

## THE COLLECTIVE IMAGES, THE PHANTOMS AND THE DIVINATORY ART

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### Resumé:

Cette étude met en relation la problématique divinatoire (en général et sa actualité en special) avec l'imaginaire collective. Dans une perspective sociologiques parettienne, l'art divinatoire peut être interprété comme un résidu qui se roule dans le temps et l'histoire après une règle précise de type combinatoire (voir en ce sens la théorie de fractal de Ioan Petru Culianu). Cette manière d'analyse m'a conduit à conclure (en ses points) sur les relations entre le phénomène divinatoire et l'imaginaire collective.

**Mots clé:** *l'art divinatoire, l'imaginaire collective, résidu, déficit symbolique, fiction, biennes symbolique*

The social-anthropological research of the divinatory phenomena can be finally related to the collective images. This happens no matter the hypostasis of the divination (traditional practice, kitsch, simple experiment, phenomenon with a strong metaphysical element, religious - magical phenomenon, etc) it expresses and influences the entire collective images. What is worth being emphasized here is the fact that the divination – as analyzed in the previous chapters – is situated somewhere between *reality and fantastic*. The experiment and the observation of some real objects and phenomena which characterize the divinatory practice, make it more similar to reality and to what the modern scientific spirit might mean (not by chance it was named proto-science, pseudoscience, para-science). At the same time, the interpretations, the philosophical and argumentative support of the practice and also the existence of some spontaneous forms, unprovoked make it more similar

to fantastic. Nevertheless, between these two dimensions of the imagery (reality and fantastic) there is no breaking off. Between them can rather be found a relation of mutual determination. This subject is approached by Marc Augé<sup>1</sup>, in a fascinating paper, *La guerre des rêves. Exercices d'ethno-fiction*. The French author talks about the existence of “a new fiction system“. Therefore it can be observed that in the contemporary world not only the pictures changes but also the circulation conditions between the *individual images* (the dream, for example), *the collective images* (we mention here the myth), and the *fiction* ( in this case we refer to literature, artistic fiction etc.). The whole imagery's mechanism includes three poles: collective images and memory, individual imagery and memory and fiction – creation<sup>2</sup>. The connection between these three is also confirmed when referring to divinatory practices. The soothsayer is, from this point of view, the perfect image of the one who *tries to find a balance between the collective images and representations with the personal ones in a creation – fiction process*. Certainly his whole activity is based on a code of signs and symbols. What happens in this case is, in fact, an activity of decryption, revelation and breaking the spell of reality. On their turn, at social level, these are reflected in all kind of fiction-creations (literary, artistic productions, etc).

In a way, the situation is similar to that which accompanies the appearance of modernism. “From this point of view the transition to modernism corresponds to individual independence, “breaking the spell of the world”, (which involves renaming the sign we give to the social connections), and the apparition of new myths of the progress, “great stories” which will disappear at their turn)<sup>3</sup>”. The nowadays paradox is that breaking the spell of the world from the old myths, beliefs and phantoms, we live in full fiction, a fiction through images. This,

<sup>1</sup> Marc Augé, *La guerre des rêves. Exercices d'ethno-fiction*, Paris, Editura Seuil, 1997

<sup>2</sup> The functioning principle of the three elements of the imagery is one of perfect mutuality. The relation of these three elements can be described by the image of a triangle or of a circle in which the collective images influences and enriches the individual images and this has a similar influence on the creation – fiction. These, on their turn, will enrich the collective images. Marc Augé explains that the movement can take place in both ways.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Augé, *La guerre des rêves. Exercices d'ethno – fiction*, quoted edition p 155

according to Marc Augé, does not rely on many symbolical revalue but it is the sign of a *symbolical deficit* that affects our world. It is “fashionable” to call it a world of the image, and not one of the imagery.

In our opinion, the process is not definitive and irreversible. It is accompanied by a simultaneous phenomenon that functions vice – versa: the one of *respelling* the world. The proof is the permanence in time of some symbols, beliefs and rituals, as the divinatory ones (even seen as fiction). Their presence expresses the availability of the human spirit to use signs and symbols, to overtake the compulsory individual judgement. Referring to this aspect, Mircea Eliade expressed his optimism towards the modern world’s challenges. “I do not believe that certain primordial revelations could disappear. Even in the most advanced technological civilization we can find something that cannot change: because there is day and night, winter and summer (...). We assume our human nature on the bases of this essential condition. We can say that this “fundamental” man is “religious” no matter the appearance because it is about the meaning of life (...). The big surprise is always the freedom of the spirit and its creativity”<sup>1</sup>. No matter the context, the objective existence is always given a symbolic dimension, too. It is relevant in beliefs, images and representations. For example, the filmed images, although they take us in a mainly fictional, recall in us the sensibility for images and symbols long ago forgotten or for other new ones. Even the presence of some kitsch images which recall some divinatory practices can have a similar role. The same can also happen in the case of artistic creations. The mythic or magical ritualised scenes get the attention, fascinate and incite the viewer. Certainly this is doesn’t identify with the image and he will not live in this fictional universe, but for sure he will become more careful at some certain aspects of his living. Probable he will find new meanings and he will be able to represent them in a different way. This fact is possible because our identification with the image or the information that we have contact with (here we refer mainly to those which define the divinatory practice) it is not a total one. For example, we ask for the prediction practice with a view to “advisory”. Therefore the final result

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<sup>1</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Maze Trial*, translated by de Doina Cornea, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1990, p. 103

carries the “shadow” of individual representations. Probably the situation can be best described by the way in which the respelling phenomenon works at the level of the divinatory practices. If the soothsayer is the one who reveals and makes accessible the mystery of this world, paradoxically, the client is changed into the one who “respells” it. How does he do it? Through simply trying to reinterpret, adapt and reanalyze the situation. More exactly, the divination becomes only a false reason for the client, who tries, at his turn, to interpret the world. Actually, the act of reinterpreting is presented as a last stage of the divinatory practice.

I have also seen that usually the predictions have a general nature, vague and even lacunose. In other words, the information is not given with precision; the final part is of the subject - client who has to interpret the statements, by connecting them with some real events. It is not just about a simple checking operation. The result is different according to personal beliefs, availability and personal sensibility. These could not be only the result of sensible and rational perception of the world, but also of one “spiritual perception”<sup>1</sup>. After “interpreting this interpretation” the reality is far from being clarified and totally, rationally explained. On the contrary, appear new questions, new mysteries. As a matter of fact what happens is a respell of itself. The divinatory practices are maybe the best example to prove that in the *collective images* of the present day people is not dominated only by images but also by a *symbolical imagination*<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Dealing with the relation between *Ego and Self-awareness*, from the perspective of the symbolic interaction, promoted by G. Herbert Mead and from the Constantin Radulescu Motru theory (the society as spiritual reality), Ilie Badescu calls *homo ludens* and *homo divinans* as being „the unlimited poles in which all the human feelings come into being. Therefore we cannot count on the witty man, the lascivious man. His opposite, *homo religious* has the same living permanence”. (Ilie Badescu, *The History of Sociology*, 1996, p. 374). The difference between *somatomorphical ego* and *pneumatomorphical ego* could explain the human sensibility for the magical-religious area. See Ilie Badescu, Dan Dungaciu, Radu Baltasiu, *The History of Sociology. Contemporary Theories*, Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 1996; George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago, 1934; Constantin Rădulescu Motru, “The Power of the Soul” in the *energetic personalism*, Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Durand, *The Adventure of Imagery. Symbolic Imagination. The Imagery*, translation by Muguraș Constantinescu and Anișoara Bobocea, Bucharest, Nemira

The fact is a normal one if we think that “all the societies lived from imagery”<sup>1</sup>. From this perspective the collective representations and symbols, even those that refer to divinatory practice are meant to balance the reality. Otherwise any reality would become “hallucinating”, meaning a hallucination object for fellows and groups. The divinatory practice presence in society into different forms and images can be - some believe - a sign of “decadence”<sup>2</sup> or of “reality’s fictionalization”. The effect would be the artificial production of some individual and collective identities. At last, “reality’s fictionalization” that Marc Augé announces, cannot totally be put under the sign of “symbolical deficit”.

As a rule, this type of crisis can be recovered in natural way by using another symbolical and interpretative register. Thus, we can discover that human desire to know the hidden mysteries of living and future recovers today in the most different states: either as some specific magical - religious practices aspect, or hidden under the most honourable probabilistically and sociological, psychological studies, in psychoanalysis sessions etc. The human pursuit essence remains always the same while the collective image constructs always new and new representations values, fantasies, and myths.

According to Pareto’s sociology the presence of divinatory phenomena and their audience in the Romanian area could be translated in this way: the divinatory phenomena are only residuals (superstitions, beliefs, practice) and not derivations of such religious doctrines. Even if both of them belong to the non logical area and sometimes the magical

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Publishing House, 1999. The author makes an obvious difference between what we call imagery (“the museum of all the passed images and possible produced or which are to be produced”p.125) and symbolical imagination (calls an “absent object *represented* to consciousness by an *image*, in great detail of this term p.14). Gilbert Durand in *The Anthropological Structures of the Imagery*, translation by Marcel Aderca, afterword by Corneliu Mihai Ionescu, Bucharest, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, 2000, reveals that although they get different definitions the two terms (imagery and the symbolical imagination) coexist and manifest in many situations.

<sup>1</sup> Marc Augé, *La guerre des rêves. Exercices d’ethno-fiction*, quoted edition., 1997, p.18

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne – Pierre Sironneau in *Figures de l’imaginaire religieux et derive ideologique*, Paris, Harmattan Publishing House, 1993 insists on Gilbert Durand’s ideas regarding modernism mythologies. The multiplication and the prosperity of “religious derivations” announce a mythology of decadence” typical for our days.

operations are mixed up with the religious ones (see the ritual of casting tin), each category has separated fates. Vilfredo Pareto finds out that “superstitions continue while religion is changed: in other terms residues continue while derivations change”<sup>1</sup>. This fact is completely confirmed if we keep in mind numerous beliefs and pre-Christian superstitions, which populate the social images of the Romanian area. In these conditions, the residue essence consists in a number of primordial images or archetypal, those persist in time based on a set of rules and a precise combinatory. Ioan Petru Culianu (Ioan Petru Culianu, 1995) would call this set of first data *invariants*. From Culianu’s theory point of view, countless shape imagination of reality are not anything else but combinatory games of human mind that always hide in different representations the same prime data. As potential they exist in infinity of variants. Only real history data make possible to take a shape in history. For example, let’s consider two constants: *there are the stars; the stars may affect man*. These axioms took the shape of images and representations, for example: philosophical ideas of the similitude type between microcosm (man) and macrocosm (universe); appear as magical divinatory practices; we find again as beliefs and superstitions connected to the signs of time and of farming calendar; also like scientific knowledge as medical and psychological type; today we find them as type of new combinations between the most advanced IT technology and the astrological practice. Practical this mechanism of generating “residues” is continue and unlimited. Some can be changed in religious systems and doctrines, while others remain simple superstitions and others, probable, do not have the chance to take any shape in history.

The extraordinary survival and adaptation in time of the divinatory practice could have on base a set of dominant invariants such as: *there is divinity; it is a sort of knowledge, man can have access on it*. How? Through faith, asceticism, initiation, myth, practice, magic, sign, symbol, etc. Practically, the variants which appear in time do not represent only abstract, philosophical ideas, they transpose in different cultural types and even more in lifestyles.

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<sup>1</sup> Vilfredo Pareto, *Traité de sociologie générale*, vol. I-II, Paris, Payot, 1933

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The real phrases, of this way of interpreting the social imagery in case of divinatory practice can constitute the conclusions of this scientific paper:

1. Depending on the historic and social context the divination has been on turns, religious fac, philosophy, knowledge, science, art, practice, superstition or kitsch. Nowadays situation is one somehow new: *in a global world, the imagery tends to globalize*<sup>1</sup>. The fact is also reflected at the level of these practices. They receive collective representations which include in a “global” manner almost all the values mentioned above. On the other side, themselves tend to translate a lot of individual and social phrases (for example the trial to get in touch with some divinatory practice with different scientific area or to connect them to the new technologies). Perhaps, the transparent society of Gianni Vattimo<sup>2</sup> becomes clearer under the sign of relativism of the permanent composition and informational communication reconstruction of our time. Being situated under total zodiacal sign, under *weak thinking*, we can say that divination like any other social event tends to give a total image about the collective images and system.

2. However from another perspective, stricter, the divinatory phenomenon can become an element of *psycho – social balance*. Gilbert Durand considers that this function is one specific of symbolical imagination using one psychoanalytical argumentative model. The divinatory act has in this case, a tampon area between *throb* and *repression*. In others words the practice takes the man away from a

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<sup>1</sup> Lucian Boia *For a history of the imagery*, translated by Tatiana Mochi, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2000. The author considers that “any action owns an imagery measure, in a very large fan, which spreads from the assumption that expects its examination until the most unusual fantasies. His themes are rebel to traditional cut up: historical ages, civilizations, particular areas of history (...) Each perspective aspires to globalise. Each one is susceptible to structure a global history. The imagery history is one of these perspectives, capable to offer a total vision to human and his evolution.” (pp. 26-27)

<sup>2</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Trasnparent Sociaety*, translated by Ștefania Mincu, Constanța, Pontica Publishing House, 1995

universe of image (nowadays world is a world of image) and gives back to him the symbolical dimension of existence. As matter of fact is unimportant if the divinatory act is efficient or not in real aspect. Its efficiency has a symbolic meaning. Thus, its presence can rebalance the human existence.

3. We can also discover a certain *identity use* of divinatory phenomenon presence. Due to them, some people are able to find themselves, to ask questions, to change something in their identity. Using the symbolical endorsement, these changes are complex and lasting. The consistence of these changes is precisely given by that something which quit the rational and accountable area. The one which offers certainty in this case is only the human faith.

4. *The social connections are revalued* as a result of recalling different type of divinatory practices. The new studies in the field of social and cultural anthropology show that the main problem of the contemporary societies is the one of interacting, of establishing relationships with other people. "In a world in which the religious representations and magical strength are not in an essential place, may seem that these elements are not a subject rich enough. The rationalization of social rapports and individual behaviours has a contribution to this diagnosis. Values have been removed from the fields of symbolical representations to others conceptions seemingly more adapted to historical evolution among the one of powerful industrialization and use production and mass consumption of services and objects. These must fulfil an implicit or explicit our expectations, to enchant, to incite and to seduce without referring to essential mythology"<sup>1</sup>. Or all the profane mythologies hide old signs and meanings of the world. The apparent "fictionalization", "industrialization" and kitsch of these collective representations is a sign that we are permanently in the situation of *rethinking and reconstituting reality*. As being emphasised thought this paper the divinatory practice, no matter the value of the act itself, brings in stage the problematic of surviving in the world, of the relationship with the other. Disease, success, failure, envy, love, business, justice, etc,

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bouvier, *La socio-anthropologie*, Paris, Armand Colin Publishing House, 2000, p. 82



reappear in this case in a new light. For example disease is not perceived as being the consequence of some physiological dysfunctions anymore but as result of a psycho – social lack of balance. Practically the quality of the human relationship with the self and the world is emphasized. The gesture, the attitude, the look, the word, etc, become important in this respect. Knowing and mastering these elements lead to mastering the social relation.

5.The practices of divinatory type possess without doubt one *cognitive and active* component. The fact that beyond curiosity man has the ambition to dominate those three temporal dimensions is not a secret any more. This is also confirmed in the case of the scientific research methods of events. In the summer of 2005, in Chicago took place the Delphic Conference of futurology<sup>1</sup>. We can say that, at least, from the perspective of proposed objectives, futurology is revealed as an authentic successor of the old and ancient divinatory. The difference between these two is that the latter doesn't operate anymore the instruments of a symbolical thinking. Pc technology, probable calculation, fractal models and others are the instruments with which futurology works. Yet, also like divination, it has the obligation to present *possible futures* and to prescribe different possibilities of action. "The science of prediction now must make believe the best possible future and start creating it"<sup>2</sup>. The research has proved that the big consumers of futurology studies are in the Asiatic countries. Governments and big companies from here and from the whole world guide their politics after these types of predictions. The usefulness of these kinds of studies is seen also by political world. Any ruling party and statement which respect itself, before taking an electoral behaviour, first hires a company of political audit. This has the obligation to present the situation at a certain moment and also to make scripts for

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<sup>1</sup> In *Discover* magazine from November, number 10, 2005, is presented the futurological science from its utility perspective. For instance, Peter Schwartz and Douglas Randall, futurologists, have been employed by Pentagon in 2005 to reveal the effects of a drastically climatic change. In 2004 The Scottish Parliament organized one conference of 150 futurologists who debated on "Scottish evolution in the next 20 years". Afterwards, the same parliament adopted a series of rules based on futurologists predictions"(*Discover* magazine, nr. 10/ 2005, p.71)

<sup>2</sup> *The Discover* magazine, no. 10/ 2005, p.71

future. One of the most receptive areas at futurology studies is the military one. „David A. Jarvis member of Navy Center of Submarine War from USA sustains that: “the army is very open regarding futurology””<sup>1</sup> It is useless to insist on the importance which has the anticipation of such events in this field. Business world is the second big consumer of futurology search. Schell Company is one of the biggest producers of future studies. Philip Watts, Schell director, emphasizes that: “futurology scripts are not an exercise of prophecy. Rather they are created to challenge thinking so that today to be able to make better decisions in business taking into consideration the future income”<sup>2</sup>.

Just like sophisticated studies of futurology the classic divination tries to create scripts for future according to which we shape our behaviour and actions. Being a part of more complex structures of the individual and collective images it could be said that divination would rather have a *euphemism function*. This could be translated into: “idealization of what the human being goes through in an imaginary journey”<sup>3</sup> It seems that practice represents for most people the preamble of very precise actions. “Most people come to me to find out what they should do in order to have a better in life”. (Elena, 55 years old Cristești, Iassy). Moreover, the majority of clients end by also giving an attribution to symbolical dimension of their daily deeds. For example, some of them rediscover the sacred and religious value of family and their behaviour towards it can be rethought and deeply modified.

6. All the divinatory practices can be related *to symbolical goods* which cannot be missing from any society. Pierre Bourdieu considered that: “the religious beliefs contribute to an economy of symbolical goods”<sup>4</sup>. From this perspective, the divinatory practices, in their whole fan of forms and manifestations do not represent but a mechanism that

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<sup>1</sup> Ibidem p 69 In the same context, of utility and active usage of predictive information, Police Futurists International PFI warned since 1985 about the cybernetics (it is about piracy and child pornography on-line. As a result of these predictions, the Communitarian Program Foresight was founded.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem p 70

<sup>3</sup> Maria Nicoleta Turluc, *Imagery, identity and social representations*, Iassy, Al I Cuza University Publishing House, 2004, p. 46

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, no. 13, 1977, Paris, p. 12

cultivates faith and symbolic thinking. Moreover, paraphrase the one who is Castoriadis, the divination is: "at the same time work and device"<sup>1</sup>. It operates with a whole range of symbols and, at the same time, contributes to the making of new others. As a result is about a permanent reproduction of symbol and symbolic thinking.

Of course, we can reproach many things to the divination: in the first place, the lack of logic and then its weak relevance for a social-anthropological study. Anybody may ask himself about: how can different signs and destinies are put together, how can be disturbed the normal flow of time making unexpected reference to past, present and future? We consider that things cannot be definitive explained but only sketched. From the perspective of the Pareto's sociology<sup>2</sup>, the divinatory and magical-religious practice can receive another different interpretation. Each non logical fact in relation with social time can have its proper logic in relation with individual or collective representation connected to the dimension of eternity. Thus the ascetic practice can be non-logical in relation with modern time, however there are perfectly logical if we report at their ultimate purpose and also to their practitioners' representations. The same happens in the case of divination. The divinatory gesture may seem perfectly right for those who have other measure and report of living. This fact is available for any time and space. Residue can

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<sup>1</sup> C. Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris, Seuil, 1975

<sup>2</sup> The theoretical system created by Vilfredo Pareto, besides explaining the residues and derivations, tries to „rediscover irrationality” of human action. It is proved to be extremely useful for approaching some present phenomena, such as the magical - religious, that involve the circulation of some norms and values together with to human concrete actions. In this respect we have been inspired by Ilie Bădescu papers in which it is precisely surprised this thing. „On the basis of Pareto's ideas, he tries to establish „sociability and integrity residues”, to make a difference between „reasonable human and social human”, or to analyse and to construct a model of circulation of the elite in the Romanian area. In this respect we suggest the following papers: Ilie Bădescu, *The History of Sociology*, Galați, Porto-Franco Publishing House, 1994; Ilie Bădescu, Dan Dungaciu, Radu Baltasiu, *The History of Sociology. Contemporary Theories*, Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 1996; Ilie Bădescu, Dan Dungaciu, *The cosciology an geo – politics of the borders*, Bucharest, Floarea Albastră Publishing House, 1995.

constitute that hidden and steady fact from the human and social existence which proves that despite our diversity there are some data which connect at the same time. Behind of logical and non-logic gesture, fact, behaviour etc. there is a whole system of collective representations which often can function even against the versions and official representations. The anthropologists and then the sociologists called these *collective images*<sup>1</sup>. It deserves to be studied even in its manifestations and its versions less easy for modern science because (such as the ones referring to the divinatory phenomena because they express the social and human entirely).

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *The Philosophy of images*, translation by Muguraș Constantinescu, edition after word by de Sorin Alexandrescu, Iassy, Polirom Publishing House, 2004, reveal that sacred images could lead the idea of „one regrettable or intolerable limitation, which leads to human freedom correlation with un-sacred, in the favour of a pure rational consciousness. The crisis of un-sacred contemporary societies warns that still it is not enough to give up these religious images, to be actually free and to get one happy autonomy (p. 354)

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