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The Mountain as Behavioural Matrix, Perceptual Stimulus and Symbolic Sublimation**

Abstract. *Three effects of the mountain in human being's relationship to this impressive form of relief are subjected to analysis and interpretation. (1) The idea of "behavioural matrix" refers first of all to mountain as a natural framework of occupations and, generally, of economic life. On this basis, in several zones of our planet, people configured "mountainous civilizations". For example, along its millenary history, the Dacian-Romanian people developed such a flourishing civilization related to the Carpathian Mountains. Further on, the bioanthropologists identified in the human typology two racial types proper to the inhabitants of the heights; these types were named "alpine" and "dinaric", from the corresponding mountain chains of Europe. (2) The idea of "perceptual stimulus" suggests that the mountain is a challenge to eyes and not less to human curiosity. Hence mountain became an object of knowledge; what kind of knowledge? – equally scientific and artistic. Mysterious realm of gods since the old times, it is only in the modern era that the mountain has become an object of scientific knowledge and artistic representation. A large part of this article is reserved to the representation of mountain in the romanticist literature (René de Chateaubriand, Alfred de Musset, George Gordon Byron), in music (Richard Wagner, Hector Berlioz, Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky, Vincent d'Indy, Richard Strauss), and painting (Caspar David Friedrich, Paul Cézanne). (3) Finally, human experience transformed the mountain into a symbol, first as a sacred space, or "axis mundi", and then as embodiment of properties like greatness, height, verticality, strength, stability, durability, singularity, etc. Victor Hugo associated the mountain to genius: "Dante is not less a peak than Etna", and added: "Nothing more tender and more distinguished. So are the poets, so are the Alps". In his turn, Thomas Mann gave configuration to the modern paradigm of the symbolism of*

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mountain in his novel The Magic Mountain. The article is closed with examples of sayings and proverbial formulae related to mountain.

Keywords: mountain, behavioural matrix, perceptual stimulus, symbolic sublimation, bioanthropological types, object of knowledge, literature, music, painting.

Among the elements of the natural landscape that lay before human perception, the mountain presents itself as a particular case: it reveals itself as the sole main land-form that challenged the human spirit to inquire into its origins. We are, at least, directed towards this ascertainment by a close reading of Romanian mythology. Let us rekindle our memory: the story goes that, after having created the earth and waters, God found that a not at all a negligible quantity of earth had remained to Him. Lacked of inspiration in using the excess of matter, He sent the bee to ask the hedgehog, which passed as the wisest amongst God's creatures. Prickly (both literally and figuratively), the hedgehog refuses to speak, but after the bee's retirement, it muttered to itself: "Fancy that!... it doesn't occur to God's mind to create the mountains and hills!..." The bee, however, had only simulated to leave: concealed behind the door, it caught up on the hedgehog's words and conveyed them to God, and the Creator gave those words their due course without delay.

There is an evidence of a perceptual kind in the underlayer of this mythological episode. In its natural rush to scan the horizon, the eye meets an obstacle that asserts itself by uprightness, strikingness, and everything that the *condition of unconventional presence* confers to it. In other words, the legend would not have appeared if the mountain, in its concreteness, had not caught the attention as an unusual form of reality. A patient proneness to this reality uncloaks the exceptionality of the effect through which it marks human existence. Let us follow the mountain's action on human life in three regimes of development of this relation, regimes that we have already ascertained in the title of the present text.

From behavioural matrix to existential matrix

Before anything else, the mountain has served as a natural frame which has determined – since time immemorial and in any geographical area of the planet – the behaviour of human being as individual, group, and species. Under such determination lie, in their variety, the *occupations*. From this point of view, the natural environment represents a fatality; we shall not expect, for instance, the mountain dwellers to promote there (in their environment, at an industrial magnitude) fishing. Certainly, fishing is present in the landscapes with mountain waters – rich in

alluring species (barbell, trout, and others) –, but this activity is not practised as a basic and vital work, but as an occasional one (especially – as, doubtless, some of us remember – as children’s amusement, adjacent to bathing – in Rom.: *scăldat*). The mountain environment predisposes, on the other hand, to the intense practice of some occupations like shepherding, sylvan activities, hunting, mining, stone and marble quarry exploitation. In Romania, as worldwide, tradition established such professions, which, regarded as a whole, configure an authentic type of civilization – the mountain civilization. And maybe it is not by chance the fact that from France, namely from the country with the largest “natural mountain park” in Europe – The Alps – a publication meant to highlight the values of this type of a civilization entices us to a captivating reading; I have in view *L’Alpe*, a journal emerged under the patronage of the Dauphinois Museum in Grenoble¹. One of the issues of the journal was set up just to point out the rich spectrum of the economic life² run by these “*gens de l’alpe*”, admirable for the way in which they have moulded their personality – humanizing the mountains and drawing from them strength and greatness. Well connected to reality, the authors of the contributions to that thematic issue emphasized the importance of some material and energetic resources – unknown to plains, but organic to mountains –, so necessary for the development of technology, from archaic stages hitherto. From this diachronic perspective, a preliminary observation from the opening of just mentioned issue sounds emblematically:



The journal *L'Alpe*, no. 3,
mai-juillet 1999.

¹ For more details about this publication, see: Gheorghiiă Geană, “*L’Alpe*. Quarterly review, Grenoble, Éditions Glénat, Musée Dauphinois (issues 1–15, 1998-2002)”, in *Revista Română de Sociologie* [The Romanian Journal of Sociology], new series, year XVIII, issues 3–4, 2007, pp. 431–433 („Recenzii și note de lectură” / “Reviews and reading notes”). The title of this publication is linked, of course, to the Alps, but its pages are open to any contribution referring to this kind of civilization. A note on the inside cover of the first issue (1998) sheds some light on the foundation of this extension: “According to the grammarian Servius (from the end of the 4th century A.D., *alpes* is a Welsh epithet, that designated all the tall mountains”. Hardly surprising, for example, in the issue no. 3, having transhumance as a theme, one of the articles is dedicated to the transhumance movements practiced by a shepherding population in Asia, between Tibet and Kashmir.

² *L’Alpe*, no. 17, automne 2002: „Économie de montagne”.

“The computer science revolution has considerably modified the conditions of the natural environment. From the first prehistoric siliceous flint to the silicon of semi-conductors, the way was paved in the innards of the mountain. A hundred thousand years divide these two moments: *homo faber* and *homo economicus*!” (Pitte, 2002: 3).

Significant data regarding the matrix actions of the mountain over the human being are also to be found in the scientific studies of Simion Mehedinți (1868–1962). A protean spirit (geographer, ethnographer, philosopher of culture, educator), S. Mehedinți treated the subject matter as a component of a wider theme, that of the link between the human being and geographical environment. In his approach of the man–environment relationship, as a proof of the unity of his personality, the scholar brought into play all of the above faces of his portrait and even that of a man of letters, him being the author of a book of short stories – *People of the Mountain* / in orig. Romanian: *Oameni de la munte* (1919). As a theoretician of cultural phenomena, S. Mehedinți classified the elements of human material life as acts of “civilization” and defined them as means of adaptation to the natural, geographic environment³. The environment’s influence is detected even in the subtle – usually overlooked – aspects of behaviour, such as *the walk of a person*:

“Then⁴, let’s look at the walk of the mountain people. – When ascending the abrupt side of the mountain, a highlander leans forward and steps differently than a lowlander. The leg does not tread straight, but with the tip outwards, to give the centre of gravity a broader space. Then, the long staff is forever present, to give support both at the ascent, but more importantly at the descent. (Hence, this staff had oddly got a peculiar name: *boată* [’boatə] or *moacă* [’moakə] [untranslatable words], whence the family name Mocanu, frequent enough in Romania). Often, when the ascent is not arduous, the traveller puts the staff on his back, and the palms catch its two ends. Why? To open up the chest and allow the lungs to breathe more at leisure. – All these skills have their usefulness, required by the mountain climbing” (Mehedinți, 1938: 12–13, *emphasis in orig.*).

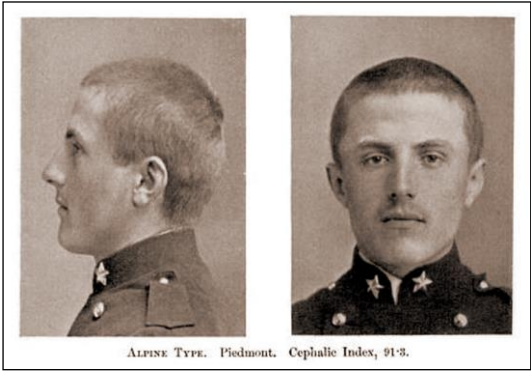
From the physical movement of the human body, we shall now pass to the appearance itself, i.e. to the build of the body from a structural, static point of view. The environment has worked upon this aspect as well, and the phenomenon did not escape the attention of physical

³ According to his own words, “by civilization we understand: the sum of all the technical discoveries that have facilitated human’s adaptation to the physical environment” (Mehedinți, 1930: 19).

⁴ In context, the word “then” creates the transition from the description of the shepherds’ *attire* to the next detail that is the description of the *walk*.

anthropologists⁵. Indeed, whoever will examine a synoptic table of *bioanthropological typology* (as standardized by the classical contributions of Egon von Eickstedt, for example), will immediately discover the existence of two types whose labels evoke mountain toponyms: *the Alpine* (or *Alpinoid*) *type* and *the Dinaric* (or *Dinarid*) *type*. Let us specify, beforehand, that the determination of bioanthropological types (or racial, without any connotation of racism in the term itself) is the result of an *ars combinatoria* that functions through the combination of six criteria, namely: stature (= height of the body), the skull cap (in short: the shape of the head seen from above – let us say, from a “bird’s eye view”), the face (its shape), the nose (its length and shape), the eyes (firstly their colour) and the hair (shape and colour). Extracted from the synoptic table we had previously referred to, the two types present themselves as follows⁶:

Type	Stature	Skull-cap	Face	Nose	Eyes	Hair
Alpine	short	brachycephalic ⁷	short	short-concave	brown	brown
Dinaric	tall	brachycephalic	long	long-aquiline	brown	brown

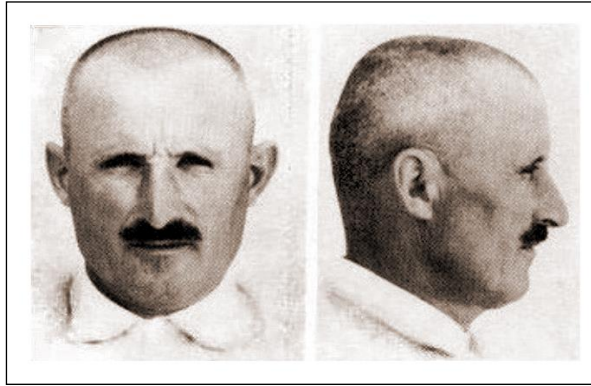


Alpine phenotype from Piedmont, Italy (Ripley, 1899).

⁵ We are using, here, the term “*physical anthropology*” as a distinctive sign as opposed to the other main branch of this vast science, a branch known as “*social anthropology*” in the United Kingdom and as “*cultural anthropology*” in the U.S.A.

⁶ The table represents the advanced version of the Romanian anthropologist Petre Râmneanțu. See its complete reproduction in: Victor Preda, *Tratat elementar de antropobiologie* [Basic Treatise on Anthropobiology], Sibiu, Editura Dacia Traiana, 1947, p. 34.

⁷ Brachycephaly characterizes a relatively round skull cap, dissimilar to dolichocephaly, which designates an oval skull cap; for instance, the Nordic type (tall, blonde, with blue eyes) is – in regards to the skull cap – dolichocephalic.



Dinaric phenotype from Greece (*Apricity...*, 2019).

A vivaciousness in bodily movement is usually associated with these types – a trait required by slope climbing, by crossing mountain rivers by foot etc. Let us also mention that both the Alpine and the Dinaric types hold a strong representation in the anthropo-physical configuration of the Romanian population.

Once proven, the influence of the mountain on the bioanthropological type invites us to understand this action much more profoundly: the mountain actually intercedes with the human condition not only as a behavioural matrix (as, for material economy, we have shortened the wording), but also as an *existential matrix*. At this point of the present text, let us not shy away from reviving a problem that had once distressed the eminent geographer Ion Conea: the origin of the name “Muntenia”. As we shall soon see, the issue forms an angle of incidence with the collective Romanian identity. What does Ion Conea advocate? –

“The Romanian people from the mountain understand by this word [«mountain» – *my note, G.G.*] only the alpine emptiness, the high pasture land which, in summertime, covers the superior crests of the immense rock construction that we, the city dwellers, encompass in its entirety – from low, from its foot, high up, to the alpine emptiness – under the name of «mountains». Whatever there is under that alpine emptiness is «woodland» or «hill» or – according to regions – «lawn field» [Rom.: *plai*]; it is, in a word, anything – but «mountain»” (Conea, 1960: 44, *emphasis in orig.*).

The argumentation goes on, enriched by a linguistic charm, typical to the author:

“And the Southern Carpathians [*Carpații Meridionali*] are by far the most «mountainous» of all the mountains of our country, namely they are by far the first in the vast expanse of their alpine pasture land.

In the Moldavian Mountains, «the emptiness», i.e. the alpine pastures, does not even occupy a twentieth part of the surface of alpine pastures of the Southern Carpathians, and from the Apuseni Mountains even less” (*ibidem*: 44–45).

From whence, summarizing, the conclusion:

“Therefore, the feudal Romanian state that, at its birth, covered by far the largest «mountainous» surface (in comparison with the states – or voivodeships – of Moldavia and Transylvania), was, hereby, the most deserving to be named Muntenia, not only by *its* people, but equally by the Romanians from the other provinces of the country (Romanians who have also, forever, understood by «mountain» whatever those from Muntenia understood)” (*ibidem*: 45, *emphasis in orig.*).

This interpretation – the mountain as a collective existential matrix – attains its plenitude within Romanian framework through the understanding of the role which was played by the *Carpathians in the genesis of the Romanians’ national consciousness*. I have elaborated the idea elsewhere⁸, but it appears also adequate *hic et nunc* to the extent that on the one hand it gains a new heuristic valence, whilst on the other, on account of the concrete case on which it rests, it reiterates its original theoretical value. The referential of this case is constituted by the fairs on the high plateaus of the Carpathians. In some areas they were called „*nedei*”, in others „*sântilii*” (from St. Elijah), and in most cases simply „*târguri*” (fairs). Beside their obvious functions – economic (of traditional market) and entertaining (especially for the youth) –, these large-scale folk gatherings have fulfilled for a long period a latent ethnical function as well. The participants came to such fairs from all the main Romanian provinces, namely: from Moldavia and Transylvania to those in the Eastern Carpathians, and from Muntenia and Transylvania to those in the Southern Carpathians; in both situations we are dealing with “fairs of two countries” („*târguri de două țări*”) (Conea, 1957: 115). In Vrancea, where the boundaries of all three principalities meet, fairs are “of three countries” (*târguri „de trei țări*”). In that area of *trium confinium*, between St. George’s and St. Nicholas’ celebrations (calendaristically: between April 23rd and December 6th) there take place, even today, no less than 15 fairs⁹! Until the middle of the 20th century, people from Neamț, from Dobrogea and Ialomița, from the Târnave area attended the fairs of Vrancea. Those people spoke the same language and upheld the same Christian feasts,

⁸ Gheorghîță Geană, “The Carpathian Folk Fairs and the Origins of National Consciousness among Romanians”, in: *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 34 (2006), no. 1, pp. 91–110.

⁹ Their list is displayed in: Gheorghîță Geană, cit. art., p. 96.

that is they made use of the same (let us say) “ethnic markers”. Prevailing since time immemorial, these fairs would have led to the formation of a “perceptual pattern”¹⁰, whose object was the Romanian folk in its hypostasis of a large human community standing for a kindred group. As equivalent to “Romanian people”, the phrase „*neamul românesc*” (where „*neamul*” means “the kindred group”) is the perfect illustration of Walker Connor’s idea that a nation is “a super-extended family” (cf. Connor, 1992; Geană, 2006: 100).

The mountain as a perceptual stimulus

Precisely by its aspect of a protruding geographical shape, the *mountain challenges the eye*. By exaggerating somewhat – rhetorically –, we might say that the mountain *itself* comes in the way of the traveller, regardless of where he might head in the terrestrial space. “Mighty before them rise up the old mountains” – „*Naintea lor se-nalță puternic vechii munți*” (*The Ghosts / Strigoii*), or even more evocatively: “While at the earth’s four corners he sees high chains of mountains” – „*Iar în patru părți a lumii vede șiruri munții mari*”¹¹ (*Satire III / Scrisoarea III*) – observed Eminescu in his romantic verses.

Not only the eye (or – leaving aside metonymy – the gaze), but, as a continuation, even the *sense of curiosity* falls within the challenging incidence of the mountain. As we have already pointed out, the mountain is the only geographical form that generated a legend (or, if it does not hold the condition of singularity, then, surely, the story of the mountain is the most spectacular).

Naturally, while stimulating curiosity, the mountain has stimulated at the same time, by extension, an aspiration: the one which will transform it into an *object of knowledge*. The question is: what kind of knowledge – scientific? poetic? artistic in general? Whichever of these ways of knowledge is based, as a primary stage, on the common sense knowledge. But, in the history of humankind, it was very late that the mountain became an object of knowledge. Since the old times, an image about the mountain as a *mysterious and inaccessible space* has been perpetuated in the collective mind. Olympus was the privileged territory of the gods, who allowed

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 101. On the occasion of that study, I amended the modernist theory (embraced indiscriminately by anthropologists, sociologists, or political experts from abroad and from Romania); historically, that theory explains the idea of national solidarity through the action of the bourgeois class of transmitting “from up, down” (from their own elitist level towards the masses) the urge to cohesion, its pragmatic goal actually being the merging of the markets and of work forces. As a matter of fact, the Romanian ethnographic reality of the Carpathian fairs – spontaneous manifestations, not planned by any elitist social category – peremptorily illustrates that the birth of the national sentiment and consciousness may preponderantly be explained by a “from-downward-upward” movement.

¹¹ In Corneliu M. Popescu’s translation.

themselves to meddle among mortals on Earth intermingling with them into all kind of adventures, without, however, earthlings being permitted, in their turn, to get close to the realm of gods. A similar ontic status in Germanic mythology had Montsalvat¹² – the mountain from the sacred region of Grail, where the lord was Percival and where, in a golden chalice, the blood trickled from Christ's crucified body was kept:

“So sacred is the blessing of the Grail,
that – once revealed – it shuns the layman's eye”
(Wagner, 1850: 65 – *my trans. in English, G.G.*),

says Lohengrin to the mortals incapable of assuming an existence under holy mystery. The same aura (with local nuances, of course) enveloped the important mountains in the lives of peoples around them: Kogaionon, Caucasus, Himalaya, Fujiyama etc. In our Carpathians, the rocky heights were traditionally considered realms of the dragons (*zmei*): in the Transylvanian villages on the Arieș valley (Sălciua, Poșaga, Ocoliș), the elders kept recounting until nowadays how, in a not too remote past, the dragons (imagined to be dwelling between the monumental cliffs that form the Bedeleu ridge) would visit the local dance (*horă*) on Sundays, blend in with the youth and kidnap a girl during the dance¹³.

This view persists in the collective imagination during the entire duration of the European Middle Ages. In the structuring of space (determined by the way in which it relates to human being), a special place is held by *the forest*. As it was revealed in a fundamental work for the understanding of the epoch, the forest represented “the physical reality of the medieval West” (le Goff, 1970: 189). The continental landscape looked like a “vast cloak of wood” strewn with glades. “For a long time, the medieval West remained a conglomerate, a juxtaposition of domains, castles and towns raised in the middle of vast and deserted places” (*ibidem*). However, the desertedness meant the woodland, an uninhabited space exterior to rural and urban settlements. Otherwise, people escaping the world found shelter in woods: hermits, wandering knights, outlaws, lovers. One of them, Tristan, freed from the hands of pirates, climbs a promontory; from there he sees a forest, from which a hunting pomp is exiting. At first, the

¹² A term with double meaning, deriving from *mons silvaticus* (afforested mountain), as well as from *mons salvationis* (the mountain of salvation) – see: Julius Evola, *Il mistero del Graal*, quinta edizione corretta, con: Saggio introduttivo di Franco Cardini, Appendice e bibliografia di Chiara Nejrótti; Roma, Edizioni Mediterranee, 2002, p. 140.

¹³ Personal field notes, G.G.

character joins the pomp, but later on addresses Isolda: “Let us return to the forest that shelters us. Come, Isolda, my love...” (*ibidem*). In short, we are in the 10th to 12th centuries, and the mountain had still not become the object of an attention stimulated by the ambition of knowledge. Situated between the mountainous area and the space populated with settlements (either urban or rural), the forest occupies the place of the *proscenium of the mountain*.

The closeness to the mountain arises in the 17th century, when, somewhat surprisingly, the British – not the French – discover the Alps. Indeed, at that time, in the educational curricula of England, the Europe tour is included for the wealthy youth as an “institutionalized ritual”, the visiting of the accessible areas of the Alps also being included in the itinerary. The cultural effects have not delayed, some of the great English poets of the day – Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley – setting off on trips in the Alps and painting in verses their beauty and magnificence (see Perrin, 2003: 103–104).

The great mountain-oriented impetus finds its ideal *time* in the 19th century, and the ideal *agent* in the romantic spirit. In our judgements, we must also take into account a fact that only at a first glance appears as a secondary or neutral element, but which in reality engages quite the destiny of the mountain as an object of knowledge. We have in view the cristalization of geography as a modern science, through the successive contribution of a series of eminent German scholars, out of which it suffices to only mention... the peaks, namely: Carl Ritter, brothers Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, Friedrich Ratzel and Adolf Bastian. They entirely cover the 19th century, if we think that Alexander v. Humboldt travels to South America (climbing even the Cordillera Andes) between the years 1799–1802, and Bastian passes away in 1905. Thus, the Great Geographical Discoveries (which had reached their highpoint in the 15th–16th centuries) marked man’s capability of taking the control over the planet not only horizontally, but also vertically!...

The most spectacular reflex of the exploration of mountain is actually produced by the *romantic spirit*, whose creative saps enter, after the impact with the mountainous landscape, into a prolific state of frenzy. Neither in the cosmos of Shakespeare’s plays, nor in the polymorph work of Goethe (who had otherwise anticipated – through the *Sturm und Drang* experience – the restlessness of Romanticism), the mountain had not found a place in accordance with its natural greatness as a form of relief: its time had not arrived; or maybe the worshippers had not arisen!?... Certainly, however, the mountain awakens a true fascination in the romantic soul. And what does it, the romantic spirit, hope to find at the meeting with the mountain? – Peace of mind, solace in the love suffering, consolation for the disappointments caused by society, in a nutshell: looking after the inner wounds induced by that *mal du siècle* that contaminated the characters in the

writings of René de Chateaubriand (*Atala* and *René*), Alfred de Musset (*La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*), Lord Byron (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Manfred*)... Byron's heroes, especially, see in the mountain the majestic sovereignty with which they feel of the same essence, but equally the environment in which they rediscover the simple joys: the murmur of a brook, the green of a meadow, the whistle of a shepherd, or (like in the following verses with a hymnic resonance, uttered by Manfred in the Alps) the pure sunlight:

“Glorious Orb! the idol
 Of early nature, and the vigorous race
 Of undiseased mankind the giant-sons
 Of the embrace of angels, with a sex
 More beautiful than they, which did draw down
 The erring spirits who can ne'er return;
 Most glorious Orb! that wert a worship, ere 180
 The mystery of thy making was reveal'd!
 Thou earliest minister of the Almighty,
 Which gladden'd, on their mountain-tops, the hearts
 Of the Chaldean shepherds, till they pour'd
 Themselves in orisons! Thou material God!
 And representative of the Unknown –
 Who chose thee for his shadow! Thou chief star!
 Centre of many stars! which mak'st our earth
 Endurable, and temperest the hues
 And hearts of all who walk within thy rays! 190
 Sire of the seasons! Monarch of the climes
 And those who dwell in them! for near or far
Our inborn spirits have a tint of thee,
Even as our outward aspects; – thou dost rise,
 And shine, and set in glory. Fare thee well!”

(Byron, 1837: 336, *my italics*, G.G.; the feeling of consubstantiality of the romantic human being with the mountain is here extended to that with the sun).

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The courage of approaching the mountain makes its echo felt (even in the sensorial sense, of a sound effect) also in the *musical domain*. The previous reluctance in the attempt of relating

to the mountain has in the musical world a double determination. On the one hand, there reigned the same general inhibition, as well, towards a realm reserved for the sacred powers. However, in addition, there intrinsically operated a difficulty of language; let us explain this. A general outlook shows us that in every domain of knowledge and creation, human has developed specialized languages. Poets, for instance (as we have already mentioned some of them), they use a *denominative language*, i.e. a language that is able to denote: objects, attributes, actions, relations; being verbal at the same time (fixed through words), the denominative language proves to be very efficient in the most subtle descriptions of the world (either real or imaginary). In a denominative language express themselves the sciences, too, in their sphere (each domain in turn) basic words being elevated to the position of concepts. Completely different (with privations, but also with privileges!) is the situation of non-verbal arts, in fact that of arts beyond literature. In order to communicate their message, they make use of a *symbolic language*; being formal at the same time (fixed through signs and expressions), the symbolic language can no longer achieve precision in description, so that the chance of these arts to attain their goal remains the ability of the particular artists to harness the specific modes of expression possessed by each of them (for example: colour in painting, the specific timbre of instruments in music etc.).

Thus, in our context, the great problem of music is raised by language. Let us take note that, along the centuries, the art of sounds has known a clear distinction between vocal and instrumental production: if the vocal pieces could still be seconded by an instrumental accompaniment, the instrumental pieces have been kept in their pristine condition, that of “absolute music”¹⁴. And, honestly speaking, who amongst the music lovers would have not always felt the need to know some details about a concerto or a symphony just before listening to the first strains of that composition?! For addressing this need, but not less for their own yearning to facilitate the adequate reception of their own works, the creators in the field invented *programme music*¹⁵. Far from being a staff of weakness, “the programme” attached to an

¹⁴ The phrase “absolute music” was introduced by Richard Wagner in 1846, in a commentary on Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*. The creative ideal of the commentator was the “musical drama” as a “total art” (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), in which the uttered word was allowed not only together with music, but also with scenography, with light show, with dance. That is why Wagner considered Beethovenian innovation as a step in “the transition from the «imprecise» (*unbestimmter*), objectless instrumental music, to objectively «precise» (*bestimmter*) vocal music”, i.e. to what he defined as “absolute music” (more details and aspects of this concept in Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*. Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1978; just quoted: p. 21).

¹⁵ Franz Liszt – who practiced himself this type of music – described “the programme” as follows: “an introduction, expressed in an intelligible language and annexed to the purely instrumental music, a foreword by which the composer intends to avoid the listeners’ whim of a poetic interpretation of his work and to attract beforehand the

instrumental composition is rather a window towards the intentions of the composer, a possibility for the listener of sharing the artist's feelings and enriching himself through them. Germs of programme music date back to antiquity, but the first composition of this sort often presented as a historical paradigm is the series of concerts *The Four Seasons*. The author, Antonio Vivaldi, composed these *concerti grossi* (with a prevailing role attributed – anticipatively! – to the solo violin) in the 18th century, illustrating some sonnets through his music. It is with an outline of programme that Beethoven will also introduce the listeners of his *Symphony No. 6*, known as the “Pastoral”, precisely due to the titles of its movements: “Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside”, “Scene by the brook”, “Merry gathering of country folk”, “Storm”, “Cheerful and thankful feelings after the storm”.

However, the programme music flourished in the middle of the 19th century through the geniuses of Romanticism – with continuation in Post-romanticism and later on. Frequently, such geniuses have produced masterpieces exactly on account of the endeavour to illustrate the magnificence of the mountain, the richness of impressions and feelings it can generate. Mainly, the deeds were carried out under the influence of some romantic poets (sovereigns over... the denominative language!)¹⁶.

A privileged place is held, in this perspective, by Berlioz, who fraternizes with the restless Byron and composes, in 1834, the symphony with a soloistic viola *Harold in Italy*. In his *Memoirs*, the composer confesses himself: “By setting the viola in the middle of the poetic memories left by my wanderings in Abruzzi, I wanted to turn this instrument into some sort of a melancholic dreamer similar to Byron's Childe Harold” (*apud* Nicolescu, 1964: 74).

Under the Byronian genius yields fruit the no less gifted talent of Tchaikovsky as well. The hero accompanied by the Russian composer in the Alps is Manfred this time, in the symphony with the hero's name. The presence of Manfred is suggested, in the key moments, by a portretistic leitmotif – grave, solemn – that crosses the entire composition, caught in varied orchestral weavings from one episode to another but recognizable, expressing painful anxieties, caused by the death of his beloved and not less by the uncertainties of knowledge (references to Faust have been made, too).

Unlike Berlioz and Tchaikovsky, Vincent d'Indy brings into his compositions, a calm

attention to the poetic idea of the whole, [or] to a point of it” (Franz Liszt, *Hektor Berlioz und seine „Harold-Symphonie”*, Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von Breitkopf und Härtel, 1881, p. 336. – Abstract from Franz Liszt, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band IV, pp. 319–405, Google.books, <http://books.google.com>).

¹⁶ The hegelian concept of *Zeitgeist*, is thus, once more, validated by “the spirit of time”, which, among others, reveals the coherence existing between the great ideas of a historical period.

(even Apollonian) note, because their author remained untouched by the contradictions of the romantic spirit. Although rarely played in concert halls, two of his creations are worth being included in any anthology on the theme here discussed. They are: *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* (*Symphony after a French Mountainous Song*, also known as *Symphonie "Cévenole"*, after the name of a mountain in Southern France which the composer had admired in his youth and where he had heard the tune that inspired this composition), and the symphonic triptych *Jour d'été à la montagne* (*Summer's Day on the Mountain*). The sonorities of d'Indy are not only pleasant through their melodiousness, but they also contain an invitation to reflection; about the second piece, the composer himself wrote:

"There are three impressions about my mountain there, or more exactly a summer day in three moments. «Aurora», a cloudless sunrise, «Day», dreaming in a pine forest, with songs, down on the road, «Evening», the return to the nest guarded by the last circles of light from the top of the pines, then... «the Night». I am still imbued with all of these, I have placed in them my entire heart of a mountain dweller"¹⁷

Hence the profound observation of a French commentator: "In a broader sense, over the three periods of the day, d'Indy evokes the three ages of life itself"¹⁸.

Examples regarding the musical reflexes of the mountain can be found plenty, but the problem concerning language still persists. There might have been understood that the representation through sound of the alpine reality (and, not only the alpine one) is dependent on programatism. Nevertheless, even so, "explained" by a minimal programme, how can one express only with any speechless instruments the form of objects (in the present context the form of a mountain, or a detail of it), or concrete impressions (soul vibrations, the enthusiasm of ideas) experienced before a peak, a waterfall, a rainbow? The question inevitably occurs, pushed into forum by the double-conditioned need we have discerned beforehand; here and now, the need is specified as the composer's aspiration towards performance (the more his musical phrase – written and interpreted – is suggestive, the more the performance achieved is closer to the ideal); on the part of the receiver, the aforementioned need reiterates as a desire to unravel as adequately as possible (and, undoubtedly, with the most agreeable resonance) the message s/he is delivered by sonorous means. From this problematic turmoil, a principle is revealed, namely that: *the description constitutes the first step of artistic communication*. Once this principle is assimilated,

¹⁷ Marc Vignal (no title), in the presentation booklet of the CD: D'Indy, *Jour d'été à la montagne & Symphonie „Cévenole"*, Paris, Apex, 1991.

¹⁸ Jean Gallois, *ibidem*.

the first step towards understanding is the discovery of the *descriptive solutions* proposed by Beethoven, Berlioz, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Wagner and other composers of whose creations we are getting closer. Let us take a moment to analyse, for example, the orchestral prelude to Wagner's *Lohengrin*. The musical discourse is meant, here, to describe the land of the Grail. Firstly, one can hear the violins – in the most acute register, in pianissimo, suggesting the absolute, sacred purity of the Divine Kingdom. The leitmotif of the Grail is then amplified by the entrance, in turns, of the other groups of instruments: the blowers, violins and cellos, the horns, followed by the trumpets and trombones. The acoustic intensity increases until paroxysm, emanating heroism and almightiness, and finally decreases again and returns to the initial gradation. Or, another example: at first intonation, the leitmotif of Manfred is instrumented by Tchaikovsky by means of blowers, made to sound amply, in grave register – the hero undergoes dramatic moments, but appears solemn and powerful. And still another example, from the many possible: in *Harold in Italy*, Berlioz achieves a rare performance: he manages to suggest “The March of the Pilgrims Singing Their Evening Prayer” (the *Symphony*'s 2nd part) without bringing on scene in any way (not even in the score, obviously) the human voice, but only by the play of the groups of instruments, including the participation of the viola¹⁹.

After discovering the descriptive solutions, the *evaluation of adequacy* follows. In a way, it is the same as establishing the *truth* of musical representation. In the classical sense, (from Aristotle via Thomas Aquinas, with application to scientific knowledge), the truth means *adaequatio rei et intellectus*; by transposition, the truth of musical representation is found in the formula: *adaequatio rei et sonoris* (adequacy between object and sound). From here on only *aesthetic emotion* can be comfortably and durably settled in our souls (it being clearly conditioned by other factors, too, such as melodiousness, organisation of the sound material, content of ideas, etc.).

In appearance excessively speculative, the considerations above exposed are meant to

¹⁹ In one of his famous didactic lectures, Leonard Bernstein stated the theme of the first part of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* (the *Sixth* one) – “Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the country” –, then he sang the theme, after which he set forth the following commentary: “It certainly does sound happy, cheerful, pretty. But these feelings could be happy for any other reason too. Supposing Beethoven had written in the score, «Happy feelings because my uncle left me a million dollars» – he could still have composed this happy music, and it could be just as good, just as happy” (Bernstein, 2005: 2); and let us add that this is not the singular example of such kind invoked by the famous conductor. There is a grain of truth in this relativizing conception, but insufficiently mastered it leads to confusion. As a matter of fact, the relativity of the descriptive significance of a “musical programme”, as fixed by the composer, opens also for the listener the chance to “contribute”, with his own interpretive imagination, to the content of a particular composition.

facilitate the understanding of the aesthetic message invested by a composer in his creation. In any given circumstances, they prove to be necessary for a clear understanding of the musical reflexes of mountain. It has been said, for instance, about *An Alpine Symphony* by Richard Strauss, that it is a “musical reportage” (Krause, 1969: 257), deprived of any aesthetic message. Moreover, it was said: “In his attempt to «reveal» nature as exactly as possible, [the composer] descended to naturalism, and in the sound scenography of the Alps one can feel too much the «model»” (*ibidem*). In counterpoint (!) to such a comment – and taking as landmark the speculative digressions of before regarding the representability of the musical phrases –, we will reply simply by stating: however, a successful description of a landscape in sounds is a performance in itself!

*

It would be worth bringing into discussion, at this point, the reflexes of the mountain in *the fine arts* as well. Nevertheless, when you first dive into the field with the obsession of this idea, the first reaction is surprising: masterpieces are more difficult to find here²⁰. Of course, the mountain is not a proper object to be represented in sculpture. How about in painting? In painting, the inopportunity seems neutralized... And yet, let us consider the specific habitude in this field. As a rule, while creating, the painter feels the need to have the object of his attention before his eyes. The painter works according to a model and, when painting, the artist wants the model to be permanently at his disposal. That is why, painting has been for a long time an art of studio. Moreover, when it was taken out into nature, it so happened that it was into a zone of plain. We are talking about landscape painting in the open air, or the art of “*plein-air*”, hence the denomination “*pleinairism*”. The trend flourished in the middle of the 19th century, under the denomination of the School of Barbizon – a village next to the Fontainebleau Forest, near Paris²¹.

A notable exception is Paul Cezanne, but one that reinforces the rule. Among the innovations Cezanne introduced by his style of painting is the perception of the object from afar. As noted (Elsen, 1983: 105 and the next), painting after nature (as much as it was practiced)

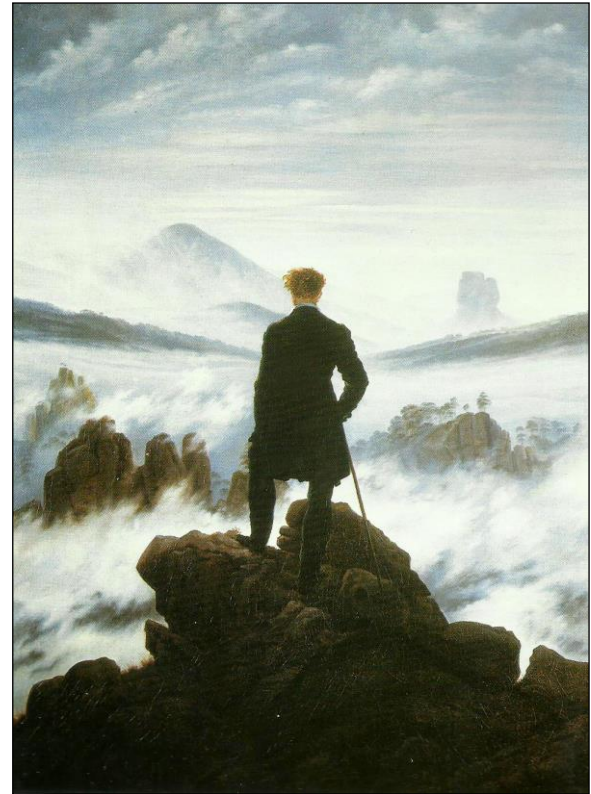
²⁰ This statement looks at the depiction of the mountain as a *primary motif*; otherwise, as a *secondary element*, the mountain is not missing from the paintings of famous landscapers, or from the painted representations on religious themes (starting with the scrawls and drawings that accompany the archaic religious imaginary until the works on biblical subjects of famous painters).

²¹ Let us not forget that in that beautiful blessed place two great Romanian artists enjoyed from doing their apprenticeship: Nicolae Grigorescu and Ion Andreescu.

requires that nature be closely observed. This is possible when the targeted object is a landscape with flowers, a group of trees, a lake, or a river. But how can one paint a mountain up close? Cezanne, who took the mountain for his favourite theme, intuited the unusual state of things and painted the mountain from afar, from the necessary distance that allowed him to perceive its physical dimensions in full (see his famous painting *Mont Sainte-Victoire*).

But the painter who depicted the mountain more than in its objective dimensions was Caspar David Friedrich. This artist felt a profound – close to mysticism (and therefore transfiguring) – attraction towards the mountain. Although born and raised in Pomerania (a plain area at the Baltic Sea), he soon discovered the mountains, which – as a consequence – he sought as milieu of habitation, near Dresden, in 1813, when Napoleon conquered the town.

He also painted plains, marine sequences, or domestic scenes, but the themes in which he invested his reflexive – metaphysical and religious – vocation were those related to fog, clouds, and mountains: *Morning Mist in the Mountains*, *Morning in the Giant Mountains*, *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen*, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, a.s.o. Friedrich plants crosses and crucifixes on the height thus marking the sacrality of the mountain. In *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, a man arrived at the peak of the mountain, standing there with his back turned to the viewer, is looking at the sea of clouds beneath him: a white, agitated sea from which some other crags show themselves, and another mountain at the horizon (but with a quiet peak). One observation: the man's silhouette looks identical to that of... Martin Heidegger! – a coincidence, maybe, but one that cannot be explained by the natural causality! In this painting of Friedrich (and not only in this one) the mountain is more than mere background or decor: it is a vanquished difficulty, a pedestal for the affirmation of human majesty, perhaps even a limit surpassed by the powerful man.



Caspar David Friedrich:
Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog,
1818, Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

Be it with this painting alone (but we have seen that there is not just this one), Caspar David Friedrich saves the honour of the painters towards the greatness and mystery of the mountain.

The mountain – some metasymbolistic considerations

The symbolism of the mountain – *c'est la mer à boire*; how to write about it only in a few words? Especially, having in view that some of the symbolic aspects having as reference the mountain (sacred space, *axis mundi*, etc.) so much has been glossed about (orally and in writing), that they have become common places. Let us better try some *metasymbolistic considerations*.

In general, the symbols concerning an object are based on its *characteristics*. For example, the symbolism of the sea evokes depth, the indefinite horizon, the relentless movement of the waves, the colour of the water, aquatic deities etc.; the plains suggests horizontality, the boundless horizon, the seal of draw wells with shadoof, the crop fields, iridescence of air...

With the mountain, the characteristics that stand out are: the grandeur, height, verticality, solidity (decomposable in strength and perennality), firmness, difficult accessibility (= not inaccessibility as such), singularity, purity, mystery... And sacredness? This is a characteristic that derives from the others – be it together or in partial combinations (according to the context). Some of these characteristics have become parts in *paremiologic formulae*:

- “Human with human kisses anyway, but mountain to mountain «good by» doesn’t say”.
 - “The mountain and river are good neighbours”.
 - “The mountain does not fear snow”.
 - “If Mohamad does not come to the mountain, the mountain goes to Mohamad”...
- ... or in *stylistic phrases*:
- “where mountains knock their heads”;
 - “within the brains of the mountains” / “within the heart of the mountain”;
 - “a mountain of money” (“...of gold”, “...of stupidity”);
 - “as big as a mountain”; with the variant:
 - “a human like a mountain” etc.

The last stylistic phrase (“a human like a mountain”) is the result of a phenomenon similar to that of anthropomorphism. Through anthropomorphism, some human features and traits are transferred to some objects, plants, animals, or gods. (An appropriate example in the present discussion is the investiture of the mountains with the role of priests, in the nuptial ritual in

Miorița [The Ewe Lamb]: “Priests – mountains high, / Birds – fiddlers”). In the case of the phrase “a human like a mountain” we deal with a reverse phenomenon (should we call it “mountainomorphism”?), through which the physical grandeur of the mountain is used to characterize a person having a bodily constitution that transgresses standard norms. There exists in Romanian culture a particular case in which the phrase “a human like a mountain” was applied still more exactly to a public figure after the mountain had received a particular name! – for example, Mihail Sadoveanu (1880–1961) was called “the Ceahlău of Romanian literature”. It should be mentioned that – with its 1907 m – the Ceahlău [Tcheah’ləu] is not the highest mountain in Romania, but, thanks to its popularity among the writers and scholars, it became the most spectacular.

A similar case seems very attractive from France. This time, the target of comparison is explicitly genius. “A mountain, a genius – strong magnificence! These massifs give off a sort of religious intimidation. Dante is no less a peak than Etna. Shakespeare’s abysms are as valuable as the chasms of Chimborazo”. The author of these words is Victor Hugo, who continues the comparison: “Nothing more tender and more distinguished. So are the poets, so are the Alps, too”²² (Hugo, *apud* Chenêt-Faugeras, 2000: 117–118)²³. The French poet evaluates his own novel *Les Misérables* as follows: “This book is a mountain; it can only be measured and well perceived from a distance” (*ibidem*: 119).

But why are the poets like mountains? Because they – the poets – are (according to Rilke’s metaphorical phrase) “exposed on the mountains of the heart” („*ausgesetzt auf den Bergen des Herzens*”); and on the mountains of sensibility, “something is well blooming here” („*Hier blüht wohl einiges auf*”) – that “something” being Poetry²⁴.

The modern epoch has brought an augmentation of complexity in the symbolic valuation of the mountain. In *The Magic Mountain* [*Der Zauberberg*] – a novel whose difficult reading resembles a climb on a steep mountain –, Thomas Mann configured the modern paradigm of alpine symbolism. Without completely losing its sacred dimension, the mountain that hosts the sanatorium in Davos is no longer a place of illumination, but a parable of initiation into the paradoxes of human existence. Arrived with the intention of loitering for a few days, Hans Castorp stays there for seven years – witness of his own illness (that he had not suspected before), of knowledge, love, elapsing time, genius, music, life and death, Paradise and Hell; Clavdia – a

²² In orig.: „Rien de plus tendre et de plus exquis. Tels sont les poètes; telles sont les Alpes”.

²³ Both quotations are from Victor Hugo’s essay, *William Shakespeare*. Chimborazo is a mountain from the Ecuadorian Andes.

²⁴ The quotations are from Rilke (2006).

depiction (even if a vague one) of Dante's Beatrice – teaches Hans that the road to Paradise goes through Hell. The sanatorium is located “up high” – as the modern civilized world itself, but what a depressing paradox: the world nestled there is itself a sick society!...

Instead of conclusions

...Therefore, a generalized *mal du siècle*. How far we are from the Romanticism of Byron, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky!... Where should the human being retire to yearn for freedom, quietness, and purity?

Our endeavour reveals that the relation of human to the mountain followed a certain path. In *logical – natural – order*, this path appears marked (quite clearly) by three moments: behavioural (ultimately existential) matrix, perceptual stimulus, and symbolic sublimation. In *historical order*, nonetheless, the three moments did not follow the due course exactly; well before being conquered and taken over as a physical reality (by climbers, tourists, cyclists)²⁵, the mountain was *embraced* in (and for) spirit: the process of its sacralization, tropologization, and symbolization does not know a chronological beginning.

Now, the *Zauberberg* case calls for our reflection towards the future. The mountain has been sought for by heroes and has generated heroes. “The great conquerors, dismounters [*descălecătorii*, as the first occupiers], country founders – all of them come from the mountains”, Dan Botta noted. Today, when they have become easily accessible, the mountains are pierced by tunnels, rummaged through mine galleries, exposed to pollution and radiation, abandoned in the favour of a more comfortable lifestyle in the urban environment at their foot. In such circumstances, how many of the millenary symbols and functions of the mountain will not be eroded? What is the human destiny of the mountain? We cannot provide an exact answer. However, we can still entertain a hope, namely: that the mountain will remain, by its uprightness, a finger of appeal to Transcendence!...

²⁵ A few definite data: the highest peak in the Alps, Mont Blanc, was reached in 1786, Aconcagua (in the Andes) in 1897, and the Himalayan Everest in 1953.



Invocation to Transcendence – Caspar David Friedrich:
Dawning over the Waves of Mountains,
1810-1811, Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten, Berlin
(to be observed a feminine silhouette helping a man to reach the base of the cross).

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