

# The Anthropology of Poiesis



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*To my wife, Adriana*

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## OPENING REMARKS

*Poiesis* comprises a range of matters exceeding the concern of science as a product of summative intelligence and aims to give answers that can be indirectly obtained through metaphysics. In its largely acknowledged meaning, experience, applied to established facts, does not account for the immediate objective of *poiesis*, but rather for transcending empiricism, except experience seen as an already experienced fact or as an experience of thought. However, this transcending cannot occur by criticizing knowledge or the faculties of knowledge, but by correlating the results of experienced life with more general reflections, which aim for the absolute. Therefore, experience, as a given, analytical intelligence and poietic intuition can never be considered the same thing. The classical approach of *theoria*, understood as mirroring and contemplation of a reality that lays beyond experience and exceeds the possibilities of the intellect, reason and classical logic can bring the notion closer in its intention to metaphysics. Still, *poiesis* is not metaphysics in the Aristotelian way, as prime philosophy, nor in a present-day way, as knowledge that surpasses the boundaries of experience because science can never be separated from experience.

Several works of mine dedicated to this theme have been published over time in Romanian magazines like ‘Revista de filosofie’, ‘Studii de istorie a filosofiei românești’, ‘Studii de istorie a filosofiei universale’, ‘Studii de teoria categoriilor’. Other works have been the subject of national symposiums or presented at conferences. Guided by creation and the creative synthesis of different domains of the spirit, the author tried to make his theme available to the philosophy of culture or the philosophy of art, along with a series of concepts that can be edifying in its development, sometimes put in opposition: abstract/concrete, universal/ particular, immanence/ transcendence, creation/ imitation, form/ content, etc. If we succeeded putting forth the unity of all the studies gathered between the covers of this volume, is not due to the analysis of concepts, but to our historical approach.

*The author*



# CHAPTER I

## THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF *POIESIS*

### **In between the immanent and the transcendent**

In one of my previous papers<sup>1</sup> I made the distinction between *poiesis* and *noesis*, having as a starting point the cultural style, meaning forms or categories perceived just as Lucian Blaga did, in his *Horizon and Style*. The *noesis* paradigm opens up a very particular horizon, the causative order, while *poiesis* deals with an abstract spiritual order, and a more inclusive ontological model than the causative-determinist one, precisely, a paradigm in which the cause is not unilateral. Each particular way of being, which actively and knowingly immerses us in reality, corresponds to a different level of abstraction.

Throughout history, man achieved fulfilment from his deeds and through his deeds; he unfolded himself. But if his actions do not reflect into things – artworks of the spirit – nothing he does, lasts, his work does not come to be. It lays in our strength to be equal to ourselves, as long as we do not compare ourselves with others and consider them our opposites, but rather our equals. Our actions always define us. But these actions have nothing to do with things that simply turn into objects; they need to be works that come from our soul. The notion of *poiesis* proves the soul to be the core of oneself and the energy that works through us into the world, the spirit that opens up the world. We are always equal to our actions. Only the Divine can show us the Path. Words that lose sight of the Path can no longer be considered speech or Logos, but deceit and disappointment.

***Symbolic and creative abstract.*** Spiritualizing abstract, inherent to the poetic way of being and knowing – recognizable in art and culture in general – sets itself against analytical abstraction. The first one is a type of abstraction that builds inside the idea. Using this concept, we try to account for a more profound order, that surpasses the abstract and the

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<sup>1</sup> Mihai Popa, *Antropologie stilistică (An Anthropology on Stylistics)*, (Bucharest: Publishing House of The Romanian Academy, 2017).

symbolic, a concept specific to artistic endeavors and other cultural domains. Abstract refers here to a certain tendency towards an ideal, one that has not been ejected from reality, but an ideal whose purity permeates and transforms (transfigures) the world's reality through its intrinsic traits.

Ideality manifests itself, it has a visible side, but also an invisible one. We can ponder upon the unperceivable side, but our thought cannot entirely grasp it because this side of reality is more complex; we can feel it as part of this world, but our senses cannot fully render it. That is why *poiesis* and the abstraction of creative activities are closer to intuition and to the experiment of thought, but their field of interest does not stop here. Constructive and creative abstraction (the poietic type) belongs to man, but it comes from beyond reality. Man's artistic achievements still preserve the stigma of distance and contain, each in their own unique way, the light that transpires in all the junctures that reveal them as works that do not belong to man entirely. Only poietic products are defined by a specific movement and have an inner dynamic, a dialectics of the spirit that holds them together and transforms us when we get in touch with them. They lead us into thinking and feeling them as always belonging to us – therefore this is an ascending revelatory dynamic, taking place on multiple levels, but restricted by order.

***Dialectics of the artistic act.*** This dynamic provides a personal trait to art endeavors (and not only to them). It always remains relevant and has been captured in all its complexity (pentadic, related to a pentad) in the art of tragedy by Alexandru Surdu in his *Pentamorfoza artei (The Pentamorphosis of Art)*<sup>2</sup>. After reading this book, which deals with art from a pentadic point of view and reveals to us its remarkable junctures, visible especially in classical works, we should keep in mind that art is the development and achievement of different elements in constant interaction. Every piece of art speaks to our being as a whole, through the totality of our senses. It has the power to transform us (*catharsis*), to unravel for us the will of the Divine, which does not alter man's path, not even when it derails or prevents him from achieving a purpose.

The poietic can also be identified in poetry, as a reminiscence of the primary act, but we can detect it outside art as well, in theoretical works, in science, and philosophy.

The product of art is a result of a personal effort. It is possible to accomplish a piece of art only through total cooperation between all the capacities of our self, those in charge of affectivity, and the ones

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<sup>2</sup> Alexandru Surdu, *Pentamorfoza artei (The Pentamorphosis of Art)*, (Bucharest: Publishing House of The Romanian Academy, 1993).

responsible with knowledge. Every art piece is unique and whole, complete.

**Creation is personal.** Wholeness is considered here from an anthropological point of view. Every piece thought and produced by man bears the traits of his personality. Therefore, when considering each field of creation – scientific, philosophical, or religious – we must do so from the perspective of the *person*, and not reduce it to just one of its qualities. Every attempt made to reconsider man from a cultural perspective, as a creative force and not merely as a simple recipient and consumer of ready-made products – attempt recurring in history – has underlined one or more of his characteristics. In retrospect, some qualities of man have been highlighted, and some have been put in second place since the early modern period. Only throughout the Renaissance, there has been an attempt to integrate and *reconsider man as a person*. That was possible only because they caught a glimpse of how *poiesis* could act as a ferment for the human being's essential development. Man became the *unification of his genuine qualities with the ideal ones*, and the totality of his artistic work became important due to his conscious and free personality. By omitting even one trait of the human character, we set *poiesis* in between brackets and lead to disregarding man as a person. That is a good example of analytical abstraction, abstracting some conditions seen as essential for the human being and casting a shadow over others. This type of abstraction is specific to particular sciences, especially those which have evaluated their means and the result of knowledge through positivity. On account of that, all sorts of abnormalities and abridged anthropological (from the perspective of 'positive' science) standards arose, complete with profiles of man, more like caricatures, that leave out man's *poiesis* and neglect seeing him as a person. Ignoring one trait of the human character, either the real or the ideal one, which integrates all the others, made all the exaggerations possible and it made it easy to believe that man can be understood by starting with repositioning him – ontological, epistemological, ethical, or aesthetical. One side of his being got emphasized – historical, political, social – while we lost sight of the fact that, in the actual life, as much as in the metaphysical existence, the human being must always come first. Man is not objective by himself, nor is he (only) subjective, *he just is*.

**Man and nature. Man and 'polis'.** Man gets closer to nature, and more importantly, he distinguishes himself from it through his poietic side – understood as occurrence or as able to generate. As poietic beings (gr.

*poietikos*, *poiesis* < *poiein*, to do), we have access to all those created and, indirectly, to all those eternal, uncreated; we share a part of the joy brought upon by Creation. In this last sense, poetry is not the only art (primordial in a way, even in Plato; the supreme art that connects us with the Divine) through which we can take part in the primal act. The poet subordinates his will of knowledge to a higher degree of understanding, which is no less human either. He wishes to become integrated into the cosmos with his whole being. The poietic state or the proclivity towards pure, integral, personal living transforms the human. This intense living, this full engagement that brings about change, is also provided by other 'arts'; it is traceable in all of man's artistic achievements from different fields. In everything he does, man rather emulates Plato's Demiurge from *Timaios*, who regularly creates and destroys the world. For ancient Greeks, the Demiurge (or the gods) possesses this attribute (*poiein*), which Plato considers to be inherent to ideas (ideas as eternal forms). 'Through his will, the Demiurge can destroy them, not only the physical, but also the divine ones, those made (born), which up until then are partly eternal, respectively temporary, except ideas.'<sup>3</sup> Therefore, from the ancient point of view, the Demiurge's actions and the permanent creation of eternal ideas represent *poieien*.

However, *poiesis* has yet another meaning: occurrence that reveals something hidden up to that point (by the Divine or one of its attributes). We must also mention that the notion carries within a part of its extended meaning – by the agency of *poiein*, as a generating source and occurrence, man (starting with the ancient Greek, which conceptualized this reality), firstly integrates himself into nature (existence), then he understands and fears it, and finally takes part in the Divine Creation through art (*catharsis*), becoming shaken by the Absolute, the Infinite, Everything, all of which he cannot understand, but indirectly takes an active part in, just like the one who can represent himself through himself and his ideas in unique pieces of art (*poiein*). *The uniqueness of the work of art is man's aspiration towards the long-lasting, as a signification of the original poiesis*, aspiration which is opposite to the integration in diversity. In this sense, the work of art is inspired. While inspired, man feels like part of something greater than him and has the feeling that, with his gesture, he gives meaning to his existence, limited in time. He is now able to suspend the signification of his existence inside the spirit. By using our faculty of reason, we can represent existence and its categories, and strive towards

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<sup>3</sup> Alexandru Surdu, *Filosofia pentadică II, Teoria Subsistenței* (The Philosophy of Pentad II, Theory of Subsistence), (Bucharest – Târgu Mureș: Publishing House of The Romanian Academy and Ardealul, 2012), p. 72.

general meanings or universal entities. However, through poiesis, we can set forth or against our existence that which is inherent to our self, we expose ourselves and live as a person. From a poietic point of view, under the constraint of the ephemerality and relativity of every action that becomes history, just because it is being stupidly repeated (or through blind becoming, or a becoming that lacks in spirit), man represents himself, not only through his daily, tedious activities, needed in order to survive, but also as part of a different reality which we generally call culture.

Not everything that man does has a meaning or a purpose, and not everything owns the attributes of his being. Through his daily repetitive activity, man integrates himself into becoming for becoming, necessary for biological sustenance, but not into becoming within being, something which is specific to man as a person, as a spiritual being, just as Constantin Noica argued. Looking back at what represents us, towards those things that last and remembering the deeds of the spirit, we notice that some of man's creations have lost their significance; they fell into the wrong becoming and have been forgotten, classified in history's weak memory, just as everything that becomes. All those deeds that repeat themselves, the historical events, they all have an evanescent sparkle and they were not able to awaken the spirit of the man that brought them into reality, nor have they been rendered to a different spirit. But those works that last (not so much in their material form or concrete existence), no matter the time and the place, they gave meaning to the entire history of humankind. Finding significations of being in the world is easy, but significations of becoming within being are remarkable, exceptional works of art. Those are an exclusive privilege of truly elevated spirits, meant to interfuse historical reality with the reality of the spiritual and to represent the right path for the next generations to follow.

The poietic transpires in everything man accomplishes using his mind, but not everything contains it. In similar terms, not every artistic creation represents something original. Out of all the artworks a man can produce, him being extremely gifted, only some can reach that high degree of talent and, furthermore, only a fraction of those few, even though created with talent and devotion, can achieve the realm of the poietic. However, culture is the sum of so many meaningful artistic works which also contain an idea imparted further along with other ones, that culture itself takes on their nature and quality. That is how we come to recognize and appreciate it. Particularly in traditional cultures, but especially in developed cultures, those set auspiciously under the authentic poietic spirit, the nature of this spirit has a great impact upon all the other works of art and all of them are

bestowed, one way or another, by the poietic spirit. The Greeks have best defined this spirit using the forever vivid harmony of the spoken word beauty (*λόγω καλως*). In order to be remembered (by society and by people), man's actions are absolute aspirations that change his life, similar to sacrificing in battle for the spirit of your people. We owe them our gratitude, but not just anyhow.

The word beautiful makes people's deeds worthy of being remembered, just like Plato argues in numerous dialogues. For instance, in *Menexenos*, Socrates quotes Aspasia's words about those killed in wars:

There is a tribute of deeds and of words. The departed have already had the first, when going forth on their destined journey they were attended on their way by the state and by their friends; the tribute of words remains to be given to them, as is met and by law ordained. For noble words are a memorial and a crown of noble actions, which are given to the doers of them by the hearers.<sup>4</sup>

People can become part of the collective memory only if they are part of the *polis*.

**Poiesis and beauty. Catharsis.** 'Beautiful words become true if they reference beautiful deeds' is the essence of this discourse and also the core of Greek thinking, which connects *poiein* to *logos*, with *kalos* in between, a connection not without contradiction, which always manifests on the speaking level. It is, in fact, the harmony of speaking (or uttering) about actions, things, and people. It occurs in a different time, aiming for a different order, inspired by gods. The connection is inherent to man and his deeds transfigure reality, shifting it towards something else, a higher one, difficult to grasp by man. This elevated reality does not belong to man, unless his deeds, words, their order, and the reality he targets are in no way a simple indication, but a presence. Thus, the becoming of oppositions, the word (spoken), the targeted higher reality, can reveal to us the essence of man's actions, meant to purify him, to create the possibility of being or transposing himself into a certain state (*catharsis*), to be shaken, frightened and in awe: this is the purpose of myth, poetry, and ancient tragedy. This last art is not just about the discourse, but an intertwining of several arts, a combination elaborated in thought (*logos*), so that it purifies man.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Dialogues of Plato. Menexenus*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1871), p. 11.

Combining dance, music, stage movements, and choreography with the atmosphere specific to Greek theatre results in purifying, not only the performers and the producers of the show, but also those who watch it; everyone becomes part of the poietic state, they enter a different reality, their divine will is being unraveled. A rhythmic narrative, harmoniously presented, does not carry one away in the myth's logos, solely through rhythm and evocation. The entire tragic performance gives us this possibility to enter the poietic state because it is a performance of the arts coexisting in dialog, a divine show. 'Destiny, gods' will to let come into being what was predicted, usually inauspicious to man, this is what awakens fear. As a matter of fact, this is *the essential feeling* of the ancient tragedy, undertaken also by the passages from the myth.<sup>5</sup> This is the reference here, the myth, or in other words, myth is the pretext of the tragedy. The narrative is presented as taking place *in a certain time*, a mythical one, therefore a simple evocation cannot transport man *in that time*, unless it does so in a very particular way. This way (or manner) is acquired through the whole performance.

Even if the poet and the spectator truly believe the myth (necessary condition, but not sufficient), they will still not get frightened and they will not get conquered by fear just from a simple narration of a myth. Moreover, not even reading the text could awaken their fear.<sup>6</sup>

Alexandru Surdu sees the ancient tragedy as a dialectical becoming, made out of five moments or, more precisely, the tragic play is the revelation of the essence of actions that unroll following a pentadic order. We can attain this order gradually, by taking part in the combined movement of the performers and the spectators. Going through these stages, we reach the feeling of tragic and attain purification through *catharsis*.

It is all about that moment of maximum tension, carefully prepared, continuously anticipated and insinuated (something that modern play writers cannot understand, so they rely on the element of surprise), when the fatal moment comes; that terrible second, brought to life by the choir, music, and dance (sometimes even *deus ex machina*), more vivid than any reality, when the divine and the human becomes one, when the dreadful decision that will bring death, pain and dismay is taken. The wailing of the choir, the strident screeches of the flutes, the wild dance and the thunder-

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<sup>5</sup> Alexandru Surdu, *Pentamorfoza artei* (The Pentamorphosis of Art), 1993, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

like voice of the God, manifesting in the middle of the ancient theatre, in the middle of Hellas and the terrified Greeks are all elements of the performance that the preserved texts cannot offer us, but we can still imagine them as inducing fear.<sup>7</sup>

Tragedies of Hellenic theatre were meant to recreate that authentic primary state, the poieticity in which the entire ancient community could take part.

### **The Pentamorphosis of Art, an original view of the artistic phenomenon, in Alexandru Surdu**

Philosophy of art emerged as an extension of special systematic compartments of philosophy – for example in Kant or Hegel – different from aesthetics, a field of study in philosophy, differentiated ever since Aristotle.<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, with every important restructuring of philosophy also came a theory or a philosophy of art, as an integrated part of philosophy, just like systematic approaches emerged in history or in any other sciences. We are interested in Alexandru Surdu's approach, related to category and structured around the notion of pentad. He states that philosophy of art has been frequently discussed in works specially dedicated to this field of philosophy – just like the one already cited – or in studies concerning disciplinary issues, others than aesthetics, or related to art theory.

*Art and dialectics.* The Pentamorphosis of Art brings us into the issue through pentadic dialectics. Art is a particular domain of reality, but at the same time, it is part of reality, influenced by all the other domains. There is a permanent dialogue between reality and art, based on the talent and experience of the artist (creator of art), incentive in both directions. Similarly, there is also a dialogue between art and the other domains of knowledge or of culture in general, but it is impossible to state if this interaction, which also has a dialectic component, leads to a scrupulous or at least coherent interpretation of the mechanism of creation. Dialectics (in both its objective sense, as a way of being and becoming of the world, and also the subjective, as method and mechanism of knowledge) can be applied entirely to reality and every one of its domains. Thus, both meanings of dialectics direct us towards movement (the course of actions)

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

and its contradictory aspects, whether they bear an antithetic signification or a contradictory one (*contradicere*).

Being one of the most complex domains of reality, art, with its works of art (at least some of them) seen as a standard for perfection and relatable to any generation, it cannot function and it cannot be understood, according to Alexandru Surdu, without subjecting it to a dialectic system (and method) designed using the notion of pentad, although we can also apply dialectic methods of binary (dyadic), triadic or even tetradic type. We can find an overview of all these dialectic types and how they include one another (according to their explanatory and functional complexity, where the most complex ones undertake the least complex, relying on them) in the first four chapters of the already mentioned book, especially in II. *Semnificatia metodologica a dialecticii (The Methodological Signification of Dialectics)* and III. *De la dialectica binară la dialectica pentadică (From binary dialectics to pentadic dialectics)*. The study is remarkable because, apart from the introductory studies in the history of dialectics, the author applies his method – pentadic dialectics – to many domains and original creations (works) in a fashion that proves, the ground functionality of the method, and it also opens up new perspectives in interpreting and understanding the artistic phenomenon. We definitely believe that, in terms of aesthetics and the anthropology seen from a stylistic point of view, the *poiesis* way of being and knowing can also be one of those perspectives. The pentadic ‘mechanism’ is first ‘verified’ in chapter IV, one of the introductory chapters, that we can consider to be an exercise in applying the method to physiology, the domain of the human organism. The entire chapter is dedicated to professor doctor Daniel Danielopolu and his works, describing and explaining the physiological processes specific to the human organism. They appear and manifest antagonistically, creating a series of inter-stimulating mechanisms (‘inter-stimulating antagonism’) that permanently self-regulates, turning the organism into a whole, a system that coordinates its functions and develops. D. Danielopolu also highlights a series of laws that regulate the functioning of systems and organs, the most important for us being ‘the law of the circular mechanism’, which is of pentadic type (meaning a pentadic dialectics of objective opposition, antithetic). This law balances the power of the antagonistic parts (systems, mechanisms, organs, etc. that function in an antithetical manner, producing substances or generating reactions that have an excitative-inhibitor role) in five steps, described as follows: 1. active force, 2. reactive force, 3. interaction between them while one prevails, 4. training reactivity from the counterpart, 5. balancing

forces.<sup>9</sup> Showing how the pentadic, antithetic ‘mechanism’ works, based on the organism’s laws and means to self-regulate emphasized by D. Danielopolu, it sets the ground for the next chapter, *Perfecțiunea artistică și pentamorfoza artei* (*Artistic perfection and the pentamorphosis of art*), chapter V.

***Perfection in art.*** Artistic perfection is an ideal. At times, we say that some works of art are almost perfect. Their perfection is not static, but dynamic. Unlike scientific precision (here we stumble upon relativity, in both technical and theoretical aspects), in art, the author (the creator of art) cannot identically replicate the artistic act, nor the circumstances (material) of his creation through his artistic action. The result of this act is the *occurrence* and the actual coming into existence of the art piece. But since he cannot replicate it, he tends to identify himself with perfection and the aesthetic never easy to attain. It is impossible to state with certainty if this ideal is obtained in a pentadic manner, but the dialectic pentadic unity, especially in all domains of the traditional classical art and other fields of culture and science, is not accidental. There are basic works of art we use as reference in ‘this uncontainable realm of the aesthetic’, but those which are even remotely close to the ideal we relate to, that of beauty, of aesthetic harmony, starting with the works of ancient Greeks for example, or the architectural and plastic accomplishments of ancient Egyptians, they all have in their structure pentadic mechanisms. Alexandru Surdu points out these mechanisms in many domains or works of art. The Pentamorphosis of art – always dynamic, but well-balanced – has been made obvious (other times, once discovered, it got hidden, similar to a huge secret) ever since ancient times.

The pentadic role (that of the relation between two and three,  $2/3$  and  $3/2$ ) in music, architecture, and painting, the pentagon, the golden cut or the divine proportion, the non-symmetrical proportion – dynamic symmetry – they are all discoveries that have never been revealed and passed on to Pythagoreans (for example), but only to the initiated ones.

Thoroughly organized, methodologically and historically (concerning the genesis of the fundamental domains of art), the book discusses the most important genres of art, all under the perspective of interior dialectics, the pentamorphosis. Following the already stated historical introduction, the next chapters are dedicated to music, architecture, and plastic art, with focus on the monuments from Târgu Jiu belonging to C. Brâncuși, the ancient tragedy, Shakespeare’s passion dramas, *The Plague*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

by A. Camus, the legend of *Master Builder Manole*, M. Eminescu's *Luceafărul* (variously rendered as 'The Morning Star', 'The Evening Star', 'The Vesper', 'The Daystar', or 'Lucifer'), all in this very order. The book ends with two more conclusive chapters written from the perspective of the pentadic philosophy of art: (XV) *Pentamorfoza artei și implicațiile ei dialectice* (*The Pentamorphosis of Art and its dialectic implications*) and (XVI) *Ansamblul pentadic al artei*. (*The pentadic assembly of art*). *The Bibliography* offers the reader general and special literary references cited throughout the book. Our interest fell mainly on those two substantial chapters about ancient Greek tragedy and the passion dramas of Shakespeare, in terms of philosophy and aesthetics, innovative in their theoretical approach and suitable for an exquisite way to give a tangible form to our theme. In order to fit the amount of space dedicated to this study, we will discuss only part of the characteristics attributed from a pentadic point of view (the pantamorphosis of art) to ancient Greek tragedy.

*Aesthetic, appearance, essence. Pentamorfoza artei* (*The Pentamorphosis of Art*) by Alexandru Surdu unravels the *somehow*, the way a work of art exists, or, to quote the author, the state in which a work of art 'reveals itself in a particular manner, or its ability to picture itself in a certain way'.<sup>10</sup> We would argue that his book opens up an original perspective on how innate *poiesis* manifests as a way of being and as a way of inserting yourself into reality. This reality always displays itself differently, according to each domain of the human creation, but in essence stays the same, even if it manifests in opposition. The aesthetic always unfolds distinctly. It is apparent, but this *appearance* instantly sends us to essence; it is a way of being. Pentamorphosis lights up this path as well, to clarify and understand the way of being of the work of art because it is not just repetition, it is about generating and becoming, or as Constantin Noica said, becoming within being. On a different note, the book also allows us to understand what lays beyond appearance and grasp the essence and the totality of a work of art, unique in its way or the idea that renders its existence in being. Ancient tragedy had a pentadic structure. This structure allows a complex development and becoming within diversity while having the same finality: *catharsis*. Reaching *catharsis* (pure state) essentially requires five elements: fear, compassion, love for your fellow human, wonder, and pleasure.<sup>11</sup> Some structural elements of tragedy are also included. The whole performance leads us towards reaching and surpassing all those

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

stages with its organic motions because each component targets a dynamic whole, calling into play all of its elements: the actors wearing masks, the human voices, the stage effects (the orchestra = round area designated for dance with an altar for the gods in the middle), the setting, the theatre and of course, the surrounding nature.

Tragedy should not be reduced to the written text; we cannot set aside all the other elements, but unfortunately, we gradually begin to lose sight of this fact, ever since ancient times, according to Alexandru Surdu. He mentioned that just a few centuries after the last great tragedy writers passed away, Aristotle stopped paying the same attention to the genre; he only had access to the written text, just like we have today, therefore he also lost sight of the pentadic structure of the tragedy. Nonetheless, if Aristotle had not given tragedy its rightful attention in *Poetics*, we would have been deprived of essential information regarding the importance of tragedy among ancient arts. Greek theatre gets us pondering on the importance and grandeur of dramatics, as well as the fact that through this art, the Greeks were able to keep a connection with transcendence, one of a particular nature, but not an entirely special one, that they could reestablish through ritual within the bounds of the temple.

Ancient tragedy was a complex event, dramatic in its essence, but very different from what we make of it today, in modern times. Tragedy included five different arts: poetry, actor's theatrical performance, vocal music of the choir, instrumental music of the flute, and dance.

However, all five of them have the myth at their core. The modern writing, including Shakespeare and even those *retour du tragique* of Sartre and Camus, could not recreate, neither through the narrative, nor the poetry of the dramatic text, the ancient myth of the Greeks because this myth was the spirit of that culture, the base of their religious, ethical and philosophical conscience. According to Alexandru Surdu, tragedy can no longer be experienced nor understood in the same way Greeks did. Aristotle discusses the performance of tragedy from the perspective of the feelings that lead towards it and attain purification (*catharsis*), feelings of fear and compassion (*Poetics*, 6, 1449, b, 24-27). In some exegeses, he adds pleasure or hedonism (*hedone*), love for the human fellow or philanthropy (*philanthropon*), exhilaration or mimesis (*thaumaston*).<sup>12</sup> Modern authors have persistently tried to revive the spirit of tragedy, but could not do so because they left out its dynamic complexity, the pentadic character and its purpose, the particular structure of the ancient Greek spectacle, also pentadic, all of which brought the five arts together, as a

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

whole and were able to revive the five feelings that led to purification (*catharsis*), a rebirth in the spirit of the ancient myth.

The ancient man was able to experience *catharsis* and to be part of this poietic act of creating and generating the cosmos, the divine *poiesis*. It is impossible nowadays to experience the tragic - the poietic way of being of ancient Greeks (which does not come down to just one art, but to all five arts, which together represent the divine way of purification). The state of tragedy will never be revived, no matter how many attempts will there be. The revival of ancient drama, attempted by Romans and by Christianity in a spiritual way, together with the revival of the ancient spirit by the Italian *quattrocento* are all achieved differently and represent a distinct poietic way of being from the ancient one.

**Symetros and dynamis in classical works.** The notion of revival is very familiar to all ancient cultures. It exists in every domain of the spirit, in art, religion, and metaphysical constructs. Restoration, refinement, every specific feeling – including those considered by Aristotle in *Poetics* – will be preserved one way or another in every great creation. According to Mircea Florian, a prolific Romanian philosopher, the manifestations of regeneration and reform have their origin in the ‘mysteries’ of the Greek-Latin paganism, therefore deeply rooted in the ancient atmosphere, but the notions acquire a deeper meaning in the Christian era. This idea of revival, of ‘a new man’, is also the point of focus in Paul’s letters: ‘the ancient man’ dies and ‘a new man’ is born. Furthermore, in John the Evangelist, the man is reborn out of spirit and water. The hope for revival and pagan mysteries is continuously nurtured in Christianity by the occult rites of the sacraments (liturgies), like baptism, communion (the Eucharist), and of course, penitence. Baptism is *sacramentum regenerationis* and penitence is *sacramentum resurgentium*.<sup>13</sup> We grant this idea an important place, alongside other notions like permanence, the becoming of contraries and pentadic dialectics because it always circles back into the discussion, reinforced in every chapter, domain or work of art analyzed in *Pentamorfoza artei (The Pentamorphosis of Art)*. It is the fundamental concept of the anthropology of *poiesis*. Similar to the ideas of revival, permanence, balance, and perfection, we have genesis as the core principle of ancient cultures – without referencing only Greek culture. All of them have managed to pass through eras and cultures, becoming universal ideas,

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<sup>13</sup> Mircea Florian, *Filosofia Renașterii* (Philosophy of Renaissance), edited by Adrian Michiduță and Vasile Gogea, foreword by Adrian Michiduță, afterword by Vasile Muscă (Cluj-Napoca: Grinta Publishing House, 2003), p. 55.

symbols, manufactured images of human spirituality, kept alive in myths and artistic creations (of all sorts), in religions, beliefs, rites, and rituals of every historical community. Alongside other symbols, these ideas (construct-images) have been encoded, sometimes becoming well-kept mysteries, into poetic works or representations of art. Perfection, dynamic balance, the creation and the becoming of contraries, asymmetric becoming, these particular symbol-figures of ancient geometry (the Pythagorean pentagon and pentagram) that set the ground for sacred and civil architecture, the sacred ratio or the golden cut (the divine proportion), *symmetros* and *dynamis* in other words, they will obtain a long-standing tradition in art, science and philosophy. These concepts and rules also had an impact on traditional classical arts, whereas dynamic symmetry (*dynamic symmetry* – Hambridge), the analogy, and the perspective (dynamic as well) have been perpetuated since ancient times, through the Renaissance, in modern arts and architecture inspired by the classical. The golden rule or the divine proportion of either a building in blueprint or the design of architectural projects is asymmetrical (dynamic, generating), dialectical. Alexandru Surdu's opinion is that structural asymmetry is what guarantees the divided segment, using the golden cut, traits like *dynamism*, *formative power*, *productiveness*, *ability to generate* symmetrical shapes in relation to the segment, but *potentially different*, while the symmetry of the square is not productive, but *repetitive*. The symmetric square cannot generate something other than a symmetric shape symmetric to itself, therefore another square.<sup>14</sup> The common aspect of classical traditional arts is that they all gravitate towards the ideal of beauty. The ancient mindset understands beauty as balance (harmony) between opposites, calm, perfection, and peace. By setting these traits in the forefront (seen as specific to all the arts), we forget that beauty is dynamic. If it is limited by the characteristics just mentioned, beauty will be an empty category, lacking in spirit.

The pentamorphosis of art brings forward precisely this dynamic and pentadic content, without turning into a rigid layout. Pentadic dialectics allows a perspective on arts that uncovers the harmonious and dynamic content (based on asymmetrical development and energizing formal/technical elements) in perfect balance with elements that can explain the autonomy and hierarchy of arts, using precision and perfect interactions (relative to an aesthetical ideal). Al. Surdu argues that, from this perspective, we can talk about a hierarchy of arts, justifiable through the relation between precision and perfection, which also implicitly contains

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<sup>14</sup> Al. Surdu, *Pentamorfoza artei*, 1993, p. 68.

references to the components and the relations between them inside dialectic structures of a pentadic type. On the first level, we find perfection based on numerical precision; on the second level, perfection based on geometrical precision; on the third, we find the one starting to elude the rigid control of precision; on the fourth, perfection barely recalls precision and on the fifth, it only occurs roughly and by accident.<sup>15</sup> The precision of art is not a numerically quantifiable strictness. Although art does not disregard the number, it is not limited to it; whereas a work of art where we admire perfection as a result of the artist's imagination, exists only in the matter organized according to the laws (canons) specific to each art. Whether it is a sculpture by Phidias, a temple dedicated to Athena or Apollo, a sculpture or a painting from the Renaissance, Michelangelo's *David* or *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, they all reference the man and the measures of the human body, which represent the ideal harmony, the ideal *beauty* sought after in every work of art. Harmony is not a rigid (symmetrical) factor, but the ideal dynamical (asymmetrical) measure that we can see in all the classical works of art because like Al. Surdu would say, all the great works of art (sculptures and paintings) pursue *the beauty of the human body* and face. So ever since ancient times, the beauty of the body has been associated with *measure* and *proportion*. Therefore, the fundamental, basic problem of the *shape* in sculpture and painting regarding the human body is finding *the ideal proportions*, so their rendering would guarantee *the beauty* of future works of art.<sup>16</sup> Considering all of the above, we believe we also managed to outline the important philosophical and anthropological (from a cultural point of view) contributions of the so often quoted book of Alexandru Surdu. One of these contributions is that we can understand the classical work of art in itself by applying his principles and method, as well as the art piece as a whole, in its intrinsic signification. The approaches to interpretation, contemporary with the execution of some works of art, as well as those that followed, up until the present – interpretation related to content or form – have rarely considered the whole. The pentamorphosis of art does exactly that. While discussing ancient tragedy, Alexandru Surdu unravels the deep significations of the spectacle, its resorts, how it was all put together, its way of becoming (as an act of creation), and how it was perceived by the public. This type of tragedy – just as ancient Greeks conceived it (author's note, M.P) – is not part of what we call 'tragedy', but its *result*.<sup>17</sup> By analysing its components, we realize that the spectacle

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 175-176.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93.

was not just an act of imitation, nor just simple acting, but had a precise purpose: to get the audience in the state of the act of creation – *poiesis* – which transforms and purifies the soul. Tragedy cannot reach its purpose if it cannot trigger this change inside spectators, who, in fact, partake in the performance. We cannot rebuild tragedy just by studying it, no matter the perspective. Al. Surdu states that studying ancient tragedy, even from a philosophical point of view, is very important, but not because it can lead to its revival, but because we can achieve a better understanding of modern tragedy and the meaning of the tragic in general.<sup>18</sup> It is not enough to simply identify its classical, aesthetical parts or the phases it goes through, nor is describing them in detail, but establishing the importance of each moment as part of a whole and especially identifying the forces that give intensity to the tragic act, through their antithetical collision – the essence of the spectacle. The element that sets off the process of achieving tragedy is *the opposition* of two forces: *one* is the authentic existence, eternal, fixed, necessary, and universal – the absolute, divine force of destiny –, the second one is its opposite, apparent existence, vanishing, changing, incidental and individual – the humane, relative force of the fellow.<sup>19</sup> It is important to keep in mind that this opposition takes place within existence (they are antithetical) and not within the being, as in Hegel's theory. The forces are in opposition and they will always be, but they do not contradict each other. This is why, says Al. Surdu, only one, the absolute one, is dominant, determinant, but it can only work through its negative, fusing together and identifying with it.<sup>20</sup> To understand ancient and modern tragedy, its spectacle (dramatic in general), and the other arts, we need to pay close attention to where we place this opposition and how we resolve it. It is obvious that, inside every art, there is a tension between two forces that enlivens and structures the artistic act from inside out, being perpetuated from the author, through the work of art towards the spectator (reader, listener). This core – with a pentadic structure – energizes the work of art and gives structure by virtue of the opposing forces, not balancing it but inserting that asymmetrical tension (done in five steps) that gives it dynamism. Each work of art contains an eternal core and a tangible, contingent exterior layer. Men of the Renaissance, artists, and theoreticians have identified this asymmetrical relation inside a war of the souls or into a conflict of the spirit, by following the path of medieval theology – which took on Plato's view through Ficino, or Aristotle's, through Thomas Aquinas.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

The eternal soul – the divine one – stands against the corrupting soul, resulting in a war of the souls, a conflict between eternal and ephemeral, universal and particular, general and individual. The true spirit (found in the supreme intellect) is perturbed by the *anima*. As Robert Klein said, *anima* is most of the time portrayed as including the word *caro*; due to its superior essence, the intellect is not considered, thus reaching the opposition *anima-spiritus*: the flesh part of the man is weak, but the spiritual part is his strength.<sup>21</sup> This opposition is essential and pertains not only to the dramatic spectacle but also to other fields of art like music, and painting. It is represented more genuinely in those arts that use the word as an ‘instrument’ of revealing the creative tension. Ancient tragedy is probably where the unification of the divine spirit with the human spirit is more obvious, as the artistic act that produces catharsis. Since this whole issue is of great importance, we will revisit it in a future study.

### **Publius Ovidius Naso and Dante Alighieri.** **From *Metamorphoses* to *Itinerarium mentis in Deo***

*The Divine Comedy* bears the significance of a spiritual journey while being this wonderful poem that has brought together the hope of all the Renaissance artists and men of letters to render a different spiritual representation of ancient, Medieval Christian symbols. Dante puts forth a fresh poetic perspective and a philosophical view, easy to identify in his masterpiece and also in his other ethical, aesthetical, political, and theological works. All of them exude his desire to shape and transform the mind of his contemporaries through artistic sensibility and aesthetics. He attains the awakening of his Tuscan successor's taste for art and science and of their desire to create a whole new art. They are the ones who will carry out a new design for the Greco-Roman art and science, rediscovering sensibility, the love for nature, and the experimental work by pulling it out of the scholastic canon. In general, they will rediscover ancient philosophy, Plato and Neoplatonism, but especially Aristotle.

In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid (43 BC, Sulmo, Sulmona – 17/18 AD, Tomis, Constanța) retraces mythological paths and experiences (imaginative paths and experiences) that integrate geography, initiative adventures and mythical, spiritual, ancient experiences into a heroic verse. So, in a medieval Christian context, the same cultural values of the Ancient Times

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Klein, *Forma și inteligibilul. Scrieri despre Renaștere și arta modernă* (Form and Intelligible. Writings on the Renaissance and Modern Art), vol. I, translated into Romanian by Viorel Harosa (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1977), p. 77.

generate substance and give Dante the occasion to evoke the Greek and the Roman culture in *The Divine Comedy*. It is not by chance that both writers relate to Virgil, the author of *Aeneid*, although in a different way. Another biographical detail that brings the two together is their forced exile after 'injuring' with their political, moral, philosophical and aesthetic view the beliefs and principles of the governing power; Augustus in Ovid's case and the personalities and moguls of Florence in the case of Dante. While he was on the Elba Island (8 AD), Ovid received the news of Augustus' decision to exile him (*relegatio*) to Tomis (Constanța), on the shore of the Euxine Sea where he spent the rest of his life and died (17 or 18 AD). Dante is sentenced to death after failing to pay a debt, so he is bound to spend the rest of his days in exile, from 1304 to 1321 in Ravenna.

The writer of tales of tender love ('*tenorum lusor amorum*'), as he called himself in an epitaph, the author of *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*, hardly fits in the Scythian atmosphere of the province, a city built by Greeks that didn't actually amount to the commanding appearance of the imperial city. Ovid soon realizes that his past life will become just a fading memory, devoid of substance, forgotten by men and gods, disowned precisely by those who have once elevated him to the highest realms of the Eternal City. Vintilă Horia, in his novel dedicated to Ovid's life among the Dacians, manages to grasp this feeling very accurately, the huge cultural difference between the Dacians and Rome's elevated environment. Ovid will come to believe that his *Metamorphoses* will not have the same impact on the Shore of the Euxine Sea as they had home. He also realizes that gods can no longer talk to him as they did back in the Eternal City and the fact that they don't even listen to him is proof that they are in fact the echo of our fears and of everything we do not dare to do unless it is in the shadow of our atonements<sup>22</sup>. Vintilă Horia underlines here a limited qualification of the *poiesis* anthropology: in spirit, man reclaims himself from divinity as long as there still is the conscience of him having the same substance; when a severance occurs, he does not become an atheist, nor self-sufficient, but rather starts feeling sorry for himself; here is where we set the line between *poiesis* and *noesis*, one which remarkable personalities like those of Dante and Ovid can pass off through creation and self-knowledge. These spiritual itineraries give forth the criteria that define man in his new life (*vita nuova*), both exile and rediscovery of self, which for Dante Alighieri can also signify, among others, an *itinerarium*

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<sup>22</sup> Horia Vintilă, *Dumnezeu s-a născut în exil* (God Was Born in Exile), afterword by Daniel-Rops (Craiova: Europa Printing House, 1990), p. 6.