

THE ORACLE OF PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

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From the mists of time and in the most disparate forms, when the negative assails one's existence, divinatory practices fulfill the task of disclosing a mythical horizon in which a series of events finds its already written positive solution. In this contribution a particular oracular technique is proposed which makes use of the tools of Psychosynthesis.

80 First part

Historical notes on methods of divination and definition of oracle

In ancient times oracle practices enjoyed absolute prestige and influenced every sector of social, religious, political, administrative and frequently even military life.

They implied a dialogue with the invisible: with the Gods and, in some cases, with the world of the dead. The term (from the Latin *os-oris*: 'mouth') highlights the peculiarity of the oracle: priests, prophetesses, soothsayers were considered the 'Mouth of the God'.

The answers were considered infallible, even if laconic and enigmatic, as in the case of the Pythia or the pythoness of the oracle of Delphi and of the Sibyl in Cuma; hence the adjective 'sibylline' still in use today: 'which lends itself to different solutions and interpretations'. Any errors were attributed to the interpreter.

There was a prevalence of the female element in the practice of divination and its homeland is attributed to Egypt. Egyptian prophetesses, kidnapped by Phoenicians and sold as slaves in eastern ports, would later found the first oracle sanctuaries in Greece and Asia Minor.

Among the most famous oracles of antiquity are those in Greece, of Apollo at Delphi and of Zeus at Dodona and that of Cuma, near Naples.

The primordial oracle places were telluric, in underground caves or caverns (the term Delphi derives from the Greek *delfys*: 'uterus, navel'). The priest of Zeus at Dodona stood barefoot, anchored to the earth and the God spoke with the voice of the wind that rustled through the oaks. The pythonesses, or Pythias, of Delphi and the sibyls at Cuma, inside the sacred cave and perhaps under the effect of telluric fumes with a psychotropic action, intent on listening to the voice of the God within them, expressed a sort of mantic frenzy (in Greek, *enthousiasmòs*: 'prophetic madness'). They changed their voices and at the end of the response manifested amnesia of what had happened.

A widespread method in antiquity was that of obtaining oracles through 'sacred sleep', also aided by shamanic rites which involved isolation, prayers, fasting and in some cases, the use of drugs (such as 'Soma' juice in India). Inside the sacred precinct the sleeper spent four or five days during which he received dream visitors. To propitiate divine dreams, the American Indians even amputated parts of their body: a phalanx of a finger, a fragment of an ear, etciv ...

In ancient Rome, the official cult required the augur to interpret the will of the Gods by observing the flight of birds and prodigious events, such as the births of men or animals with particular deformations ('teratomancy'). The Etruscan *haruspices* (from the Chaldean *har*: liver) practiced divination by examining the internal organs of sacrificed animals, especially the liver.

The Roman science of augury and the Etruscan *haruspicy* merged over time into a single corpus of principles of divinatory science merged into the Sibylline Books. Delivered, according to legend, to Tarquinius Superbus († in 495 BC), they were placed in the temple of Jupiter and considered the incontestable oracular authority in Rome.

Over the centuries, divination, from a refined and aristocratic art, declined and became popularized, continuing to survive in different ways over time up to the present day. In the 19th century it took on the appearance of 'mediumship': the symptoms of

possession by a supersensitive entity were similar to those manifested by the Pythia: change of voice, convulsive movements, retrograde amnesia. Through the ‘medium’ the entities reveal the secrets of life and death, the past and the future. A similar phenomenon of our days is that of ‘channeling’, with some variations: the ‘channeller’ does not fall into a trance, but rather accesses superconscious levels in a manner which according to Alice A. Bailey (1880-1949) resembles the «ability possessed by a meditation expert to maintain spiritual attention at the highest possible level». It was with this particular capacity of ‘connection’, we would say today, that ‘The Tibetan’ spoke through A.A. Bailey and that Pietro Ubaldi (1986-1972) – from Foligno, contemporary and perhaps an acquaintance of Assagioli – compiled his vast work contained in numerous volumes, of which the best known is *The Great Synthesis* (1933).

I omit the immense chapter of the revelations contained in sacred scriptures by prophets or saints, mystics, seers, not only for reasons of space but because it does not fall within the scope of this article.

Mantics of daily life

A potpourri of beliefs and divinatory practices (‘mantics’ or ‘manzie’: from the Greek *mantèia*) survives in today’s social fabric and also in the psyche of the hyper-technological modern man.

In certain suggestive places, because they are isolated, immersed in the nature of the countryside or hills, still today do ‘operators of the occult’ practice the ‘cartomancy’ (reading the Tarots), the astrology (or ‘astromancy’), the palmistry’ (study of the lines and reliefs of the hand). Sometimes elderly relatives trust that they have sought the response of a seer who drew auspices from the shape of dried coffee grounds (‘cafféomancy’) or from the behavior of oil drops in water (‘lecanomancy’).

Even today it is said that “being born with a caul” is a good omen for the unborn child: a resonance of the ancient practice of ‘amniomancy’, or the study of the appearance of the amniotic membrane. When we eat

in restaurants of the Chinese or Sino-Japanese culinary tradition, it can happen that we come across boules filled with sweets – called ‘of fortune’ – which contain greeting cards or short prophetic responses, to be drawn by lot (‘sticomancy’).

If, while eating a roast chicken or other bird, we happen to pick a particular forked bone, scientifically known as a *forcula* (in English: wishbone), some of our guests can exclaim: «it’s the bone of fortune!» inviting us to break it by expressing a wish: probable echo of a primitive practice of divination through the random throwing of small bones (‘osteomancy’).

‘Oneiromancy’, the ancient practice of interpreting dreams in an oracular sense, still enjoys a certain favor today. Many individuals are inclined to look for clues in dreams about future developments, or messages aimed at directing crucial personal choices. Specific auspices are drawn from some contents. Thus, dreaming of the death of loved ones, living, according to popular belief, would lengthen their lives. Dreaming of ‘losing teeth’ would instead be a bad omen. Certain numbers ‘seen’ in a dream can be directly associated with the occurrence of a lucky win. The Neapolitan *Smorfia*, whose etymology is linked to the name of Morpheus according to some sources, is a compendium, initially handed down orally, which decodes symbols, objects, situations, people, recurring in dreams, into specific numbers to play the Lotto. Thus, for example, “dead man speaking” corresponds to the number 48; “fear” at 90, etc.

For psychoanalysis itself, dreams are potential messengers of profound truths inherent in the individual’s unconscious and if appropriately translated (by the subject, with the help of an expert therapist) it directs and organizes his psychism. Nor does S. Freud exclude that, in certain circumstances, during sleep and dreams, and in cases of suspension of intellectual activities - as observed in some of his patients and according to some personal experiences - consciousness is predisposed to the perception of ‘telepathic’ messages, warned upon awakening or in any case after a certain amount of time, as ‘premonitionsvii’.

Even the baptismal name attributed to newborns would not only have positive effects but would incline their fate ('onomancy'): almost all proper names have particular virtues in their etymology or refer to religious influences, such as those of Christian derivation for example. It must be recognized that this is certainly true in reference to the past, given that today we are witnessing the assignment of names based on other criteria (fashion, catchiness, etc.).

There are still even traces of ancient and outdated conceptions concerning 'physiognomancy', which has as its object the study of features and the shape of the face: thus, for example, a high forehead in a child/adolescent predicts the development of an intelligent mind, while voluminous ear lobes are associated with the person's wisdom.

There are important mantics that draw on ancient wisdom traditions, such as 'arithmomancy' or 'numerology', for which auspices are drawn from the interpretation of the various combinations of letters of the alphabet and numbers of the verses of the sacred scriptures (Jewish Cabbala). The ancient Chinese oracular and wisdom book of the I King (The Book of Changes) - in which Taoism and Confucianism have their roots - provides answers based on the results of the drawing of lots of yarrow stems, a plant considered sacred or alternatively, by the random tossing of suitable coins. The sum of the numbers obtained refers to hexagrams which, with words of profound wisdom, prefigure future developments for the consultant, conduct to be followed and dangers to be avoided.

C. G. Jung calls it a "monument of Chinese thought ... infinitely different from our way of thinkingviii". He edited a thorough and enthusiastic preface of the I Ching for the English and Italian editions. R. Assagioli mentions the ancient oracle in his own writing *Balancing and synthesis of opposites* ix as one of the most interesting texts of the Chinese philosophical tradition. According to the father of psychosynthesis, in the form of a method of divination, in the I Ching we see at work one of the major principles that guarantee well-

being and wisdom to the individual: the harmonious alternation of opposite polarities (Yin: receptive female aspect, symbolized by the Mother and the Earth and Yang: creative aspect, symbolized by the Father and Heaven) and the consequent insertion of the human being in the cyclical evolution of the universe.

A method still widespread today is the production of oracles through the random opening of books, more often sacred, with the reading of the first words or sentences ('bibliomancy'). It is precisely through the use of this particular type of 'inducer' that I realized a few years ago that psychosynthesis also has its own oracle. I will go deeper into the matter and deal with the simple technique I have derived from it in a subsequent paragraph.

Overview of divination methods, contra-indications and risks

Divination arts, oracular and mantic techniques can be anthropologically framed in the class of 'magical practices'. A somewhat happy definition, although not exhaustive, according to an approach that favours a psychological reading of 'magic', can be found in the 'Dizionario di Psicologia', edited by U. Galimberti and deserves a full quote: "... Magic ... discloses a mythical horizon, defined by E. De Martino as metahistory, where the meaning of men's actions is already described and anticipated in its good end When the negative assaults existence in history, the individual does not founder in the supervening negativity, because he knows that there is a higher order, a metahistorical order, which magic is responsible for describing. As in the myth a certain series of events finds its positive solution The magical protection consists in inaugurating a stable representative horizon.... and in de-historicizing historical becoming, whose drama arises when there is no longer a meta-history that contains a further meaning than what the irruption of the negative appears to be the ultimate meaning....".

Jodorowsky, speaking of the oracular practice of the Tarot, proclaims that it "is an eminently projective instrumentxi", and that each Arcanum being a mirror

and not a truth in itself “is transformed into what the consultant sees in itxii. E. Lévi quotes, for whom the Tarot speaks “making one think; inspirer and regulator ... true philosophical machine that prevents the soul from getting lost, leaving it initiative and freedomxiii” .

C. G. Jung himself argues that a possible utility of the I Ching method consists in projecting thoughts that have not yet been realized in its abstruse symbolismxiv, but integrates this (psychodynamic) hypothesis, as we will see later, with the ‘synchronistic’ one.

At this point it is necessary to underline, again with Galimberti, how both P. Janet and S. Freud described the presence, respectively, of magical thought and of the omnipotence of thought, both in children (who do not deal with reality data) and in primitives (who consider objects and things animated and endowed with intentionality). In particular, S. Freud would have grasped the essence of the magical in the omnipotence of the thought of obsessive neurotic patients who “with their fixations and their rituals [compulsions, annulments, etc.] try to control, projecting into the external world, their internal world animated by forces that fear cannot otherwise contain.

In paranoid-type psychotic functioning, the world teems with meanings and almost every object, person, situation loses its characteristics of neutrality (inversion of the subject/background relationship), to go on to confer special meanings, but more frequently contradictory or tinged with pitfalls, realizing that psychopathological condition known as delusional perception, fertile ground for delusional intuitions.

The Ego is disconnected from the Self and characterized by the lack of integration and harmony of one’s main functions (volition, affectivity, cognition), including the bodily ones. Contents of the unconscious, both individual and collective, burst into the field of consciousness. Powerful identification mechanisms are created with positive or negative archetypal elements, usually removed, but also archaic dynamics of projection and splitting, so that perceptions teem with revelations/meanings, most often hostile and sinister.

From a psychosynthetic point of view, when these individuals aspire to create a bond with the sublime, they do so without a true integration and synthesis between all aspects of the personality and with the rest of life, and above all with the transpersonal Selfxvi.

It is evident that divination systems - like the projective techniques in psychotherapy - are contra-indicated both in subjects who have a fragile Ego - suggestible and predisposed to carry out dependent infantile relationships and in subjects with a prevalent psychotic organization of the personality. R. Assagioli himself recommends prudence in the practice of techniques that use symbols in psychotherapy, in subjects “who have a spontaneous production or overproduction of symbols” (psychotics and schizophrenics in particular). These are not used profitably as a “bridge to external reality” but “as a means of directing interest and attention towards the internal world of fantasyxvii” .

A. Bocconi and P. Lacerna, who have studied and applied the symbolism of the Tarot cards in psychosynthesis as archetypes, discourage the divinatory use of them in the therapeutic setting. This practice would go in the opposite direction of psychotherapy which is the empowerment of the patient in facing his own destinyxviii.

For an exhaustive exposition on the pitfalls, contraindications and precautionary rules in the approach to the methods of divination, the careful reading of A. Jodorowsky (referring to the Tarot but reasonably applicable to all oracular practices) is recommended.

It is the case here that we are focusing on the main source of errors and potentially serious consequences of oracle practices, which is the error of interpretation. Since, if the oracle is like a mirror for the consultant, it would be appropriate, as far as possible, to use it autonomously, learning certain oracle techniques, without intermediaries. Inexperienced hands could transform the oracle into a mirror for themselves and not make it available to the consultant. This important question has analogies with the problem of interpretation in psychotherapy, which I now believe I will not go into further.

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The synchronistic paradigm

As anticipated, Jungian theory also hypothesizes the intervention of 'synchronicity' in 'oracular techniques'. This second paradigm, 'synchronistic' (alternative, on other planes of reality, to the psychodynamic one), considers the coincidence of events in space and time, as a 'signifier' of a peculiar interdependence of objective events between them, as well as between them and the subjective (psychic) conditions of the observer.

According to the great Swiss psychologist, in the synchronistic view it happens that A, B, C and D all appear at the same time and in the same place, because the physical events A and B are of the same quality as the psychic events C and D, i.e. they are in somehow interconnected with each other: in entanglement, according to an expression of quantum physics in great vogue today. All of them would be exponents of the same momentary situation.

In practice, consultation and response are in a 'non-causal' relationship with each other, included, according to this conception, in a psycho-physical structure of the universe, such as that of the ancient Chinese tradition but also of certain quantum physicists of today xix. C. G. Jung details the 'synchronistic' view in his Foreword to the I Ching xx.

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