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The Sign Upgrading of Archetypes in the Music of Postmodernism

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Abstract

The paper starts from the thesis that the pronounced narrativity in postmodernism, unlike modernism, is spurred by non-interference of the symbols in the overall order of the work. They are unambiguously *decentralized* in relation to the context from which they were taken out. The consideration of incessant simultaneous and successive relationships between the symbols (what James Jacob Liszka calls *trans-valuation*) will lead to the identification of primary archetypal patterns that are part of the deep dynamic structure of the musical work. In the composition the *Tree of Life* by Ivana Stefanović the very form is being branched, that is, the repetition of the archetypal performance of life growing up occurs. In the composition *Soneti* by Svetlana Savić, there is a string of symbols referring to a romantic waltz, a pastoral treatment in French music of the twentieth century, or the sonnet texts are reduced to the pronunciation of one word to which the significance is attached and, finally, by concrete sounds are marked phenomena from nature. In this collage, the symbols do not interfere neither in the vertical nor in the horizontal order, so they appear to have been brought to the level of archetypes, that is, they are “liberated” from the burden of meaning to such an extent to create a constellation in which questions *when*, *where?* and *why?* lose their sense. Finally, at the piano concert *It?* by Ivan Brkljačić the symbols are on the very surface, and so, like on the screen, the flow of universal model-symbols can be followed, which in such a constellation can be viewed as archetypes. The goal of the paper is to apply some strategies, incorporated by the basic *decentralization* strategy, so as to present the image taken from the original environment of the original style – the image brought to the level of universality.

Introduction

The central part of my research in the field of music theory is related to intertextual relations and inter-stylistic connections in the music of the first half of the 20th century. Literary theory, in particular, addresses these issues, and

so one of the impetuses for my doctoral thesis, *Resemantization of Tonality in the first half of the XX century*, came from Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence theory. Bloom does not view the relationships between literary works through historical continuity. He believes that influences are not merely the transmission of ideas and images from generation to generation: “in conjunction with the psychoanalytic postulates of Freud's theory, Bloom's theoretical premise assumes that when receiving influence the younger poet creates anxiety over the elder, anxiety that is expressed through feeling of loss of the personal” (Teparić, 2020: 105). This includes creativity through which it is possible to express those deep, timeless influences that we might call archetypal. Thus, Bloom also affirms that the semantic upgrade is, in fact, the foundation of all artistic creation:

“Poetic influence – when it involves two strong, authentic poets – always proceeds by misreading the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation” (Bloom, 1997: 30).

In an interview in which he discusses this theory, Bloom avoids mentioning the word “archetype” which is understandable because he conducted his research on the postulates of Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Nonetheless, he states: “The oldest in us, as Emerson would say, is what we feel as literary intellectuals, as intense readers or writers, or perhaps simply as intense lovers in the erotic sense, what people like us feel is not part of the created world but in a certain way precedes creation, and can survive our death, it is certainly that element necessary for writing and interpreting poems” (Herman-Sekulić, 1992: 71). Let us move on to those authors who talk quite openly about the archetype. Here, Jung's idea of the collective unconscious is

inevitable, a domain from which the archetypes, according to him, originate. General knowledge of Jung's research leads us to believe that archetype represents a mental activity. Archetypal performances in art, as well as in music, would also represent their symbolic expression. According to Jung, the archetype is constantly changing, upgrading, while still retaining its primary, universal meaning: "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its color from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (Jung, 1959/1981: 5). Further, according to Jung, the archetype is a primordial type, which refers to the unconscious contents that are especially represented in the world of myth and fairy tale in which the symbols are employed. In this regard, in an extensive preface to Jung's book *Red Book (Liber Novus)*, Sonu Shamdasani writes:

"Symbols, he maintained, stemmed from the unconscious, and the creation of symbols was the most important function of the unconscious. While the compensatory function of the unconscious was always present, the symbol-creating function was present only when we were willing to recognize it. Here, we see him continuing to eschew viewing his productions as art. It was not art but symbols that were of paramount importance here" (Jung, 2009: 210).

It is logical, then, why in the case of archetypes, we talk about symbols, although in all other cases I call musical patterns the signs, for which I would need much more space to explain. Like Jung, who argued that the archetype represents the image of God in man, for Northrop Frye this term is also all-pervading and he equates it to a symbol. His definition of archetype reads: "A symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole" (Frye, 1973: 365). For all of the above mentioned, it is very important for symbols to have the possibility of unlimited transmission, which was also observed written about by Charles Sanders Pierce, from a completely different spiritual environment and from the perspective of pragmatism. Important is also his claim about symbols that have the

capacity to "insert" all kinds of meanings and which, in this way, become totals, the elements of depth structure: "Nevertheless, they have a great power of which the degenerate signs are quite destitute. They alone express laws. Nor are they limited to this theoretical use. They serve to bring about reasonableness and law" (Pierce, 1976: 243). Like Jung, who noted that the hard archetype represented the image of God in man, this term is also all-pervading for Frye, and he equates it with a symbol. Thus, Frye's definition of archetype reads: "A symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole" (Frye, 1973: 365).

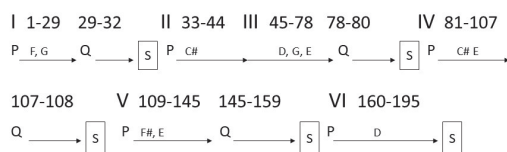
Another important point regarding the semantic upgrade is the idea of exemplification put forward by American philosopher Nelson Goodman. The idea of exemplification should be relevant to any form of interpretation of symbolization. Goodman states, "an extremely important but often overlooked form of *non denotational* reference is exemplification: reference by a sample to a feature of the sample" (Goodman, 1984: 59). Thus, every inter-textual relationship, including the archi-textual one, can be explained through the phenomenon of exemplification. In the case of "influences", each symbol exemplifies the properties of the image to which it refers, those essential features that are sufficient to represent the true image. In archi-textual relations, the connection with the concrete image is lost. The image is actually a primordial image. We shall assume that the musical narrative, as a space in which the interaction of musical elements takes place, is a framework in which musical archetypes exist. The most basic level of musical narrative speaks of a limited number of organizational patterns, that is, narrative archetypes. Any recognition of a narrative involves an awareness of the existence of multiple levels of meaning. For this reason, James Jacob Liszka proposes the term transvaluation: "In its most general form, *transvaluation is a rule-like semiosis that evaluates the perceived, imagined or conceived markedness and rank relations of a referent as delimited by the rank and markedness relations of the system of its signs and the teleology of the sign user*" (Liszka,

1989: 70). Further within the musical narrative, a recognition that depends on the competence of the culturally informed listener is possible. It is for this fact that Byron Almen defines the narrative as follows: “a narrative is essentially an act of transvaluation” (Almen, 2017: 51). Therefore, the analysis of musical archetypes would be based on the following questions (1) what do they mean for the musical narrative separately and within the context; (2) how archetypes interact with other musical elements within musical time and space; (3) which are specific traits of meaningfully upgraded archetypes within a specific historical epoch, postmodernism. Below, three examples of music in postmodernism will be presented in which the archetype of pastoral is treated in a variety of ways. They were chosen because they possess the main three characteristics of what the German literary theorist Andreas Huyssen calls postmodern nostalgia: “But what distinguishes this nostalgia from the ‘real thing’, and what ultimately makes it anti-modernist, is its loss of irony, reflexivity and self-doubt, its cheerful abandonment of a critical consciousness, its ostentatious self-confidence and the mise-en-scène of its conviction . . .” (Huyssen, 1984: 7).

The Tree of Life by Ivana Stefanović

The composition *The Tree of Life* (1997) by Ivana Stefanovic for string orchestra is an example of how a narrative archetype can be so deeply embedded in a structure that even a graphic representation of a form points to it. In one of my earlier works, I stated that the movement “from birth to transcendence” in this composition is filled with symbols that indicate the “revival” of a musical piece. “The metaphorical ‘treelike form’ consists of sections that form a part of an inseparable whole, but at the same time, they freely grow towards different sides, and each of the individual parts of the form could be called the leaf. It is quite obvious that meaning in the context of composition by Stefanović is expressed through simultaneous and successful relationships between parts of the form, thus creating a kind of narrative plane within the temporal structure” (Teparić,

2018: 74). The process of transvaluation within the musical narrative can also be recorded at a lower level: we could talk about the constant “flipping through” the motifs, their growth, and decline. The transvaluation of symbols-musical motifs—builds a whole of logically arranged “life” elements. Therefore, we would not be able to talk about layered contexts as it would be in postmodern collages. We could not even classify this composition as a neoclassical homage, although there are elements of stylistic imitations. Transcendence through movement causes a part of the attained spirit to be exemplified through artistic poetics. It is depicted here as a moving condition that freely ages and branches off and is an integral part of the pastoral archetype that seems to originate from the originally pronounced syntagma, “In the Beginning was the Word” (Teparić, 2018: 85).



Symbols:

P – prolongation Q – quittance

S – stop

Figure 1. Scheme of composition *The Tree of Life* by Ivana Stefanović.

Sonnets by Svetlana Savić

In the composition *Sonnets* for cello, piano, and electronics by Svetlana Savić, a different kind of establishment of the process of transvaluation and the setting of the narrative archetype occurs. The entire composition is a series of fragments of images that alternate in front of the listener as if in a dream. It could be said that the signifiers in this piece have a visual property. The expressive narrative of such a postmodern collage is fueled by the non-interference of symbols that are unambiguously *centralized* and which in their synergy do not lose any of their primary “archi” properties. The first movement of the composition called *La Douce Nuit* (*Silent Night*) composed in 2010 uses samples of a recording of a recitation of poems from Charles

Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, interpreted by Eva Le Gallienne and Louis Jourdan. This movement could be characterized as an archetypal pastoral scene. Through the static image, characterized by the long sustained pedals, a collage of individual images is created, which in such an environment *centralize* the archi properties of the phenomena to which they refer. The individual words of the sonnet are reduced to sound properties, indicating the original meaning of the word *suono* (voice, sound). In the passage where the text reads, *Listen darling, let's go now, with a slight step the night is approaching*, the recorded sounds of the train, the swamp and the cello melody that brings the leap of the minor sixth upwards (*a-f*) exemplify the archetype of the pastoral. The minor sixth, as a romantic signifier of the sphere of the idyllic, layered on sounds from nature, as symbols act in such a way that they represent a direct penetration into the depth structure of the musical narrative of the Arcadian space.

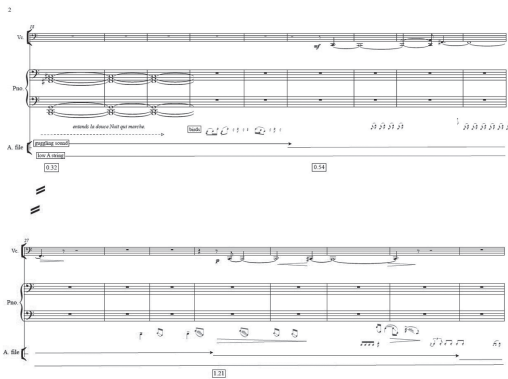


Figure 2. Excerpt from *Sonnets*, movement *La Douce Nuit* (mm. 18–34) by Svetlana Savić.

It by Ivan Brkljačić

A piano concerto *It* by Ivan Brkljačić (2000) brings a horizontal, temporal sequence of rhythmic à la Prokofiev's motifs. By trans-valuating symbols that exemplify incompatible jazz rhythms combined with those of heavy metal music, in rapid tempo and through a specific orchestration upgraded with two batteries of drum instruments, Brkljačić reaches deeply into the pastoral primordial image of the ritual.



This image shows the first 25 measures of the piano concerto 'It' by Ivan Brkljačić. The score is written for a large orchestra, including woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Cor Anglais), strings (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, Double Bass), and percussion (Timpani, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Cymbals, Triangles, Tom-toms, Gong, Chimes, Bells, and a variety of other percussion instruments). The notation is complex, featuring many accidentals, slurs, and dynamic markings. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4.

This image shows measures 26-50 of the piano concerto 'It' by Ivan Brkljačić. The orchestration continues with the same instruments as the previous excerpt. The music features a variety of textures, including melodic lines in the woodwinds and strings, and more complex rhythmic patterns in the percussion. The notation is dense, with many notes and rests.

Figure 3. Excerpt from piano concerto *It* (mm. 1–25) by Ivan Brkljačić.

Discussion

All three examples discussed above illustrate different ways to penetrate some of the archetypes. With Ivana Stefanović it is the phenomenon of life, both in superficially literal and in the deepest, archetypal sense. With Svetlana Savić, the pastoral is presented in the form of an image, while with Ivan Brkljačić it flows with their sequencing. The answers to the three questions I posed earlier are the archetype of pastoral in an environment of diverse stylistic references and indications, act as “stripped down”, that is, as a separate part of the overall meaning network. The strategy of their *decentralization* is completely different from the modernist *centralization*, which implies visible participation of the author in the process of meaning-building. The transvaluation of symbols indicates the creation of a deep structure, within which the emergence of stripped archetypes occurs, which ultimately exemplifies postmodernism. Artistic tools are

This image shows measures 51-75 of the piano concerto 'It' by Ivan Brkljačić. The orchestration remains consistent with the previous excerpts. The music continues with a variety of textures and patterns, including melodic lines in the woodwinds and strings, and more complex rhythmic patterns in the percussion. The notation is dense, with many notes and rests.

brought to the level of generality, so it could be said that these works still belong in some way to the modernist, avant-garde affinity. The idea of uniqueness, reflected in the kind of improvisational spirit of all three compositions, points to a performance in which the representation of archetypes is stripped down their expression. That is why they act as *archi* and that is precisely why this way of treating archetypes is characteristic of the art of the time we live in.

Conclusions

The theoretical postulate that discusses the semantic upgrading of archetypes in postmodernism starts from Jung's idea of the collective unconscious, the archetypes that he equates with the language of symbols. This brief outline starts from the following theoretical assumptions: (1) The semantic upgrade is linked to the entire artistic creation and does not necessarily take place in historical continuity; (2) There is a certain primordial image, a world of symbols, where archetypes exist that are universal in every historical time; (3) Symbols, as transferable elements, participate in the process of transvaluation, that is, in the process of creating a meaning constellation within a musical narrative that represents the exemplification of a particular archetype. Based on an analysis of examples from *The Tree of Life* compositions by Ivana Stefanovic for string orchestra, *Sonnets* for cello piano and electronics by Svetlana Savic and *It*, a piano concerto by Ivan Brkljačić, emerge the three different ways in which they treat the narrative archetype of pastoral work. The results that should indicate the features of the semantic archetype upgrade in the music of postmodernism are as follows: (1) Archetypes act as "stripped down"; (2) The depth structure of the musical narrative is such that they do not interfere with other references but act as a separate part of the overall meaning network.

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