

# SYMBOLS WITH MAGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Ph. D. Thesis in Visual Arts

Abstract



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**KEYWORDS:** symbols with magical significance, re-contextualization, composite symbols, archetypes, communication, manipulation, mass-media, subjective creation.

## INTRODUCTION

Our interest for the fascinating world of symbols originates in ideatic quests and techno-artistic experiments, which are going for a long time already, and are focused on the discovery of a personal way of expressing our own sensibility. This is also the origin of the personal “artistic obsession”, relating to the world in continuous relational transformation of the symbols, to the way in which it interacts with the human consciousness and to our interest for the primordial sources of the Creation, as well as our constant focus in deciphering the connections and relations between the artistic and the divinatory manifestation. And what beginning could be better than the analysis of the essential symbols found in the spiritual manifestation of the past?

The analysis of the figurative actions and spiritual substance, which the widespread use of symbols reveals within the known human history implies both the reviewing of impressive amounts of data (from various sources and various cultural timeframes, which, in certain cases are corroborative while in others are contradictory) and their comparative interpretation, which are often relative, subjective and in many cases only valid in principle for a given historical period. A similar situation is present in the theories and the sciences that study the role of symbols involved in communication phenomenon, as well as those studying the altering of the communication processes in general or of the human perception in particular.

Due to this reason, we must point out that the aim of our cognitive endeavor is not „to bring light” into the various polemics of the scientists, of historical, cultural, social artistic or religious persuasion. We may touch these only in regard to their relevance to the theme of the present work. In the same regard, we did not plan a historical study proper (or an exclusively artistic or religious one), as the availability and range of this type of works is quite large and our research used them extensively.

In the following chapters we shall analyze the various aspects and interpretations of symbols, deriving from myth, magic and/or religious rituals or from exemplar artistic manifestations, presented within their general or special information context, relevant to the approached subject. Thus we propose to reveal the context that caused the appearance of certain particular symbols, their way of manifesting (typology, shapes, particular figurative techniques etc.), the mutations underwent by the signification of fundamental symbols

throughout the cultural history of mankind, as well as their impact, both on the individual human being and the human community. We then analyze the alteration modalities of inter-human communicational processes, in general, and the influence on the human self-awareness, in particular. In both cases the symbols, as intermediaries between the sphere of reason and the one of sensibility, allow the expression of an explicit and/or implied informational content, which can be apparent or hidden and is affected in various degrees by the conditions of “transmission” on one hand, and the subjective vision of the “emitter” on the other, and finally by the subjective vision of the receiver.

As we shall see in the Chapter *Personal Contributions*, our personal conceptual endeavor is synthetically oriented on the idea of revealing an intimate, mystical-magical subjective reality, which may insinuate into the conscience of the viewer, through symbols with magical meanings, *situations-thoughts-feelings*. Based on the most circulated symbols throughout the eras, we shall regard these symbols as belonging to the *familiar-indefinite* type<sup>1</sup>.

The use in our own work of the *familiar-indefinite* symbols that are circumscribed preferentially to the Christian spirituality resulted in a necessary extension of the investigative area. Thus, the first chapter analyzes the origins of the symbols and the magical-mystical, religious and artistic manifestations of the Prehistory, the particular aspects of the funerary symbolism in the religions of Ancient Egypt, the influences of the Judaic civilization’s ritualism and, finally, the fascinating cryptic symbols of the Pre-Christian art. To the extent of being regarded as relevant for the subject, the significances of some particular symbols (magical, mystical or religious in origin) were augmented in some cases with particular interpretations from the Romanian traditional cultural space and/or with aspects specific to certain religious manifestation form outside the area of Christian spirituality.

In terms of general structure, the PhD thesis entitled “Symbols with Magical Significance” is organized in four chapters, part of them including whenever adequate a short introduction, which provides additional details. The information is organized in an arborescent structure that is rooted in the four general groups of interest (*chapters*), continues in multiple directions of research (*sub-chapters*), ending in the various subjects of study (*sub-sections*). We regard this structure as the most effective way to maintain the unity of the work, in order to facilitate its synoptic perception, as well as to keep the analyzed problems permanently connected to the general research theme.

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<sup>1</sup> This term implies in fact a first action, of the viewer recognizing the symbol, even though he does not succeed afterwards to identify it clearly or to associate it with a certain given context.

## CHAPTER 1 – SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

Its first sub-chapter, *Conceptual Limitations*, is organized in three sections, which are presenting general information on the notions of *sign* and *symbol*. The first two sections, *Signs* and *Symbols*, are meant to establish a conceptual perimeter of each of the two notions, by laying down definitions of signs and symbols, which are, in fact, points of view belonging to several prestigious authors. The third section, *Sciences and Theories Involved in The Study of Signs and Symbols* is concerned with the main current schools of thought approaching the origins of symbols and the contexts in which the symbolic associations and relations take place.

“The way in which the symbols appeared, developed and were interpreted concerns nowadays a large array of disciplines: the history of civilizations and religions, linguistics, cultural anthropology, art critic, psychology, medicine. Without considering the list as being complete, one may add to it the techniques used in sales, propaganda and politics” [\[CGDS. 23\]](#)\*. In order to avoid burdening the present work with excessive information, and due to the complexity implied by the presentation in a coherent form, within a single volume, of the data produced by the multiple direct and indirect corroborations of the symbols within the aforementioned fields of research, there are presented in a synthetic form only the disciplines and theories that are relevant to the conceptual scope of the present work: *Psychoanalysis*, *Symbolism*, *Symbolistics*, *Semiology* and *Semiotics*.

An exception to this type of presentation is only the *Semiotics*, which is also approached in Sub-chapter II.1.5, but from the theory of communications point of view. A presentation of this theory is required for both the identification of perception-interpretation causal relations and the better understanding of the ways the informational content (involved in the inter-human communicational processes) is altered, by methods and means known at present under the general denomination of “manipulation”. The field is thus prepared for the second Chapter: *The Subjective Dimension of Communication*.

The fundamental and particular signs and symbols were organized in groups, within the sub-chapters, as thematic categories. Within the chapter we analyze symbolic concepts, notions and significations, which are represented, under various shapes, in the personal works included in the Chapter *The Own Artistic Creation: Proposal of Recovering Certain Symbols With Magical Meanings*.

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\* All the abbreviated references in the text of the Abstract are explained in the *Bibliography*, at page 15.

The attempt to organize and classify the symbols was a difficult task, for each individual symbol draws on, in most of the cases, complex concepts and meanings, sometimes related, sometimes completely different: "... by its own nature it (the symbol, n.n.) tends to dissolve the established limits and to reunite the extremities into the same vision" [CGDS, I. 16]. Thus, just a simple alphabetical list of symbols would have led first to a gap in the conceptual unity, and then to a fragmented structure of ideas in the research. In the same regard, a purely historical approach would have been insufficient, due to the fact that, with few exceptions, there is not presently enough data to allow the clear framing of a symbol in a well defined culture, or to allow its inclusion into a specific moment in time. Beside that, the quest for original connection between meanings involves a comprehensive study of the historical relations between analogous symbols, an enterprise that, by its size and implications, goes beyond the scope of this work.

The above reasons underlay the choice of presenting the symbols as general thematic groups, which included the analyses focused on the meaning and significance of the symbols, relevant for the making or the presentation of the own artistic creation. Within each category of symbols we chose to present the symbols using an order dictated by their special particularities. For example, in the case of "sacred symbols", the forms are presented in alphabetical order, while in the case of "geometrical symbols", the order is from simple to complex, the "planetary symbols", in the next step, will be presented in the order of their importance. Special consideration is given to the "sacred symbols" in general, to the Christian ones in special, as symbols like the "cross" or the "fish", the references to holy personages from the Hierarchy of Light, of Saints, or from the Hierarchy of Darkness are to be found in various aspects in our personal works.

After each symbol presentation there were inserted references to other symbols, complementary or thematically related to each other, which can complete or augment the expressiveness of the symbols used in our own creative work, providing, at the same time, the opportunity of a different direction of approach. To facilitate the identification of the analyzed signs and symbols we thought useful to attach an *Alphabetical Index of Symbols appearing in the text* to Annex 2.

The observations made in the sub-chapter *The Expressive Force of Symbols* close this first chapter, preparing the field, at the same time, for the thematic coordinates of the topics studied in the following chapters. To begin with, the sub-section Symbol and Perception treats the symbolic knowledge, which is never completely achieved, as it is not identical or similar in value for all subjects involved, as it relies on the same theme, whose infinite variations are

caused by the different interpretation of each entity involved. Although the representation of certain symbols as their archetypal form is deeply rooted into the human imaginative structures, the meaning is often different for each individual and each culture. The Symbol, Between Reason and Sensibility tackles the interpretation of the symbolic values through the filter of the observable incompatibility between reason and sensibility, within the same research. Although the psychoanalysis regards the symbols as “the very soul of an imaginative life, for they reveal the secrets of the unconsciousness, put in motion the most hidden springs of certain actions and provide new perspectives on the Infinite and the Unknown” [CGDS, I, 15], both the representation and the interpretation of symbols are using schemes and mechanisms pertaining to the reason. Because of its antiquity and cultural persistence, and mostly due to its multitude of intellectual meanings and affective connotations, the symbol is opposed to any **excessive** attempt of “reasoning” or “affectualising”, of simplification or banalisation. The symbol appears ultimately as a mediator that unifies separate elements, antinomial forces and trends that sometimes are opposing to each other; inside the human *psyche*, for example, it mediates between the conscious and the unconscious. Apart from the condensation phenomenon, by which a single significant is able to bring up several meanings, The Multiple Implications of Symbols, Between Potentiality and Perversion refers also to the relational connections between distinct symbols, which results in chains of symbols, mobile assemblies of relations between several different terms. Therefore, the symbols are always multidimensional, being permanently open to receive new dimensions, the limits being only set by the cultural size and imaginative receptivity of the receiving subject. Conversely, as remarked upon by Evseev, “... inside cultures, it often happens that a certain symbol, sacred and full of profound meaning in the past, is transformed in a sign that is both flat and monovalent, turning into an officialized emblem or a commercial label” [EIES, 8]. In fact, the mutations undergone by the meaning of certain symbols form a phenomenon that is symptomatic for the general attitude of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century man, i.e. the use of information for personal gain, or for the profit of the group of interests that he represents, by using the psychological impact of symbols to manipulate de community. The deep mutation of meaning suffered by the *hook cross* (*swastika*) is perhaps the most significant example of fundamental transformation of meaning for a symbol through political command and, unfortunately, of symbol perversion (being known nowadays mainly as a Nazi symbol, the swastika is loaded with all the negative meaning brought by this association).

The last sub-section, The Symbol, Between Incantations and Manipulation, is about situations, which often occurred in history, when the use of a symbol does not issue from purely aesthetic requirements or solely spiritual needs. Resorting to magical practices and rituals or to divinatory ones by the use of certain symbols is mainly caused by pragmatic reasons (in most of the cases): from desiring hunting success to asking the divine protection unto one's family and even to obtaining fraudulent gains. However, in the present society the symbolic images are manifesting themselves in a twofold manner: on one hand they can bring to life the spiritual universe of past eras or may augment latent meanings, on the other, the force of knowingly and immorally used symbolic images may considerably alter, or even crush the human spirit, reducing the individual from a willful personality to a puppet of some mercantile interests. "The *mystery seducers* of our modern advertisement are fully knowledgeable in using the force of image, applying it often without thinking. They know how to drive the common man into an ever increasing loss of freedom by manipulating the symbols and to induce him into fantasizing" [\[BHDS, 9\]](#).

## **CHAPTER II – THE SUBJECTIVE DIMENSION OF COMMUNICATION**

This chapter focuses on the communication and is organized in two distinct sections, first of which being dedicated to *The Science and Theories of Communication*. One of the biggest challenges faced by our research was to identify an optimal information organizing structure, in accordance to the subject of the thesis, due mostly to the complex interconnection of the many sciences, schools of thought, trends as well as theories and points of view about the communication processes. The solution we eventually selected is the gradual presentation of the information pertaining to the subject, organized according to the increasing level of complexity.

Therefore, the *Introduction* presents a series of general ideas on the notion of *communication*, which are, in fact, attempts to define the communication phenomenon, which also faces us with the first problem: how to achieve a reasonable balance between the precise definition that can be applied only to a specific domain and the general definition that cannot be adequately applied in all cases. As a working scenario, we adopted the definition of Louis Forsdale, which mainly gives precedence to the integrating role of communication. The next section is dedicated to the presentation of certain basic characteristics of the *Communication in The Animal Kingdom*, which are useful for some later comparative approach, while the *Verbal Communication* deals briefly with the essentials of Linguistics, as well as with some

types of social communication. The more complex presentation of the *Non-Verbal Communication* includes several areas of interest, like the Kinesics – the communications theory that focuses on body language and facial expressions, the most important mode of non-verbal human communication. The detailed treatment of the meaning, for the main body gestures that are frequently used in the relations between humans, is useful for both the identification of hidden messages (very often more important than the verbal ones) and the recognition of mind-control attempts that use various techniques of manipulation; the Proxemics – the study of self-management in terms of personal space, the role of distances between people in the communication process and the manifestation of territorial instincts in correlation to the evolution of social relations; and finally the Written Communication and the Communication Through Artistic Creation are the last modes of non-verbal communication that are presented here. The synoptic presentation of *The Science and Theories of Communication from A Sociological Perspective* links the above content to the next sub-chapter, *Techniques of Psychological Manipulation*.

The challenge of building a comprehensive image of the altering ways of the processes involved in human communication, by means of methods and techniques of influencing, persuading and manipulating the human consciousness, was greater as the mass of contemporary literature is quite deceiving, taking into account that most of the sources, for example, agree on the fact that “the media is manipulating” while obfuscating the actual mechanics of the manipulation; in the rare cases of actual analysis of these mechanics, their approach is rather unilateral, without any multidisciplinary analytical view on the phenomenon. Our personal research into this domain led to the systematization of the obtained data into two distinct groups: *Manipulation Techniques Through Direct Human Contact* and *Manipulation Techniques Used by the Media*.

The first group deals successively with the Verbal Communication (presenting, by actual examples from important published studies, the most well-known techniques in the category of so-called “small manipulation”); the Non-Verbal Communication – Body Language (final observations on the study of manipulation through the means of Kinesics); the Mixed Techniques – Neurolinguistic Manipulation (the description of a persuasion method developed by Richard Badler and John Grinder, a psychologist and a linguist respectively, a method that uses the combination of Milton Erickson’s indirect induction and subliminal inoculation of suggested identification by mimicking the interlocutor’s body language).

The *Manipulation Techniques Used by Mass-Media* consists in two sections: the Induction by Means of Static Images (“classical” case studies of manipulation through calling on the social rules) and the Mind-Manipulation Techniques Using Hidden Messages in Advertising Images and Video. Firstly the controversial subject of “Subliminal Images” is given a review; although they “can only be successful when the subject is induced toward a behavior it is already inclinable to” [FBTM, 167](#) and they are banned by law in Romania, these messages are still currently used, in various forms, by the present-day media, as demonstrated by the actual examples included in our thesis.

The next subjects are the “Hidden Visual Messages” and the “Visual Stimuli - Exploiting Primary Instincts and Sentiments”, both of which are using dissimulation and benefit sometimes from certain “Technical Artifices” that can alter the state of consciousness of the receiving public. The penultimate point, “Symbols in Advertising” briefly presents the application modes for symbolic meanings of fundamental elements; the rather moderate use in advertising and media of meanings deriving from these “pure” symbols, as well as from the archetypal ones, is a reality that most probably is generated by the impossibility to control the dominant meanings, which cannot be easily altered or quickly associated with some commercial product. In most of the cases some “cultural” pseudo-symbols are “invented”, such are the logos for companies or brands, built by alteration or “adaptation” of widely-known symbols to the requirements of the beneficiary’s commercial strategy. The chapter is concluded by the presentation of a yet another controversial subject, the “Hidden Messages In Audio Clips”. On one hand, in the case of *backmasking* (a recording technique that includes backwise recorded fragments of instrumental or vocal music between the normally recorded tracks) we more or less deal with a speculative attempt of the producer, eventually with financial gains in mind. On the other hand, in the case of *phonetic reversal*, the results achieved by random phonetic combinations are nothing but, well, random soundbytes; is intriguing, though, the occurrence of “satanic” fragments that, even if they are caused by the susceptibility or the infantile exaltation of some of their listeners, is in essence a phenomenon hard to explain.

### **CHAPTER III – THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF THE CREATION, BETWEEN GENESIS AND INTERPRETATION**

This chapter treats the human components of the creative process, on the basis of our previous studies regarding the primordially of the elements involved in act of creation and

the viability of the work of art in the exponentially dynamic environment of the present days, as well as taking into consideration the subjective factors of the creative genesis and the ways, also subjective, to valorize the artistic creation by interpreting it.

The first sub-chapter is focused on the *Socio-Cultural Premises* and it analyzes these in relation with the deep technological and socio-cultural transformations of the society during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and then with *Influential Factors for The Art Expansion Process*, which factors were decisively influential on the reformation dynamics of the cultural processes and on the day-to-day life; the sub-chapter *New Conceptual Perspectives: the "Death of Arts" or The Shock of Artistic Innovation* opposes the eschatological rhetoric to the innovations brought by the Avant-Garde movements, through the cyclic trends of obsolescence of past artistic movements, which are perceived as lagging behind the current, continuously transforming reality. The first sub-chapter is concluded by an argumentation for the necessity of permanently relating the arts to the trends of the present day: *An Art in Continuous Change*. Whichever its aim is: to educate, or to communicate, or to express the individual or collective angst, or to voice the protest against the faults of the contemporary society, or to pass on certain profound human emotions, the arts are continuously changing, like any other live phenomenon, a concept that has to be permanently revalued and remodeled through the prism of present-day requirements. In this context, our own cognitive endeavor can be also regarded as a connection attempt to the contemporary trends, by recourse to the suggestions of symbols that are both forceful and enduring.

The analysis of the long time dilemmatic (for us) issue of the primordially of Reason and Sensibility as factors in the *Genesis of The Work of Art* led us to the conclusion that in the course of the act of creation one cannot separate Sensibility from Reason as they work together towards the visible finality. These factors function as an organic whole and their weight in the genesis of the work of art is variable, proportional to the author's intention. Starting from the premise that the artist is the initiator of the creation, the subject is then analyzed from the perspective of the author's intentionality, *sub speciaie* of two distinct categories, which are partially opposable: the *Non-Intentional Art* (the creations that pertain to the irrational and assigned as such to the pathological and the creations that result from the ludic spirit of the artist or from the more or less fabulating interpretations of the public) and the *Intentional Art*, which supposes that the author's intention is recognizable, at least up to a certain level, regardless to the public's degree of involvement. The conclusion of the above analysis is presented under the *Intentional vs. Non-Intentional: Communication or Ludic in the Arts?*

The sub-chapter *The Interpretation of The work of Art* begins by outlining the special difficulties in issuing value judgments about the contemporary artistic phenomenon (due to its unprecedented expansion of its range of manifestation, and consequently its range of valuation criteria) and continues, under the title *Intentio Auctoris vs. Intentio Lectoris*, with an exercise in critique that, starting from the terms proposed by Umberto Eco, raises again the discussion about artist's rights as prime initiator of the artistic act, in relation to potential value of the artistic creation, as derived from the public's act of interpretation. The dispute initiated above, of Reason against Sensibility, is renewed here in the context of artwork interpretation: if the weight in the act of creation is mostly taken by the creative impulse of irrational origin (then translated in visible form by means of the reason), in the act of reception then the weight is taken by the reason itself, which works towards decoding the primary impulse and deciphering the original meanings of the artistic creation. A possible solution, even temporary, could consist in adopting a "middle path", a mediation of the two extreme ways. In choosing certain *Modes of Approach in The Interpretation of The Work of Art* we support in fact the necessity to adapt the judgments of value to the present-day reality, through a liberal approach in the evaluation of artistic works, and to take an multidisciplinary approach towards the contemporary artistic manifestations. The new dimensions of the modern experience transform simultaneously both the work of art and its reception and acknowledgement modes, the aesthetical activation of the artworks being made, more often than not, by the public itself.

The sub-chapter *The Creative Subjectivism in Art* is concluding the third chapter: viewed as a result of an exclusively subjective undertaking, the work of art requires the presence of both elements specific to being human, the reasonable component cannot be dissociated from the sensible one, as both of them are involved in various degrees in the creative process and in the valuation through the public's interpretation. Even when he is creating a reproduction from nature, the true artist succeeds in giving a personal note, a subjective interpretation of a reality expressed through image, by which the represented reality transforms itself into a wonder-generating phenomenon.

#### **CHAPTER IV – THE OWN PERSONAL CREATION: A PROPOSAL TO RECUPERATE CERTAIN SYMBOLS WITH MAGICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

In this chapter we propose to discover the meaning of our own creative endeavor of conceptual essence: to express, within the present, the idea of sacred and sacredness, to unveil

the spiritual substance of the World, by using re-contextualized signs and symbols (specific mainly to the Christian spirituality and not excluding other cultures and civilizations), represented through an artistic language that is personal. The symbols with magical significance, as they are recuperated in our own artistic creation, have no mystical, magical or religious essence as such, but relate to these essences. In this regard, the notion of *magic* is not used in relation to the magical rituals and practices, but it refers to their capacity to evoke a certain spiritual atmosphere, through the attraction towards the fascinating mystery included in the images.

By mean of the symbols of *familiar-indefinite* type, which are accessible to the viewer regardless of their cultural preparedness, their consciousness is permeated by *situations-ideas-sentiments*, which are symbols re-contextualized and circumscribed through a personal meaning that is connected to the current trends of re-vitalizing the mystery towards the resuscitation of values and of latent forces of the human spirit.

Throughout the entire chapter the catalytic role played by our decade-long theoretical investigation that intensified during our Ph.D. research program is evident. The chapter begins with the presentation of the conceptual foundations of the two directions taken by our own artistic creation, which are conventionally defined as *conceptual* and *lyrical*.

The *conceptual* direction is dominated by the rational vision (both in the ideatic presentation and the compositional organization), discretely accompanied by a lyrical accent.

The works that we classify within the *lyrical* direction express condensed artistic-spiritual experiences, perceived as a simultaneous flow of associations of *sensations-sentiments-ideas* that are translated into image by the restrained usage of rationalizing elements, regarded as just “tools of work”, with a focus mainly on the spontaneous creative gesture.

For the presentation of our artworks we adopted the following organizing scheme: firstly we display the concept that initiated the genesis of the work, followed by the detailed analysis of the image and finally we present the materials, the techniques and the methods employed during the successive work stages. When possible, the most important stages (or computer simulations thereof) were illustrated with meaningful images.

Our professional training as art restorer – involving detailed recording of intervention methodology on the artwork, supported by comprehensive graphic and photographic documentation – combined with our current employment as teaching assistant in the same field, had undoubtedly an impact on organizing the presentation of our personal works. Fully aware of the risk raised by the excessively detailed presentation of the “making” of our

personal artworks, this section of the doctoral thesis underwent several stages of reduction and condensation, leaving only the detailed presentation of particular works that show high conceptual or compositional complexity, as well as unusual technical solutions for some issues that appeared during the creative process. As we shall see, these situations are to be found mainly within the *conceptual* direction.

The presentation of each artwork is concluded by a reference, placed as an extended caption beneath the final image, directing to the corresponding image in *Annex 1.3* of the thesis. In the electronic document (.pdf) this reference functions as a hyperlink to the corresponding page in *Annex 1.3*, to ease the flow of lecture.

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the dawn of time, the human beings have incessantly tried to make themselves a better face. Trying to survive in a hostile environment, humans gradually uncovered their own cognitive potential, which allowed them to discover and explore whole ranges of abilities and techniques that helped them survive the competition with the other species. During the human evolution, once the essential priorities were changed, these practices and techniques were adapted and perfected to the aim of achieving the supremacy against another fearsome adversary: the man's own species. Beginning with the advantage that achieving these abilities provided (enhancing his position among the people), the human being started using various divinatory practices, by which he hoped to bring on his side the unseen supernatural forces, both of which being possible incipient forms of communication. Equally, the human being is permanently involved in complex information exchanges with its living environment or its peers. These exchanges occur at various levels of depth and complexity, beginning with those that use the sensory organs – which enable it to make a first contact with the environment and other beings, continuing with empathic requests (with spontaneous resonance at the level of subconscious), and finally the exchanges that manifest through the direct use of reason (verbal or written communications, etc.). Concurrently with the first forms of inter-human communication, the first attempts at manipulating the fellow human also appear.

The present “explosive” development of technology, and implicitly of the means of public broadcast of information, generated an unprecedented dynamics of human relations, which are today in a state of unbelievable complexity. In few seconds, people from the furthest corners of the world can communicate through text, sound, static or moving images. This state of fact can have, though, the negative result of a tendency to alienate and isolate the

person, which tends to lose its horizon of social life. Concurrently, the domain of visual arts is also affected negatively, as the present “explosive” development of new technologies, which led to a major evolutionary leap of the mass-media, has as a secondary effect a sensorial over-stimulation affecting the present-day humans. This over-stimulation causes first of all a distinct confusion of human perception, reasoning and affect. Thus, there appear new “moral and cultural” systems of value, which are focused on our transformation into “happy consumers” of unneeded products and services, under the commercial slogans of modernity and comfort regardless of costs. Last but not least, a whole range of behavioral alterations are induced, on large scale, to the receiving public.

It is perhaps symptomatic the fact that the majority of contemporary youth choose to see a movie instead of reading the book the movie is based on, they choose to spend their time in front of the computer instead of visiting a museum or an art gallery, they prefer to go clubbin’, instead of going to the church, and they prefer to endlessly chat within the social networks of the internet instead of practicing sports.

We shall not provide in this context statistic data on the time spent in front of the TV set or the PC, nor shall we refer to the available information on the behavioral deviations resulting from the “bloody” productions broadcasted in cinemas or by the TV channels. We shall though point out the most worrying aspects of present-day life: free violence and the grotesque, more and more frequently found within productions meant for **children**. Another relevant example is the broadcasting in the 1997 Japan of an episode of the ”Pokemon” animation, entitled *Computer Soldier Porigon*: “(...) at the end of the episode, ambulances picked up hundreds of kids, from the panicked show viewers suffering from hemorrhage, convulsions, epileptic seizures etc” [RDMS. 78]. The episode, that contained red and blue stroboscopic images intercalated between the animation frames (in the forma of successive flashes), was broadcast only once, being later on forbidden for large-scale broadcasting (it can still be seen nowadays but only on the [internet](#)).

In Romania, according to the study “Representation of TV Violence and Child Protection”, ordered by the National Audio-Visual Council, animation programs, meant especially for children, contain 6-7 more violence scenes than other monitored programs, broadcasting, as an average 20 violent actions (especially physical and verbal) per hour. The above aspects draw the attention of politicians as well, a first alarm signal dating from 2010 and consisting in the political statement of the PNL deputy Cristina-Ancuța Pocora.

With the help of mass-media, we are nowadays all connected and involved in the realities of a continuously changing present and implicitly we depend on the means that made this possible.

Which are the common denominators of these means of transmitting the information?

**Symbols** certainly represent one of these common denominators, as they initiate a form of universal communication, which exceeds any linguistic or cultural barrier – the expressive force of symbols being virtually unlimited. By their very nature, symbols cannot exist though without the meanings assigned to them by the human society in general and the human being in particular. The plurivalence of symbols is developed from the multiple interpretations assigned to them by the human consciousness, which in its turn is conditioned by a wide palette of factors: from the educational, cultural and moral ones, belonging to cultural areas specific to the various geographic zones, to the multiple influences generated by the necessities and standards of civilization of the nowadays society.

How can symbols under these circumstances be an efficient form of universal communication?

We have not found so far an easy answer ... One of the explanations can consist in the specific features of symbols, such as the one of mediator between the conscious and the subconscious and the one of suggestion, or the one of expressing the indefinable. Another explanation can be provided by Jung's archetypes, which would become manifest as almost universal psychic structures, or as a kind of collective consciousness expressed by means of "the most energetic symbols" [\[CGDS.I, 27\]](#). Symbols being available to all community members, their deciphering involved the participation for the discovery of the meanings they contain. An image becomes a symbol only to the extent the one contemplating it is willing to make an imaginary transfer of meanings, the symbol having the force, as a message bearer, of transforming the receiver in participant, by a kind of psychological and emotional transfer.

In order to be viable, a symbol must always remain actual, to determine multiple interpretations and constructive spiritual and cultural relations. In this case, we could speak of a benefic evolution thereof, of a real progress of its meanings. Unfortunately, the intense usage of certain symbols for commercial purposes considerably shortens their lifetime, leading by the effect of supra-saturation, to the banalization or even their condemnation to mediocrity and vulgarity. Be them forms of verbal communication – the written word (expressed by means of publications such as: newspapers, books, magazines etc.) or the spoken one (the interpersonal usual dialogue, or conferences, lectures taught in various educational institutions), forms of non-verbal communication (body language, mimicry etc),

or forms of mediatization of the information with the help of mass-media – the static image (artistic works, albums, photographs) or the moving one accompanied by sound (non-conventional forms of art: happening, installations etc, as well as various types of films projected in cinemas or broadcast via the TV channels), all these forms of communication, susceptible of persuading in various degrees of value the human psyche, are corruptible.

Under these circumstances, many of the initial meanings and values of certain symbols (intensively used by mass-media) acknowledge important conceptual, semantic and ideological mutations, becoming the bearers of ordered “cultural values”– in general, and of the commercial messages– in particular, belonging to the various interested groups.

Throughout time, the techniques of influencing the human will have acknowledged a spectacular development, culminating nowadays with the numerous types of manipulation of the human consciousness: “The 20<sup>th</sup> century did not invent (...) either the strange persuasion force of the image (which religion and political power have since always used and abused), or the suspicion the image realism determines in us as for the world surrounding us. The novelty consists undoubtedly in the formidable expansion of this manipulation and in the consolidation of the power of a representation system that now infiltrates in all action of daily life, even in our brains and affectivity” [\[MFAN, 10\]](#). All means of communicating information can be and in many real situations they real are bearers of the will and implicitly of the interests of different persons, of the interests of political groups or of the mercantile preoccupations of transnational companies. This fact is achieved with the help of experts in marketing strategies and of the directions of imagistic propaganda for advertising, which are using on purpose techniques of alteration and influencing the human consciousness, using even the extraordinary expressive force of certain symbols; **all** means are used for reaching the advantages aimed at, be them as impressive as possible turnovers or “just” obtaining the electorate’s sympathy.

In certain cases, in order to obtain a major impact at the level of the target group, there are exploited certain meanings that pertain to archetypal symbolic images, which in other cases there are reactivated obscure or exotic penetrating symbols that are raised, by disturbing the initial context and by the obsessive repetition, to the degree of real “cultural values”. Finally, “cultural” pseudo-symbols are “invented” by the alteration or “adaptation” of the known ones to the requirements of the own marketing strategies. Combined to the techniques of influencing and manipulation of human consciousness (individual or global), the meanings with commercial connotations of these pseudo-symbols become on one side an effective instrument for the generation of artificial needs, or for the generation of dependency on some

products or services, and on the other side, they produce new standards of a doubted value promoting subculture, easily acquired illicit comfort and mediocrity. A typical example in this regard is the syntagm the *MTV generation*, invoked more and more frequently by the youth nowadays.

As we could notice so far, a series of these techniques, detectable until a certain point and apparently harmless, are manifested by exploiting the lack of awareness of the receiving public, or by means of various subterfuges, by the creation of favorable conjunctural situation for the pursued aims. In marketing, for instance, the **AIDA** model is used, – consisting in capturing the **A**ttention, raising **I**nterest, stimulating **D**esire, passing to **A**ction or to **A**cquisition [\[MAIT, 35\]](#). More serious is the situation in which by various procedures, the human psyche is influence and manipulated at the level of the subconscious, in most cases the subject being unaware of the fact that it was the target of an aggression. These techniques, whose development acknowledged a first culminating moment in the period of the “cold war”, reached at present a degree of efficiency and complexity hard to imagine. It is useless to state here that many of these techniques are not even now unveiled to the public at large, for reasons easy to understand, in the few publications on this subject available so far being identified only some of the usual types applied by marketing specialists by means of advertising.

At present, there exists a series of advices, techniques and algorithms for the modeling of the human psyche resistance to the pressure applied by those trying to modify its behavior, thinking and affectivity according to their interests. All these have as a common denominator the knowledge of the manipulation techniques: being aware of the existence hereof, knowing which are the applied techniques and the favoring contexts, the subject of the aggression can identify the aim pursued by the “stage director” and can determine his own defensive strategy... In other words, “knowing the manipulation techniques, we can resist them” [\[FBTM, 167\]](#).

As a reaction against these tendencies of influencing the human will, no matter its ways of expression, the own ideatic and artistic approach aims at valorizing positive ideas and concepts, expressed especially by means of symbols with magical meanings, whose perception, apart from the reasonable content, also involve the cognitive meanings that belong to the spiritual – empathic side of the human being.

The ”novelty” proposed in this context consists not so much in the way of organization of the artistic signs, of the symbols involved but rather in the proposal of involuntary insinuation of the ideatic content (by means of archetypal symbols) and of empathic

resonance with the unity of the own artistic creation. The empathic appeal to the viewer is based on the use of elementary symbols *of the familiar-indefinite type*, encountered throughout history in various fields of human activity: art (fundamental geometric shapes), science (the cube, the sphere etc.), religion (the cross, the triangle, the stylized eye etc.), *familiar* presences therefore, whose role is the one of facilitating the interaction between the public and the own artistic creation. After this first recognition of a “familiar presence”, the art viewer will be able in the future to gradually understand the various relations of compositional organization of plastic signs, as well as the ideatic, aesthetic – artistic message generated by the same.

The necessity of finding modalities of persuasive artistic expression of the own ideatic universe led in the end to the creation of original mixed symbols – *symbols with magic meanings*, achieved by new combinations of symbols with great preservation power, the novelty of these combinations unveiling significant elements of the intimate layers of the subjective inner world.

The expressiveness and mystery involved in the symbolistics of the elementary geometric shapes, combined and organized in various compositional schemes, allude both to various artistic cultures of the past and to the present ones. Thus, both the personal ideatic universe, and the states of the soul, sentiments and personal thoughts, difficult to transmit by means of the only otherwise unlimited support of words will insinuate, due to the exploitation of the sentiment of familiar-indefinite, much more easily in the art viewer’s consciousness. Given the continuously increasing daily stress, the viewer does not need an additional anxiety generating source (the fear in front of the unknown, even if it gets manifested in art). We refer here to the recuperation of a certain predisposition toward that “spiritual”, which the noise of existential fight sometime turn obscure, a predisposition of throwing those seeds with benefic effects, that shall germinate together with the fulfillment of several necessary conditions.

In any case, even if the art view has not enjoyed yet any other aesthetic – artistic experience, he/she can perceive a pleasant artistic “presence”, possibly with decorative qualities, but which involves an intimate structure circumscribed to an abstract concept (of metaphysic type). Such insinuation of the metaphysic in the viewer’s consciousness can provide the necessary support for a later “germination”, which will involved the viewer in different evolutionary processes of the spiritual type.

In the own artistic creation, we try to give a real expression to our passion for the fascinating universe of symbolic inter-relations and for the latent spiritual potential, still unexploited, of the human being, in tangible artistic forms, that may insinuate in the viewer’s

consciousness, by means of the *symbols with magic meanings*, *situations-ideas-sentiments* that express a mystical - magical subjective reality, which contains both explicit meanings, and unspeakable ineffable **magical meanings**. This subjective reality is expressed, by excellence, by means of images, whose role is the one of “ambassadors” of the own body of ideas. The *symbols with magical meanings* play a decisive role throughout this whole approach, as they can be, by re-contextualizing and re-circumscribing them to an original personal input, a viable form of artistic expression, thematically connected to the nowadays realities. On the other side, by means of such symbols, one can evoke (more suggestively and more variedly than words could), aspects and situations that pertain to the sphere of the spiritual, the metaphysic, the divine.

## NOTES

Additional information, a series of personal comments, as well as the completions pertaining to the chosen topics were inserted at the end of each chapter. This solution allowed both a better « ventilation » of the main body of the text, and the grouping of notes according to different areas of interest, facilitating the consultation hereof.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliographic sources that were consulted were mainly printed publications, except for a series of “sensitive” information or rare images, that were found, unfortunately, only on the Internet (for instance, those referring to the phenomenon of “manipulation”). Mention should be made though that such information was used only to the extent it completed the basic information provided by the specialized printed publications.

Due to the considerable number of symbol interpretations – sometimes contradictory – in each case it was necessary to specify the author, by insertion in the text abbreviations consisting in the initials of the author’s name and forename, followed by the initials of the title of the consulted volume and the number of the page, abbreviations that are presented in the Bibliography at the end of the thesis. For instance: [\[BHDS, 9\]](#) - Biedermann, Hans, „**D**icționar de **S**imboluri”, vol. 1-2, Editura Saeculum I.O., Bucharest, 2002, p. 9; [\[CGDS, 20\]](#) - Chevalier, Jean; Gheerbrant, Alain, „Dicționar de Simboluri. Mituri, vise, obiceiuri, gesturi, forme, culori, numere”, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2009, p. 20; [\[EIES, 8\]](#) - Evseev, Ivan, „Enciclopedia semnelor și simbolurilor culturale”, Editura Amarcord, Timișoara, 1999, p. 8;

[[FBTM, 167](#)] - Ficeac, Bogdan, „Tehnici de manipulare”, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Editura C. H. Beck, București, 2006, p. 167; [[RDMS, 78](#)] - Ruști, Doina, „Mesajul subliminal în comunicarea actuală”, Editura Triconc, Bucharest, 2005, p. 167; [[MAIT, 35](#)] - Mattelart, Armand; MATTELART, Michele, „Istoria teoriilor comunicării”, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 35; [[MEAN, 10](#)] - Mèredieu, Florence de, „Arta și noile tehnologii”, Editura Enciclopedia Rao, Bucharest, 2004, p. 10.

In the successive translations of major reference works, we noticed considerable differences, and in such cases it was necessary to specify the edition that we used. For instance, the abbreviation [[CGDS](#)] without specifying the number of the volume refers to the 2009 edition, while the abbreviation [[CGDS.I,18](#)] refers to volume I of the 1994 edition.

## SOURCES OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Each of the images we used has an explanatory caption, except for those images whose meaning is obvious. The high number of images, corroborated with the necessity of managing them as effectively as possible throughout the whole process of elaboration of the present work, led to the solution of presenting them in a distinct form for each chapter. Thus, the code number of each image is composed of the Roman number of the current chapter, which is continued by Arab numbers with the specification that the use of such Arab numbers starts over in each chapter. For instance, Fig. II.15 belongs to chapter *II. The Subjective Dimension of Communication* and Fig. IV.300 is an integral part of chapter *IV. The Own Artistic Creation: Proposal To Recuperate Certain Symbols With Magical Significance*.

The source of the various images is specified in *Sources of the Illustrations*, which can be either printed publications, or publications posted in the virtual space *World Wide Web* (Internet), or the personal image archive, in the case of the own creations.

All specified images were computer – processed in various ways, starting from corrections of the chromatic and aspect deficiencies or of the perspective distortions, up to the elaboration of local and general simulations of the works or even the integral illustration of the work in digital format, in the preliminary phase of the creation. For this reason, we used an abbreviation, specified on each page of the *Sources of the Illustrations*, so to allow the identification of the type of image we used in the case of each illustration.

## ANNEXES

*Annex 1* focuses on the presentation of information pertaining to the author of the thesis: the *professional CV* (*Annex 1.1*) and the *List of personal publications* (*Annex 1.2*) - in which there are specified basic information: dimensions, techniques of execution and thumbnails of the own works, which allow the fast visual identification of the works – thumbnails which are connected by *links* to the full-size images, presented in *Annex 1.3* (*Reproductions of the Own Artistic Works*).

*Annex 2* contains working instruments, such as the *Alphabetic Index of Symbols Specified Within the Thesis*, which can be used for the identification and fast consultation of the presented symbols, having at the same time the role of supporting the general *Table of Contents*. We also considered useful to include a *Short Glossary*, which provides the usual meanings of the key terms frequently used in the present cognitive approach, as well as definitions of very “technical” terms used in the specialized literature.

*Annex 3*, that is included exclusively in the document in electronic format (.pdf), is recorded on the DVD attached to the present thesis and contains several of the images, controversial audio and video clips, analyzed in chapter II, as well as a series of useful freeware for the viewing thereof or for the viewing of the PhD thesis.

### THE DOCUMENT IN ELECTRONIC FORMAT (.PDF)

In order to facilitate access to information, the document in electronic format (.pdf - *PortableDocumentFormat*) recorded on the DVD attached to the present thesis, contains a series of useful instruments specific to this type of document, such as: bookmarks of the titles in the “Table of Contents”, fast links to the sources of images or articles that we used, or references to other complementary symbols, or to Annexes. We also considered useful to include fast links from the bibliographic abbreviations used in the text, to the full title specified in the *Bibliography*, in order to facilitate the identification of the bibliographic sources that we used.

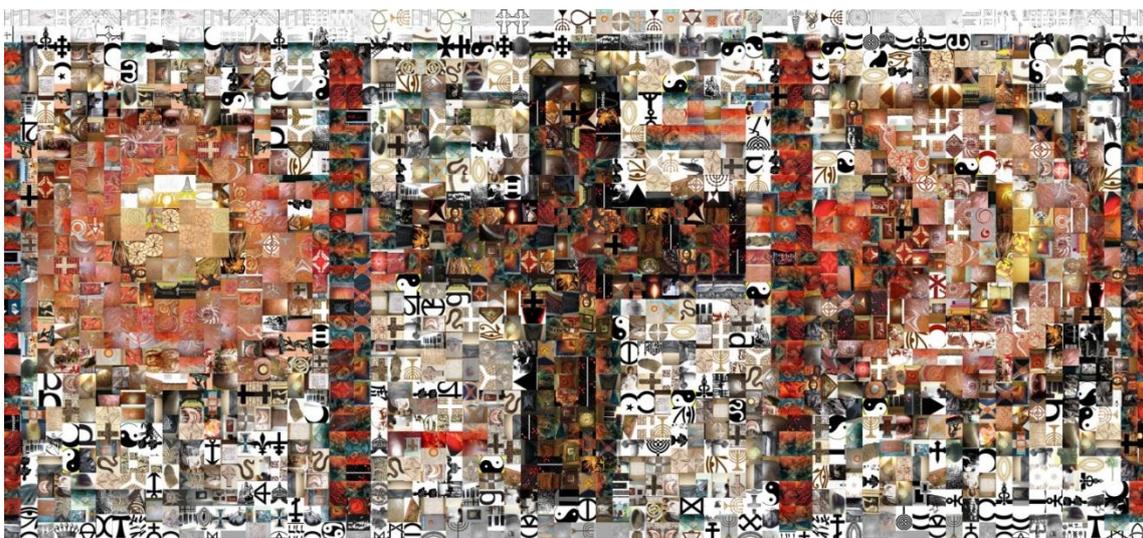
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Are symbols the result of human mind creation or are they a divine gift? Can they be manifested and perceived only in art, or are they present in other fields of human life? Are they integral parts of magic, ritual or divinatory practices, or just simple “propagandistic” images of the same? Can we involuntarily be influenced of the unspeakable content of symbols? Which is their impact on human psyche? Do we need symbols, in general? Do we need, nowadays, symbols in art?

To all these questions it is difficult to formulate strictly rational answers, due to the immixture of inherent spiritual “volatile” components such as human affects, ”responsible” of the lyric, empathic load, of inter-human relations and the perpetuation of the species, or the telluric resources of the subconscious, involved in various value degrees in the mystery of artistic creation and last but not least, due to the sacred mysteries, spiritual “common denominator” of all religions.

For this reason, at the end of this approach, we shall discover not necessarily an answer to each of the above questions, but rather a way. A way to another personal subjective and creative vision, in which an important role for the transmission of messages addressed both to the reason and to the heart of the viewer is played by the own artistic creations, in their capacity of subjective ambassadors of the inner personal universe.

By the capacity of involving the art viewer in the art creator’s fascinating subjective personal universe, by the viewer’s affective participation into the deed of creation, including by the interpretation hereof, art, born with the help of symbolic language of the subconscious, is superior to any persuasive message.



”Rite of Passage”, image of the own work, recomposed by the digital collage of about 3000 images

*In the end, creation pertains to subjective universe and the form in which it is expressed...*