

The Attraction to Endlessness

Laura MAFTEI

Universitatea Adventus din Cernica, Facultatea de Teologie și Științe Sociale
The Adventus University of Cernica, The Faculty of Theology and Social Sciences
Personal e-mail: lauramaftei2002@yahoo.com

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The human mind is made to desire the ending of every started action. In certain circumstances, as long as it doesn't know the ending and neither the moment of the ending, it becomes restless and curious, prisoner of the time between the beginning and the end of an action. From the psychological view, the triggered and unfulfilled desire represents the basis of the so-called Zeigarnik effect, which was well studied in psychology and used in advertising. Sometimes an action that was initiated but impossible to finish causes an anxious effect for the human mind, as it is illustrated by the torments captured by the Ancients in the image of the Danaides's barrel or the Sisyphus's huge stone that must roll up a hill. Other times, the art to postpone the end means to preserve life, such is the case of the Scheherazade who tells never-ending stories to the king in order to offer him suspense and to keep her alive for one more night and so on. Music and sculpture also capture something about the idea of endlessness through the infinite melody and the Endless Column.

Keywords: Scheherazade, desire's stress, advertising, Zeigarnik effect, Sisyphus, infinite melody, Endless Column.



“And Shahrazad perceived the dawn of day and ceased to say her permitted say. “Tomorrow night I shall tell something even stranger and more wonderful than this.”
(*The Thousand and One Nights*)

Introduction

The human life is built upon the events that are processes, meaning a set of operations, feelings, phenomena by which something is carried out. Life itself entails evolution, dynamics, development, action, therefore a development in progress with a beginning and an ending. The human mind is made to desire the completion of every started action in order to feel fulfilment. *Finish what you start. The Art of Following Through, Taking Action, Executing, Self-Discipline*, as Peter Hollins (2018) says in the title of one of his recent books. The incompleteness causes to the human being a disturbing effect of frustration mixed

with searching, curiosity, desire to carry things out. Otherwise a continuous waiting mood is setting in, together with a feeling of unfulfillment, incompleteness, a lack of something. This article captures several artistic highlights that approach this illustration of a started action yet not completed, or of a process that is impossible to finish: Scheherazade's stories with delayed ending, the effect of the unfinished tasks used in advertising, the innovation of the composer Richard Wagner called the “infinite melody”, mythological images that illustrate the unfinished process, as well as the representation of longing for the infinite in a finite matter.

Endless Story: Scheherazade and the Endlessness that Preserves Life

The story of the *Thousand and One Nights*, whose title Jorge Luis Borges said that is one of the most



beautiful titles in the world (Borges 2008), is one of the most relevant sources that metaphorically explain the story's saviour role in a man's life. The book has 12 volumes filled with frame stories, story within a story, which young Scheherazade tells to the king Shahryar to delay her beheading. It is a famous book that moved human souls in the entire world and across different periods of history: its narrative techniques were often imitated, its stories were adapted and retold, music was composed based on Scheherazade's history and the cinematography also fully benefited from these legends (Ouyang 2003). From the literary history perspective, these form part of the fictional literature of the Persian-Arabic tradition, that initially belonged to the oral literature and were collected from different sources, being stories meant to entertain and moralise at the same time. Richard van Leeuwen (2007) said that *The Thousand and One Nights* (or *Arabian Nights*) gives the impression of some hidden powers conferred by "the apparent endlessness of the cycle and its explicit function as a force of transformation"; the drawing power of these stories brings a certain transformation through storytelling both to the king-character and the reader. "This work, laborious as it may appear, has been to me a labour of love, an unfailing source of solace and satisfaction", said in 1885 Richard F. Burton, one of the most famous editors of the stories that form the *Arabian Nights* (*The Book of Thousand and One Nights*, 1970).

The setting story, the exterior story, seems simple. King Shahryar discovers that his wife is cheating on him with a slave, shortly after finding out that his brother went through the same situation. Soon he begins to believe that all women are the same and by the power he possesses he orders to bring all the virgins of the Kingdom, one by one, for one night. At the end of that night each young woman is beheaded, the following night doing the same with the next woman and so on. The king ends up with an excessively marked life due to the depravity of his unfaithful wife. Based on revenge, the only woman in his life, his wife, is replaced by the numerous virgins that come each night in front of him.

The number of the virgins from the Kingdom comes to an end, and the king's vizier, that had the task to bring the women to the royal court, becomes desperate. Then, Scheherazade, one of the vizier's two daughters, suggests to be the next young woman to meet the king Shahryar.

Scheherazade willingly enters into the palace with an apparent recklessness of a self-slaughter. She must have a strategy to end the king's ravage, otherwise she becomes one more seduced and killed virgin after the first night. Will she know an authentic art of seduction that is more elaborated than the other girls before her? Will she know how to properly meet the king's requirements, that seems so insatiable in his thirst

for vengeance? It seems that she knows and she saves herself through the story (Camacho&Pérez 2018).

But when it was midnight Shahrázád awoke and signalled to her sister Duniyázád who sat up and said, "Allah upon thee, O my sister, recite to us some new story, delightful and delectable wherewith to while away the waking hours of our latter night." "With joy and goodly glee," answered Shahrázád, "if this pious and auspicious King permit me." "Tell on," quoth the King who chanced to be sleepless and restless and therefore was pleased with the prospect of hearing her story. (*The Book of Thousand and One Nights*).

Scheherazade, an educated and trained young woman, begins to tell amazing and captivating stories to the king. By storytelling she creates the opportunity to built her own life story: with each story she told one more day was added to her life. The king listened stories only by night. During the day he was occupied with royal issues and actions. The story becomes an ally for her since Shahryar begins to desire more and more stories. Silence would mean death, but she is not only a storyteller woman but a woman who tells stories **that never end, never-ending stories**.

Scheherazade manages to set the King free from his unfortunate life, as he perceived it since his wife cheated on him with a slave, and introduces him to other dimensions. For the body, the existence is possible only within the present space-time borders, but the spirit knows multiple possibilities of development. So, the young woman presents stories, lives, unfortunate experiences to the king, other than his own but similar to those. Thus she introduces him to her fictional world based upon the good/bad polarity (Nayebpour 2017). Free from his obsession, his mind begins to focus more and more on other frameworks and events, and no longer feels the drama with the same intensity. The stories told by the young woman have some sort of kindness that art provides to the human spirit, because art, generally, tames the cruelty and atrocity of the human existence and creates a fictional and illusory world (Lăzăroiu 2017), where the king is brought by night. "People need stories more than bread itself. Stories tell us how to live and why." (*Arabian Nights*). (In the play *The Secret of Shahrázád* (1952), inspired from the *Arabian Nights*, the Egyptian writer Ali Ahmad Bakathir (1908-1969) illustrates Scheherazade as a light into the psychological darkness of Shahryar: she "attracts the king to a vast human horizon. She reeducates him and he is able to see the other objectively (...). The imagination is mixed with reality in which Shahrázád resorts to art to save Shahryar from his complex that pushes him to commit a daily crime. The art also saves her from death that

lurks her after her wedding night.” (Rashed 2019).

Moreover, the content of the girl’s stories is not fortuitous. Besides rescuing her own life, Scheherazade is meant to heal the king’s trauma: by her stories, which are not random, she presents relevant situations for the king’s actions and behaviour, “she builds up a world of crime and revenge that is suitable for her patient” and “in this way, Scheherazade indirectly draws a parallel between the fictional situation of the tale and the real one she is situated in” (Nayebpour 2017). The civilization of the *Arabian Nights* is patriarchal; the king is misogynistic and has all the power, the mentality of those times and places used to believe that the woman was a destructive force. Scheherazade restores the balance in the king’s life, being “the force of recovery, procreation and stability” (Van Leeuwen 2007). Telling the stories and the fact that she gives birth to three sons of the king are both acts of creation (Camacho & Pérez 2018). Van Leeuwen (2007) resumes the psychoanalytical interpretations of the history regarding the *Arabian Nights* and considers that the girl breaks that fatal cycle of sexuality and death, initiated by the king: “She gives him examples of virtuous women and slowly cures him of his childhood trauma and psychosis. Storytelling is a therapy, a verbal weapon against Shahriyar’s violent aberration.” (Van Leeuwen 2007). The young woman managed to shift the king’s attention from his carnal desires to a higher type of pleasure, the one of the spirit. During those three years of storytelling by night, Scheherazade gives birth to three sons of the king. At the end of the one thousand and one nights, the king is healed and the women from the Empire are safe, meanwhile Scheherazade becomes the king’s wife, after he convinced himself that the young woman is noble, pure and wise.

This is basically the plot. But we are interested not necessarily in the fact that the young woman is telling stories, neither in the type of the stories, but in a certain strategy to tell stories: she never tells the ending of a story in the same night, keeping it for the following night. She knows that if the story ends, the anaesthetic effect disappears together with its ending. Once the addiction is created it is necessary only to preserve it. Arousing the desire but not fulfilling it ensures the interest’s continuity, because “our cognitive system is constantly challenged to keep track of those intentions so that we do what we intend to do, and we do not do what we have already done” (see below) (Bug&Streeper 2019). Thousand and One Nights are connotatively equivalent to the infinite. The attraction must be constant and eternal, or nothing.

Shahryar can’t get enough of beheading each virgin, night after night, and his action simply seems endless. His desires are definitely insatiable, never-ending, as a consequence of the frustration and anger felt due to his wife’s action. Nevertheless, upon this endlessness is also



Anton Pieck (1895-1987),
1001 Arabian Nights

based Scheherazade’s technique: as much as the king can’t get enough of killing each virgin, as many desires the king has for listening one more story: just like **one addiction is replaced by another one**. Scheherazade keeps using the mechanism but changes the functional elements: physical rapture (provided by the unfortunate virgins) is substituted by the cognitive ecstasy (offered by the story). But since each virgin completely revealed herself in one single night providing the end of the ecstasy, the story must never be finished in the same night. Here we actually find the core of Scheherazade’s strategy. She “breaks” the story before its ending and, therefore, before the king’s decision to behead her: “And Shahrazad perceived the dawn of day and ceased to say her permitted say”. Her technique seems to be playing with time by diluting it (Bouali 2015):

Similar to the poets and diviners who are under the influence of *Mnemosyne*, Shahrazad has the absolute control over temporality. This is what Italo Calvino (2016) calls the capture of time: “knowing how to join one story to another, breaking off at just the right moment—two ways of manipulating the continuity and discontinuity of time” (p. 45). The magic Shahrazad’s memory performs is nonetheless constrained to time. (Werneck 2017).



The rotation day-night is essential in this case. The end of the night must never coincide with the end of the story. Each day light, meaning the period between the dawn and the nightfall entails the waiting of the story's ending: the king wants to know what happens in the story, thereby **he still desires** Scheherazade and this means her survival. Not wanting her anymore would bring her death. In this way, Scheherazade, through this constant delay of her stories' ending, brings a **syncopated and disharmonic rhythm** in relation to the king's desires, which both disrupts and excites him until the impossibility to act, to take a decision to the detriment of the girl (beheading her). Waiting for the story replaces the decisive action (her murder). The fulfilment of the king's desire is postponed. The art to **suspend** the storytelling results in the story's **state of suspense** and preserves the interest for the story. Going in tandem, in synchrony, reaches at a certain point the routine, monotony and the ending. The syncope and the unpredictability maintain the interest and delay the ending.

It is obvious that the syncope, the state of suspense and the delay are common strategies in the development of the feuilletons or the television series. In the case of the *Arabian Nights* they arise both in the content and in the form of a literary work. The construction's narrative strategies of the *Arabian Nights* are also relevant for the subject under discussion. At the level of the narrative structure, the rotation between the frame-story and the inserted stories requires a constant interruption of the narrative line. Richard van Leeuwen (2007) states that "interruption is used as a strategic narrative device, breaking up the continuum of the narrative, providing it with rhythm and movement, inserting transitions, perspectives, intervals, contradictions, connections, boundaries, pauses, etc."

To disclose this truth, reality has to be unravelled in a series of abstract representations, because reality is complex and there is always something hidden under the surfaces. Narratives consist of strategies to explore the relationship between beginnings and endings, postponing the reward of knowing the plot to the very last moment. Readers are misled, side-tracked, guided through labyrinths of related and unrelated meanings, to be taught all the various aspects of the relationship between beginning and end. The dénouement finally puts all the elements in their proper place. It is the deviation that is the purpose of narrative strategies, slowly disclosing not one meaning, but a whole range of meanings, which form a pattern that can only be discerned when the last component is added. (Van Leeuwen 2007).

Scheherazade captivates the king's attention by narrating successive events. Her storytelling recounts interconnected events without including any additional details, descriptions, or commentary about them. As a result of the things she has read or her

reading experience, Scheherazade is able to construct a persuasive narrative hook which transports the king into the storyworld to such an extent that he forgets the main point of their meeting. In this way, the opening tale acts as powerful magic by capturing the king's attention and persuading him to continue listening to the narrated events. This mostly happens through the narrative discourse or, more specifically through the arrangement of the plot structure. (Nayebpour 2017).

The Unfinished Task or the Outstanding Order: The Memory's Unforgettable Endlessness

Scheherazade's technique, from this story of the beginning of the Middle Ages, captures everything that in 1927 is confirmed by a Russian psychologist researches, Bluma Zeigarnik. Starting from the answer she received from a waiter, when she was a student, ("I remember every order...until I deliver it", Dobelli 2014: 297), Zeigarnik began several researches showing that an activity that was interrupted before reaching its ending kept the attention and interest of a person, preserving it in their active memory, unlike the finished action, case in which the brain eliminated and deposited it deep within the memory: „Strong needs, impatience to gratify them, a child-like and natural approach – the more there is of these, the more will unfinished tasks enjoy in memory a special advantage over those which have been completed” (Zeigarnik 1927); therefore we cannot easily forget and detach ourselves from the unfinished issues because they insist, in our subconscious, to pay them attention (Marsh, Hicks & Bink 1998; Dobelli 2014: 298). Zeigarnik used to believe that in order to delete a process from our mind this must be finished (but further researches show, nevertheless, that a well disciplined mind can eliminate the terror of an unfinished task) (Dobelli 2014: 298).

Nowadays, the impact of a started and unfinished action upon the man is researched, for example, in relation to the customers' behaviour from the current society (Liu 2008), where it was observed a strong correlation between the Zeigarnik effect and the customers' attention; according to these studies, advertising uses very much the Zeigarnik effect in their attempt to determine the buyers to purchase a certain product, or another one, based upon the fact that there is a certain stress regarding the result of an action or of an event and that the started situations (or the aroused desires) require an ending, and they become hard to forget for the human mind. The customers are tempted with different advertisements every day of their lives, and the advertising agents try to create notices or advertisements (meaning *stories* just like Scheherazade) that not only temporary draw the attention of the

consumer but also remain stuck in their memory in order to remember them later on. An advertisement that the consumer memorizes and remembers is the first step to repeatedly make a purchase (Hammadi and Qureishi 2013).

Endless Action: the Bottomless Pit, the Never-Ending Climbing or the Endlessness as an Excruciating Incompleteness

The frustration of the incompleteness still remains a frustration, and even a frightening one¹. In the Greek mythology there are certain allegorical images that suggest the torment of the human being for not reaching the end of a process: The Danaides' barrel and Sisyphus's myth are two of them. To the ancient Greeks, the Danaides were the 50 daughters of Danaos king who all, except for one, during the wedding night murdered their predestined husbands, meaning the 50 sons of Danaos's brother, king of Aegyptos. The Danaides were sentenced to pour the water of the Styx river into Inferno, which they had to spill in a bottomless barrel (Graves 2018; Jouan 1998).

The second image is the one of Sisyphus, also a victim of a torment; he was sentenced by the Gods to roll a huge stone up a hill. Once the stone arrived on the peak of the hill, under its own weight, it descended on the other side and arrived again at the basis. Sisyphus performed this action endlessly (Graves 2018). In his case, we refer to an internal stress (Henry 1892). He became a mythic hero of the existentialism, that saw in himself the symbol of the outraged man but who is

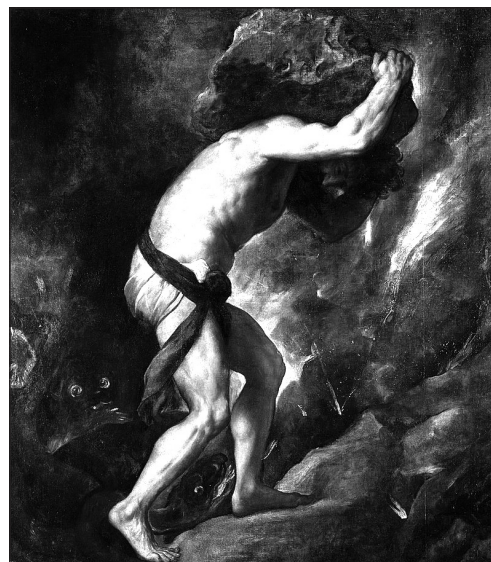


John William Waterhouse (1849-1917), *The Danaides*

liberated from the power of destiny (Slochowier 1948).

Sisyphus's mythical story illustrates the man who lives in a meaningless, absurd world but who becomes conqueror by living (the survival and not suicide) in this irrational world. He is aware of the fact that there is no external meaning outside himself, but by accepting the absurd and keeping on living he builds a meaning. He finds peace with his condition and no longer seeks for a meaning outside himself, according to the interpretations (Verhoef 2014). But the most famous image of Sisyphus punishment, beyond all interpretations, remains the one of a meaningless never-ending action, while Sisyphus becomes the symbol of **unfulfillment**, of an unfinished process, that could never speak the Ecclesiastes' words: "The end of a thing is better than its beginning." (Ecclesiastes 7: 8).

Penelope's shroud is another mythological



Tiziano Vecellio (1488 - 1576): *Sisyphus*

illustration of the ancient Greeks, built upon this idea of the unfinished action. Among all the mythological images on the endlessness, this is more similar to Scheherazade's history. Homer's *Odyssey* tells the story of how Penelope weaves a shroud by day, waiting for Ulysses (for twenty years), and she unravels the piece by night, for three years, so that she delayed the wedding moment, to remarry one of the dozens of suitors that party in the courtyard of the Ithaca palace (Homer, *Odyssey*, XIX.136-158).

Unravelling the shroud by night leads to the unfinished piece and is equivalent to Sisyphus rolling piece and is equivalent to Sisyphus rolling stone from the other side of the hill. The action is retaken but, again, annulled and not finished. An ending cannot be reached because the ending is not wanted: this would mean an event that Penelope is trying to avoid as long as possible, just like Scheherazade. Here,



the endlessness (of the shroud) becomes frustrating for her suitors.

We can find this terror of unfinished tasks also in the biblical symbolism of the Apocalypse, where the number 666 is emphasized (it is also considered the number of the beast and associated with the Antichrist, see The Bible, Book of Revelation 13:18), which, based on the scriptural interpretation would mean the *absolute incompleteness*, or the *imperfection's completeness* (of unfulfillment): 6 is the number that suggests the flaw (contrary to 7, symbol of perfection), and three times six would imply the definite confirmation of imperfection.

The Endless Melody: Never-Ending Musical Notes

The German composer Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883) is one of the famous representatives of the musical romance. In his compositions we can observe the first elements of the classical dissolution of the music's tonal organization, and these form, later on, the basis of the atonality at the composers that shall be inspired by Wagner, and especially at music creators of the XX century, a music where the atonality meets an unique magnitude. Atonality in music means the lack of a tonal center, which leads to ambiguous chords, random harmonic inflections and unusual rhythmic and melodic inflections (<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atonalitate>). The contemporary music is mainly based upon an atonal structure².

The period when Wagner lived is known for great political and social turbulences, both in Germany and in the rest of Europe. The composer, who is known as a complex and strongly preoccupied artistic character, was drawn as a young man to different ideological currents such as the utopian socialism or anarchism, and then took Schopenhauer as an inspiration for his philosophical and artistic ideas, which were captured in several musical sequences in his *Tetralogy* and especially in *Tristan and Isolde* (cpciasi.wordpress.com). Later on he meets young Nietzsche and a famous friendship emerges between them, who initially becomes a Wagnerian enthusiast (the Wagnerian current was already created in Europe, together with the Antiwagnerian current); but, eventually, Nietzsche will turn against Wagner stating that Wagner's music suggests the decadence of the German spirit and it is harmful (Nietzsche 1983; dos Santos 2014).

Richard Wagner invented two musical elements: the recurring musical theme, *Leitmotiv*, and the infinite melody, *unendliche Melodie*; Nietzsche will object to them and also to many other pretexts in order to castigate the music of the one that used to be his venerated friend. In his essay, *Wagner's Case. Nietzsche against Wagner*, the German philosopher states that his

compatriot's music is a decadent and hypnotic art (dos Santos 2014), and J. Hamilton emphasizes at the end of the XIX century that Wagner was the most responsible for the harmful effects of music (Hamilton 2008: 204). In our study we focus on the infinite melody.

This concept of infinite melody (for example in *Tristan and Isolde* opera) creates the idea of endless time, state of suspension or transcendence of time, while the listener is waiting for an ending: these are signs of the following atonal music that creates a disoriented state of mind mixed with disappointment and sometimes despair through the constant migration towards another tonal center, avoiding, as much as possible, to reach it; we refer to "the persistent evasion of full cadences by means of deceptive resolutions, or other types of harmonic interruption or elision" (Grey 1995:252). The listener's feeling is of frustration due to the permanently repetitive and unfitting sequence that does not reach any finality. John T. Hamilton, in *Music, madness and the unworking of language*, says that: "Wagner's endless melody (...) plunges the listener into an **oceanic continuity** that, according to Poizat, «tends to corrode or erode the signifying scansion of language». The result is **maddening**." (Hamilton 2008) (emphasis added). Could it be a Zeigarnik effect? Some fragments of his compositions are built upon the "half-recited songs...which never stay for measures in the same key but, with infinitive evasiveness, continue from one deceptive cadence to the next until the ear, exhausted and resigned to its fate, lets them go where they will" (Hanslick 1858, *apud* Grey 1995); consequently, the result is "a music without any «skeletal» framework". Furthermore, also Grey (1995) quotes Hanslick (1858), commentator of Wagner's music, who clearly summarizes the effects of the infinite melody starting from the structure of the musical elements:

The «infinite melody» is the dominant, musically undermining power in *Die Meistersinger*, as in *Tristan und Isolde*. A small motive begin, and before it can develop into an actual melody or theme, it gets twisted, pinched, set higher or lower by continual modulation and enharmonization, enlarged and reduced, repeated or echoed, now by this instrument, now by another. **Anxiously** omitting every **conclusive** cadence, this boneless tonal mollusk floats on toward the **immeasurable**, renewing itself from its own substance. (Hanslick 1858, *apud* Grey 1995: 244) (emphasis added).

For its part, Igor Stravinsky, in his *Poetics of Music*, denounces this musical element stating that: "It is the perpetual becoming of a music that has no more motive to begin than it has a reason to conclude. Infinite melody thus appears as an outrage to the dignity and

even the function of melody, which is, as we have said, the musical song articulated by phrase and cadence". (Stravinsky 1942, *apud* Grey 1995: 248).

In the above mentioned essay, *Wagner's Case*, published for the first time in 1889, Nietzsche states that Wagner's infinite melody is observed by the absence of a genuine melodic inspiration, while the real melody is the one that provides the listener with immediate pleasure. He wrote about this musical element introduced by Wagner:

The aim after which more modern music is striving, which is now given the strong but obscure name of "unending melody," can be clearly understood by comparing it to one's feelings on entering the sea. Gradually one loses one's footing and one ultimately abandons oneself to the mercy or fury of the elements: one has to swim. In the solemn, or fiery, swinging movement, first slow and then quick, of old music: one had to do something quite different; one had to dance. The measure which was required for this and the control of certain balanced degrees of time and energy, forced the soul of the listener to continual sobriety of thought. Upon the counterplay of the cooler currents of air which came from this sobriety, and from the warmer breath of enthusiasm, the charm of all good music rested. Richard Wagner wanted another kind of movement, he overthrew the physiological first principle of all music before his time. It was no longer a matter of walking or dancing, - we must swim, we must hover... This perhaps decides the whole matter. "Unending melody" really wants to break all the symmetry of time and strength; it actually scorns these things. Its wealth of invention resides precisely in what to an older ear sounds like rhythmic paradox and abuse. From the imitation or the prevalence of such a taste there would arise a danger for music, so great that we can imagine none greater - the complete degeneration of the feeling for rhythm, *chaos* in the place of rhythm... The danger reaches its climax when such music cleaves ever more closely to naturalistic play-acting and pantomime, which governed by no laws of form, aim at effect and nothing more... Expressiveness at all costs and music a servant, a slave to attitudes - this is the end... (Nietzsche 1983).

The Endless Column and the Endlessness that Rises into the Sky: Missing the Infinity Transposed into Finite Matter

"I love everything that rises"; "During my entire existence I searched only for the essence of the flight. Flying, what a blessing!" because "the flight will liberate the man from the narrow boundaries of the heavy matter" said the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957) (Zărnescu 1998). When something rises, it cannot rise towards other direction but into the sky, and in that moment it rises into the Infinite, such as the *Endless Column*. The *Endless Column* was seen as "the most radical sculpture in the history of classic modernism", "the only one of modern times that can be compared with the great Egyptian, Greek and Renaissance monuments"; "not only an artistic masterpiece, but also an extraordinary feat of engineering" (Solari 2013). The geometric structure of the sculptor's *Column* which, according to his confession, made the stone sing for the Humanity, comprises all the elements that symmetrically repeat themselves; and others can be added infinitely. The continuous repetition of a single element, given the spectacular height of the Column, gives the impression that it can continue infinitely (Eitan&Tamir-Ostrover 2019). This sculpture inspired Ligeti in his composition, the *Endless Column*, which is "one of several of the composer's etudes exploring musically depicted space and motion" (Eitan&Tamir-Ostrover 2019).

The Column of Brâncuși (the one from Târgu-Jiu, inaugurated in 1938, with a height of approximately 30 metres; before finishing this one, the sculpture made other ones from wood, exhibited during his exhibition in New York, in those times), is a huge funeral pillar, built in the honour of the heroes of Gorj (Buliga 2009: 47). Besides this, Brâncuși said that the column supports the sky and, therefore, had the significance of an *Axis Mundi*, a cosmic pillar, based on a megalithic concept that disappeared from the Balkan regions more than two thousand years ago, and which, according to Mircea Eliade, it could be found only in the religious folklore (Handoca 2011:90). Eliade said that, regarding the *Endless Column*, the basic inspiration for Brâncuși was this folkloric motif: an axis mundi that supports the sky and makes the connection between the sky and the earth (Handoca 2011: 92). The *Endless Column* is an "infinite materialization of infinite pure essence, therefore as an infinite creative process, an infinite becoming." (Stroe 2018)

The sculpture's interest towards philosophy, mysticism, Romanian folkloric treasury, and towards capturing the essence in its simply and genuine shapes (Buliga 2009:29) consecrated Brâncuși as a great thinker and not only a great artist. For example, he considered that the statues are invitations to meditation, (Buliga



2009: 30), or that he didn't create birds but flights. "The sculptor is a thinker and not a photographer of derisory, multiform and contradictory appearances" and "the external form is not real, but the idea, the essence of things" said Brâncuși (Buliga 2009:31, 32).



Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957): *Endless Column*

But Constantin Brâncuși was a solar, luminous artist, constantly thinking about the Upper World. His uncle, who was a priest, scolded him for not being more dedicated with more terrestrial interests, and Brâncuși answered that he did what he did and the priest himself: was occupied with serving the divinity (Buliga 2009). For those who demanded explanations for his works, he said: „Do not look for obscure formulas or mystery. I give you pure joy. Look into these works until you are able to see them. Those who are close to God have seen them already” (Buliga 2009: 33). If the endlessness of Wagner's musical art was confusing, disturbing and without milestones (the endless melody), the infinity suggested by the *Endless Column* of Brâncuși comprises nothing anxious in itself, but, on the contrary, it is sublime and uplifting because it simply captures the man's longing desire to rise into the sky, the Upper World, the Infinity.

Conclusions

The non-completion of an action that is pleasant to the human mind causes addiction, such is the case of Scheherazade's stories. In such cases, due to the Zeigarnik effect, the mind of the person who was offered the beginning of an action is also impatiently waiting for its ending. But, the endlessness can be a symbol of the thought that is constantly oriented towards the sky, such is the case of the *Endless Column*. Or, it can frustrate the listener regardless if they are, or not, a connoisseur of the musical techniques, such is the case of the infinite melody of Richard Wagner.

When we are dealing with a never-ending process that is infinitely repeating itself, the endlessness is tormenting for the human mind, such as the mythological image of the Danaides's barrel or Sisyphus stone.

Notes:

1. But not all the never-ending actions cause frustrations. Illustrations of never-ending actions can also be found in the Bible, and these are **signs of the divine intervention or presence**. In the Exodus, the story goes that Moses, while he led the herd of his father-in-law, saw a fire flame in the core of a pyre: „Ad the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, „I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn”. So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, „Moses, Moses!” (Exodus 3:2-4). Then, God called for Moses from the middle of the pyre and asked him not to get closer and to take his shoes off because the place is a saint ground. God, that could not be seen by any mortal, appeared to Moses through that burning pyre, that **never ended** – this being the peculiar feature that is emphasized in the subject under. Another example is found in the Book 1 Kings 17, when the prophet Elijah arrived to the widow from Zarephath, who was ensured that God would never allow the flour of the pot and the oil of the jug to finish if she fed the prophet: „The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.” (1 Kings 17: 16)
2. David Tame, in his *The Secret Power of Music* wrote about the tonal and atonal music: „Children all over the world, when they first begin to speak or sing, do so in melodies based firmly upon tonal intervals. The harmonic and melodic principles of tonality, then, seem to be by no means arbitrary or theoretical, but are naturally meaningful to the human psyche. In fact, scientific research has discovered that the traditional harmonic intervals and chords really are special: the physical study of sound vibrations has confirmed that traditional tonality conforms to certain unique and objective vibrational relationships between sound-pitches. Moreover, the same mathematical relationships have been found to be present throughout many and diverse phenomena of nature, in everything from the laws of physics to the geometry and the ratios present in the forms of living organisms. (...) If tonal music heals and regenerates the body, the mind, and society as a whole, then atonal music might be expected to do the opposite.” (Tame 1984: 92)

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