

The counter-modern Eliade. “Wiederverzauberung der Welt” in the life and work of Mircea Eliade

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Even though the 20th century has been astoundingly rich in polymath personalities, it is still difficult to find equals for such an all-around and erudite scholar and writer as Mircea Eliade. The dazzling array of literary and scholarly writings he produced may prove daunting to any researcher who would attempt to distill a single generative principle from his creative oeuvre. However, the task has been undertaken more than once; and it will be assumed one more time in the present essay, whose goal is to show that Eliade was decisively *counter-modern* in everything he wrote – whether literary, scholarly, or political. In the following pages, I shall re-read Eliade’s scholarly, literary, and political work using this concept of the counter-modern as an ideological filter and key in order to demonstrate how the apparent proteism and entropy of Eliade’s oeuvre thus becomes homogenous and consistent.

A rather similar attempt of reducing the variety of Eliade’s work to one generative concept was made quite recently, in 2010, by Moshe Idel, in his splendid article *The Camouflaged Sacred in Mircea Eliade’s Self-Perception, Literature, and Scholarship*. Idel groups Eliade’s novels, novellas, and plays into *literaria*, his scholarly work into *academica*, and his autobiography and journals into *personalia*, and demonstrates brilliantly that all these three categories are informed by the concept of the “camouflage of the sacred” (Idel 2010, 159–170). This concept was recurrently used by Eliade himself in some of his most important theoretical writings, including *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958) and the first volume of the *History of Religious Ideas* (1981). After reading Moshe Idel’s article, one cannot but be convinced that, indeed, the camouflage of the sacred is the basic concept in Eliade’s *personalia*, *literaria*, and *academica*, and that Eliade himself wanted all his writings to be read in accordance with this concept of the camouflaged sacred. Idel provides ample proof to support these two ideas, mainly in Eliade’s *personalia*, and here in particular in his autobiography and journals. While it is still problematic to decide whether one may draw definitive conclusions for the *academica* and *literaria* solely based on *personalia*, Idel’s demonstration is nevertheless plausible: even though extremely variegated, Eliade’s work coagulates around the concept of the “camouflage of the sacred”; or, in Idel’s

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own words, “[t]hough the topics dealt with in those various types of writings are diverse – religious, political, historical, literary, or personal – we may find an underlying assumption quite early in several of them: that the sacred camouflages itself within the profane, and is therefore largely unrecognizable” (Idel 2010, 160).

I completely agree with Idel, and my study aims at advancing towards an even more general concept and to demonstrating that the theory of the camouflaged sacred derives from Eliade’s profound counter-modernity: Eliade’s life and work are so decisively informed by the concept of the camouflage of the sacred precisely because he is equally decisively a counter-modern; his *academica*, *literaria*, and *personalia* are each just as definitively catalyzed by his lifelong opposition to modernity. The “camouflage of the sacred” is one practical outgrowth of Eliade’s counter-modern thought; it is just a specific aspect of his thinking, not its general epitome – which is that of the counter-modern. This is the conclusive point where I dissociate from Idel’s thesis.

Therefore, the aim of this article may be summarized as it follows: it seeks to prove that Eliade was fundamentally counter-modern, and that his strenuous and inventive opposition to modernity was the prime determinant of his *academica*, *literaria*, and *personalia*. Therefore, to put it shortly, the counter-modern Eliade influenced all the creative gesticulations of Eliade’s life and work.

The term counter-modern has also been applied to Eliade by Bryan S. Rennie in his justly celebrated monograph; as Rennie does not explain what this concept means to him, and as he only uses it once, we must infer or derive its meaning from the context of its usage. Here we have the paragraph where Rennie uses the term:

Careful inspection of Eliade’s writings, however, reveal his “anti-historical” tendency to be counter-modern and remarkably close to later thought which has been labelled “postmodern.” It is, I believe, a more accurate appreciation of Eliade to see him as at least a precursor of postmodernism than it is to reject him as either a sentimental champion of archaic traditions or as simply anti-historical (Rennie 1996, 232).

Quite obviously, for Rennie counter-modern stands for precursor of postmodernism – as proven by the fact that he explains the former concept by means of the latter in two subsequent sentences: Eliade’s tendency to be counter-modern seems to be precisely what makes him “at least a precursor of postmodernism”. Thus, it is not too far-fetched to say that, in Rennie’s understanding, counter-modern may be equated with “pre-postmodern” – which, as we shall see later on, is not at all what I understand by counter-modern, which means for me a strong and programmatic opposition to the desacralization of the world. Rennie’s counter-modern Eliade and my counter-modern Eliade have nothing in common besides the formal coincidence of the concept – which, as subsequently shown, describe completely different abstract references.

It has also nothing to do with what Antoine Compagnon means by his usage of anti-modern. Compagnon’s antimoderns are not in radical opposition with modernity, but rather in a soft dissidence against it; they are dissident moderns, indeed, but still moderns: “les antimodernes”, he says, are “modernes en délicatesse avec les Temps modernes” (Compagnon 2005, 7); they are, Compagnon adds, rather involuntarily using Hannah Arendt’s famous phrase, “reluctant moderns” (Compagnon

2005, 216); but what's more, their modernism may prove in fact to be "le modernisme véritable" (Compagnon 2005, 12).

While Compagnon's anti-moderns are not irreducibly at odds with modernity, Habermas' surely are. In his famous article on *Modernity versus Postmodernity*, Habermas ascribes the anti-modern attitude to the Young Conservatives, who are in an irreconcilable conflict with modernity:

The *Young Conservatives* recapitulate the basic experience of aesthetic modernity. They claim as their own the revelations of a decentered subjectivity, emancipated from the imperatives of work and usefulness, and with this experience they step outside the modern world. On the basis of modernistic attitudes, they justify an irreconcilable anti-modernism. They remove into the sphere of the far away and the archaic the spontaneous powers of imagination, of self-experience and of emotionality. To instrumental reason, they juxtapose in manichean fashion a principle only accessible through evocation, be it the will to power or sovereignty, Being or the dionysiac force of the poetical. In France this line leads from Bataille via Foucault to Derrida (Habermas 1981, 13).

Because he, too, resorts to the archaic and opposes the myth to the instrumental reason, Eliade also fits this description. This is why, while he is not an anti-modern in Compagnon's meaning of the concept, he is one in that of Habermas. In order to avoid the complications of this *distinguo*, I find it more useful to say the he is a *counter-modern* – a being who, as a scholar, a writer, and a person feels an intense incompatibility with the modernity he has to live in. And his opposition regards not some lateral or secondary features of modernity, but its main characteristic, situated at the very core of what modernity means – namely, *the disenchantment of the world*. In his 1919 conference *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, Max Weber launches this concept, showing that the intellectualization and the rationalization of the world do not necessarily lead to a progress in knowledge, but to the conviction that there are no secret incalculable forces, "geheimnisvollen unberechenbaren Mächte", that run the world's mechanism. So here we have found the phrase that has crucially influenced the way in which modernity has perceived itself in the last century:

The increasing intellectualization and rationalization does not mean therefore an increasing general awareness of the living conditions in which one stands. But it means something else: the knowledge of it, or the belief in it: that if one simply wanted to, one could find at all times that there are in principle no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, that in fact all things – in principle – could be dominated by computing. But this means: the disenchantment of the world. It is no longer necessary as it was in the wild, for which there was such powers, to resort to magical means in order to dominate or solicit the spirits. Technical means and calculating can offer that. This especially means the intellectualization as such (Weber 1995, 28; transl. R. V.).

This "Entzauberung der Welt", this conviction that there are no secret incalculable forces that run the world is exactly what Eliade most rejected. His whole body of writing depended on the violent rejection of these ideas; both his literary and his scholarly writing were obviously stating that the sacred still exists, as a "secret incalculable force" camouflaged within the profane, running the world in absolute secrecy. While his literary writing could openly express this fundamental conviction,

his scholarly work nevertheless had to project the appearance of objective and neutral scholarship; but even the fear of discredit among his peers could not prevent Eliade from showing his displeasure and discontent with this disenchantment. In his preface to the first volume of the *History of Religious Ideas*, Eliade tries to equate “the ultimate stage of desacralization” specific to modernity with “the complete camouflage of the sacred”, which identifies itself with the profane: “I refer to the ultimate stage of desacralization. The process is of considerable interest to the historian of religions, for it illustrates the complete camouflage of the ‘sacred’, more precisely its identification with the ‘profane’” (Eliade 1978, XVI). This is an obvious semantic and scholarly abuse – desacralization means the complete evacuation of the sacred, not its conversion or camouflage, as the historian of religions tries to persuade us; what Eliade unintentionally shows here, in one of the most important works of his scholarship, is his secret and quite partisan hope that he will be able to oppose the desacralization or disenchantment of the world and convert it into a secret resacralization – because, in last analysis, this is what the identification of the sacred with the profane means. It is the creed of a counter-modern who strongly believes that desacralization is wrong and searches for some ways of restoring the sacred.

In his *personalia*, Eliade can openly express his conviction that modern man is wrong when he believes he is completely secularized; he makes such an explicit statement in his diary published under the title *No Souvenirs*: “modern man, radically secularized, believes himself, or styles himself, atheist, areligious, or, at least, indifferent. But he is wrong. He has not yet succeeded in abolishing the *homo religiosus* that is in him: he has only done away with (if he ever was) the *christianus*. That means that he is left with being ‘pagan’ without knowing it” (Eliade 1977, 164). Simply because he is not a *christianus* does not make “the modern man” free of sacred charge – as the sacred is, for a counter-modern like Eliade, practically impossible to be evacuated from the world. “Modern man” cannot recognize the sacred and the miracle; that is true, but it does not mean that the knowing eye cannot recognize them. Summing up, for Eliade modernity is not about the evacuation of the sacred, but about its encryption. The code may sometimes be so difficult to read that the miracle becomes unrecognizable – for Mac Linscott Ricketts, the “Unifying Theme” of Eliade’s writings is “the unrecognizability of miracle” (Ricketts 1988, 1209). But the difficulty of the code does not involve the absence of the encrypted message: the sacred still exists, waiting for the knowing mind to crack its code.

In his apt monograph, Bryan S. Rennie undertakes at one point the task of classifying Eliade’s usage of the word “modern”. According to Rennie, it seems that it is used with three different meanings, all of them having the relation with the religious as its criterion:

So it would appear that “modern” is used in three distinguishable ways: first, as recent or contemporary but not substantially distinct from religious humanity; secondly, as recent or contemporary but distinct from traditional *homo religiosus* because of the attitude to tradition; and finally, and most specifically, as an element of secular society which is distinct from both religious humanity and from the contemporary “popular soul” (Rennie 1996, 218).

What is characteristic in Eliade’s understanding of the modern, Rennie says, is

that he hoped that the sacred (which Rennie contentiously calls “religion”) survives under the guise of myths:

Eliade is not particularly explicit about the survival of “religion” in secular thought *by that name*. He is more forthcoming about the survival of myth. In Eliade’s thought the two categories are inseparable. Where there is religion, there is myth; where there is myth, there is religion. (...) Myths are inseparable from that which is apprehended as the real, from the sacred, and from religion. Where myths survive in the secular milieu, there we have concealed religion (Rennie 1996, 219).

Thus, the re-enchantment of the world is to be achieved by re-investing it with a mythical understructure that will contain the camouflaged sacred. Based on his *personalia*, we can find this programme formulated throughout his journals, autobiography, and letters. One of its most conspicuous expressions is to be found in a letter from 1979 addressed to Barbu Brezianu:

As we are condemned to decode the “mysteries” and “to find the way to redemption” via culture, namely through *books* (not via oral traditions transmitted from a master to a disciple), we have nothing better to do but deepen the dialectics of the mysterious *coincidentia oppositorum*, which allows us to discover “the sacred” camouflaged in the “profane”, but also to *resacralize in a creative manner* the historical moment, in other words to transfigure it, by assigning to it a transcendental dimension (or “an intention”) (Eliade 1999, 112, emphasis in the original; transl. R. V.).

“To resacralize in a creative manner” – here we have in a nutshell the entire programme of a counter-modern displeased by the Weberian *Entzauberung der Welt*. Commenting upon the same letter to Barbu Brezianu, Moshe Idel calls this creative process “arcanization” (Idel 2010, 181), and even though he does not insist on this concept, I think it is crucial for the understanding of Eliade’s counter-modern *credo*. Idel does not give a descriptive definition of this “arcanization”; such as I understand it, it is the process of informing the texture of every literary or scholarly text with arcane myths meant to preserve the sacred. It deliberately parallels the camouflage of the sacred in the understructures of the real world – by arcanization, the sacred is also camouflaged in the understructures of books, whether literary or scholarly.

If one abhors the disenchanting modernity, arcanization ensues like the most logical and effective counter-modern programme. And this is just what Eliade pursued in all his public life: whether the endeavours were scholarly, literary, or political he thoroughly and consistently worked “to resacralize in a creative manner” everything, which included the world, literature, science, and politics.

We shall take them one by one.

On December 2, 1937, Eliade delivered at Radio Bucharest a conference entitled *The Mysteries of Dante*, in which he mainly referred to the “doctrine” camouflaged in the textual arcana of the *Divina Commedia*, quoting Dante’s lines in the ninth canto of the *Inferno*:

O voi, ch’avete li ’intelletti sani,
mirate la dottrina che s’asconde
sotto ’l velame de li versi strani

Here we have Eliade's scholium (the following quotes are all in my translation):

Thus, Dante's lines, according to his own testimony, camouflage a "doctrine," a metaphysical truth only revealed to those who go beyond the literal meaning of the work. Just as Dante says in *Convivio*, where he asserts that the literal meaning stops at the words, while the allegorical meaning is hidden under a "beautiful lie". (...) There have been historical periods – for example, the 18th century – when the interest in these hidden meanings has not even existed. People were simply satisfied back then with the immediate meaning of the *Divina Commedia*. This magnificent poem was read and loved only as a work of art. Such a view, however, is wrong (Eliade 2001, 269).

Why would such an approach be wrong? What is inadequate in reading a "magnificent poem" *only* as a "work of art"? Eliade also answers: "Because the *Divina Commedia* is not, and does not want to be, a strictly literary work."

Only a work of art, a *strictly* literary work – one does not need an excessively fine hearing in order to distinguish in Eliade's formulations the expression of a minimization of literature. It is remarkable that Eliade did not feel that, by defining thus the nature and function of literature, he was betraying its specificity; on the contrary, he thought this was the purest form of literature. In a diary entry from November 24, 1951, summarizing a discussion with Raymond de Vergnas, professor of English literature at the Sorbonne, Eliade is convinced that he speaks of the "novel-novel", that is, the genuine novel, when he defines it in the following way:

Long and animated discussion on the novel. I support, as so often, the "irreplaceability" of the novel-narrative, the novel-novel [*romanul-roman*] which replaces, in the modern world, the myths (Eliade 1993, 205).

One cannot help wondering at the bizarre status of this "novel-novel" which is, in fact, nothing more than a modern substitute for myths! A month and a half later, on January 5, 1952, Eliade writes in his diary about reading *The Sound and the Fury*, which so irritates him that he considers it Faulkner's "least accomplished book":

To write a long article which I could title *De la nécessité du roman-roman*. To show the autonomous, glorious and irreducible dimension of the *narrative*, a formula of myth and mythology readjusted to modern consciousness. (...) The metaphysical dignity of the narrative, ignored, of course, by the realistic and psychologizing generations. (...) The great lesson of a few Anglo-Saxon writers (Thornton Wilder, Faulkner in his novellas, and Graham Greene), rehabilitating the direct narrative, showing how much metaphysics and theology can reveal the narrative as such – not the comments or analyses of the author (Eliade 1993, 210).

In the same journal entry Eliade also repudiates Joyce; his understanding of the novel brings him into the implausible position of setting Joyce and Faulkner-the-novelist in derogatory opposition to Thornton Wilder, Graham Greene, and Faulkner-the-novella-author – all of the latter respectable writers, undoubtedly, but under no circumstance comparable with the greatness of the former. His misjudgment is due to the excessive valuing of the narrative charged with mythical structures, superior in Eliade's eyes to any other narrative, disregarding the accomplishment of its literary technique.

Borrowing a phrase from Gershom Scholem, I would say that what frustrated Eliade so hard was the “liquidation of the myth” (Scholem 1975, 106) which accompanies its desecration in the modern world. In 1978, in a lecture at the University of Chicago, Eliade directly acknowledges that:

The investigation and understanding of the exemplary and universal literary creations are equivalent to *the recovery of the meaning of religious phenomena*, [and historians of religions will have to insist on] the seemingly profane universes and languages of literature, fine arts, and film in order to highlight *the “sacred” elements thereof* (Stan 2007; emphasis R. V.).

In 1937, 1952, and 1978, Eliade understood literature in the same way: as an auxiliary discourse whose function is to convey mythical understructures and meaning – and thus to “recover the meaning of religious phenomena”, restating “the sacred elements thereof”. This is the attitude of *a dedicated counter-modern*; and we have seen that, where literature was concerned, Eliade was consistent with this view from his youth (he was 30 in 1937, when he delivered the Dante radio conference) to the end of his life.

Eliade’s scholarly literature was most often attacked with the charge of harbouring in its understructures the nostalgic remnants of one of the most destructive political myths of the 20th century: namely, fascism. The first serious study in which Eliade’s writing as a historian of religions is taken to task in for a possible crypto-fascist taint is Ivan Strenski’s *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History* from 1989. But the first study which systematizes the accusations and delivers them unapologetically is Daniel Dubuisson’s 1993 book *Mythologies du XXe siècle (Dumézil, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade)*. Dubuisson deconstructs all the important concepts of Eliade’s system and draws the conclusion that under their apparent scholarly objectivity lies a secret fascist thinking. For Dubuisson, Eliade’s lifelong programme consisted in the systematic encryption of the fascist political myth in the articulations of his scholarly literature. Thus, Eliade is for Dubuisson nothing less than a “militant fascist”, as well as a “journalist involved in the heart of a fascist, mystical and anti-semitic movement” (Dubuisson 1993, 221). Even though Eliade was not formally a member of the Iron Guard, Dubuisson is convinced that he “played an active part in the legionary movement” (Dubuisson 1993, 220). Even more, despite the fact that Eliade’s support for the Iron Guard practically ceased after the assassination of its leader Codreanu in November 1938, Dubuisson seems to insinuate in the beginning of his book that his support was a full membership which lasted for a whole decade, negligently stating that Eliade “adhered to a virulently anti-semitic fascist movement in the thirties” (Dubuisson 1993, 18). Quite obviously, the violent conclusions Dubuisson prefers to draw in spite of any historical evidence prove that for him Eliade is a *bête noire* which has to be found guilty of every possible charge.

Bryan S. Rennie undertook the task of deconstructing Dubuisson’s accusations; he concluded that his book “makes the model fallacy of drawing positive conclusions from negative premises. No *evidence* is given regarding any of the accusations of militancy, fascist journalistic activity, or antisemitic tendencies” (Rennie 1996, 165). It is almost amusing to notice, following Rennie’s demonstration, how

clumsily Dubuisson builds his case. For example, in order to prove the “antisemitic tendencies” Eliade allegedly absorbed from the Iron Guard, Dubuisson quotes “one of its partisans cited by Jean-Paul de Longchamp”, without establishing any connection to Eliade. Then, Dubuisson states that “Ernst Jünger was one of the rare writers retained and referred to by Heidegger”; the fact that “it was also with this former Wehrmacht officer that Eliade founded the review *Antaios* in 1961”, plus the aggravating circumstance that Eliade has indeed read Heidegger is enough for Dubuisson to conclude that Eliade is the new Heidegger (Rennie 1996, 166). It is no wonder that Rennie’s conclusion regarding Dubuisson’s demonstration sounds harsh: “his arguments for guilt-by-association, guilt-by-inaction, guilt-by-proximity, his *a priori* accusations and question-begging all smack of sensationalist Nazi-hunting rather than sound scholarship” (Rennie 1996, 176).

It is not typical for a scholar to behave like a “sensationalist Nazi-hunter” when reviewing the contributions of his colleagues. My supposition is that Ivan Strenski (1989), Leon Volovici (1991), Adriana Berger (1994) and others reacted with so much passion against Eliade because they felt that he was not one of their own – and I mean by this that he was not *modern*. They all intuited the mystical underpinnings of his scholarly work – a feature which, for a disenchanted modern mind, would have been more than enough to discredit the scholar; but, when they found out about his guilty Romanian past, they naturally thought that this suppressed mysticism is a residuum of fascist mythology. This is why they all adopted the tones of prosecutors rather than that of scholarly critics; the more strongly they react, the more counter-modern he proves to be.

Moreover, we can see that it was not simply the suspicion of crypto-fascism that caused this violent reaction. The revolt was not strictly limited to the years when one found out about his collaboration with the Iron Guard (the early 1990s); it was not a contextual reaction, but rather subtextual – the modern scholars were actually reacting more to the restrained mysticism than to the purported fascist vestiges. For example, after Eliade’s fascist dossier has been fully analyzed, Dubuisson no longer attacks him on fascist grounds, but rather for the “mystical predicates” of his “stylistic choices”:

The vocabulary chosen by Eliade also serves to strengthen his own stylistic choices. Not merely does it strengthen them, it exalts, it glorifies them. One of his favorite processes consists in applying *mystical* (‘sacred,’ ‘divine,’ ‘spiritual,’ etc.) and empty (‘total,’ ‘cosmic,’ ‘deep,’ ‘complete,’ ‘superior,’ ‘higher,’ etc.) predicates to the most general notions (‘nature,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘existence,’ ‘soul,’ ‘life,’ ‘being,’ ‘universe,’ ‘reality,’ ‘totality,’ etc.). With its total lack of rigor and precision, this vocabulary provides us with a *vague outline of the contours of Eliadean metaphysics* (Dubuisson 2010, 138, emphasis R. V.).

This is precisely what is most disturbing in the eyes of a disenchanted modern mind: namely that Eliade has built in public view a metaphysics and dared to present it as a product of scholarship. All mystical and metaphysical discourses are suspect for the “modern man”; therefore, Eliade’s scientific text, insofar as it operates with “mystical predicates”, is necessarily discredited, disregarding what it actually “predicates”: “Under these conditions, the Eliadean text is condemned indefinitely to

repeat its own postulates and, in so doing, to paraphrase itself, even to quote itself!” (Dubuisson 2010, 140).

Ironically enough, Dubuisson himself begins his article by quoting, summarizing and paraphrasing his older contributions and postulates on Eliade. *Cuisque suum*, he seems himself “condemned indefinitely to repeat” his own postulates regarding Eliade’s unacceptable mystical and metaphysical discourse. As such, it is not the arguments that matter, but the language: Eliade’s “mystical predicates” are in his eyes far more despicable than the fascist mythology. Like most of Eliade’s scholarly critics, Dubuisson is a modern condemning a counter-modern.

Eliade’s collaboration with the Iron Guard was indeed passionate. His political involvement did not last long, but it was quite intense. Mac Linscott Ricketts was one of the first to discuss it publicly in 1988 – and, even though some other important documents have emerged since then (among which the diary of Mihail Sebastian plays a leading role), his brief summary of this disastrous period in Eliade’s life still remains valid:

Between January 1937 and the imposition of the royal dictatorship in February 1938, Eliade gave open and enthusiastic support, through his periodical writings, to the Legionary movement. Because of the eight or ten explicitly pro-Legionary articles he wrote in this period of slightly more than a year, and because of the close association with Nae Ionescu who had been a Legionary supporter (though he was never a member) since late 1933, Eliade became suspect in the eyes of the government (Ricketts 1988, 882).

Among the many proofs documenting Eliade’s political madness, there are few as saddening as Mihail Sebastian’s diary. Sebastian loved Eliade more than any other of his friends; therefore, he notes in his diary with aching astonishment the depressing transformations his best friend underwent. In 1937, when Eliade reaches the climax of his political infatuation, Sebastian writes: “March 2, 1937. Nor should I forget his explanation for joining the Guard with such passion: ‘I have always believed in the primacy of the spirit.’ He is neither a charlatan nor a madman. He’s just naive. But there are such catastrophic forms of naïveté” (Sebastian 2000, 114).

Ionescu, on the other hand, writes in a 1945 letter to Tudor Vianu, a foremost professor of aesthetics:

He [Mircea Eliade] is really very guilty. But he, as well as Cioran (...) and so many others (...) are victims of the hateful departed, Nae Ionescu. If Nae Ionescu had not existed (...) today we would have a fine generation of leaders between 35 and 40 years of age. Because of him they all became Fascists. He created a stupid, horrifying, reactionary Romania. The second guiltiest is Eliade. At one time he was close to becoming a left-winger. That was fifteen years ago (...) Eliade is responsible for having pulled after him part of his generation and all the young intelligentsia. How different everything would have been if these two [Nae Ionescu and Eliade] had been good masters (Călinescu 2010, 106–107; translation by Matei Călinescu).

Ionescu will come to terms with Eliade later in Paris, but he will always reproach his friend for his political infatuation. Even though both Ionescu and Sebastian (especially the latter) had been close friends of Eliade’s, they both paint an uncompromising picture of his collaboration with the Iron Guard – which clearly shows, even

better that Eliade's own articles, how seriously he took it. The sheer truth is that, like any real counter-modern, he also read historical events in a mystical key. This was his "catastrophic form of naiveté"; he believed that the sacred is also camouflaged under the gestures of everyday life. Thus, trying to be consistent with his own theory, he sought the sacred in every aspect of his own life, including the political. His marriage with Nina Mareş and his collaboration with the Iron Guard were equally symptoms of the sacred. Moshe Idel finds a passage in his *Portugal Journal* where

Eliade confesses that his love for Nina and his adventure in the Iron Guard were a matter of his search for the Absolute. This means that again Nina, namely, human love, and the Iron Guard, presumably representing for Eliade some form of spiritual religion, are conceived as paths for reaching the Absolute. Or, to formulate the entire problem in a different manner: the manifestation of the transcendent needs the power of discernment of the human. The miracle is recognizable only to someone who expects or longs for that miracle. The attentive openness of the spiritual man is therefore necessary, since the sacred does not reveal itself in a manner that is manifest to everyone (Idel 2010, 166).

For Eliade, his *personalia* (including here his daily gesticulation, even the most banal) were also part of this "form of spiritual religion"; the political was no exception. And he wrote often in his diary about this mystical reading of the political. Matei Călinescu has identified such a crucial passage in a still unpublished part of Eliade's diary held in the Special Collections of the Joseph Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago; Eliade wrote on October 4, 1945: "After the death of Codreanu and the other leaders, the Guard became a vampire [*strigoi*]. (...) As the victim of a violent death, the Guard turned into a vampire. It cannot rest, either in the grave or in history. With the blood of the Legionaries and of those killed by the Legionaries, the vampire has continued to 'live.' This must be brought to an end; that is, integrated" (Călinescu 2010, 111). Eliade also read the assassination of Codreanu in November 1938 in a mystical key and concluded that the "vampire" brought to life by the blood of the Legionaries and of their victims can only be "brought to an end" by a sudden exit from under his influence. Interestingly enough, Eliade does not make a distinction between the blood of the Legionaries and the blood of the victims; on the contrary, he only uses the term "victim" in connection with the [Iron] Guard. He refuses to acknowledge that he was not on the side of the real victims; and this refusal also tells us a good deal about the profundity of his infatuation with this "vampire".

A "form of spiritual religion", Eliade's political involvement was not done for the usual reasons people enter politics, ranging from public service to personal profit. It represented the same pursuit of the camouflaged sacred, sought after in the realm of politics. Besides Eliade's notes in this regard from his diaries, the best proof is that his political involvement suddenly ended when he conceived the *mystical* argument of the "vampire". It was not politics that took him out of politics – but his counter-modern mysticism.

We have now solid evidence that Eliade was a counter-modern seeking the camouflaged sacred in all his realms of activity; that is, in his *academica*, *literaria*, and *personalia* taken as a whole body.

We also know he was doing it programmatically; this intention is to be found throughout his journals, but also in some scholarly texts. In the last two decades of his career, he sometimes referred to this programme as “the new humanism”, trying to give it a scholarly appearance: “It is on the basis of such knowledge that a new humanism, on a worldwide scale, could develop” (Eliade 1969, 3). In the 1990s, David Cave built an entire book around this Eliadean concept; after examining it extensively, he concluded that this “new humanism” is a “metaphysics” with the mystical goal of “participat[ing] in the divine initiative”: “The metaphysics of the new humanism is a metaphysics of creativity, for in creating one engages in life yet also participates in the divine initiative” (Cave 1992, 194). Daniel Dubuisson’s example is paradigmatic for the manner in which the archetypal “modern man” reacts to this “metaphysics” with “mystical predicates” (*v. supra*, 4).

Even for scholars who see in Eliade’s work hermeneutics rather than metaphysics, it is still rather “a synthesis of religious knowledge” (or an anticipation of it), non-adherent to the strictly rationalized methodology of modern science, interested in the possible changes in the human subject and culture:

The hermeneutics that Eliade seeks does not adhere to a rigid or strict methodology, but rather to a broader more integral method that he calls a ‘creative hermeneutics.’ Comprehensive in scope, it anticipates a synthesis of religious knowledge, while the fruits of its interpretations promise to affect transformative changes in human beings and cultures alike (Dadosky 2004, 24).

Eliade’s “creative hermeneutics” or “new humanism” are strikingly similar with the counter-modern concept of “implicit religion”, theorized first by Thomas Luckmann in his *Invisible Religion* (1967) and systematized by Andrew Greeley in his book, *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion* (1985). The sacred is also implicit throughout his whole writings and in all his public gesticulation; and the problem which interests him the most is *the possibility of the restoration of the sacred*. The counter-modern Eliade is violently displeased by the modern disenchantment of the world; and his lifetime programme is its re-enchantment, *die Wiederverzauberung der Welt*:

All questions converge to the same problem: *how can the reality of the sacred be introduced in a society as desacralized as ours?* (For concepts, symbolism, theories regarding the sacred can be communicated, discussed – without the interlocutors ever being confronted with sacredness as such) (Eliade 1993, 178; translation R. V.; emphasis in the original).

Eliade’s counter-modernity is what makes him more similar to the great figures of the 19th-century scholarship than with his contemporaries; yet, at the same time, it is what makes him so similar and compatible with our own world.

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The counter-modern Eliade. “Wiederverzauberung der Welt” in the life and work of Mircea Eliade

Mircea Eliade. Counter-modernity. Camouflage of the Sacred. Arcanization. Re-Enchantment of the World. Creative Hermeneutics. New Humanism.

The present article aims at proving that Mircea Eliade was decisively *a counter-modern* in everything he wrote, including literary, scholarly, and political works. It re-reads Eliade’s oeuvre using the concept of counter-modern as an ideological filter, in order to demonstrate how the apparent proteism and entropy of Eliade’s oeuvre thus becomes homogenous and consistent. Eliade’s counter-modern work can teach us how to recognize remnants of the sacred; he conceived his work as a *vade mecum* in this regard. This is why he appealed, in his early work, to those cultures where the mystical structures were still present, still central, still recognizable; namely, the Oriental cultures. And this is also why, towards the end of his activity, which coincided with the end of modernity, he felt that he could at last openly speak, as we have seen, about the necessity of reintroducing the sacred into a desacralized society. Eliade’s work in the literary, scholarly, and political realms is nothing less than a *vade mecum* for the re-enchantment of the world. And this is also why it so fascinates readers situated beyond historical modernity: this counter-modern thinker can teach those of us who have survived a disenchanted modernity, how to re-enchant our world.

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