

MUSIC UNDER THE SIGN OF THE LUDIC – 1

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Argument:

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy*

Hamlet¹

Abstract. „Everything already happened once before” [1], asserts Cioran in one of his marvelous books. Parmenides – a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher – was the first one to offer us what would be later called, in Aristotle’s formal logic² the principle of identity: „what is, it actually is, what is not, it is not, nor will it ever be”. Now, why these statements?

Keywords: ludic, music, piano.

1. INTRODUCTION

In support of the idea that our preoccupations with the ludic are not accidental at all, and that, throughout our existential ludic journey, certain meetings were really meant to be, such as the „meeting” with:

- The piano – in several languages (German, English, French, Russian, Hungarian etc.), in the collocation playing an instrument, the verb used for performing music is the same as for playing with something – why not with that very instrument;
- The true masters of the initiation in the art of piano (Mrs V. Taban, a genuine trail blazer in music, while also opening up a world of pathos, or Mr S. Neuhaus, who guided me – as if at play – into discovering a few things of the artistry of Ravel, Brahms, Scriabin, Shostakovich etc.);
- Bosch (*Garden of pleasures*, Prado Museum, Madrid) or Matisse (*Dance, Music*, Hermitage Museum, Sankt-Petersburg) or the impressionists from Musée du Jeu de Paume (now moved to Musée d’Orsay), Paris;
- Ravel (*Gaspard de la nuit*), Stravinsky (*Petrushka*) or Scriabin (*Three studies op. 65 for small ninth, great seventh, perfect fifth, or the Sonatas V and IX*);

¹ Shakespeare, W., *Hamlet*, act I, scene V: „There are more things in the sky and on the earth, Horatio,/ Than those dreamed in your philosophy”

² The principles of formal logic are:

1) *principle of identity*, ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* (V, 9, 1017b – 1018a)

2) *principle of excluded third (tertium non datur)*, ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* (IV, 4, 1007b)

3) *principle of contradiction*, ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* (IV, 3 1005b)

4) *principle of enough reasoning*, PLATON, *Timaeus* (28A) and LEIBNIZ, Gottfried Wilhelm, *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis* (reproduced by Gerhardt, Phil., VII), referred to as *principium reddendae rationis*, in DUMITRIU, Anton, *History of Logic*, Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1975, page 619.

- The Royal Shakespeare Company’s performance of *King Lear*, directed by Peter Brook, a director who had his actors, during the rehearsals, obviously, act the most dramatic scenes in a very comic manner, and the other way round, just to emphasise the correct sense;
- Erik Satie, with his first *Gnossienne*, impressed and inspired by the band of musicians of the Romanian pavilion during the First World Exhibition in Paris.

The following were also defining for our preoccupation with the ludic: J. Huizinga’s – *Homo ludens*, the academic atmosphere, particularly fertile for our aspirations, from the Faculty of Philosophy (with professors: Ion Banu - on the history of ancient philosophy – the play of Pythagorean numbers or the golden section, among others – Petre Bieltz on logic – play of words – or Ion Ianoși on aesthetics – the play of beauty – and the play of categories and of the other dimensions pertaining to Ștefan Angi’s aesthetic system.

This last play stood for the ideal opportunity of getting to know and study in detail the respective system. In mutual agreement with Ștefan Angi, we tried to take it over, assigning it a ludic tinge and considering it from a ludic perspective, applying it – obviously, where the case – to the contemporary Romanian musical creation.

There would be many more such „meetings“. We would still note only one more (and the last): during our numerous walks, so full of essence, a distinguished and wise colleague of ours warned us that „it is not good to play with the ludic!”

2. DISCUSSION

We will try, in what follows, to further argue, starting from a poem by Blaga, *Three faces*.

The child laughs:
 „My wisdom and love lie in play!”
 The young man sings:
 „My play and wisdom lie in love!”
 The old man remains quiet:
 „My love and play lie in wisdom!”

These lines are sheer delight in the way the poet and culture philosopher, Lucian Blaga [2], introduces us to the unfathomable depth of play, while actually playing in the process.

The gradual presentation of the three ages is in accordance with the characters’ actions and assertions:

- For the unconscious child, wisdom and love themselves are his very play, and he says so while laughing;
- For the young man in his prime, love is everything; it is the play (of love), as well as the wisdom of youth; he sings them out with all the exuberance of his age;
- The old man, in the plenitude of his maturity, reaches the stage at which everything is silence (he does no longer laughs unconsciously, he no longer sings enthusiastically). At this stage of the existence, even love and play are wisdom.

The triad, *play-love-wisdom*, has a dominant note for each stage, namely play, for the first age, love, for the second age, and wisdom for the third one. It is manifest in three specific ways: laughter, singing, silence. Consequently, this charming poem binds and combines, composes and decomposes words like in a play.

The full success of the poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga lies in having managed to completely annihilate the distance between the manner of expression and its intention.

Therefore, what is play?

It is one of the terms of the great existential syllogism; substance, subject and spirit in turn, within its three figures. Play never disappears, and neither will ever the childhood of each and one of us, on the one hand, and of the world itself, on the other hand.

And yet, what is play?

„Play is older than culture” [3] – this is how the Dutch Johan Huizinga begins his work entitled *Homo ludens* – a memorable work in the European culture and not only. The author is considered today a classic of the history of culture and of the philosophy of history.

Therefore, why did play appear before culture? Because the cultural phenomenon involves, implicitly and explicitly, no matter how incomplete its definition may be, a human society, be it at its very early stage of development, while play is unique, and the animals did not need man to get the knowledge of how to play. More than that, play has preserved the same characteristics we will revert to at a later point.

Man plays, superior animals play (dumb, yet communicating), probably the evolved machines will also play (obviously, we do not mean playing machines, already existing). When they existed, the gods used to play as well – among them as well as with the mortals’ fates. That is why the Greeks put Destiny above the gods, as Destiny is the only one, by definition, which does not play.

Through play, something special, of an immaterial nature, takes shape. It is clear that animals did not need to wait for man to learn how to play. In exchange, man could create a kind of play which enhanced ludic spirituality up to the point at which the latter precipitated culturally.

With Huizinga, play means creating culture, it does not revolve around Knucklebones (a game of ancient origin), but around those activities which, maintaining one of the fundamental characteristics of play – the capacity of reaching beyond the common frame of life –, are performed in a more beautiful world, and therefore lives on a good neighborhood basis with the sacred.

Whereas all the other playful beings (even the common play man) use up in the process of playing the entire quantity of spirit „involved in the play”, homo ludens is the only being enhancing it, turning it into an act of culture. Or, culture is the very history of taking refuge in the ludic.

Because:

Play binds and unbinds, asserts and separates, captivates, fascinates, even entrances. It features two of the noblest traits that man may perceive in things and that he himself can express: rhythm and harmony, which are also two defining coordinates of music,

we will dare embark upon a ludic decoding of the musical creations of four Romanian composers who represented, for us, a certain spiritual communion, as a result of having had innumerable opportunities for mutual knowledge and acknowledge.

Pascal Benteoiu, Dan Voiculescu, Ede Tereny, Theodor Grigoriu have always inspired us a special respect full of admiration, as they have dedicated us musical compositions (of more or less wide scope) that we performed as an absolute first audition.

We would like this appreciation – in the virtue of the idea of play which governs us – to spread everywhere worldwide, like dandelion seeds in the wind („*Ils sèment à tout vent*”).

It is only ludic *àlea* that has determined us to choose for our analysis a cycle of parts for piano, a cycle of songs for children chorus, a cycle of lieder (songs), an opera, a cycle of piano parts for children.

But why have we chosen four composers and why them?

The answer is simple: we have been meeting for dozens of years. We have selected four composers, maybe because the first and the second and the third and the fourth is ten.

This addition, „1+2+3+4=10”, is identified „with Harmony itself in the «Pythagorean catechism»” [4].

It is the harmony of the Sirens, who are „the planetary prophets of the harmony of Spheres” [4], presented in Plato’s *The Republic*.

The *Decade* (10), as it results from the quaternary formation, is the fourth triangular number:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} 1 & & & \\ 1 & 1 & & \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \end{array}$$

The Tetractys (the four numbers) has the transcendent qualities of the *decade*, the symbolic number of the universe. „The Tetractys is the assembly of the four numbers whose ratios represent the essential musical chords“ [4]. „It is true, the 4-to-2 ratio, or the 2-to-1 ratio represents the *octave* (dia pason/ διά πασών), the 3-to-2 one, the *fifth* (dia pente/ διά πέντε), the 4-to-3 the *fourth*, so we may say (...) that tetractys is the assembly of the four essential numbers.”

As a symbol of the universe, Nicomach, in *Theologumena*, „names the *Decade* Wholeness (pan/παν), since it serves as a measure for everything, like square rule and a tape in the Sequencer’s hand” [4]. Going further, we assert that the half of the decade represents one of the brightest personalities of the numbers, *pentada*, or the characteristic of Five.

„In Arithmology” or *Mystics of Number*, it (*Pentada*) pertains, on the one hand, to the essence and importance of *Decade*, as being its half and its concentrated image, while also standing for GAMOS /ΓΑΜΟΣ, the number of Aphrodite, as a symbol of fecundating union, generating love, abstract archetype of generation.

Five really stands for the combination between the first even feminine number, matrix, scizipar (Two, half), and the first odd number (masculine, asymmetric, – complete (Three, third).

„Pentad is also the number of harmony as to the health and beauty achieved in the human body; its graphical image, pent Alfa or pentagram (star pentagon) will be thus, at the same time, the symbol of creative Love and living beauty, of balance in health (Plato considers beauty, harmony and health related or inter-changeable qualities) of this human body – the projection of soul onto the material plan – which reflects the great rhythm of the «Soul of Light» or Universal Life” [4].

The synchronism between the individual soul and the Universal Soul is clearly stated in Plato’s dialogue, *Timaeus*. Let us also add – and that would be all – that these correspondences in terms of structure and rhythm, between cosmos and man mirror the macrocosm – microcosm relation, a relationship which has inspired and borne fruit during over 2000 years both in the laic and the religious philosophy.

Since we cannot put an end to something which simply cannot be put an end to, and since Blaga's faces keep haunting us, „what if we were” to play with them.

We shall see that,

- If we read each line in reverse order, from right to left, crab-like, the poem will read:

Laughs the child:
„Does play lie in my love and wisdom?”
Sings the young man:
„Does love lie in my wisdom and play?”
Keeps quiet the old man:
„Does wisdom lie in my play and love?”

- In a mirror reversion, the poem will read:

The old man laughs:
„Wisdom lies in my play and love!”
The young man sings:
„My love lies in wisdom and play!”
The child remains quiet:
„Play lies in my love and wisdom.”

- Yet!... As compared to the original:

The child plays:
„My wisdom and love lie in laughter!”
The young man loves:
„My play and wisdom lie in song!”
The young man speaks wisely:
„My love and play lie in silence!”

These would be ludic versions, the flick which we sometimes need, at least to projecting ourselves on another trajectory, on another existential orbit.

What trajectory and what existential orbit?

Whichever you may like. „The rest is...”³, anyway, PLAY.

³ Because, to the suggestion and advice of the Romanian famous pianist Dan Grigore, I played for dozens of times in *Hamlet*, at the Municipal Theatre „Lucia Sturza Bulandra”, under the direction of Alex. Tocilescu, playing the musical (piano part) role of Hamlet, **we end with the end of Horatio.**

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