly between the space of the sacred and the world of the triumphant profane rationalism. The Renaissance censorship of the *magic*, one of the last major cultural censorships, along with the firm establishment *in history* through Joseph Scaliger's chronology (*The Emendatione Temporum*, 1583), initiates the process of successive reformulation of the three *genomes* of the syncretic – the ritualistic, the mythological and the sacred-, recomposing them one by one in terms of the

*profane*. It gradually substitutes them with just as many *replicas* because the secular order has no analogies for the three *genomes* and could only substitute them *mimetically*, with obviously weaker, *artistic copies*.

Through the efforts of the members of the Florentine Camerata, of Monteverdi, but also of Giulio del Bene (in 1586), a member of another Florentine group – the *Accademia degli Alterati*, the sacred ritual of the *Mass* becomes a stage representation in *opera* style.

The mythological is the second element subject to “conversion”, and through the efforts of Corneille and Racine, as well as through those of Lully, Purcell, Vivaldi, Rameau or Handel, mythology becomes a dramaturgical, poetic, but also literary *subject*. This was all that was possible in terms of a generalized secular rationalism, although it is more than obvious that mythology is not a fantastic narrative crammed with scraps of some ancestral genetic experiments – centaurs, fauns, harps, jellyfish, pegasi, naiads and cyclopes. It is only Wagner's genius that succeeds in the impossible, more like an exception to the rule, restoring the profaned dignity of the myth in his monumental tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelungs*.

If for the peoples of nature, the Sacred was and has remained the fundamental category of the syncretic imaginary, then for the rationalist secularism of the European civilization in full industrial and colonial expansion (the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) it becomes a *category*, a *noun*, a *concept*. In other words, the solution is found whereby the Sacred is reduced to the meaning of a *discursive subject*.

It is not until 1917 (the year of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, a relevant parallel) that the German theologian and comparatist Rudolf Otto publishes the text entitled *Das Heilige – Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* [The Sacred. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational]. But the process of secular “reactivation” and eventually of “reincarnation” of the Sacred begins in 1890, when Scottish anthropologist James Frazer publishes *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. In 1913 he is followed by Sigmund Freud with his *Totem und Tabu: Einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenleben der Wilden und der Neurotiker* (Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics). Of special note are both the qualifier *savage* and the synonymizing of *savages* with *neurotics*. Through the efforts of these three authors, later joined by Darwin and Marx, Dostoevsky, Einstein, and Schoenberg, the Sacred becomes distorted in psychoanalysis and evolutionary biology, in Bolshevik demonology and in the bloodstained and sexualized musical expressionism, much to the joy of the triumphant humanoids.

The transformations were meant to be and eventually became irreversible. The European culture was able to enter the first *modernism* of

the third *modernity* (after the first one of the Renaissance and the second one of the Enlightenment) only after the completion of the “recycling” of the three genomes in just as many profane acceptations thereof.

Each new (scientific or artistic) conception was acquired by dismembering, relativizing, and disqualifying the value of the previous ones. It becomes clear that *oblivion* was the “bargaining chip” for the progress, which in turn was even more fascinating, the stronger the *amnesia* was.

For each *operation*, history reserved one of the three modernities: the end of the Renaissance for the conversion of the ritualistic, the Enlightenment Baroque for the rewriting of the mythological – with a spectacular and final culmination in Richard Wagner's work – and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for the dissolution of the sacred.

After millennia of the (1) *syncretic*, the four (from 1600), or three (from 1700 according to Marcel Gauchet) centuries of synthesis of profane *simulations* of the ritualistic, mythological, and sacred rightly fall under the auspices of the (2) *synthetic*, of the counterfeit, substitution, and definite loss of the original meanings. The cultural negotiation of Baudrillard's simulacra culminates with the suppression of the historical perspective in Lyotard's and Jameson's postmodernity.

The projection onto the past of the contemporary conceptions or, on the contrary, but with the same effect, the bringing into the present of the past events filtered through contemporary mentalities, establishes a (3) *synchrony* of all with all and everything, of the legitimized simulacrum, as innocent and harmless as it is utterly sterile, just like the postmodern cultural memory, which in a neurotic and ultimately redundant way tries to recover as much as possible, recycling the residues of meanings that were once procreators of culture and civilization. They all turn out to be “wandering”, “nomadic”, “uprooted” conceptions, rambling through the meanders of the past, rewriting it in terms of the present, while *The Oldest Dead White European Males* (the acronym *O.D.W.E.M.*, the classics, as presented by the English philologist and translator Bernard Knox) actively adapt themselves to the perception of the new generations, in order to be understood by everyone.

P.S. Postmodernity excels at bringing back and reinstating the entire collective memory, any memory, along with the meanings, any meanings, albeit merely literal. And the recovery is applied primarily to the *genomes* without which culture can be neither identified as such nor legitimized in its own terms: the ritualistic, the mythological, the sacred. The ritualization of politics, the mythologization of history and the (re)sacralization of the ideological are the contemporary forms of the culture of the new millennium, even if the meaning of *residue* for all the three cultural genomes is explicitly assumed as such.



All three are substituted with a corresponding simulacrum, but this time not as *profane replicas*, but as *simulacra* legitimized as *real* and not as “shadows” or “loans” – where the copy substitutes for the original, the hologram substitutes for the material reference, in order to resuscitate the syncretic itself, the primordial consubstantiality, through the usual process of recycling, though already in a *virtual* space, the new chronotope of a *digital age*, as Nicholas Negroponte described it (*Era digitală* [Being Digital], Bucharest: All Educational, 1999). Both reality and identity become *fluid*, while the legalized *simulacrum* (“... do androids dream of electric sheep?”) establishes itself by pushing everything towards the beyond human *posthumanism*.

And just as the entire canon of European culture loses its exclusivity in the new world of *multiculturalism* and means nothing to an African, Japanese, Arab or Indian, citizens of other traditions with a much longer history than the European one, in the new reality of the *posthuman*, of the *fluid virtuality*, the very meaning of the word *canon* as a *historical* and *identity* norm, or as a *value memory*, loses its meaning altogether. Losing their original meanings and referents, the “lexicon”, “language” and “dictionaries” of the European culture become inconsistent with the reality they are used in.

The cycle of cultural history ends here. And it ends by, in the new temporal context, both questions once so important and necessary, both generators of civilization and culture, become simple words that have long lost their content.

The third question remains the only one that still makes some sense – *What are we left with?* –, while removing the frightened confusion of two others: the baffling *Where have we reached?* and the optional *Who should we think we are?* The answer is also obvious – with *nostalgia* and, perhaps, not even that, but only with a *nostalgic referent* – a *mnemonic ghost* inserted through education and meant to reproduce in consciousness the *counterfeit image* of a non-existent past.

*Translated from Romanian by Marcella Magda*

