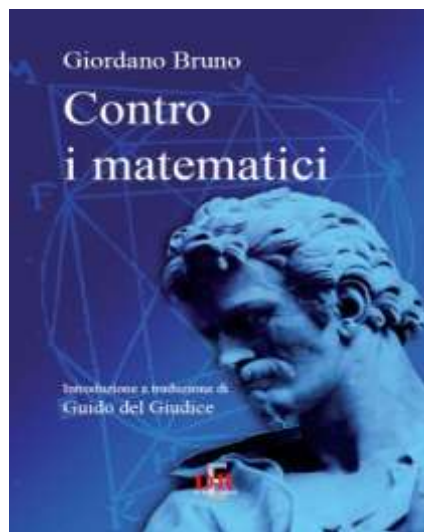


BRUNO AND THE ENIGMA OF THE ARCHETYPES

The mystery of the images and an unknown book

GUIDO DEL GIUDICE

In the spring of 1588, in the middle of his long peregrination, Giordano Bruno made a stop in Prague, home of the Emperor Rudolf II Hapsburg, where he hoped to attract the patronage of this sovereign. This brief interlude is also linked to the publication of a tract, *One Hundred and Sixty Articles against the Mathematicians*, which I recently translated for the first time into Italian (Giordano Bruno, *Contro i matematici*, Roma, Renzo Editore 2014, pp. 192, 14 euros). The work has been known, until now, from its dedication to Rudolf, one of the most celebrated passages by Bruno, as it constitutes a clear exposition of his philosophical beliefs. The most interesting aspect of the monograph is made up, however, of a related series of iconographic drawings, the most extensive ever made by the Nolan, consisting of 42 woodcuts. It is a work of opportunity, made in haste, as evidenced by numerous inaccuracies, something unusual for the philosopher (incorrect numbering of the articles, passages interpolated in a disorderly fashion), comprehensible solely in light of the urgency required to present a “visiting card” to the emperor. It was printed in a very small edition, of which only four copies survived to



our time. In addition to that of Monaco di Baviera, which has mutilated figures, and the Moscow copy contained in the Norov Codex, there is the specimen at the *Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris*, which was used by Felice Tocco for the first edition of the *Opere Latine*, and one, hitherto completely neglected, but perfectly preserved at the *Biblioteca Comunale di Como*, which I have personally examined. The first eleven figures are

distributed among eight large tables outside the text (seven with a single impression and the eighth with four) without any caption to designate them. In particular, the first three, which Bruno defines as “most fecund” archetypes, corresponding to the Hermetic trinity of Mind, Intellect and Love, assume an import regarding the afterlife of mathematics, crossing over into *mathesis*, which is a type of transcendental geometry that Bruno inherited from the master Nicholas da Cusa. In it, the figure, the *seal*, assumes the function of a support tool for an investigation on the level of form which rises to the metaphysical. These three diagrams, in a Platonic system, are referred to continuously in the treatise via three symbols: a sun, a moon, and a five-pointed star, taken from *De Occulta Philosophia* by Cornelius Agrippa.

Not abstrusely coded language, as Frances Yates concluded carelessly, having apparently not read the book, but simply three symbols (*notae*) to represent the archetype corresponding to the operation described in the text.

Comparison between the *Articuli* and successive works of mathematical argument reveals the existence of a little mystery concerning the exact identification of two of the three archetypal figures. Giovanni Aquilecchia, in the introductory notes to *Prelaetiones geometricae* and in the *Ars Deformationum*, had made the three symbols of the *three principal figures* (*Mentis, Intellectus & Amoris*) coincide with the three temples or chambers (*atria*) (*Apollonis, Minervae & Veneris*) of *De Triplici Minimo*. He had, however, noticed that two of them, that of Intellect and of Love, were reversed with respect to the *atria* of Minerva and that of Venus, which he logically had matched. Also, Mino Gabriele, in his *Corpus Iconographicum*, has noted that the second image from the Parisian copy, described by both Tocco and Frances Yates as the *figura Intellectus*, in *De Minimo* becomes the *atrium* of Venus, while the third, described as the *figura Amoris* becomes the *atrium* of Minerva in the poem [*De Triplici*]. Which is, therefore the archetype of the Intellect, and which that of Love? Those defined in the *Articuli* or those in *De Minimo*?¹

Gabriele suggests that the confusion is due to an error in the Parisian copy, and that reversing the order of the images is enough to restore the correct order. It takes no account, however, of two important details, by which it can be seen without a shadow of a doubt that the two figures to which Bruno refers correspond to those belonging to the Parisian copy. In the chapter named *Figuratio*, in fact,



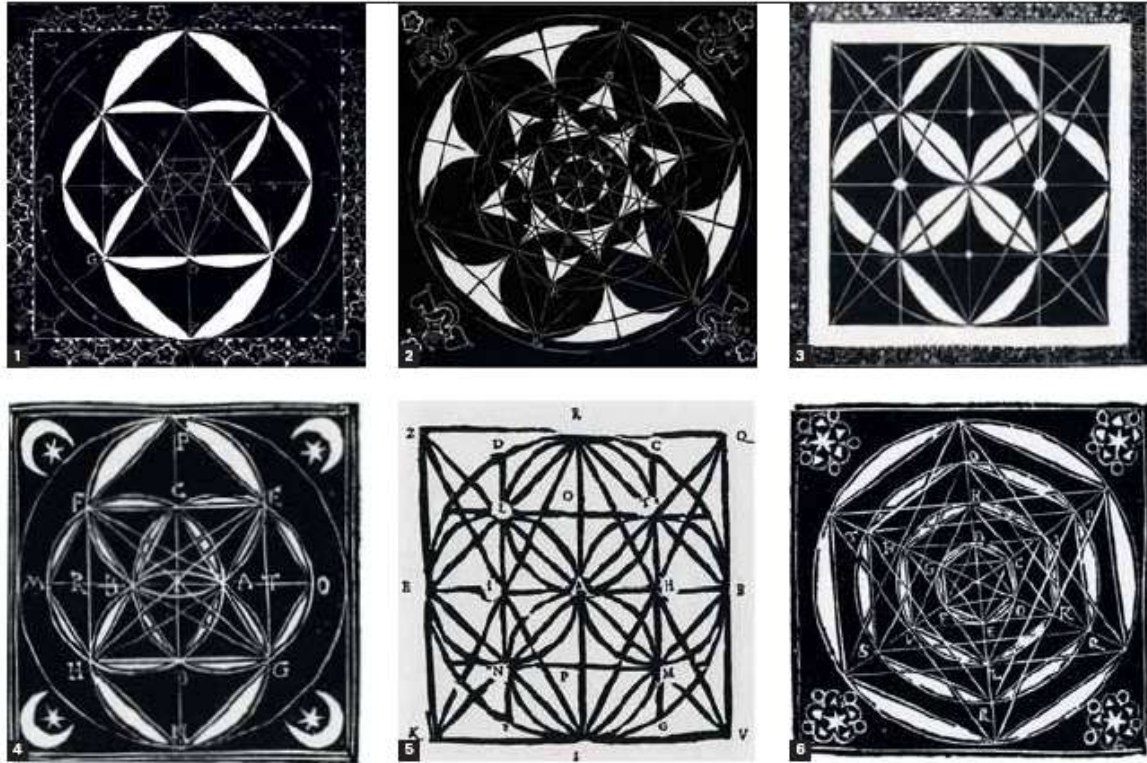
Presumed portrait of Giordano Bruno, by anonymous author. Juleum - Bibliotheksaal, Helmsted

he not only describes the images, but he also sets out the meaning of “mathesis”:

The second, consisting of seven circles tangent, that is, at points which do not penetrate and intersect each other, is called the figure of Intellect, all of which distinguishes and distributes it according to its own reasons. Also, it is composed of three concentric circles, with one indivisible center, which is the principal, and no less than a single circumference at the extremity of the figure, which certainly includes everything and unites it.

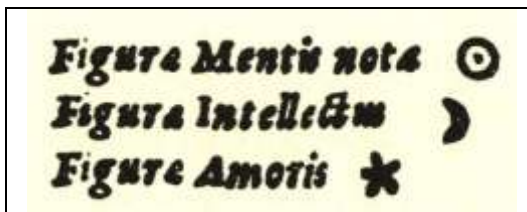
The third, which is expressed in circles or in tangents, which intersect with each other, is called the figure of Love, because the substance of the universe is opposition and concord, as it maintains contraries perpetually in concord, in the concordance of opposites, the union of differences and in difference of unions, the multitude united and the unity in the multitude.

¹ Traditional associations would suggest the pairings of: Apollo-Mind, Minerva-Intellect and Venus-Love.



1 Figura Mentis; 2 Figura Intellectus; 3 Figura Amoris; 4 Atrium Apollinis; 5 Atrium Minervae; 6 Atrium Veneris

Moreover, in the same chapter, Bruno assigns all three figures to symbols corresponding to images called from time to time *praxes* (constructions), described in the members (*membri*) which subdivide this book. This allows us to state with absolute certainty that what in *Figuratio*, he considers the *figura Intellectus*, will become what the *De Minimo* describes as *atrium Veneris*, and that of the *figura Amoris* will become the *atrium Minervae*, while the *figura Mentis* remains the domain of Apollo. The hypothesis of pagination error is therefore going to fail, the moreso as, when examining the Como copy, I could detect that the sequence of images in it is yet again different, suggesting that their position is independent of their identification. In Book



IV of *De Minimo*, using his customary mnemotechnical technique, the Nolan describes the construction of three images, using mythological associations,

so it is likely that he chose in advance, the figures that would best lend themselves to the memorization myths used in accordance with a geometric pattern.

In the passages about the hermetic trinity from *Articuli* and about the mythological trinity in *De Minimo*, the seals' assignment to the three Olympic divinities is definitively crystallized, and as such will be analyzed in detail in *Prelaetiones geometricae* and in the *Ars Deformationum*. It is also in this case of occasional writings, which include the notes of a lecture given by Bruno in Padua when he applied for a chair of mathematics left vacant

by Giuseppe Moleti and then assigned to Galileo. They follow the Frankfurt poems and therefore present a better arrangement of material, both with regard to the iconography and the discussion. The result is two texts which, despite their brevity, are very precise and well-kept, unlike the *Articuli*. The above demonstrates the relative importance the philosopher conferred on them relative to the Prague monograph, also presented in dedication to Rudolf II, only as an introduction to the works that would follow, only much more comprehensive and accurate. For the rest, it is not unusual for Bruno to return to concepts expressed already in previous work, to modify or even invert them. The *Figuratio* remains, however, a true and proper preview of the *De Minimo*.

The definition of the three archetypes:

Most fruitful figures, that relate to the highest degree, not only of geometry, but also the whole field of knowledge, the observer and they operate certainly without fault, there cannot exist more than a few more useful.

This will be reiterated in the latin poem:

You feel these are fruitful not only because these figures include the requirements for every type of measure, but also because they, by their design, are the archetypes and seals of those things.

The peculiarity of *Articuli* is to be understood in all of its aspects, in light of the value

attributed to the images by Bruno. As reported by Johann Wechel, the Latin poem's printer, he personally carved the molds for the diagrams of *De Minimo*, and must have done the same for the essentially identical ones in *Articuli*. This practice took on for him, very probably, the significance of a sort of "mandala". Carl Gustav Jung, who long studied this form of expression, defined a mandala as: *a center for meditation, through the construction of which man frees his spirit, purifies his soul, enters into communion with all the positive forces present in the cosmos*. Similarly, the figures represented for the Nolan tools of introspection into natural mechanisms (cycles of vicissitudes, coincidence of contraries, and indivisibility of the minimum) which constituted a foundation for his powerful, obsessive vision of the infinity of the universe.

As you see, this unrecognized monograph of the Nolan, if correctly analyzed, assumes great importance to our understanding to his stupefying approach toward a syncretic truth, realized through a fusion of multiple elements of knowledge derived from hermeticism, mnemotechnics and magico-naturalism. The seals, the archetypes, revealed as potent talismans, able to concentrate an enormous wealth of knowledge, becoming ideal instruments to intermediate between man and divinity, and between micro- and macrocosm. Another confirmation that the serious study and appraisal of Bruno's works, when not limited to the usual methods and basic profile, are able to reveal unexplored mental horizons.

(Translated by Scott Gosnell)

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