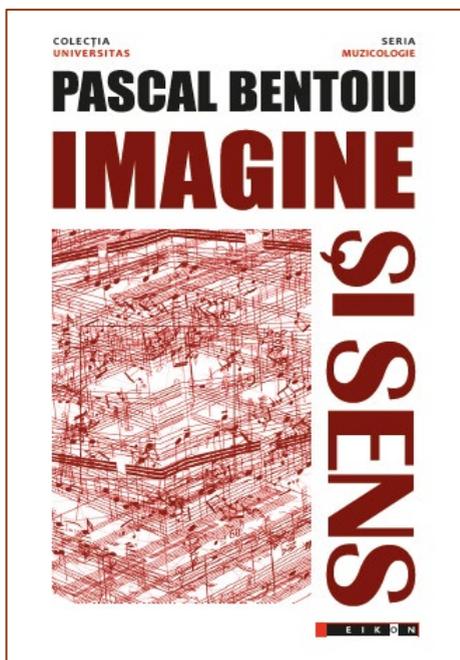


BOOK REVIEW

THE BOOK OF A THOUSAND IMAGES AND MEANINGS [Pascal Bentoiu, *Imagine și sens (Image and meaning)*, Bucharest: Eikon, 2023]

It was only after I read the entire volume did I understand that the title *Image and Meaning*, which the author gives to his book, should also be accompanied by a subtitle – *The Book of Revealed Mysteries*. For me, this is the only way such a title can be deciphered. And understanding requires analogies. As many. At first, the thought took me to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the famous writing of Joseph Campbell, because there it is also about the images and meanings of a single reference, albeit a mythological and archetypal one. I wouldn't have ruled out *One Thousand and One Nights* either, where Scheherazade acts narratively on Padishah Shahriar's imagination, converting him to empathic humanity. Exactly as Rimsky-Korsakov



presents the two in the first part of the famous symphonic suite. In a second sequence, I thought that in the case of music, the phrase image and meaning get a relevant analogy in the binomial form and content and further – structure and expression. I also assumed that it was about the images and

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meanings of the music, not even the same, from the consciousness of the receiving audience. How else? But no. It was about much more. The seed of the future revelation was planted for me from the very first pages when I understood that in the same way that when listening to a symphony orchestra, I hear three „choirs” accompanied by percussion, so also when, for example, I listen to a symphony, I perceive the synchronous interference of several kinds of music. A „choir” in several voices, in several images, synchronously broadcasting several meanings of the same musical material.

The first would be the music housed by the composer in the score. A simple graphic image of portables infused with many varied notes. That is, the graphic image of the composer’s a priori sound intuition. And with infinite possibilities of „reading” even by one person. The second music appears directly through the performer’s voice or hands. Live music, acoustic, sonic, ... invisible. Music as a phenomenon and event. And without any explicit reference to something objective, or tangible. And barely a third is the music accumulated in the listener’s consciousness. Following music that is essentially unique and thus personal. Like the first two. A mind-boggling infinity of images and individual meanings of the same interpreted work. Or, I would add a fourth – the music of the combinatorial and analytical game in equal measure from the evaluative imagination of a musicologist. And by no means is this a metaphor.

The key to reading and, implicitly, understanding, is offered to us through a real “cascade” of well-hidden questions precisely on page 78:

„...by what mechanism does this sound flow determine in the receiving subject the intuition of which meaning.”

And he continues already on page 79:

„...how can a meaning come to be embedded in a physical (acoustic) structure?”. In other words, how does the composer manage to incorporate one or more meanings into an articulated sound structure, and, equally, how is it possible for the latter to incite a sense of meaning in the receiving audience?”

I consider these two situations mysterious, and Pascal Bentoiu resorts to „disenchantment” with an admirable and coherent argumentation, demonstrating that what in musical Romanticism was considered to be the transcendental object of art as religion, nowadays turns out to be, giving hyperbole and emphasis aside, the subject of science that is human psychology. And the answer to this „riddle” is very simple, no matter how

trivial it may seem: analogy. And even more, since any musical composition operates primarily through mnemonic accumulations, and thus activates the entire available memory, the storehouse and, library is saturated with an infinity of analogies not always exposed, however, on the surface of consciousness. Consuming the time allotted for its unfolding, music simultaneously uses it to accumulate in memory. And as a necessary tool for „refreshing” perception serves attention, which Haydn himself, according to the anecdote, stimulated in a very original way, as it follows from the very title of Symphony no. 103, in E-flat major (Hob. 1:103) – *Paukenwirbel – With timpani beats* (1795), where the shock of sound intensity produced by the percussion awakened the audience (some literally) to the reality of the performed work.

And Pascal Bentoiu intervenes with the argument that the perception of music does not happen in perfect continuity, but in a sequence of phases (page 21). But of a subtle finesse, downright „neurosurgical”, is the observation regarding the specific way in which memory interacts with attention:

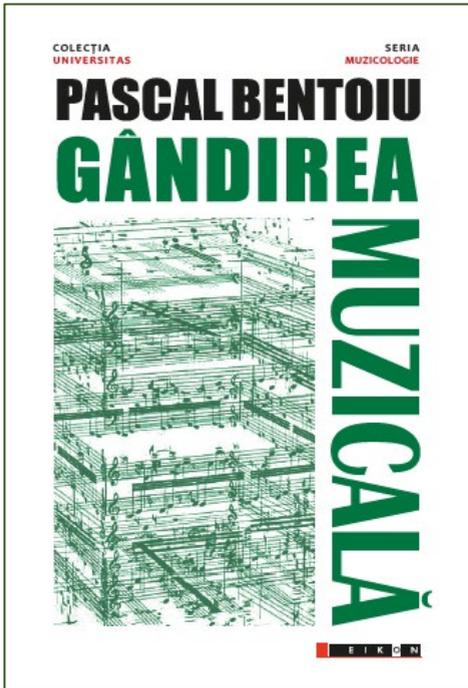
„memory will make certain stops to regroup into a unique image of a traveled route (that is, absorbing sound accumulations of a joint – editor’s note) will necessarily be those places where attention is least required”.

Useful observation especially for composers, but also for performers, music event critics, musicologists, and the public. Because this is the only way to reveal the pulsating or, in other words, respiratory and, therefore, the alive character of both perception and especially of the musical work itself. And only in this way is the surprising image of a musical composition revealed as a tool for attention manipulation. Like a desperate dialectic between monotony and chaos, searching for only one possible path forward on the razor’s edge of efficiency. It could be said, not without humor, that in formulating the famous cut, Ockham was not alien to certain characteristics of musical thought.

So, a volume on the psychology of perception? Psychology of musical audition? One of the finest matters, whose mystery is raised to the power of the invisible „materiality” of music. Or, perhaps, is it a book about the psychology of the act of composition, and in general a very detailed exposition of what might be called the logic and psychology of musical composition? The answer is just as simple: all of these, all together, but displayed in an accumulative gradation designed very effectively.

Or here the author’s narrative style speaks for itself, even by being inclusive, it is explicitly orchestral and polyphonic, mobilizing both the concept of time and the concept of space, in the edification of the image (mental) and meaning (associative) of music. Both constitute themselves as

coordinates and organic analogies of the receiving conscience. And the thinking of music reformulates them in its characteristic way, acting in at least two planes, as formulated by the French philosopher Henri Bergson – the first of time-space, ontological, and the second of time-duration, psychological. From Newtonian objectivity (the structure and acoustic form, performed, of the musical composition), a stable one, to Einsteinian relativity (the images and meanings activated in the public's consciousness), a fluctuating one. This is how I justify and legitimize the title of this preface – *The Book of a Thousand Images and Meanings*. This is how the composer Pascal Bentoiu reveals them, one by one.



As can be seen from the *Table of Contents*, the body of the text consists of three parts. The first part – *The image*. The second part – *Meaning*. And the third part – *Incursion in concrete*. Attention is drawn to the quantitative content of each part, structured in a descending progression: 9 (Image) + 8 (Meaning) + 7 (Incursion into concrete) constitutive subchapters. As if in a perfect analogy with the kind of metro-tectonic analysis of a musical composition, where the indivisible unit is a tact, that is, a measure, of the musical text. Moreover, the second volume of this cycle – *Gândirea muzicală* (Musical Thinking) – is made up of ten (10!) chapters, a number that completes, placing itself at the top, the descending numerical string from the first volume.

But whatever the numerological meanings, since they could be speculated, the relevance of the analysis would be insignificant. Instead, it is worth noting the consequence of the three parts as a progression from the abstract of the *Image*, through the logic of *Meaning*, towards the objective, concrete finality of the *Incursion*. Correlating the two strings it is obvious that the number of subchapters is greater, the more abstract the concept analyzed. And invoking the explicitly musical logic of the narrative, the convergence of several ideational „partitions” in a single hermeneutic „score”, I cannot help but appreciate the yield, i.e., the efficiency, of each phrase, formulated, which ultimately determines an impressive cohesion of the entire text.

Among the mysteries of the first part of the text – *The Image* – I will highlight only two ideas: the first, the psychic substance, and the second, the double character of the musical image. To be read very carefully. First, however, the oxymoron (that is, the paradox) of the relationship between the visual and static regime of the image (!) and the invisibility with the dynamism of music appear explicitly mysterious. The plot of the narrative is amplified starting from the dynamic character of the music. That is, an evolutionary-expansive one, and hence the question: how much image reaches the auditor after the main theme of the Exposition of a Sonata? Because there is Treatment, Reprise, and an eventual Coda? Each with its images. How is each image constructed, how does it evolve and ultimately how does the global image of a musical composition integrate into consciousness? How do we separate the image of the structures from the image of the accompanying experiences? Whose image is it: the composer's thinking, the performer's, the score, or the imaginative „mess" in the audience's mind? And what would be the difference between image structure and image configuration? All the answers are to be found in the text, carefully formulated by the author in the last two sub-chapters – *Image characters*.

The second part – *The Meaning* – is treated with more pragmatism. In other words, claiming a much more advanced concreteness compared to the image, the query is not much different. And this is because the traditional acceptance of meaning is a notional one, but what about the non-objectivity and an obvious non-referentiality of music? A second „floor" populated with paradoxes. Is meaning synonymous with content? Just as an image would (would?) be a synonym for form? And in this case, hypotheses find an argument that turns them into certainties. Subsuming both concepts, the author observes:

„...the only criterion by which we can judge the musical work is its ability to engage the listener's attention and memory and thus communicate a meaning to him (...)."

The third part of the text – *The Incursion in Concrete* – has a double meaning. The first is a demonstration of the application of the concepts of image and meaning but in the syntagmatic form of the title of the first subchapter – *Musical consciousness*, which can also be understood as an anticipation of the second volume of the series (The Musical Thinking). The mystery persists because again it is a question of differentiation (common consciousness versus musical consciousness) and evaluation by specificity:

„...musical consciousness has within its horizon first of all a greater or lesser number of musical objects, then a variable amount of knowledge (or intuition) of the relationships between those objects and finally a series of value criteria that differ enormously from individual to individual.”

The following interpretation would be a document of the era, because more than half a century has already passed since the very distant year of publication – 1971, and what was then, at the border between decades, considered to be new music, today already long ago represents historical objects canonized as referential. If today we have our consciousness of actuality, it represents the consequences of those premises described and analyzed by Pascal Bentoiu as belonging to his actuality. A real „tilt” in time and a fascinating possibility to follow the dynamics of musical evolution through the opinions and attitudes of a first-rate Romanian composer.

Comparing *The Image and Meaning* (1971, second edition in 1973, and the French version in 1979) and *The Musical Thinking* (1975), the necessary continuation of the first volume, I cannot help but notice, first of all, the uniqueness of the approach of the first volume – the musical image and meaning –, without there having been anything comparable in Romanian musicology neither before nor after the publication of the book. Secondly, as a confirmation of the „relatedness” of the two volumes, Pascal Bentoiu’s musicological project displays a certain relevance and thus authentic excellence by relating two great fields of musicology which are musical psychology (the volume *Imagine și Sens*) and the compositional-analytical technology (the volume *Gândirea muzicală*). Even if each volume can be read as independent writing, the order in which the author himself wrote and published them suggests the correct and necessary consequence of the reading. From the „disenchantment” of the mysteries of music perception and imagination to the „unveiling” of the secrets related to the elements and procedures operated by a composer in the laboratory of musical thought.

Namely, the „disenchantment” procedure privileges this first volume through an obvious narrative intensity, which should be explained by an analogy. I could say that I associate almost every sentence formulated by the author with a very thin and transparent imaginary foil on which a single indivisible unit (quantum) of information is inscribed. Just one for each image and one meaning respectively. For each sentence, a foil with a discrete quantity. As a Scandinavian, Germanic, or Slavic runic character. And the accumulation in the consciousness of the contents of the book would thus be like the successive superimposition of sentence upon sentence, foil upon another foil, so that at the end of the reading a virtual transparent „cube”

would be obtained which would contain, suspended in weightlessness, the holographic image of the „body” of the entire text obtained by superimposing all the inscribed foils. A three-dimensional geometric object composed of thousands and thousands of foils, containing thousands of images and thousands of meanings. It would be something like how Mozart himself visualized any of his compositions: not from left to right in a two-dimensional projection, but in the pose of a „tunnel” or „spyglass” subtended from the first sound of the visor, passing through all the others until the last „lens” of the final cadence. The coherent diffusion of exposure would ensure a corresponding harmonious absorption of new and new quanta, as in an animated simulation, in a „vegetable” evolution of the textual object. Each constitutive sign is visible through the transparency of the foils but also becomes visible in the already integral totality of the text accumulated in this way. With „roots”, „stem” and „crown”, functioning as a tree of life with all ten sephiroth actively radiating luminescent energies.

The correct objective correlation would be the growth of a plant from a grain, and in terms of compositional practice, it would be most appropriate to invoke the technique of the cumulative evolution of a symphony from a single intonation or motif. As Beethoven did with his Third Symphony, *Eroica*, in E-flat major, Op. 55 (1803) or in the case of the Fifth Symphony, *The Destiny*, in C minor, op. 67 (1804-08). The definition of this composition technique as organic belongs to the American musicologist Leonard B. Meyer, who presents it as such in his text entitled *Music and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century (The Tanner Lectures on Human Values)*, delivered at Stanford University, May 17 and 21, 1984).

And returning to Pascal Bentoiu, I wonder how it could have been otherwise than just like that, organically, when a composer proceeds to compose a text. Because by conceiving the text of his book as a notional score, the composer seems to suggest the correct way to represent the narrative material: the reading of the text should be felt rather in terms of an audition and necessarily equally orchestral and polyphonic. In this sense I consider myself privileged because I knew him, and could listen to and memorize his voice, speech, arguments, analogies, and cultural references, recognizing them in the text of both volumes.

P.S.1. I must confess in this way that I am deeply indebted to Pascal Bentoiu. Over the years, the ideas initiated in these two reference texts have had their effect on me even through the gentle „coercion” of the need for repeated re-reading. But it was even more. The quantum stacking (‘enveloping’) technique in *The Image and Meaning* proved to be seductive enough to prompt me to attempt some quantum modeling of my own. This is how the text appears 11..., then 14..., and finally, 15 *Theses about the*

Musical Image, which I dedicated to the Master, published in the not-so-distant year 2003 in the volume entitled *Contraideologii muzicale* (The Musical Counter ideologies, Limes, Cluj-Napoca, 2003). And reading *The Musical Thinking* motivated me and thus obliged me for the second time in a completely different sense, because in return for the conceptual system of a composer, I proceeded to formulate my system of concepts of musical thought, this time as a musicologist. And at no time was it an epigonic emulation or, God forbid, a „competitive-critical” attempt, but only a grateful tribute to the impulse felt after repeated readings to think a „related” conceptual system, although organized differently. This is how the volume entitled *Genurile muzicii: ideea unei antropologii arhetipale* (The Genres of Music: An Idea of Archetypal Anthropology, Eikon, Bucharest, 2016) saw the light of day, prefaced with dedication, but already to two important formative personalities in my case, Pascal Bentoiu joined by the Cluj composer Vasile Herman. And things didn't stop there, because the idea of producing my dilogy – two interconnected volumes – led me to write two consecutive book volumes, which eventually found their name: *The Tools of Musicology (Epistemologica)* and *Cioran and the Music of Primary Elements (hermeneutics)*. Debts must be returned to the last idea and the last character.

Both volumes – both *The Image and Meaning*, but also *The Musical Thinking* – remained mysterious texts for me, and not only for the lessons I learned from the techniques of disenchantment and unveiling, respectively but first of all for the living content that over decades it was able to exert its generative force, driving me in my research, to finally motivate me to proceed with the re-circulation of both volumes. And this in the hope that what happened to me – the revelation of the thousand images and meanings of musical thought - will be able to happen to any other reader.

P.S.2. In addition to the great compositional project that includes three operas (*The Love as Doctor*, *The Sacrifice of the Ifigenia*, and *Hamlet*), eight symphonies, five instrumental concerts, a symphonic poem, and two orchestral suites, six quartets, lieds, and stage music, Pascal Bentoiu created and a parallel project, a musicological one in the proper and full sense of the word. Consisting of three stages or, more precisely, of three thematic articulations, the musicological approach would find a pertinent definition in the phrase *narrative education*.

The first group of writings is oriented towards the public and could be defined as one of popularization, but one made at the upper limit of acceptance and with the mark of authentic musicological excellence, and includes three volumes: *Imagine și Sens* (three editions – 1971: Musical Publisher, Bucharest, 1973, and 1979, respectively), *Deschideri înspre lumea muzicii* (1973) and *Gândirea muzicală* (1975), all three volumes published by the Musical Publishing House in Bucharest.

The second group of writings of technical-analytical substance, oriented towards the environment of professional musicians, is entirely dedicated to the legacy of George Enescu and consists of two volumes: the monumental text *Capodopere enesciene* (1984: Musical Publisher, Bucharest, second edition in English, *Masterworks of George Enescu. A Detailed Analysis* – 2010, the third being in German, *George Enescu: Meisterwerke* – Pascal Bentoiu, in 2015) and *Breviar enescian* (UNMB Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005 and a second edition – Casa Radio Publishing House, Bucharest, 2017).

And not only that, but, this time, it is also about a restorative compositional-musicological exploration of Enescu's creation, following famous examples from the history of European musical culture: Franz Xaver Süssmayr, and the completion of Mozart's *Requiem*, Rimsky-Korsakov's work for the re-orchestration of *Boris Godunov* and *Hovanscina* (also revised and supplemented, followed by Shostakovich with the revision and re-orchestration) by Mussorgsky, the completion of Bartók's *Viola Concerto* by Tibor Serly, composer-violinist-violist, a true epic unfolding over several decades and with the involvement of several composers and musicologists, for the complete recovery of *Symphony no. 10* by Mahler, or the completion of the first part of the *Concerto no. 6* for piano and orchestra by Beethoven, undertaken by the British musicologist Nicholas Cook in 1987.

Pascal Bentoiu recovers several Enescian scores such as Symphonies no. 4 and no. 5, the symphonic poem *Isis*, and the Piano Trio (in A minor), shifting the definition of the „peak achievement” of Enescian creative destiny from Symphony no. 3 to the symphony, here is no. 5.

The third group consists of a single book – *Opt simfonii și un poem* (Eight symphonies and a poem, UNMB Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007) – and is an analytical “confession” regarding his creation. As a poem, the volume includes the concerto for orchestra, op. 23 (1976), *Eminesciana III*.

And the musicological project was not only limited to 3+2+1 volumes, but following the idea of *narrative education*, it also extended towards studies in specialized magazines, radio and television shows, courses, and conferences in the country and abroad. Paraphrasing Arthur O. Lovejoy's famous title – *The Great Chain of Being*, I cannot help but evaluate Pascal Bentoiu's musicological effort as an authentic *Chain of Knowledge*, only the first link of which is the *Image and Meaning* volume. An invitation to a narrative education course that I accepted with all enthusiasm and, consequently, with all gratitude.

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