

## SCRYING

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“Imagination is nearer to the substance of the soul than the sense is”<sup>1</sup>

Scrying<sup>2</sup> has been variously defined as “the faculty of seeing visions in a smooth surface or clear deep, or both”;<sup>3</sup> “an occult method for obtaining oracular visions in water, glass or crystal;”<sup>4</sup> and “the deliberate act of perceiving events that lie beyond the range of the physical senses by using the agents of the unconscious mind.”<sup>5</sup> As such, scrying is a form of clairvoyance or cryptesthesia,<sup>6</sup> and as it would usually also involve the interpretation of the meaning of such visions, it can be considered to be a form of divination.<sup>7</sup> The idea of a mirror or shining surface revealing an occult dimension—an alternative world which cannot be seen via sense-perception alone but which requires an intuitive “second sight” to reveal it—leads us to question what is being revealed, how it is revealed, and why humans have the capacity to see beyond the veil of consensual reality. The silvery, shiny and translucent surfaces of crystals, mirrors or water remind us of the moon, poetically associated with the role of mediator between the elemental life on earth and the immaterial life of the spirit. In a receptive state, it seems possible for the scryer to gain access to this other realm, which reveals itself in shapes, images and symbols to be deciphered by the conscious mind.

It is not my intention in this chapter to give a history of scrying or a description of its various techniques, as these topics are covered in other sources.<sup>8</sup> Suffice it to say that its many variants have been practised at all times and in all cultures,<sup>9</sup> two of its most famous exponents being Nostradamus (1503-1566) and Dr John Dee (1527-1608/9) with his medium Edward Kelley.<sup>10</sup> I am more interested, however, in exploring the metaphysics of scrying, in locating the practice within an epistemological context, and to this end I will highlight some of the avenues by which we may approach the subject of clairvoyant and divinatory “knowing” in ways which honour its verity and integrity.

I will first of all address the nature of divination itself, and then consider theories of subliminal mind and cognitive imagination in relation to scrying. In my view, it is not sufficient to approach such an activity from a purely psycho-physiological perspective—a legacy of post-Enlightenment material science—but rather we should situate it in within a discourse of liminality, poetics and supra-rational paradigms of perception if we wish to gain insight into its *modus operandi*.

### Divination

It is all too easy to marginalise divinatory knowledge as superstitious, irrational or fictitious from a standpoint of an “objective” rationalist who fears usurpation by “the dark tide of mud of occultism” as Freud put it;<sup>11</sup> and for such a rationalist, even the spiritual science of visionaries such as Rudolf Steiner or Henry Corbin, for whom research into transpersonal reality involved rigorous inquiry into interior

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<sup>1</sup> Agrippa: 202.

<sup>2</sup> From the English word *descry*: to catch sight of something (difficult to discern).

<sup>3</sup> Besterman: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Tyson: xvi.

<sup>5</sup> Tyson: 3.

<sup>6</sup> “subconscious perception of occurrences not ordinarily perceptible to the senses” or “a mode of paranormal perception, such as clairvoyance” (<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/cryptesthesia> accessed 11/2/13).

<sup>7</sup> Tyson defines scrying as divination only if it involves the “unconscious mind,” i.e. some form of subliminal intuition, and is not merely deduction according to a set of rules (4-5).

<sup>8</sup> See Besterman, Tyson, Thomas & Lang.

<sup>9</sup> Besterman lists catoptromancy (mirror), crystallo-mancy (crystal), cyclicomancy (cup of water or wine), gastromancy (marks on belly), hydromancy (water, river, lake), lecanomancy (water in basin or open receptacle), lithomancy (stone), onychomancy (fingernails), pegomancy (spring water) plus any other method using reflective objects or precious stones or metals (2-8). Tyson adds telepathy, dowsing and psychometry (4-5).

<sup>10</sup> Dee and Kelley believed they were summoning autonomous spirits via the famous “shewstone”, in whose black obsidian surface Kelley saw visions of angels who communicated to him in a complex language. See Harkness, Suster, Szönyi 2006a.

<sup>11</sup> In Jung 1961: 150.

experience, is likely to be critiqued as “religionist.” Contemporary scholarship on divination, however, has certainly progressed from the “self-congratulatory rationalism” of various historians of science and anthropologists of the past,<sup>12</sup> with authors such as Patrick Curry, Geoffrey Cornelius and Barbara Tedlock (all practitioners as well as academics) addressing head-on issues of divinatory phenomenology, ontology and epistemology in a wide inter-disciplinary inquiry.<sup>13</sup> They all expose divination as an essentially ubiquitous and creative—or co-creative—process, whose rationale is *affective* and metaphorical rather than causal. Divining involves the derivation of meaning from signs, and this metaphorical seeing is a fundamental principle of esotericism in the West. As Plotinus (204-270 CE) reminds the reader of his second *Ennead*, “All teems with symbol; the wise man is the man who in any one thing sees another”, adding that this is a common, everyday experience.<sup>14</sup> In our positivist society, it tends to be overlooked that this kind of seeing may produce valuable knowledge for the participant, the bottom line of truth always being the natural, physical causation in the underlying medium. Signification is regarded as an arbitrary and unverifiable leap of an over-active imagination, and the “seeing of one thing as another” (*pareidolia*) as either a useful tool for psychological diagnosis or nothing more than an amusing coincidence.<sup>15</sup> However, it is not problematic for diviners to hold both rational and symbolic levels of perception as equally valid in their respective cognitive domains; in fact in esoteric epistemology, intuitive cognition (or “the intuitive intellect” as Plato would call it) is logically prior to discursive reasoning, as it is an innate faculty of knowing in the soul which is intimately connected to its own ground of being.<sup>16</sup> It is this faculty which transcends subject-object duality as it exists beyond time and space as we know them.

What then is divination? Cornelius has defined it as “a work where human being submits intimate concern to a primordial intelligence or reality that goes under various names, such as “spirit-like” or “divine”, or a named god”,<sup>17</sup> and Tedlock defines diviners as “experts who embrace the notion of moving from a boundless to a bounded realm of existence in their practice.”<sup>18</sup> A divination is both “functional and performative”, always constituting a “unique case” whose truth is realised in lived experience and is never mere speculation or correctness of propositions.<sup>19</sup> In its authentic form, divination involves taking moral responsibility for actions and decisions. It is not primarily about predicting the future (although it may involve prophetic utterance) but about asking for guidance about “right action”, about how to follow the path of good fortune in one’s life, for “destiny is negotiable” on the level of human affairs.<sup>20</sup> In neoplatonic and theosophical contexts, as well as many “new age” ones, divination has the teleological aim to cultivate self-awareness and raise consciousness, in the understanding that the human soul has an innate duality—a human and a divine aspect—which need to be brought into single focus. The higher part, according to the Platonists, is aligned with the all-seeing divine mind, and therefore has the power to alter what may appear to be “fated” to the more materially-bound level of cognition. This power (whether it is conceived as “internal” or “external” to the diviner) is sought and possibly embodied through a ritual action such as scrying, as the image arising is interpreted as a message from the spirits, gods or “higher self”. The divinatory act allows the present moment to reveal itself, as it were, and within this moment the future is implicit and will flow according to the choices made.

In the act of gazing into a crystal ball or shiny surface, an *abaissement du niveau mental*<sup>21</sup> may take place in which shapes or forms appear and assume significance as omens. The visions may be either

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<sup>12</sup> See Szönyi 2006b: 74.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Cornelius 2003, 2007, 2010; Curry & Willis 2004, Curry & Voss 2007, Curry 2010; Tedlock 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Plotinus, II.3.7. See also III.1.6.

<sup>15</sup> It is beyond the remit of this article to examine the approaches of cognitive psychology to paranormal experience, but *pareidolia* is normally classed as an hallucination or illusion (see Blom, 389-90).

<sup>16</sup> The principle sources for Platonic epistemology are his “divided line” metaphor and “allegory of the cave” in *Republic* VI (509d-513e) and VII (514a-520a). See Voss 2013a & b.

<sup>17</sup> Cornelius 2007: 247.

<sup>18</sup> Tedlock : 62.

<sup>19</sup> Cornelius 2007: 234-8.

<sup>20</sup> As W. Warde Fowler pointed out, “The augural art [in ancient Rome] never provided an answer to the question ‘what is going to happen?’ but only to that more religious one, ‘are the deities willing that we should do this or that?’” (298). *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* [London: Macmillan & Co. 1911] 298.

<sup>21</sup> Term used by Jung, following Pierre Janet, to refer to a relaxed state of consciousness prior to using the active imagination to access elements of the unconscious mind.

unbidden or bidden;<sup>22</sup> that is, either actively sought through ritual intention, or spontaneously observed without any preparation or expectation of their appearance. As an example of the former, Crystal Addey draws our attention to the tradition of catoptrromancy in ancient Greece, where shiny surfaces or mirrors were used for divination.<sup>23</sup> According to Pausanias, at the sanctuary of Demeter at Patras rituals for the prognosis of illness involved lowering a mirror into a spring—after various ritual activities the images in the mirror would reveal whether the person enquired about was alive or dead.<sup>24</sup> As an example of the latter, Pausanias again describes a mirror on the wall of a temple at Lykosaura; apparently when the visitor looked into it they did not see themselves, but only the distant statues of deities which were brought into sharp focus.<sup>25</sup> Here we have a concrete metaphor for any scrying practice which aims to reveal aspects of an invisible world to normal sight.

The two modes of rational (human) and revelatory (divine) knowledge in turn relate to two distinct forms of divinatory practice: artificial and natural. In other words, some things could be ascertained through inductive rituals requiring speculation, inference or deduction, but others were directly “revealed” through visions, dreams or direct symbolic insight. Tedlock has termed these forms “representational” and “presentational symbolism” and notes:

In representational symbolism, specific intentional inference is paramount, the medium of expression is straightforward, and inductive reality is dominant. In presentational symbolism, meaning emerges directly from experiential immersion in the expressive or emotional patterns of the symbolic medium that is grasped intuitively.<sup>26</sup>

In practice, it is not so easy to differentiate between the two modes as perception and interpretation are often instantaneously intertwined; but, as Cornelius has pointed out, post-Enlightenment thought “has removed the ontological necessity [of the relation between reason and revelation] and with it, the ground of divination”.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the notion that all rational analysis is ultimately grounded in a “supra-rational”, noetic or deeply intuitive insight is no longer considered valid. In an “ontological inversion” of cognitive value, the material world has assumed the status of ultimate reality, whilst metaphysically speaking it is contained and governed by far more “real” spiritual law.<sup>28</sup> It is illuminating to view this duality in terms of the functions of the brain hemispheres, as researched by Iain McGilchrist. In his pioneering book *The Master and his Emissary* he posits that the left brain of rationality and abstraction has become severed from the right brain’s intuitive, visionary and holistic capacity and is no longer its “emissary” but strives to become the master, if not the tyrant. McGilchrist concludes that it is in fact the imagination which provides a bridge between the two modes, which can be equated with (but *not* reduced to) the connective function of the *corpus callosum* in the brain.<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey Kripal follows this line of enquiry in his suggestion that scholars and researchers of religious or paranormal experience should develop their capacity for engagement with trans-rational, transpersonal or “sacred” reality as well as their critical minds, an argument which I have also pursued elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

So how can we characterise the kind of revelatory knowledge gleaned via the image in a crystal bowl or pool of water? It would appear to embody a sympathetic resonance, a “consubstantiality” or “momentary identity of substance” between observer and observed: the omen, the vision, IS at the same time the numinous “other”, which is also implicated in the event it points to in the world.<sup>31</sup> The omen is unique in that it is *only an omen for the one who sees it*, to whose life it has direct relevance, and this sense of being “meant” is often attributed to a daimonic agency, as it resists all our usual categories of understanding.<sup>32</sup> However, it may also be attributed to an “unconscious” dimension of the human mind, and to this theory I will now turn.

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<sup>22</sup> *Omina oblativa* and *omina impetrativa*; see Cornelius 2010: 396.

<sup>23</sup> Addey 2007:1.

<sup>24</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 7.21, 11-12, quoted in Addey 2007: 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> Pausanias, 8.37, 7-8, quoted in Addey 2007: 5.

<sup>26</sup> Tedlock: 70.

<sup>27</sup> Cornelius 2010: 5.

<sup>28</sup> Further on the ontological inversion, see Milne: 5; also Corbin 1964.

<sup>29</sup> See McGilchrist: 198-208.

<sup>30</sup> Kripal 2001: 5, 2010: Conclusion; Voss 2009, 2011, 213a.

<sup>31</sup> See Cornelius 2007: 235.

<sup>32</sup> Cornelius 2007: 235.

## Subliminal mind

The suggestion of the nineteenth-century psychic researchers and psychoanalysts that the human mind contained “unconscious” powers which could produce all manner of precognitive and telepathic information, and that these powers were open to rational investigation, was a radical one and it continues to inform parapsychological approaches today. But such a view strains to accommodate either a magical cosmology of autonomous spirit-agency (on its own terms) or the validity of gnostic insight, as it remains firmly bound to a spirit of scientific inquiry.

William James (1842-1910) triumphantly reported on the rigour of the investigative activities of the Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1882, praising F.W.H. Myers’ (1843-1901) theories of the “subliminal self”—an “ultra-marginal” or unmanifested part of human consciousness responsible for precognitive or telepathic events.<sup>33</sup> In his essay “What Psychical Research has Accomplished”,<sup>34</sup> James gives the example of a Miss X, who on consulting her crystal ball, saw printed characters telling of the death of an acquaintance. On perusing *The Times* from the previous day, she saw the identical announcement in the newspaper, although she was not aware of having read it before her scrying session. With the theory of the subliminal mind, events such as this could now be explained coherently with no need to resort to supernatural explanations, for such information could have been “unconsciously” remembered. But other phenomena were more difficult to explain. For instance, James, Myers and their colleagues struggled to incorporate into this paradigm their experience of mediumship, which often demonstrated a tangible and inexplicable presence in the séance room which was difficult to attribute to “subliminal mind”.<sup>35</sup> James attempts to construct a paradigm of “hallucination” which embraces everything from the powers of suggestion to hearing the warning voice of a deceased relative in a time of danger, but cannot avoid the suspicion that in the latter case there must be “something else going on”. In fact, he cannot resist the speculation that the theosophists may be more correct in their theories of autonomous astral bodies.

For the psychical researchers, it was enough that scryers or mediums could peer into an super-sensory realm not bound by laws of time and space, into an unconscious mind which could access information from a mysterious source, yet which needed a vehicle of words or images. Myers observed that scryers were not in a hypnotised state, but scrutinised their visions in complete conscious detachment. He concluded that crystal gazing is “an empirical method of developing internal vision; of externalising pictures which are associated with changes in the sensorial tracts of the brain, due partly to internal stimuli, and partly to stimuli which may come from minds external to the scryer’s own”.<sup>36</sup> It thus may involve telepathic activity, and Myers appears to leave it open as to whether these “external” minds are embodied or not. Besterman follows a harder line and sees no “evidence” for spirit activity, concluding that

scrying is a method of bringing into the consciousness of the scryer by means of a speculum through one or more of his senses the content of his subconsciousness, of rendering him more susceptible to the reception of telepathically transmitted concepts, and of bringing into operation a latent and unknown faculty of perception.<sup>37</sup>

The contemporary scryer and scholar Donald Tyson takes a more radical view. He uses the metaphor of the unconscious mind as a computer which can pick up information and convey it through an image on a screen—such images might be clear and concise such as the words seen by Miss X, or shady and symbolic therefore requiring interpretation.<sup>38</sup> He calls them sensory metaphors, which like dream images, may point to an important message for the recipient. The “computer” tunes in as it were to autonomous

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<sup>33</sup> Besterman gives several examples of Myer’s theory of the power of suggestion in relation to scrying, along with other reports from SPR members. See also Cornelius 2007: ch. 12, on Myers’ hopes for a reconciliation of science and spiritualism.

<sup>34</sup> At <http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/23336/>.

<sup>35</sup> As James famously remarked in this essay, on witnessing the skills of the medium Mrs. Piper: “If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, you must not seek to show that no crows are; it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white. My own white crow is Mrs. Piper.”

<sup>36</sup> Myers: 150. See also his “The Subliminal Consciousness”, *Proceedings of the SPR* 1982, viii, 489.

<sup>37</sup> Besterman: 160.

<sup>38</sup> Tyson: 144.

presences from other frequencies which might be experienced on an inner level as form, voice or touch.<sup>39</sup> The scrying mirror here, he claims, acts as a reflector of images communicated by discarnate spirits to the scryer's "inner mind" which projects them onto its surface, in the same way as automatic writing or drawing. We note with interest that in Myers' supposed post-mortem communication via the medium Geraldine Cummins, he confirms that indeed the "minds external to the scryer's own" are not incarnate. From his position "on the other side", he explains that the inner mind of the medium is like soft wax which receives the thoughts of the discarnate being, but it must then find the appropriate words or images in which to "clothe" it:<sup>40</sup>

It is true that we communicate by pictures or images, by signs which the deeper mind of the sensitive apprehends, and sometimes we may convey by a sign or symbol, a name or word unknown to the medium. It would be well for you to note that what you call "normal consciousness" means the raising up of the barriers between your mind and another human mind. But behind all that there is among human beings a deeper self, a subjective mentality that can trespass into the domain of other subliminal selves, that meets with few barriers.<sup>41</sup>

Whatever the reader may make of that, we are certainly left with an unresolvable ambiguity around the potential of the subliminal mind to embrace the intelligent "other", however it is conceived.

### The Imaginal World

Myers draws our attention to the importance of the symbolic image as an interface between two dimensions or levels of consciousness, and this leads us now to consider traditions in which the imagination itself is regarded as *cognitive*. The psychical researchers were aiming for scientific respectability through adopting a rational, methodically thorough examination of non-ordinary consciousness. On the other hand, we find the esoteric stream of wisdom in the West concerned with a mode of cognition which transcends rationality *per se* and engages with an epistemology of transcendent intuition derived from the Platonic notion of "intellect" as the path to *gnosis* or wisdom.

The neoplatonic theory which illuminates our theme of scrying hinges on the understanding I mentioned earlier, that the sensible world is a natural image or reflection of the divine or intelligible world which interpenetrates it.<sup>42</sup> Here we find again the crucial distinction between artificial and natural images. According to Plotinus, artistic or sculptural images would be artificial, representing a "perfected" nature, and therefore could act as *eikons* or symbols, pointing back to an essential, archetypal form.<sup>43</sup> Natural images on the other hand are reflections in surfaces, such as water or a mirror. The appearance of an image in a scrying mirror for instance could be seen as a natural, immediate imprint of an eternal dimension of reality, because the eternal world contains the temporal and nothing impedes their interpenetration. As Plotinus explains: "because of their closeness to something else in the world of real being [i.e. the spiritual world], something like an imprint and image of that other suddenly appears, either by its direct action or through the assistance of soul [...] or of a particular soul".<sup>44</sup> The shadow or image of the archetype is produced directly and spontaneously through the mirroring process, unlike the artist's creation which involves planning and construction; but most interestingly, Plotinus emphasises the co-creative aspect of these spontaneous visions, for as he says of dreaming nature, "my act of contemplation makes what it contemplates."<sup>45</sup> The amphibian soul has a dimension which continuously inhabits the archetypal, unchanging world, whilst its "human" part is able to translate intimations of this world through visions into the world of the senses "by casting the reflections and shadows which make it up [...] or by dreaming the dream which it is".<sup>46</sup> Thus our attention is drawn to the fact that the dreams and visions hold an essential truth, whilst our normal waking consciousness is a mere reflection of an eternal reality.

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<sup>39</sup> Tyson: 145. Of interest here is the more "objective" phenomenon of instrumental transcommunication (ITC): the supposed direct communication of spirits via technological means (radio, telephone, television or computer). See Cardoso, Cooper.

<sup>40</sup> Cummins: 23.

<sup>41</sup> Cummins: 126.

<sup>42</sup> See Armstrong.

<sup>43</sup> Plotinus V.8.1.

<sup>44</sup> Plotinus V.8.7.

<sup>45</sup> Plotinus III.8.4.

<sup>46</sup> Armstrong: 162-3.

In relation to the art of scrying then, the more polished or transparent the mirror of the psyche, the more powerful the vision, but the accuracy of its interpretation must depend on the quality of intuition of the individual. Reflections and shadows on water for instance can be true signs for some, but bewitch and mislead those who do not understand them and take them to be ultimate realities, or try to grab and literalise them, fixing them in immutable meanings.<sup>47</sup> The idea that meaning and truth arise from a “symbolic attitude” is central to esotericism, as it is to poetry, and it is necessary to side-step our habitual rationalist assumptions if we are to get to the heart of image-magic. We also need to suspend our notions of causality, for to ask if images in a shiny surface are produced *either* by the psyche of the operator *or* an autonomous, non-material being creates an unhelpful dichotomy which can never be resolved one way or the other.

The neoplatonist Iamblichus (245-325 CE) refers to theurgic rituals which involve different kinds of light shining on reflective surfaces, and he too is careful to emphasise the difference between the two orders of “divine” and “human” action. True divinatory acts, he says, are instigated by the gods, not by men, for it is their transcendent power which illuminates the human imaginative faculty and allows it to glimpse images of another order. As Addey explains: “divine illumination emanates from the god’s ethereal vehicle to the human’s ethereal vehicle, which is wholly taken over by the gods and the oracular message is pictured on the soul’s imagination: these ‘pictures’ or images come from the gods, thus divine illumination irradiates the vehicle, causing divinely inspired images in it.”<sup>48</sup> The divine appearances within the soul vehicle then, set in motion by the gods’ will, take possession of the imaginative power, the mirror or glass acting as a medium for the practitioner’s imaginative faculty.<sup>49</sup> This power of the imagination to access an eternal, omniscient realm leads philosophers in this tradition to consider it as the means of prophecy—and, interestingly, as a daimonic intelligence in its own right.<sup>50</sup>

Cornelius Agrippa in 1533 confirmed that prophecy occurs “by the true revelation of some divine power in a quiet and purified mind; for by this our soul receives true oracles, and abundantly yieldeth prophecies to us.”<sup>51</sup> He echoes Plotinus in his insistence that the “imaginative spirit” must be pure and undisturbed, “so that it may be made worthy of the knowledge and government by the mind and understanding; for such a spirit is fit for prophesying and [...] is a most clear glass of all the images which flow everywhere from all things.”<sup>52</sup> For Agrippa as a Christian magus, it is religion which will lead the mind to the necessary state of purity.<sup>53</sup> The physician Paracelsus (1493-1541) too speaks of the twofold human soul, part of which can rise above the illusions of the senses and perceive the “astral light” or hidden occult properties in all elements of creation. This “inner man” is “the natural man, and knows more than the one which is formed of flesh”. Paracelsus brings our attention back to the importance of intention and commitment, for “imagination springs from desire” and is required for successful clairvoyance; when the active will ceases to dominate, the imagination is freed to “act on the invisible substance of the soul”.<sup>54</sup> Paracelsus reiterates the crucial neoplatonic distinction between “fancy” and imagination, the former being “the corner stone of superstition and foolishness”, the latter the faculty which “becomes pregnant through desire” and may enter into contact with spirits.<sup>55</sup> This metaphor connects us directly with C. G. Jung’s theory of active imagination, to which I will now turn.

*Looking*, psychologically, brings about the activation of the object; it is as if something were emanating from one’s spiritual eye that evokes or activates the object of one’s vision.

The English verb, ‘to look at’, does not convey this meaning, but the German *betrachten*, which is an equivalent, means also to make pregnant [...] And if it is pregnant, then something is due to come out of it; it is alive, it produces, it multiplies. That is the case with any fantasy image; one concentrates upon it, and then

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<sup>47</sup> See Armstrong: 173, 178.

<sup>48</sup> Addey: 8, see also Finamore 89-93.

<sup>49</sup> See Synesius for a more detailed explanation of the relationship between the astral body and the imagination; also Addey 2012; Finamore.

<sup>50</sup> Synesius 137b; see Voss 2013b.

<sup>51</sup> Agrippa: 633.

<sup>52</sup> Agrippa: 633.

<sup>53</sup> Agrippa: 638.

<sup>54</sup> In Hartmann: 106-7.

<sup>55</sup> In Hartmann: 112.

finds that one has great difficulty in keeping the thing quiet, it gets restless, it shifts, something is added, or it multiplies itself; one fills it with living power and it becomes pregnant.<sup>56</sup>

Jung notes that an attitude of active expectation is required for the images brought forth to be examined by the conscious mind, whereas a passive attitude may result in an indiscriminating identification with the mood of the image (such as in a dream). When the mind is active, it is able to start penetrating to the meaning of the symbol revealed through concentrating on it and bringing it alive.<sup>57</sup> In this way the divination becomes “co-creative”.<sup>58</sup> For Jung then, the act of scrying would facilitate the arousal of unconscious contents prior to their shaping, interpretation, and subsequent conversion into moral obligation. Furthermore, when a union of conscious and unconscious contents occurs, the transcendent function arises, which “makes the transition from one attitude to another organically possible, without loss of the unconscious”.<sup>59</sup> In an interesting parallel Tedlock notes that “whenever a theory of divination has been proposed by diviners, we find not only inductive or propositional thought and intuitive or compositional thought, but also integrative consciousness or ways of knowing”.<sup>60</sup> Following McGilchrist, she reports that this integrative consciousness can be neurologically related to the inter-hemispheric connective passageways, thus providing a physical correlate for the function of the active imagination as go-between.

What Jung expresses in psychological terms is a process we can see as intimately related to the neoplatonic aspiration to access the wisdom of the higher soul. Of course not all visions in the scrying mirror will necessarily aid this therapeutic endeavour, for often they will appear to be random, obscure or inconsequential. But the devotee of higher wisdom will be seeking a form of communication which will not only lead to psychic integration, but to spiritual *initiation*; and this brings us to Jung’s contemporary Henry Corbin, the French historian of religion, on the function of the symbolic or visionary image.<sup>61</sup> Our scryer is here placed in a teleological context, where his or her second sight, or *imaginatio vera*, tunes in to a “supersensible” reality which is not the shadowy unconscious mind but a highly-delineated supra-rational realm of angelic beings. Steeped in the Islamic mysticism of Suhrawardi and Ibn’Arabi, Corbin’s active imagination is a way of gnosis, of eventual participation of the soul in the angelic consciousness.<sup>62</sup>

The whole task consists in purifying and liberating one’s inner being so that the intelligible realities perceived on the *imaginal* level may be reflected in the mirror of the *sensorium* and be translated into visionary perception [...] We have already gone a considerable distance beyond the limits imposed by psychology [...] The vision of the angel does not emerge from the negativity of an *unconscious*, but descends from the a level of a positively *differentiated* super conscious.<sup>63</sup>

James Hillman suggests that “The difference between Jung and Corbin can be resolved by practising Jung’s technique [of active imagination] with Corbin’s vision; that is, active imagination is not for the sake of the doer and *our* actions in the sensible world of literal realities, but for the sake of the images and where they can take us, *their* realisation.”<sup>64</sup> For Corbin, “spiritual hermeneutics” involves a “simultaneous turning towards the Angel and the sensible”<sup>65</sup> through engaging with the *mundus imaginis*, a world “as ontologically real as the world of the senses and the world of the intellect”,<sup>66</sup> a world in which spiritual reality is reflected as living image and perceived through the power of the imagination. To go beyond the symbolic representation, to open the eye to the dynamic, eternal reality of spiritual being that constantly

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<sup>56</sup> C.G. Jung, ‘Interpretation of Visions’, privately mimeographed notes of Mary Foote; 1930-4a, vol. 6, Lecture 1, May 4, 1932, 3 (quoted in Chodorow: 7).

<sup>57</sup> On the ancient practice of animating images through contemplative exercises, see Voss 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Chodorow: 6.

<sup>59</sup> See Jung 1916/58.

<sup>60</sup> Tedlock: 68.

<sup>61</sup> Cheetham shows how Corbin’s theory of symbol owes much to Jung: it is “the only means of saying something that cannot be apprehended in any other way.” (Cheetham 2012: 134, Corbin 1968/1999: 14. See also Wasserstrom).

<sup>62</sup> See Cheetham 2012.

<sup>63</sup> Corbin 1986: 265-6.

<sup>64</sup> Hillman: 33, n.5; see also Cheetham 2007: 104-9; 2012: ch. 5. Corbin writes (1969/1998: 93) “the active imagination is not a theory, it is an initiation into vision”.

<sup>65</sup> Corbin 1969/1998: 13.

<sup>66</sup> Corbin 1964.

informs the material world, is for Corbin the way for modern man to overcome the “divorce between thinking and being” that so plagues him.<sup>67</sup>

I have attempted, in this brief overview, to locate the practice of scrying within a wider framework of divinatory hermeneutics, to show how it may facilitate a process of reflecting an “occult world” back to our senses. In my view, “how” this may happen is—in a technical sense—of less importance than “why” it may happen. It is surely not sufficient to resort to neurological explanations of hallucination, and yet it is deeply problematic in our current intellectual (and academic) climate to claim “truth value” for a non-material dimension of purposive intelligence which may interact with our mind in some way.<sup>68</sup> I would suggest that we need to reclaim a philosophical and metaphysical position which acknowledges that there is a middle ground, a mode of cognition in which the mysterious truth of clairvoyant phenomena such as scrying is most fully revealed by honouring and engaging the daimonic and unifying powers of the imagination. As for “why”, such a question must surely impinge on the nature and destiny of the human soul, themes which lie beyond the scope of this essay.

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<sup>67</sup> See Corbin 1978.

<sup>68</sup> See Cornelius 2007: Introduction, on the reasons for “the impossibility” of certain studies within the academy.



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