

**Mircea Eliade and Ioan Petru Culianu**  
**Two Different Paradigms in the Study of Religious Facts\***

Ramona MATEI,  
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania

**Keywords:** history, history of religions, hermeneutics, method, mind games, Mircea Eliade, Ioan Petru Culianu

**Abstract:** In the “reading,” made by the disciple Ioan Petru Culianu on the master Mircea Eliade’s work and life, we actually distinguish the interpreter’s own obsessions and the need of a self-enlightenment regarding the role of the discipline that he practices (history of religions) and the significance of the unpredictable succession of the historical events. “Young Culianu,” who is still influenced by Eliade’s philosophy, understands the history of religions as a discipline of the existential implications, capable of offering a profound cognition of the human being and of his relations with the world (history) in which he lives. In the last period of his creation, exceeding the modern hermeneutics of the sense, practiced by the master, Culianu interrogates history from an interdisciplinary and systemic position. In his attempt to learn the universal method, a true *clavis universalis*, applicable to any field of knowledge, Ioan Petru Culianu gradually detaches himself from Eliade’s view, unveiling a new paradigm in the study of the religious facts.

**E-mail:** [ramonamatei78@yahoo.com](mailto:ramonamatei78@yahoo.com)

\*

## 1. *Introduction*

“Subject Eliade” (the man, the scholar and the prose writer) certainly represents one of Culianu’s constant interests in his work. The monograph *Mircea Eliade*, published in 1978, in Italy, in Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, the study entitled *Mircea Eliade, the Unknown*, which should have represented the introduction to a planned book of conversations between the two historians of religions (for the collection “East-Quest” run by Paul Goma at the Hachette Publishing House), the correspondence between Culianu and other acquaintances or friends (for instance, the letter exchange with his Italian friend, Gianpaolo Romanato), the studies, the essays, the reviews and the young scholar’s conferences that have as target the master’s work and personality, some political articles published by Culianu in his exile press (especially in the weekly *Lumea liberă românească* in New York, in the column “Scotophilia”) and other texts that belong to the disciple and that have, at first sight, nothing in common with the master’s work and personality (sometimes even Culianu’s deliberate “silences” and the absence

---

\* This article was written for the following project: *PhD Studies: Portal for an Eminent Career in Research and Knowledge Society*, financed by the Functional Domain Programme for the Human Resources Management 2007-2013 (grant POSDRU /88/1.5/S/47646).

of certain expected references to Eliade's work become revealing for their specific complex relationship) – all these form an interpretative *puzzle*, a labyrinth whose centre is nothing but the same story of the finding of the Self.

Culianu, who is most of the times encomiastic, sometimes distant and ironic, alludes, in his writings, to the “model Eliade” in a continuous attempt to find his own identity; although he credits his achievement to the master, he is aware that the personal “path” can only be properly chosen through an act of self-performance. Thus, Culianu will gradually detach himself from Eliade's, and he will adapt himself to a postmodern “age” of studying the religious facts.

## 2. Mircea Eliade in “young” Culianu's interpretation: the existential implications of the history of religions

In the first stage of his creation,<sup>1</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, truly influenced by Mircea Eliade's thinking, had not yet been detached from the modern hermeneutics of the meaning. This attitude of constancy towards the profound signification of the world is moderately expressed through the medium of some studies where the exegete describes and elucidates the essential data of work belonging to the one who was meant to become his master. The article *L'anthropologie philosophique*, published in *Les Cahiers de l'Herne*, number 33/1978 (as well as its variants: *Experience, Knowledge, Initiation. An Essay about Mircea Eliade* – July-August 1974; „... in his stories ...” – an incomplete text), *Mircea Eliade's Imagery Universe* (approximately dated in 1978-1979), *Mircea Eliade's Metamorphosis* (published in *Limite*, Paris, 28/9, 1979), *Mircea Eliade and the Flying Turtle* (written at the beginning of 1981, but published in the German version in H. P. Duerr (ed.), *Die Mitte der Welt*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1984), the monograph study *Mircea Eliade* (drafted between 1976-1977 and published by Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, 1978) – all these become conspicuous for the manner in which Culianu understands the role of the History of Religions in the first stage of his activity.

In both Eliade's and Culianu's views, this privileged discipline, through the medium of which they will elaborate contemplations that will transcend the field of religion, cannot be reduced to a simple chronological order and inventory of the researched deeds. The history of religions is not an autistic discipline whose research is exclusively historical, but an expansive manner of interpreting religious deeds. This implicit “openness” in the research of the religious phenomenon affects the entire epistemology and it also presents ontological effects. Investigating the religious ideas

---

<sup>1</sup> Horia-Roman Patapievicci elaborates the theory of “the last Culianu” in an article initially appeared in *Letters, Arts, Ideas*, a cultural supplement for the *Cotidianul* newspaper (IV, nr. 27 (161), 18th July, 1994), which subsequently would be modified significantly. The article is specifically meant to be included in a volume coordinated by Sorin Antohi and entitled *Ioan Petru Culianu. The Man and the Work* (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2003, 618-639); afterwards, the article is entirely revised in order to become the nucleus of a book entitled *The last Culianu* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2010), in which the exegete suggests the following division, making reference to the years of the writing or rewriting of the paradigm-books from every stage: “<young Culianu> (*Iocari serio*, 1979); <the first Culianu> (*Eros and Magic in Renaissance*, 1981); transition from <the first> (*The Dual Gnosis*, 1986) to <the last Culianu> (*The Gnosis Tree*, 1990); <the last Culianu> (*Out of This World*, 1990; the articles in the *Incognita* magazine, 1089-1990; books projects, 1990-1991)” (annotation nr. 2/p. 8).

that are shaped in time in human mentality, the historian of religions tends, in fact, to answer questions related to the being-in-the-world condition and to offer a more profound understanding of human being. Young Culianu will insist on these exact aspects in order to establish the particularities of the “implicit method”<sup>1</sup> that appears in Eliade’s work. Being influenced by the phenomenological perspective, which was concerned with the perception of the religious essence, Eliade introduces the concept of *hierophany* in order to designate the manner in which the sacred manifests itself in the world, and it appears to be something different and superior. The sacred-profane dichotomy, “two manners of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in his history,”<sup>2</sup> becomes a central theme in the maestro’s work. Although the sacred can manifest itself everywhere, there are privileged hierophanies which Eliade inventories, establishing the most significant categories (the firmament, the earth, the water, the stone, the tree etc.). Together with the sacred experience of time and space – rendered by the archaic man’s ritual participation to the cosmogonic myth – these hierophanies become the object of a “creative” interpretation whose aim is the understanding of the significances of religious forms. Excelling the pure historic-religious morphology (that depicts and classifies the forms of a phenomenon), Eliade’s research leads to a “philosophical anthropology,” that is the “hermeneutics of hierophanies in relation to the question about the meaning of the being placed besides the deeds and the hierophanies”<sup>3</sup>. Religious hermeneutics, as it is understood by Eliade, reveals the principles of archaic ontology and, through a rebound, it can indicate the specific manner of placing the modern man in the world. Eliade’s entire work (both scientific and literary) questions, in fact, the meaning of the western civilization, and the solutions through which the present existential “crisis” can be surpassed. In this sense, the history of religions transgresses the intentions of an exclusively historic discipline, becoming a “creative hermeneutics” that is meant “to decipher and to explain all man’s meetings with the sacred, from pre-history to our present time”<sup>4</sup>. It is able to clarify significations that otherwise would remain indistinguishable, setting it up for being a saving “spiritual technique,” that is susceptible to “transforming man”<sup>5</sup> through the quality modification of his existence. Explicating the master’s work, the young exegete believes that its humanitarian message is represented by the possibility of “liberating” the being through the rediscovery (anamnesis) of archaic ontology. Although he no longer recognizes the “signs” of the sacred, the modern man continues to live unconsciously and depending on the same categories as the archaic man did. On the other hand, the profound structure of his psychic life is ordered by the same symbols of

---

<sup>1</sup> One of the most significant reviews on the master’s suggested system refers to the absence of a scientific methodology: “Eliade does not have an explicit `method,` but he is implicitly connected to the phenomenology of religions as well as to the morphologic and structuralist trends that were active inside or outside the history of religions. (Ioan Petru Culianu, *Mircea Eliade*, 2nd Edition, translated by Florin Chirițescu and Dan Petrescu (Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, 1998), 132).

<sup>2</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 3rd Edition, translated by Brândușa Prelipceanu (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2007), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, *Mircea Eliade*, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Nostalgia of the Origins. History and Meaning in Religion*, translated by Cezar Baltag (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 1994), 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

initiation that used to constitute “the pragmatic models” of existence. The initiation patterns have lost their traditional meaning and now they exist in the imaginary and illusory life, and they can be recognized, in a degenerated form, in the “evidences,” “obstacles,” “attempts” and sufferings that the present man encounters in his trial of living a genuine existence. Culianu’s conclusion is that, in Eliade’s perspective, the complete being can only be formed through a double action that suggests the escape from the historic present, from the profane contingent (through dreams, music, reading, artistic imagination) and through the participation to history (through the “ritual of the destiny”). The second situation is formed in Culianu’s terms: “the modern man endures the judgment of history, and he is unconsciously initiated in the sensible existence through his very historicism”.<sup>1</sup> In other words, being in the world (living in history) represents an experience of suffering that is necessary for man in order to freely evolve to the sacred. History itself plays the role of an “initiator” who proposes, through its “signs,” the openness towards a trans-historical reality, archaic in nature. Whereas the traditional society man used to transform every historical event in accordance with the mythical categories, rendering a “reality” through his sacred belonging, the modern man is overwhelmed by the arbitrary sequence of events in the profane world. The linear and irreversible time, which was introduced by the Judaic-Christians, leads to the abolition of the temporal cycle, and makes impossible the intermittent recovery of mythical origins. Thus, the modern man loses all transcendental motifs of existence and misses all attempts of finding true liberty. Nonetheless, Eliade’s message, in “young Culianu’s” interpretation, is optimistic. In order for our existence to become meaningful again and to stand up the “terror of history,” one must remember the fact that destiny, the world, and history are a simple “camouflage” of a foreign reality that sometimes breaks out in the ordinary life. One must rediscover and interpret the hierophanies that have remained unrecognizable for a long time in order to understand it all. Both Eliade’s scientific and literary works have this function of saving man, connecting him to the “paradise lost” of origins. The narration becomes, as psychoanalysis does, a technique of anamnesis that reestablishes the “hierophanic trans-signification of objects,” pointing to the hidden miracle in the “painting on the carpet” of history. “Narrating” becomes equivalent to “saving,” and the literary symbolism represents a manner of revealing the being towards the paradoxical nature (absence-presence) of the sacred. Thus, “history reveals its <true> image, a vehicle of a transcendental texture,” an “immense tapestry,” where it “is that <painting on the carpet> that everyone must re-find and understand”.<sup>2</sup>

This first reading of Eliade’s work reveals the fact that the disciple believes in the “humanitarian” message, deeply “religious” that belongs to the master who cares for his fellow men’s destiny and tries to awake them to live a genuine existence. Eliade, as a wise Tao or a ch’an master, orders the knowledge, suggesting possible paths for attaining liberty. In order to sustain his thesis, Culianu adopts the example of a Buddhist story (*The Scripture of the Lotus*), where it is narrated that the human being’s possibility to attain liberty is as rare as that of a half blind turtle, that reaches the surface of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, *Romanian Studies I. The Illusions of the Nihilism. Doctor Eliade’s Secret*, 2nd Edition, translated by Corina Popescu and Dan Petrescu (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2006), 221; 243.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 247; 253.

water in the exact moment when a holed log appears and helps it reach the shore. "The ch'an master's role" – states Culianu – "is to place holed logs on water in order to offer half blind turtles many possibilities to reach the shore,"<sup>1</sup> and Eliade's humanitarian attempt is, without a shadow of a doubt, can be compared to this action.



Aleksandra Chaushova, *The Yard of Feelings*, 2011,  
pencil on paper, 46,4 x 32,6 cm

"Young Culianu" reflects upon the master's message, and this fact is to be seen, for example, in the belief in those existential implications of the study of the religious phenomenon. Educated in the intellectual climate of Romania of the 60s, the young scholar is disappointed by the arid manner in which this discipline is practiced in the western world, and expresses his regrets in a 1977 letter to his friend, Andrei Pleșu: "«here», in «the West», the history of religions is totally different from what it is in Romania: it is **not** the result of an individual evolution towards a form of ontological perspective (as it was, I believe, in our case), but a philological and archeological discipline with no existential implication. *The possibility* of its cultivation leads to the defeating of any intention of knowledge or of openness towards being"<sup>2</sup>. During his entire career, the history of religions represents a privileged discipline, meant to transgress the historical limits of the research and to generate powerful-impact meditations in the fields of epistemology and ontology. Although in the "last Culianu's" view, everything may be rendered in terms of *mind games*, religion remains the most

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>2</sup> The letter is available in a volume coordinated by Sorin Antohi, *Ioan Petru Culianu. The Man and the Work*, 93.

significant "pattern" of society, whose conscious transformation could lead to the changing of humanity's future.

### 3. "The Last" Culianu and the Theory of the Mind Games

As the scholar adapted to the new postmodern tendencies, Culianu will become more and more interested in the cognitive matters and in all kinds of cosmogonies. The "last Culianu's" view can be found in the interview with Gabriela Adameşteanu, on December the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1990 in Chicago. In this conversation, Culianu emphasizes the fact that contemporary philosophy does no longer favour Heidegger's great themes (*the being* and *the being-to-death*), but it rather concentrates on the investigation of the alternative worlds and on the parallel universes: "Heidegger belongs to a philosophical tradition that experiences the worst dimension of the Christian theology – *memento mori*, the meditation on death –, which does not represent the fascinating part of the Christian theology, that is the *multiplication of the worlds*, the exploration of God's known possibilities, in which man does not have any significant role."<sup>1</sup>

For the "last Culianu," the multiplication of the worlds and the deconstruction of the unique reality, artificially imposed by the modern positivism, represent a necessity both epistemological and ontological. If, at the beginning, Culianu seems enthusiastic about the possibilities of the "philosophical anthropology" suggested by Eliade, later on, he will consider this process obsolete and he will aspire to a cognitive perspective in the study of religion. Thus, the "new philosopher," exposed in Culianu's last letters, "is no longer a mystic of the being and of the intellect, but an enchanter of the creative becoming and of the action itself."<sup>2</sup>

Soon after the publication of the studies after 1981 (*Mircea Eliade l'inconnu* – a unique text written between 1982–1983, that represents the introduction of a planned book of dialogues with Mircea Eliade, and which should have been published at Hachette Publishing House, the „Est-Ouest" collection; *Mircea Eliade et son œuvre: <L'histoire vraie> du mythe* – 1983; *Mircea Eliade et l'idéal de l'homme universel* – 1984; *Mircea Eliade at the Crossroad of Anthropology* – 1985; *Mircea Eliade à la recherche du Graal* – 1987; *The Secret of Doctor Eliade* – 1988; *L'Albero della conoscenza. Invito alla lettura di Mircea Eliade* - 1989), there appear the first symptoms of this transformation of perspectives: the master who was once seen as a "saint," becomes the image of the "mystery priest" who initiates people in the mysteries created by himself. Excelling the stage dominated by Eliade, Culianu neither believes in the "true story" of the myth, nor in the function of the religious hermeneutics of connecting man to the archaic realities. Nevertheless, in the 1978 monograph, the exegete observed the semantic variations of the usage of the term "archetype" in Eliade's work and he did not trust the practicability of Jung's concept "unconscious" in the field of the history of religions. This new interpretation demonstrates the fact that Eliade's achievement was that of expressing, at the right moment, the needed message. The mystery priest, the conscious creator and player of enigmas wants to save the bewildered humanity,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Talking with Ioan Petru Culianu*, an interview by Gabriela Adameşteanu, in *The Sin against the Spirit. Political Writings* (Iaşi: Polirom Publishing House, 2005), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Aurel Codoban, *The Philosopher (of Religions) as "enchanter,"* in Sorin Antohi (coord.), *Ioan Petru Culianu. The Man and the Work*, 559.

providing "holed logs" in order to help man's awareness, but the significance of such a gesture is different. Commenting upon the fantastic stories after 1966 (*Les trios Grâces, Incognito la Buchenwald, Nineteen Rose, Endless Youth, etc.*), Culianu believes that Eliade's third cycle, called "the cycle of the show and of the crypto-graphics," contains the clues of an intention to hide the ultimate truth, which, if it had been known, it would convict us to an existence where there is no possibility of salvation: far from representing an "exemplar story," the myth "stands on nothing," and it is a "tendency of interpreting the nothingness".<sup>1</sup> The hermeneutic activity only makes the myth be "true" and settles a boundary between man and nothingness. In this new "reading," the disciple suggests that Eliade's hermeneutics keeps its existential status; and not because by the end of the interpretation stage it would get to a pre-existent meaning, but because it is the only dimension that can create and built ceaselessly the "meaning," so that the human existence can have a clue: "*The meaning belongs to man, who cannot live unless he has it. <<Liberating>> means to find a meaning. Hermeneutics represents the very function that establishes a meaning. [...] The <<first>> Eliade, the theoretician of the miracle that breaks into the world, believed that the meaning is transcendental to hermeneutics itself. The <<second>> Eliade, the one that belongs to the <<miserable, looked for and encountered Graal>>, believes that the meaning is established by hermeneutics itself. [...] Now, the entire Eliade's message can be summarized as it follows: we must practise hermeneutics in order to survive*"<sup>2</sup>. The Graal is a symbol for spiritual evolution as long as its seeking (interpretation) lasts; hermeneutics, a creative dimension, is, eventually, the seeking of a seeking.

According to this changing in vision, the sequence of events is no longer referred to with a transcendental meaning, and it is no longer situated in an initial field that could insure a justification for human tragedies. The "scrambled writing" of the world could be deciphered, but it is recommended a new possibility of reading it. For "the last Culianu," everything can be defined in terms of the "mind games." The consequence of such an approach indicates the fact that humanity's primordial unity neither consists in a unity of beliefs, nor in the continuity of some unconscious archetypes, but simply in the unity of those procedures with which human minds function regardless of time and space. Humans think, and in similar situations, their minds always produce similar results. The universality of some symbols or the astonishing similitudes among different religious beliefs in distinct geographical areas are no longer explained through conventional origins and mutual influences, but rather through "intertextuality" ("our mental tendency of expressing every new experience in antique expressive patterns"), and "cognitive transmission" (a flexible manner of diffusion, understood as an "active rethinking of tradition, based on a simple set of rules")<sup>3</sup>. The distance between the disciple and his master's "school" is obvious in such contexts.

Considering the new acquisitions of cognitive sciences, as well as fractal mathematics and quantum physics, the savant conceives, in the last part of his life, a universal method, a true *clavis universalis*, that can be applied to any domain of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, *The unknown Mircea Eliade*, in *Mircea Eliade*, 247.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, *Introduction to Out of This World*, translated by Gabriela and Andrei Oişteanu (Iaşi: Polirom Publishing House, 2007), 46-50.

knowledge. Thus, Culianu will start a border research that implies the interconnection and the synthesis of various disciplines. Dissatisfied with the possibilities implied by the morphology of religious deeds, a method that does not involve historical transformations of phenomena (a subtle blame for Eliade inserted in the monograph dedicated to his master), Culianu elaborates his own theoretical model – morpho-dynamics – able to reconcile synchronicity and diachronicity, morphology and dynamics. Defined as “the study of events in a spacing and temporal continuum,” “a cognitive step meant to include diachronicity as a compulsory dimension of the world,”<sup>1</sup> morpho-dynamics studies “ideal objects,” that is the systems<sup>2</sup> of thinking that are extremely complex, and whose heterogeneous development is generated by the dual option-games, applied on a “simple set of rules” (elementary ontological statements, simple sentences about existence, soul, gods etc.). According to this cognitive approach, religion, philosophy, science, literature are no longer understood as distinct domains, but rather they represent systems of ideas originated by the same “generative mechanism,” which operates, in fact, until all connective and reordering possibilities are consumed. The existence of these “ideal objects,” that have an infinity of potential in deployment, cannot be perceived through the limited dimension of reality, but it becomes perfectly intelligible in “their logic dimension,” in the multidimensional space of mind. At this point, Culianu presents “Hinton’s soup” parable that depicts the limited-to-its-existence being’s impossibility of perceiving an object that belongs to a superior dimension: “a flat being that lives on the surface of the soup which I am about to eat will perceive (painfully, I think) the spoon that crosses its space as a simple line whose dimension varies in time”<sup>3</sup>. The dwellers of such a flat Realm can only understand an object that belongs to another dimension if that object appears as a series of events that happen in time. Similarly, ideal systems cross the surface of history called time, and generate an apparently unforeseeable sequence of temporal events. If we succeeded in exiting our limited space, and looked in it from the outside, we would understand that history is a simple *puzzle*, “the sequential, incredibly complex result of the great interaction of some non-sequential systems of thinking”<sup>4</sup>. Looked upon through the narrow “slot” of historical time, these ideal systems seem fragmented and inscrutable, though, in their logic dimension, they form a wholeness similar to the ramifications of a tree. Furthermore, the one who knew

---

<sup>1</sup> Idem, *Introduction to The Tree of Gnosis. Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism*, Second Edition, translated by Corina Popescu (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2005), 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> The systemic perspective refers to the fact that “all phenomena referring to a single unity are interconnected and integrated in a complex structure that generates them.” These systems are “mental processes,” and they follow the “temporal and religious rules of the mind.” (Ioan Petru Culianu, *Religion as system*, Introduction II for Eliade/Culianu, *Dictionary of Religions*, translated by Dan Petrescu (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2007), 26) This text represents the introduction to the American edition for a dictionary entitled *Eliade Guide to World Religions* (New York-San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Idem, *The Historian’s Set for the Fourth Dimension*, in *Out of This World*, 58.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, *System and History*, in *The Mind Games. The History of Ideas, the Theory of Culture, Epistemology*, edition supervised by Mona Antohi and Sorin Antohi, An Introductory Study by Sorin Antohi, Translations by Mona Antohi, Sorin Antohi, Claudia Dumitriu, Dan Petrescu, Catrinel Pleșu, Corina Popescu, Anca Vaidesegan, (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2002), 280.



all the data of the system would be able to foresee all possible solutions, written on its “spectrum of logic tolerance.”

In this paradigm of epistemology, historical studies should follow the very dynamics of the interactions between two systems, and this tendency is still improbable, by far excelling the nowadays speculations. The historian could achieve a depicting operation for the systems in their logic dimension. In Culianu’s terms, “we can still perceive the spoon and the superior world, to which it belongs, a mystery, as well as the manner in which the spoon interacts with other numberless systems from other logic dimensions to form the complex model called history”<sup>1</sup>. Although Culianu does not willingly make metaphysics, he promotes speculations that have “effects in metaphysics,” because, as Ștefan Afloroaei states, in this genuine interpreter’s work, there is still “a shadow from beyond”<sup>2</sup>, that is the image of something that exceeds the being’s will. It could be discussed, in his case, a more relaxed vision of “transcendence” – a notion that loses its traditional meaning (used, for instance, in Eliade’s hermeneutics), and attributed to other meanings according to postmodern mentality.

#### 4. Conclusions

Far beyond the objections on his uncomfortable theories (which are contestable as they do not have a final form because of the author’s premature death), Culianu is to be remembered for stimulating the readers’ minds, for revealing the illusions and the errors people have absolutely trusted for centuries, and for offering us a new perspective on the world. The author suggests the unlimited liberation of the mind instead of absolute certainties and stereotyped thinking.

The young scholar had educated himself through the hearing of the “story” told by Eliade, but he was going to transmit “another story.” Fortunately, the disciple does not fall in the trap of self-annihilation through the “diligent” recurrence of Eliade’s process and, being aware of his own possibilities, he will direct the study of religious facts to another position, he will take this discipline out of stagnation by integrating it in the specific climate of postmodern thinking. In “the last Culianu’s” work (*The Gnosis Tree, Out of This World*, the articles published in *Incognita* magazine), there is almost nothing related to the master’s teaching, the references to Eliade’s work are extremely rare or they are even absent exactly where the reader expects them to be present. Even *The Dictionary of Religions*, signed Eliade/Culianu and published after the master’s death (initially, in a French edition – 1990, then, in an American one – 1991), does not remind the reader of Eliade’s religious phenomenology, it actually represents an illustration of the systemic perspective that Culianu will adopt in the last period of his creation. Should one search for Eliade’s trace in the pages of this dictionary, they would surprisingly find only Culianu.

“The new Culianu” is irreversibly placed on a different orbit from Eliade, and this evidence, however, does not mean the disciple’s “renouncement” of the master, but a normal evolution towards a contemporary perspective. Culianu adapted to the new epistemologies, and the “Eliade model” of research has become less valuable. These

---

<sup>1</sup> Idem, *Introduction to The Tree of Gnosis*, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ștefan Afloroaei, *Ioan Petru Culianu. Effects in the Metaphysical Field*, in Sorin Antohi (coord.), *Ioan Petru Culianu. The Man and the Work*, 501.

methodological differences emphasize the fact that Eliade and Culianu represent two distinct “ages” of the history of religions: on the one hand, the master’s view is more connected to the modern cognitive paradigm (although, Culianu himself considered the master an approaches leader because of the systemic approach to religion, because of his contribution to the changing attitude towards the irrational or because of the distance set towards the theory of linear and cumulative progress of cognition), on the other hand, the disciple, who is in a process of formation, will absorb the new epistemological tendencies and will adapt a specific postmodern attitude. The theory of the “mind games” and of the computer-mind, the multiplication of the worlds or the multidimensional reality, the reactivation of the “illusory cognition,” the identification of a *mathesis universalis*, a universal principle, able to offer explanations to any spiritual phenomenon, the interdisciplinary approach<sup>1</sup> – all these are essential coordinates of Culianu’s climax in creation that make the disciple belong to the “current” quest scenery.

---

<sup>1</sup>Although he is especially known as a historian of religions, Culianu cannot be placed in the restrictive limits of a single discipline, and this fact is emphasized by his epistemological manifest published in the first number of *Incognita* magazine (initiated by the author at the famous Publishing House E. J. Brill in 1990). The article-program of this publication announces an interdisciplinary orientation through which it is intended the creation of “intellectual bridges between linguistics, history, philosophy, literature, archeology, the study of religions in the past and present civilizations”. (Culianu apud Sorin Antohi, *Culianu’s Laboratory*, Preface by Ioan Petru Culianu, *Mind Games*, quoted ed., p. 53.)