

THE IMAGINARY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF "OBJECTIVE" REALITY AS A SPACE FOR RELATIONING AND COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The idea of reality, in relation with the construction of the imaginary, is developed in the context of the gradual development of a certain image upon the world. Evolution of image occurs as part of an interhuman dynamic communication developed at conscious level, for superficial messages, and substantiated at unconscious level through informational compressions, systematizations and abstractions. As a result of such processes, an image which comes to be defined as reality and equally as objective condition gets crystallized.

Keywords: *imaginary, reality, intercommunication, psycho-sociology, collective unconscious.*

The issues raised by the social imaginary may be classified into two categories, namely: how is the social imaginary formed, and the manner in which this imaginary influences each of us. Development of the imaginary as a form of society starts from the transformation of an individual image into a collective one, in the same way in which a sum of particular images gets transformed into a general image upon the world. Such a process is developed within an universe of communication, of interrelationing among images. The common resulting image is the fruit of some "negotiations" performed at metaphysical level¹ (Searle, 2000). The reality one reaches is a convention, yet not as a form of negotiation, but one accepted in the metaphysical universe of the language. The *statu quo* we are all living each moment of our life, based on imposing of the "strongest" image, is the result of some continuous transformations of the image.

It is perfectly absurd to approach the manner in which the first image occurred, as this is an event contemporary with the first social manifestation and with the language. Such an image characterizes mammals, as well, by the establishment of specific social and image

hierarchies. The difficulty lies in the identification – in some point – of reality, the way in which this gets transformed in time and under what type of influences. Considering that both the image and the social imaginary are developing on a communication level situated between the second and third part of imaginary formation, a close connection exists between them.

The realities formed on image level are not only conceptual, but equally realities of organization and status. Their evolution permits the observation of the modalities in which a collective "awareness" – including both collective conscious and unconscious elements – may be formed. The two elements are manifested and influence the individuals in different ways, and each of them performs its role: that of creating the collective imaginary. Apart from this, the subconscious is also manifested, in all its forms of reflection on social level.

They are formed under the impact of some positive or negative emotional impulses, thus delivering a common experience for the whole community. Gradually, this comes to be perceived as a reality beyond doubt, by means of various processes of cognitive nature² manifested in the collectivity (Le Bon, 2002; Moscovici, 1993). As a function of the positive or negative character of the phenomenon, reality is built up either as a space of living, or as an interdiction. Therefore, joy, happiness, tranquility, peace of mind create spaces adequate for living, starting from the immediate reality, up to those of fantastic nature – for example, the paradises. In cases of fear, anguish, a rejected taboo space is built up. However, among these types of impulses, the most important role is played by negativism, which builds up almost

all systems of human protection. Man grew up within a hostile environment, which explains why his reaction when encountering an enemy is essential for survival. It was fear that helped human beings to survive and, implicitly, their most important metaphysical component is determined by it.

When analyzing our own life, we may observe that it is developing within a common space, which we call reality. When analyzing its objective character and attempt at discovering the indubitable realities, we observe that it is quite difficult to identify aspects we cannot doubt upon. However, when analyzing their source and the modalities of formation of such daily realities, we find out realities whose positive source is interhuman convention. These are the institutions, the social status and role, the statal and social symbols, etc. Considered from the perspective of action, they are defined as "institutional actions",³ opposed to what had been labelled as "rough" or "non-institutional actions" (Searle, 2000). If institutional actions are viewed as conventions, the rough ones are frequently considered as indisputable "realities", existing beyond any conventionalism. However, do realities whose source is not of conventional nature really exist?

We consider as reality not what occurs outside us, but our own representation of the external world. Our own image on the world represents the real and, implicitly, its construction, so that any image is determined by elements of subjective nature, social conventions. How were these conventions, belonging to objective reality, formed? If the images about the world represent conventions, then reality is created at group level, as part of the experience manifested within a common space. Its existence is determined exclusively by communication, however of interest are not the communicative aspects, but what they leave behind, namely: a common image about the world, which we call reality.

The first forms of common reality were created in the primitive spaces within which the first signs of communication appeared. Each person has his/her own perceptive image, beyond which there exist, however, common realities which provoke a certain type of behavior. For example, the terrifying experience of facing a

predator determines a specific behavior, namely panic. The behavior is the same, the source is the same, so that a common representation upon some event is thus created: the predator represents a danger and, whenever it appears, we have to run away. Collective fear implements its image at group level, and it can be generalized through reiteration, or when connected with other already existing images. Through its generalization, the individual image is transformed into a collective image stating that predators represent a peril. From now on, any animal belonging to the universal category of predator appears as a danger. Equally, if one of the members in the group takes again the image or launches a specific stimulus, then the whole process may be initiated.

Such a mechanism creates a generalized image upon the world. Included in the group of predators were some animals, for example the wolf, and, whichever its behavior would be: aggressive or non-aggressive, its aggressivity is still represented as a reality, so that the fear one experiences would be considered – due to the projected image – as a normal state of mind. Nevertheless, if the collective image would be reduced exclusively to such collective experiences, then it will appear as incredibly poor. Such experiences are completed with the images created by other communities, or with individual images, which are accepted as a function of each one's social status. All these actions may be fulfilled only in a communication space within which the possibility of transmitting information does exist. In this way, an environment which we call common sense has been created, even if it is not viewed as always indubitable.

In the course of social evolution, the imaginary of some community is enlarged, more and more complex images are established, up to highly refined forms, such as metaphysics or science. In this way there have been created realities such as the common reality, the physical, the social and the institutional reality, the components of social reality: moral reality, the scientific and religious reality. All of them form an assembly constituting the social image upon the world. Each of them is created in a different way, its ontological status depending on the moment in which the respective image had been built. The

images whose source is no longer present in the collective memory are better represented, and have a well-founded status.

The development of social reality should be observed along two main directions. The ontic-type one, in which reality refers to the physical space, and the moral-type one, specific to the social space. Physical reality is built upon individual representations. Their combination, supported by reasoning, analysis and interpretation, determines a common representation of the physical space. On the foundations of such constructions, theoretical reality and part of the mythical and religious structures are being built. They create a general image of the physical universe, still liable to modifications, as a function of the specific space and time, no image being ontologically superior to another, in spite of the existence of theoretical developments which lead to a world based upon technology. This means that, important for constructing the image upon the world is not only the theory but also the technological discoveries which, nowadays, may be viewed as essential in building up new worlds.

In the case of social reality, its development involves censoring of groups or of some of its individuals. Construction of this reality starts from the interdiction of taking certain actions. The scope of such interdiction is firstly of pragmatic nature, the gestures that might affect the normal life of the group being not permitted. Acquiring awareness and acceptance of interdictions is achieved at group level, as a moral component specific to the society. Morality originates in unconscious areas, however, filtered by the mind, it becomes a form of the rational and, implicitly, conscious imaginary. Moral traditions are transmitted orally while, when acquiring an institutionalized status, they are transmitted in written form, morality thus becoming legislation. On the contrary, if interdictions are increasingly imposed, they get sacralized and transferred towards a region of the collective unconscious zone. The forbidden gesture becomes a taboo and the whole community accepts to comply with it, without analyzing its pragmatic role, simply only for it is sacred or for some other reasons of religious nature: not to make gods angry.

The common space grasped as reality can be manifested only in relation with some form of its sacralization. Evolution from individual to common perception involves imperative gestures and images, their impact being stronger when such interdictions had been transmitted by some superior entities, for assuring a suitable coordination of the people. As living beings, we cannot live outside this sacred realm, even if it is fear which determines world's sacralization. The sacred world also represents, apart from the radical, specific, compulsory censorship, the support we need for understanding that our common reality is an objective entity. Objectiveness is assured by the possibility of identifying the creator and upholder of the world, its order and final scope. The creator of the world is the one who makes it objective, the one who establishes our status and position among the other existentialistic structures. Sacralization creates an objective world gathering within it all existentialistic components considered as real.

However, in its manifestation forms, "reality" is not entirely grasped as conscious. One may mention a collective awareness to the extent to which elements grasped as consciously and socially organized do exist. They are manifested in the official histories and legends of some regions, in the memory of the community, in the opinions and mentalities of the collectivity, in the moral and legislative norms in force. Also manifested on this level is the development of a rational imaginary, involving equally its basic component: scientific imaginary, represented by the image upon the surrounding worlds. Rational imaginary is formed of the logically organized aspects of some community, such as legislation, institutional organization, societal analyses, educative institutions, etc. Numerous beliefs and mentalities from the margin of the collective awareness are manifested and depend on this form of imaginary.

Also on the level of social awareness is the action of attributing functions to the real world, which appear as active forms capable of transforming reality. Each component of the common convention has different functions, assuring its insertion in the pragmatic universe specific to reality. No component of the real

world is devoid of functions, even if it may remain, for now, non-identified. There exists a double modality for function forming, namely: by giving functions to the already created objects, and by identifying possible functions, not attributed to objects. In such a case, artefacts which we build up as objects capable of accomplishing non-objectual functions are developed. Consequently, the real world is not exclusively pragmatic, it is continuously liable to transformation, by the interrelationships created between function and object. However, many of these functions have their source in a much more obscure form of collective consciousness - the collective unconscious (Jung, 1997).⁴

If, in the individual ego, the idea of unconscious, as an imaginative-pulsional essence, appears as overused, in the case of a collectivity, it plays its specific role. There exist, in our opinion, three layers of collective consciousness: the conscious part, manifested by everything which occurs on the surface, and it is easy to observe, a subconscious part, represented by social habits and manifested through forms of social organization, having disappeared as a form of consciousness and an unconscious form, manifested by the totality of myths, legends, symbols, much more difficult to be felt as conscious. The three stages represent forms of the collective imaginary, the first two being, at a certain moment, components of the consciousness and of social memory, while the third one has its roots in the beginnings of human history, in that *illo tempore* which can be no longer reactivated as active memory, but only as a myth or a symbol. This third part of the imaginary is a form of the pulsional imaginary, to be analyzed elsewhere.

Formation of social consciousness determines building up of a surface reality within reach, viewed as our existential support for looking at the world as an objective entity. In the subconscious zone, this is represented by mechanisms which become habits, by daily realities whose origins are no longer investigated. It is constituted by all elements of the social reality which perform some function in the organization of the society: conventions accepted as such (coins, actions); roles; social status; social institutions, such as the family; social contracts transformed into institutions (property, marriage,

etc.). All these make a reality which we do not activate and analyze as representing correct forms or not, but only take them as such. This reality simply exists, we respect it as, in its absence, the society would not operate in the manner it does at a given moment⁵. All these elements form a whole social complex. Building up of the real is attained at image level, by bringing together all individual images, as well as those formed as group experience. With the creation of institutions at conscious level, they take over their functions, the remaining activities being gradually transferred on a subconscious level. The collective subconscious plays firstly roles of social nature.

The scientific elements present at subconscious level are manifested by means of the images with which we build up the universe and analyze the world - such as the calendar, hour, spacial dimensions, etc. The subconscious zone is formed by a structural reality manifested at societal level. "Any educated person of our days is informed on at least two theories: the atomic theory of matter and the evolutionist theory taken over from biology"⁶, as stated by John R. Searle (Searle, 2000). The two theories propose an image upon reality assumed by more people than those who are in direct contact with scientific activities. This image about the world is formed on the contact between the scientific universe and common sense. For example, nowadays, we do not believe that there might still exist persons supporting the geocentric theory, even if the apparent movement of the sun is perceptible. The sun raises each morning, however man does not discern in this action sun's movement around the earth. The universe is different for each of us.

The third stage refers to the formation of the collective unconscious⁷, manifested as legends, myths, parables and symbols (Jung, 1916). Realization of such an unconscious level is attained by occultation of the events or of the image present at conscious level in a certain moment of time. Occultation occurs gradually, transgressing facts into an *illo tempore* area. Collective unconsciousness is manifested equally as symbol and as meaning, its development being represented, as well, by what we use to consider as fantastic. The relation with the immediate was lost, so that a world in itself

- viewed as real exclusively in "primitive" spaces, which assume their own sacred representations as reality - was developed. Through reasoning, this pulsional world comes to lose its power, while the image corresponding to it may appear as ridiculous.

As a result of the breach created between the immediate world and the pulsional side of reality, the unconscious stage is less frequent in the formation of the scientific image. There exist, however, myths of science manifested in the social universe, there exist legends about discoveries and about men-of-science (the non-conformism of the genius), images and symbols (Einstein - the symbol of genius). The unconscious level involves a specific human behavior when confronted with the scientific discoveries.

Generally, the imaginary manifested in a certain moment of time does not remain static, being continuously subjected to evolution and extension, in quite various modes. Thus, starting from the description of "reality" formation, the manner in which this image is enlarged may be followed. The modalities at hand are not of logical nature, once the collective image is developed starting from impulses of affective type. Social imaginary does not observe logical laws, on the contrary, part of the specific evolutive procedures are of sophistic type, being possibly labelled as logical errors. Nevertheless, the present analysis will not approach the "logics" of the collective imaginary, being mainly focused on some of the best known mechanisms of collective image formation and extension.

1. The first to be considered are the cases in which an individual image is transformed into a group image. Two basic reasons exist for integrating an individual image, a new idea, into the group image. In the former case, one should consider the situations in which the individual image should correspond to the image of the collectivity or should be similar to it, for solving certain issues registered in the collective image. Secondly, the person putting forward this idea should be a leader in the domain, or should be accepted by his superiors. Therefore, the main modality for accomplishing this shift from the individual discourse to the collective one occurs under the sign of "authoritative argument". Authority, whichever its nature, is the one

imposing such an image. Starting from political authority and continuing with the academic one or with non-formal leaders, all of them represent a form of authority. Non-formal leaders appear as a form of authority from the perspective of the marginal discourse. The image of the individual becomes a group image. Here included are the scientific discoveries, the accepted theories and hypotheses, inventions, etc., which enter the scientific circuit and, by their application and popularization, become modalities of manifestation of the collective imaginary.

This mechanism is opposed to that of individual conformism, by means of which the person taking over the message from the social environment becomes its antagonist. In most of the cases, for having the new idea accepted, both above-mentioned conditions should be met. The proposed image, even if it is revolutionary, should have the support of some previous ones. For example, the heliocentric theory is a synthesis of the idea of infinity stated by Nicolaus Cusanus, doubled by the metaphysics of Giordano Bruno, by the ideas and mathematical calculations of Nicolaus Copernic, reactivated and amplified by Galileo Galilei, to which one should add the observations and formulas of Brache and Kepler. In the end, the most complex image upon the universe, imposed in the beginning of modernity, is that offered by Isaac Newton. Such a synthesis illustrates that, actually, no individual theories exist, the emerging ones being created within a large socio-cultural context. Also necessary is that the author of any theory should be an authority in the domain as, otherwise, no new idea will be accepted and, implicitly, applied.

2. One of the modalities by means of which a new image can be created may involve "imitation" of the image already present in a certain, past moment of time. A mimic gesture does not mean exclusively taking over of some idea, but equally its reorganization and reinterpretation. Generally, when a new form of scientific image is put forward, it may start from an older pattern. For example, the atomistic pattern of matter proposed by Bacon in his description of the universe starts from the ideas of Democrit, adapted to the "new universe", shown as including, apart from the model of Democrit, the planetary one, as well. The two patterns have created the atomistic

pattern specific to the beginning of the XXth century.

3. Resuming of a pattern and its utilization in the representation of an adjacent reality. The novelty refers to the adaptation of a pattern, which can be taken over from the environment, from a different domain or from another historical moment, and on the basis of which a new reality can be described. It thus contributes to the development of the collective image also because the pattern is already existing, the image upon the world is established, the only thing still to be done being its reorientation or its creative reinterpretation.

4. Interpretation of some image may contribute to the enlargement of the already occurring imaginary, as any new interpretation and analysis brings about new elements, original perspectives, which determine the development of the imaginary. Such a modality appears as extremely important if considering that, through a reasoning process specific to hermeneutics, an initially non-rational image may be transformed into a rational-type one. Equally, this form of imaginary development creates the rational imaginary.

5. The predictive modalities of development may also determine the development of collective imaginary. In this way, by means of prediction, a universe can be created at phantasmagoric level, which subsequently delivers a pattern for scientific development. In many situations, they can represent the orientation to be followed by scientists. Generally, prediction acts on formal, and not on theoretical level. A theory cannot be predicted, instead structural patterns for the development of a future science⁸ or of the instruments it may use can be anticipated (Bacon,1952). The SF literature created within the cultural environment of the XXth century played also a predictive part, a close interrelationship being manifested between the specific literary and scientific universes. SF literature takes over scientific patterns, while designing instruments and situations with no real support. This type of literature may anticipate the creation of some instruments or of some moral situations not yet imagined. Self-induced prediction is the form through which a fantastic image is taken over in the moment of its elaboration and application on scientific level.

Such modalities of building up the imaginary are manifested in each collective image, so that one may arrive at that image about the world we call reality. As a matter of fact, accomplished is not the external world, which remains the same, however the manner in which one grasps it differs, as a function of the social environment, time and space. A different perception of the world induces diverging cultural outlooks among civilizations, which actually explains the multitude of images we are delivered, under the influence of the social environment, in the same way in which the social environment is influenced by the theoretical rules and by its construction.

Reality - as one grasps it - is built up as an image on the world within a universe of communication founded on interhuman relations. Realization of such images starts from the affective impact of some event. Cognitive processes, such as generalization, abstractization, also manifested at societal level, are completed by occultation and sacralization processes, which transform the objective reality manifested on conscious level into an unconscious form, thus determining the occurrence of what we used to define as pulsional imaginary. However, also manifested at collective level is the phenomenon defined as analysis, which transforms collective imaginary into a rational imaginary and offers logically, hierarchically and causally organized collective images. Reality is viewed as a social creation whose origins are lost somewhere in *illo tempore*.

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Endnotes

1. The term "metaphysics" is utilized from the perspective of John R. Searle, as discussed in his book, *Reality as a social project*, Polirom, Iași 2000, p.16, according to whom the social relations possess a metaphysical charge by their very status. Social interrelations are developed in an universe of unanimous understanding and acceptance of reality.
2. Unlike most of the researchers of social psychology (Gustav Le Bon, *Psihologia maselor*, Antet Publishing House, 2002, Moscovici S. (1993) *The Invention of Society: Psychological Explanations for Social Phenomena* (HALLS W.D. Trans.) Oxford: Polity Press.), who considered that crowds are motivated exclusively by pulsional affective actions, the authors believe that processes of rational type intervene in building up reality. Consequently, on the level of common reality, abstraction, generalization, analysis and synthesis processes - on the basis of which reality is organized as an interhuman convention - may be involved.
3. John R. Searle, *Realitatea ca proiect social*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași 2000, p. 15.
4. The term applied is inspired by C. G. Jung (C. G. Jung, *Personalitate și transfer*, Teora Publishing House, București 1997).
5. An example about the subconscious refers to the coin. Nowadays, we do not ask ourselves whether the coin is a benefic instrument, we have doubts only about the manner of its utilization, about the mechanisms of inflation, crediting, etc.
6. John R. Searle, *Realitatea ca proiect social*, Polirom, Iași 2000, p.30.
7. C.G. Jung, Jung, "The Structure of the Unconscious" (1916) in *Collected Works* vol. 7 (1953), New York: Pantheon Books, 1953 pp. 437-507.
8. In this way, Francis Bacon realizes a classification of science in *Advancement of Learning*, (British Encyclopedia, London 1952). This classification was fully accomplished only in the XX-th century. Possibly, numerous sciences have appeared exactly on the basis of this pattern.