

MOSHE IDEL

IOAN P. COULIANU AND ARS COMBINATORIA

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Abstract: At the heart of the analyzes proposed by Moshe Idel is the change of perspective that we find in the work of Ioan P. Coulianu in the last stage of his creation. Coulianu leaves the field of historical-philological approach of religious phenomena to explain the development of religions from a fractal perspective, as an actualization of potentials found from the very beginning, which, combined in different ways, produce different results. Idel finds that the sharp methodological shift that Coulianu has been carrying out since 1986, a stage that also coincides with the one after the death of Mircea Eliade, has been interpreted by two of the most important Romanian intellectuals. Moshe Idel considers that their explanations do not address the specificity of the new approach as formulated by Couliano himself. They appear, on the one hand, as an overly simplistic explanation of a vision of great complexity reduced to a form of psychological complex, and on the other hand, the reduction to a theological perspective that appeals to the intervention of a transcendental power. Idel gives a nuanced explanation of this methodological turn, while suggesting that in order to better understand what is happening in the last stage work, it would be better to talk about the “American Couliano” instead of the “last Couliano”.

Key words: Ioan Petru Coulianu, future, memory, *ars combinatoria*, Raymondus Lullus, Mircea Eliade, methodology, religious studies.

1. Three Methodological Observations

By now, it is a commonplace that Ioan P. Coulianu underwent a sharp methodological shift in the very last years of his life, probably since 1986. In some cases this last period is referred to as the “last Coulianu”.¹ The reasons for this shift offered by scholars differ: in accordance to Matei Calinescu, this is a rebellion against the scholarship and the image of Mircea Eliade,² while Horia-Roman Patapievici opted for a sudden discovery, an intellectual jump that was censured then by a transcendental power.³ The problems I see with these explanations is that they deal with imponderables, namely the discovery of an intellectual world we do not have access to, and the rationale for the suppression of the individual that made the jump is not clear. Moreover, these explanations do not address the specificity of the new approach as formulated by Couliano himself. The first one is, in my opinion, too simple, explaining a complex story by some form of psychological complex⁴, the second one is too theological, and very complex. However, neither of them, articulated as they are by two of the most important Romanian intellectuals of our generation, is based on a detailed reading of the specific formulations found in Couliano's last writings, something I hope to do succinctly below. I adopt a more philological-historical approach, attempting to elucidate a few points in texts related to the shift in Couliano's views, without addressing his thought in general.⁵ This is a much more modest enterprise, but I hope much more grounded in facts that can be established and less in fascinating speculations.

Couliano's conceptual shift can be described as moving away from an historical-philological approach to various religious phenomena, as evident in his previous writings, to a more formalistic approach that explains the developments in religion, and in fact of human thought in general, not as developing in history and therefore conditioned by historical factors, but as an actualization of potentials found from the very beginning in certain related elements, which, combined in different ways, produce different results.

The mind game Couliano imagined transcends the importance of history in shaping events. At most, history is the neutral locus where the various combinations of concepts take place. This is evident in his programmatic essay printed in *Incognita*, under the title “System and History.” He speaks more and more about mental systems, which are closed, and the changes take place within them.⁶ History turns out to be, in his last writings, quite a porous topic, changing in accordance to the mind of the historian.⁷ In one of his short-stories printed in 1990, history

is not an unchangeable, solid block of past events, but it can intervene in the present, and the present is changed by this intervention.⁸

Though admitting those shifts I would like to address three main methodological observations to the manner in which Coulianu's thought has been addressed so far by scholars.

A] First and foremost, let me adopt the phrases that occur in many of the analyses of Couliano: The “last Couliano” and the “game of the mind”. The “last Couliano” is a temporal epithet describing a dramatic change in his approach, defined as emphasizing the centrality of the game of the mind. Though correct historically speaking, I would nevertheless offer another distinction: What is called the last Couliano may be better described as Couliano in Chicago, or the American Couliano, since 1986 is the year he moved to the University of Chicago, on the one hand, and the date of the death of Eliade there, on the other hand. Those two changes were decisive in my opinion, in allowing the emergence of a new type of thought, that puts in relief, as I shall try to show below, trends found earlier in his thought, but only in a marginal manner. Or, to put it differently, the move to Chicago encouraged him in many ways, especially to dare to articulate some thoughts he had in the period that I call “the European Couliano”, before he became “the American Couliano.” One more, and in my opinion, very important reason for calling him “American” is his adoption of the cognitive approach, an area of studies that developed predominantly in the United States, in his lifetime.

Moreover, I would emphasize the emergence of a strong confidence after the period of hardship, suffering, and mobility from the point of view of academic positions while in Europe. This new confidence can be easily discerned in the sarcastic tone of his *skoptophilia* essays, where he criticized the nature of the political upheaval in Romania as a conspiracy of the secret services there, on the one hand, and his plans to visit his family in Romania for the first time since his departure, on the other hand. He felt secure in America more than ever, even more so, taking into account the many publications in English he was able to realize in a short period with leading American publishing houses. Also, the close relationship with Hillary Suzanne Wiesner -- a Harvard Ph. D. candidate in Islamic philosophy -- and their collaboration, should be taken in consideration in this context, as part of his success in his gradual integration in the American society and culture. It may be that his divorce from his first wife living in the Netherlands, and his engagement to Hillary represents, symbolically to be sure, his geographical-mental shift. It should be said that self-confidence is indubitably related to heightening creativity.

Thus, instead of the “last Couliano”, I would suggest that the “American Couliano” would do better justice to understanding the crucial shift in his activities. Also, the disappearance of Eliade from the academic arena has generated some form of intellectual freedom that allowed

Couliano's moves in new directions. 1986 may be thus considered as the date of a new intellectual birth.

Though I hope that I brought sufficient factors in order to portray the new or the American Couliano, let me add my personal impressions from my encounters with him: Though very European in his behavior, he nevertheless believed that he transcended the European stage and phase. Being myself in the situation of someone from a similar background and someone who left his birthplace (not far away from his), I was especially sensitive to his confident tone, though expressed in a mild manner, in our conversations. In other words, in order to understand the emergence of his theory of the centrality of the games of the mind, it is helpful to first understand his mindset in this period.

B] The second main methodological observation has to do with the material used by scholars in describing his shift. This consists in his introductions to his American books and journals, and the proposals that he sent to American presses for books that he planned to write and edit in the few years of the submission. Those are indubitably seminal statements that include programmatic manifestos for a comprehensive understanding of humanities and sciences at the same time. The feeling of an intellectual breakthrough is transpiring from each of them, adding to the confidence I have already mentioned in the previous paragraph. Without denying the importance of those essays, I would suggest that an inspection of other types of material he wrote after 1986 will contribute to a better understanding of his formulations in those introductions: The literary material he wrote, the books he chose to review, and for sure their content. As in the case of Mircea Eliade's thought, I propose to read the *academica* together with his *litteraria* and *personalia*,⁹ an approach that seems to be absent in the emerging scholarship on Couliano. The importance of *personalia* has been pointed out earlier in my insistence to see his confidence as part of the new projects. As to the *litteraria*, I shall return to it later on in this essay.

What is however more difficult is to trace the possible impact of Couliano's meetings with a series of scholars and editors, in Chicago and elsewhere, of the reactions to his lectures at conferences. In his proposals and new trends, we see only the top of an iceberg. Part of an academic complex network constituted by various institutions, conferences, publishing houses, or advanced committees, it is hard to totally separate an individual and treat him in 'splendid isolation'. When speaking about the centrality of the game of the mind, it is not helpful to ignore what can be shown that happened in his mind in the very same period, though expressed in different discursive genres. This type of reading, which I call *lateral*, is strongly related to history, namely to Couliano's specific history.

C] And, last but not least, a most crucial methodological observation: Without denying the novelty of the American Couliano, more should be done in tracing the continuities between the new visions and the older

one found in his earlier academic and literary writings dated before 1986. While attempting to highlight the creative explosion of the “last” Couliano, the possible continuities have been neglected or at least attenuated in the available scholarship. An intellectual breakthrough is very rarely also a total break with the background of the past and this seems to me to be the situation also in Couliano's later writings. Without understanding how someone moves away from the old theories but at the same time he builds on them, it is difficult to do justice to the mechanism of the emergence of the new.

It goes without saying that, in the present limited framework, I cannot engage those issues in their complexity. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to illustrate below some of the points made above by addressing a central aspect of the American Couliano's thought, his emphasis on the importance of *ars combinatoria* in its various manifestations.

2. “Memories of the Future: The Computing Machine of Raymond Lullus as a System of Magical Memory”

My starting point will be the proposal of four typed pages he wrote for an entire book entitled “Memories of the Future¹⁰: The Computing Machine of Raymond Lullus as a System of Magical Memory”¹¹ whose various versions were formulated since early 1991. He did not have the chance to write the book. Acquainted as I hope I am with some of the sources that nourished his proposal, I would like to provide a better understanding of his project, especially since the text of the proposal has been published only in a Romanian translation. To my best knowledge, this text has been analyzed solely by Sorin Antohi,¹² and Horia-Roman Patapievici, though in a different direction than I take here below.¹³

My claim is that in that proposal different types of interests of Coulianu converged, but especially his new and comprehensive approach to human thought as an *ars combinatoria*. I shall try to explain some sentences in his proposal against the sources he refers to, point out a parallel found in one of the short stories he wrote in the same period, to propose an integrative reading of both, and elaborate about the more general type of enterprise within which his thought should be seen.¹⁴ This is, to be sure, not an attempt to write his unwritten book.

First and foremost, as we learn from the proposal mentioned above, it was destined to be another, different book, on the art of memory. As his models he mentions, *inter alia*, the titles of Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, and Paolo Rossi's *Logic and the Art of Memory*. As such his interest takes him back to his special concern with Renaissance, especially his

earlier interest in Giordano Bruno's thought, since his Romanian period. However, in his proposal memory is not grounded in “places of memory”, “theaters of memory”, or “statues of memory”, as Giordano Bruno would say, as it is the case of the ancient Greek forms of art of memory and their Renaissance reverberations, namely a memory based on a special static construct that is the instrument of attaching the various elements to be memorized.¹⁵ Now, the focus is on another type of device, that consists of two or several moving concentric circles, or what he calls “machine”, namely a circular apparatus onto which letters of alphabets have been inscribed and which generate by their motion all the letter combinations.

This “machine” of Ramon Lull and his sources is designed to facilitate the calculation of all the possible combinations of two letters, which were consequently deciphered in accordance to the contents of some tables that contained the conceptual significances of each of the letters. In both cases, the focus of the human activity is on mental processes, namely on decoding the combinations of two letters as referring to two concepts, found in a table arranged alphabetically, whose affinities were created by the formal process of combining letters in a rather precise manner. This is what I call the cognitive function. That was conceived by scholars to be the invention of the late 13th and early 14th century Catalan author Ramon Lull, whose intention was to extract all the theological truths by means of this technique.¹⁶

In an article printed in 1988¹⁷ and referred to by Coulianu in his proposal,¹⁸ I drew attention to a Jewish parallel, found in a Kabbalistic commentary on prayer, extant then only in manuscripts,¹⁹ that most plausibly preceded Lull, and which was composed in Catalonia.²⁰ It was already Giovanni Pico della Mirandola who pointed out the similarity between Lull and Kabbalah and I attempted to confirm his intuition. By now, the existence of a Latin translation of the commentary on prayer done by Flavius Mithridates and known by Pico, shows beyond doubt that the young count of Mirandola has been insightful, as he was acquainted with Lull's source.²¹ Let me be clear: In the Hebrew, Catalan, or Latin sources there is no reference to the way in which someone thinks in a binary manner, but only to the rather simple application of the meanings found in a table to the results of the moving of a circle which produces the combinations of two or more letters. Neither is it a discussion of magic in any sense. The same Lull also wrote later on a treatise on the art of memory, in which *ars combinatoria* and *ars memorandi* are linked.²²

To be sure: Couliano knew very well about Lull and his art for several years. So, for example, he wrote in his *Éros et magie à la Renaissance. 1484*, printed in 1984, as follows: “though I began for years the study of *Ars combinatoria* of Raymond Lull and its commentaries... the incomplete character of our studies compels us to give priority to the commentaries of F. A. Yates...and by E. Gombrich.”²³ This comment is important since it

seems that in 1991 Couliano had the impression that he knew enough about Lull's art in order to make it the basis for his proposed book.²⁴ This is part of what I called above the new confidence of the American Couliano: It seems that publishing in French in 1984 in Europe is one story, since for European scholars he confesses that he did not know enough, while publishing in America in 1991/2 he thought it might be quite a different story. Thus, it is evident that what he proposed was not quite a novel topic, but one that had already a long history, that was -- at least in part -- known to him.

Let me turn to my second methodological observation: the proposal he submitted is not the only source from which we may learn about his concern with *ars combinatoria*. In a short story entitled "The Language of Creation", written in collaboration with Hillary S. Wiesner, printed in the journal, *Exquisite Corpse*, submitted to print at the very same time when he wrote the proposal,²⁵ he expatiates about the miraculous nature and subsequent fate of the machine, which contains the apparatus of combinations by means of circles, generating the language of creation, but brings bad fate on its possessors. Couliano attributes in the story a continuous transmission of the secret of combinations, including the 231 gates of two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, as found in some versions of *Sefer Yetzirah*, up to modern times. As found in the proposal, also here Couliano attributes the technique of combinations of letters as found in Lull to *Sefer Yetzirah*, a text he describes in the two versions as "the noble ancestor of Kabbalah." In both cases, Kabbalah has been introduced as a significant ingredient of the history of the *ars combinatoria*.

Moreover, in both cases, the universal dimension of the machine, namely the existence of cosmic sphere that move and create by their movement. However, while in the proposal he mentions the impact of the Hebrew book on Lull on the ground of my article mentioned above, in the "Language of Creation" Couliano mentions the cosmic aspects as found in the 12th century Jewish author Rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi 's book, in terms he took over verbatim from my book on the Golem.²⁶ Thus, in two different pieces written at the very same period, he used two different views found in two studies I published recently, in order to generate a much more comprehensive vision, one that connects the cosmic sphere that generates everything found in this world, with the circles as the device for generating the 231 permutations of every two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The emphasis on this nexus is not found in my discussions, and it is Couliano's original contribution. He speculated that they are part of what he calls a unified theory of the universe. It is here that the core of Couliano's proposal is formulated: He believed that he had a clue for understanding processes taking place on several levels, because of his possessing the mechanism of combination or permutation, that is his specific contribution, and part and parcel of what is envisioned as the last

Couliano.

However, his interest in *ars combinatoria* from Jewish material can be shown that existed some time earlier. In a review of my book on the Golem, entitled “The Golem born out of the Alphabet,” printed in Italian after it was translated from English, in December of 1990, he already brought together the issue of the Jewish source of Lull, with the Golem motif and the cosmic spheres.²⁷

To these issues let me add also the fact that in 1991, in the last issue of *Incognita* that Couliano edited, one of his students, Nathaniel Deutsch wrote another review on the Golem book²⁸, and in the same issue a chapter that did not find its place in my book on the Golem was printed as “An Astral-Magic Pneumatic Anthropoid from the 14th century to the Renaissance.”²⁹ Last, but not least, the concern with *ars combinatoria*, including the topic of the Golem, is evident in Umberto Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum*, which has been reviewed by Couliano.³⁰

I mentioned all those details and discussions in order to show that far from being the result of a sudden illumination, taking place beyond history, Couliano's proposal should be read in its immediate contexts, compounded of topics he wrote on in the same period, as well as other developments. So, for example, I do not know whether Couliano had the occasion to visit the exhibition on the Golem, organized by the Jewish Museum in New York, the biggest one ever on this subject, during the years 1988-1989, the preparation of which restarted my interest in the topic and my first publications that preceded my writing my book.³¹ In any case, one of the major artists that exhibited at this exhibition, Prof. Abraham Pinchas of École des Beaux Arts in Paris, became one of the editors of *Incognita*.

Thus, the serious research of views that ignore the paramount importance of history, or of the most obvious intellectual panorama of the author, cannot be itself ahistorical, and by attempting to do so, it misses interesting aspects of the topic under investigation. By inserting Jewish magical and mystical materials in the history of *ars combinatoria*, Couliano returned to an old passion that he did not fulfill during his short lifetime, the interest in Kabbalah³². As he put it in one of our conversations, he could not do it because in accordance to a more comprehensive type of order he believed in, it was not possible that two persons coming from the same geographical area, namely Moldavia, will deal with the same topic at the same time. When I heard it from him I was quite shocked since I am far from believing in such types of cosmic order, but the fact that Couliano did in such a theoretical mode, is part of the approach to the topic we discussed earlier: The belief that there is something more comprehensive that organizes and unites various forms of realities, namely an ontological order that is continuously recreated by a mind game.

Interestingly enough, this magical approach was not very different

from the magical universe of the early Eliade.³³ However, in the case of Eliade magic was attenuated in his later works, where myths play the main role. Couliano, however, continued the fascination with the image of the magician in the Renaissance, also in his later writings. Needless to say, again, in the case of Couliano, the importance of magic connected to the combinations of letters and the Golem combines his much earlier concern with magic in the Renaissance in a new way, which is original, belongs to Couliano's enterprise. Though the European Couliano was already concerned with some of the most important figures he mentions in the proposal, which he combined with the various Jewish materials, all of them are stones in a new edifice he formulated, which transcends the contents of the building blocks.

Though dealing in studies with the “wisdom of combinations of letters” as the Kabbalists refer to this type of activity, I am inclined to discern the various sorts of accommodation of this “art” to the need of various Kabbalistic schools, rather than seeing it as determining the course of Kabbalah. Since the various developments of Kabbalistic schools can be understood as the confluence of a variety of factors, the Kabbalists' use of *ars combinatoria* is embedded in a variety of larger, though often quite fluid, theosophical and philosophical systems. Without exaggerating, I would say that in the Kabbalistic texts there is a special term for *ars combinatoria*, namely *Hokhmat Tzeruf ha-Otiyyot*, namely the science of the combination or permutation of letters, which chronologically and linguistically does not depend on Lull's term.³⁴ There is no agreement between the various techniques used by various Jewish thinkers and Kabbalists included under this umbrella term. Also, Lull's system was too complex to be understood by his contemporaries, scholars at the University in Paris, and this is the reason he wrote, early in the 14th century, his shorter compendium entitled *Ars Brevis*.

3. An Apotheosis of *Ars Combinatoria*.

Let me frame Couliano's adoption of *ars combinatoria* in a larger historical context. This type of thought can be seen as an alternative, and sometimes a critique, of the Aristotelian type of logic, and by extension of the Greek type of thought. Some of them could have been known to Couliano.

In one of his latter works, after enumerating the titles of the books that constitute Aristotle's *Organon*, the 13th century Jewish mystic Abraham Abulafia claims that he studied them in depth, but then he mentions the existence of a superior wisdom, “the path of the knowledge of the permutation of letters, which is more excellent than that (of

Aristotle), its essence being explained in the commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah*.”³⁵ The Kabbalistic way, which is tantamount to Abulafia's own ecstatic Kabbalah, is regarded as being superior to Aristotelian logic, as the former is the science of the “inner (and) superior logic” while the latter is an “external and lower aspect” in comparison to the Kabbalistic logic.³⁶

The Hebrew phrase *higayon penimi 'elyon* is, to my best knowledge, unique in Jewish literature as a whole. The only approximation is found in an anonymous treatise belonging too to Abulafia's school, entitled *Ner 'Elohim*, where the ecstatic Kabbalist resorts to the term *higayon ne'elam* – the occult logic -- to represent a form of inner type of recitation, which may be understood as found between the oral and the mental.³⁷ An issue of paramount historical importance, which cannot be dealt with here, is the apparent similarity between Abulafia's view of logic as grounded in permutations, and theories of combination of letters, described as a 'superior etymology' in some Arabic writings since 1000, and it could also contribute to the emergence of Lull's *ars combinatoria*.³⁸

In his *La Dissemination*, Derrida has combined Abulafia's view of Kabbalistic combinatory logic with Stéphane Mallarmé's definition of the role of poetry, when he writes, in an explicit reference to Kabbalah: “La science de la combinaison des lettres est la science de la logique intérieure supérieure, elle coopère à une explication orphique de la terre.”³⁹ There can be no doubt that Abulafia's view reached Derrida through the French version of Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*.⁴⁰ Scholem translated a short passage of Abulafia's treatment of the topic and so it reached a larger audience, including Derrida. The French philosopher resorted to Abulafia's view, as part of his critique of the Greek thought and this seems to be a tradition in itself.⁴¹

Putting together Umberto Eco's discussions of combinations of letters in both his academic and literary works, together with Derrida, and my discussions mentioned above, it would be weird to assume that Couliano was not acquainted with this wave of interest, evident in some books written few years before his proposal. Or, to put it differently: The linguistic techniques of permuting letters as part of a higher vision of human activity was found in European culture, sometimes as a critique of Greek culture. The European critiques of the dominating intellectual approaches in the second part of the 20th century, written by authors Couliano was acquainted with, like Hans Peter Duerr and Paul K. Feyerabend,⁴² opened the way for different forms of filling the vacuum created by their critique. Couliano grafted the various theories of *ars combinatoria* on this alleged vacuum.

4. Some Concluding Remarks

The discovery of such an alleged universal insight as Couliano deemed he discovered, namely the game of the mind, is interesting also from another point of view. Mircea Eliade too was convinced that he discovered the nature of the true archaic religion and an important part of his writings was a dissemination of his vision, or to put it in terms hinted at already by Coulianu, Eliade became a *mystagogue*.⁴³ The danger involved is that because of one's image as possessing the ultimate truth, it is hard to change one's mind afterwards. Coulianu's untimely death did not allow such a transformation, though an attentive reader of his last studies will find such a beginning of a shift in his confidence. His proposal, "Memories of the Future", would constitute the first large-scale exposition of his combinatory-cognitive approach. However, we must remember that what we have are mainly Prefaces and Introductions, fascinating manifestos no doubt, but sufficient to create the aura of a new revelation. In any case, someone who met some of his Ph. D. students would easily discern an unusual attachment to their admired teacher. However, it is evident in my opinion that there was a possibility that he could become a *mystagogue*.⁴⁴ The admiration, and I do not exaggerate saying even veneration, of some of his graduate students whom I met, was evident even before the "new Couliano" was better known in print for his new theories.

Speaking about the possible future, I must confess that, unlike Eliade and Couliano⁴⁵, I believe in the irreversibility of time. However, I would like very much that Couliano would nevertheless be right, and time would go in more than one direction, and a meeting with him would somehow, somewhere, sometime, be possible again. It would be a great joy to speak with such a brilliant mind and admit to him that I was wrong, offering what he would call a "late repentance". Though personally I met only the "American Couliano", for the first time early in 1989, I was nevertheless seeing him in the light of the "European Couliano" I knew from reading some of his earlier writings. It took me some time to digest the contents of his conceptual shift in the material I perused, and when I was understanding them better -- I must confess that there are parts I still do not understand -- it was too late to discuss with him about what he did actually intend. As it is known, some of his prefaces appeared in print after his death.

I would say that though he attempted to forge a new understanding of what happens in reality by transcending the role played by historical conditions, Couliano's project nevertheless became a special part of a specific type of history: That of the perennial search of the human mind for a *mathesis universalis*,⁴⁶ but done now with the more sophisticated tools

of cognitive studies *en vogue* in some universities in USA in his generation.⁴⁷

Notes

*This is the last part of a series of lectures dealing with the history of *Ars combinatoria*, delivered at the Cantemir Institute at Oxford University, in 2011, by the invitation of Sorin Antohi.

¹ See, e.g., Horia-Roman Patapievi, *Ultimul Culianu*, (Humanitas, Bucharest, 2010), where essays written since 1994 have been knot together. See also his essay translated in English as “IPC: a Mathesis Universalis,” *Religion, Fiction, and History, Essays in Memory of Ioan Petru Culianu*, ed. Sorin Antohi, (Nemira, Bucharest, 2001), vol. 2, pp. 416-457. I prefer another way of putting it, since “last” in this context has an overtone that is both theological and teleological, namely of someone who entered the dangerous zone of disclosing too much and will be soon eliminated. See *Ultimul Culianu*, pp. 21-28.

² Matei Calinescu, *Despre Ioan P. Culianu si Mircea Eliade, Amintiri, lecturi, reflectii* (Polirom, Iasi, 2002), pp. 101, 107. In my opinion, the differences between Eliade and Couliano are evident already before the death of the former, insofar as their understanding of Romanian culture, for example. See Sorin Antohi în dialog cu Moshe Idel, *Ceea ce ne uneste* (Polirom, Iasi, 2006), pp. 193-194. See also Andrei Oişteanu, *Religie, politică si mit, Texte despre Mircea Eliade și Ioan Petru Culianu* (Polirom, Iasi, 2014), second edition, pp. 241-244, 348-390.

³ *Ultimul Culianu*, pp. 21-28.

⁴ Compare to the much more sophisticated and documented view of Dan Petrescu, “Ioan Petru Culianu si Mircea Eliade: prin labirintul unei relatii dinamice,” in *Ioan Petru Culianu, Omul și opera*, ed. Sorin Antohi (Polirom, Iasi, 2003), pp. 410-458.

⁵ For more comprehensive and insightful analyses of Couliano's thought see Sorin Antohi, “Introducere, Ioan Petru Culianu: biografie si exegeza,” in *Ioan Petru Culianu, Omul si opera*, ed. Sorin Antohi, pp. 5-40, idem, “Laboratorul lui Culianu,” the introduction to *Ioan Petru Culianu, Jocurile mintii, Istoria ideilor, teoria culturii, epistemologie*, eds. Mona Antohi si Sorin Antohi, second edition, (Polirom, Iasi, 2019), pp. 9-81, idem, “L'imaginaire de la Renaissance et les origines de l'esprit moderne, Le modèle Ioan Petru Culianu,” in *Religion, Fiction, and History, Essays in Memory of Ioan Petru Culianu*, ed. Antohi, pp. 326-346, Roberta Moretti, “Ioan P. Culianu, storico delle idee: esempi di metodologia ermeneutica”, *ibidem*, pp. 484-500, Eduard Iricinschi, “Where the Author Dwells: Searching for a Definition of Religion in the Introductions to Culianu's Books,” *ibidem*, pp. 484-500, idem, “Erezie si metodă în studiile religioase: definiția religiei în scrierile lui Ioan Pentru Eliade, in ed. Antohi, *Ioan Petru Culianu, Omul și opera*, pp. 577-617, idem, ““Cind erudition explodeaza in joc” deceniu linistit al Olandezului Ioan Culianu,” preface to *Ioan Petru Culianu, Iter in Silvis, II Gnoza si magie*, (Polirom, Iasi, 2013), pp. 7-34, or Patapievi, *Ultimul Culianu*.

⁶ “System and History,” *Incognita: International Journal for Cognitive Studies in the Humanities*, I, 1: (1990), pp. 6-17.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ “The Late Repentance of Horemheb,” *Erato /Harvard Book Review*, 15-16, (1990), pp. 6-7, with Hillary S. Wiesner. To make it clear: though this story is dedicated to me and I even appear at its beginning, I nevertheless did not reveal to Couliano any mystery about the mysterious game of history, as it is stated there.

⁹ M. Idel, *Mircea Eliade: From Magic to Myth* (Peter Lang, New York, 2014), pp. 21-23. In *personalia* I include the facts discussed in paragraph A above.

¹⁰ Sorin Antohi drew my attention to the title of the legendary book Erich von Däniken, *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*, (1968), translated in Romanian as *Amintiri despre viitor* in 1970, tr. Gh. Doru – S. Stanciu, (Editura Politica, Bucharest, 1970).

¹¹ I could not get hold of the English version of the text, which neither Sorin Antohi or Tereza Culiuanu-Petrescu could (re)find at this point in their archives. I use the Romanian translation of S. Antohi, printed first in 2002 in *Ioan Petru Culiuanu, Joculire mintii, Istoria ideilor, teoria culturii, epistemologie*, eds. Mona Antohi si Sorin Antohi, second edition, (Polirom, Iasi, 2019), pp. 365-371, (referred below as *The Games of Mind*).

¹² *The Game of Mind*, pp. 70-72.

¹³ *Ultimul Culiuanu*, pp. 195-202.

¹⁴ For a more general formulation of some of the following points see my preface to Nicu Gavriliuță, Culiuanu, *Jocul mintii si lumile multidimensionale* (Polirom, Iași, 2000), pp. 15-16, and the appendix there, p. 162.

¹⁵ See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, tr. James Fentress (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), pp. 53-69.

¹⁷ Moshe Idel, “Ramon Lull and Ecstatic Kabbalah,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 51 (1988), pp. 170-174. On this technique in Jewish sources see also Adam Afterman, 'Letter permutation techniques, Kavannah and prayer in Jewish Mysticism', *Journal for the study of Religions and Ideologies* 6, 18 (2007), pp. 52-78, Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Brill, Leiden, 2000), pp. 217-222, Andreas Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala, als Aesthetisches Paradigma* (J.M. Metzler, Stuttgart, Weimar, 1998), pp. 152-175, idem, “Kombinatorik als meditations- und mnemotechnisches Verfahren in der Kabbala und im Lullismus,” in ed. Gerhard Kurz, *Meditation und Erinnerung in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, Goettingen, 2000), pp. 99-119, and especially Elke Morlok, *Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's Hermeneutics* (Mohr, Tuebingen, 2010), pp. 36-134.

¹⁸ *The Games of Mind*, p. 366.

¹⁹ Printed meanwhile twice: Saverio Campanini, “Yehuda ben Nissim ibn Malka, Perush ha-Tefelot,” in Giulio Busi, *Catalogue of the Kabbalistic Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Community of Mantua* (Firenze, 2001), pp. 221-257, and Adam Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah: a study and critical edition of an anonymous commentary to the prayers* (Cherub Press, Los Angeles 2004) (Hebrew).

²⁰ The identity of the author is disputed in scholarship. See the previous footnote.

²¹ See Saverio Campanini, “Una fonte trascurata sul rapporto tra qabbalah e combinatoria lulliana in Pico della Mirandola: il Commento alle preghiere di Yehudah ibn Malka,” *Studia Lulliana*, 55 (2015), pp. 83-127.

²² Printed for the first time by Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory, the Quest for a Universal Language*, tr. Stephen Clucas, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 2000), pp. 195-205.

²³ I quote from the Romanian translation printed as *Eros si magie în Renastere. 1484*, tr. D. Petrescu (Nemira, Bucharest, 1999), second edition, revised and completed, p. 395 n. 8. I do not know why Gombrich is mentioned in this context. See *ibidem*, p. 396 n. 25.

²⁴ This note has been removed from the English shortened version of this book, printed as *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* tr. M. Cook, (Chicago University Press, Chicago, London, 1987).

²⁵ Vol. 9, nr. 1-4, (January-April 1991), pp. 12-13.

²⁶ *Golem; Jewish magical and mystical traditions on the artificial anthropoid*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 87: "This assumption concurs with the interpretation of *Sefer Yetzirah* of a contemporary and friend of ibn Ezra, R. Yehudah ha-Levi. In his *Sefer ha-Kuzari* he elaborates upon the uniqueness of the Hebrew language, and he compares the combination of letters, as indicated in *Sefer Yetzirah*, to the emergence of the diversity in the universe by the movement of the sphere." Couliano indicated explicitly in the "Language of Creation," the source of his statement.

²⁷ "Il Golem nasce dall'Alfabeto," *Liber*, anno 2, n. 4, (1990), p. 11.

²⁸ *Incognita*, II (1991), pp. 108-111.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-31.

³⁰ See Ioan Petru Culianu, *Păcatul împotriva spiritului* (Polirom, 2005), second edition, pp. 152-158, and see also, *ibidem*, pp. 148-19.

³¹ See *Golem! Danger, Deliverance and Art*, ed. Emily D. Bilski, (Jewish Museum, New York, 1988), with my essay, "The Golem in Jewish Magic and Mysticism," pp. 15-35, and "Golem, an Historical Overview," pp. 10-14, signed by Emily Bilski and myself. Needless to say, for writing those studies I relied on material I accumulated for years since my Ph. D. thesis, where this topic has been touched tangentially. See M. Idel, "R. Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine" (Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 130-133 (Hebrew).

³² For the earlier occurrence of Kabbalistic topics see his 1987 novel *The Emerald Game*, written together with Hillary S. Wiesner, translated as *Jocul de Smarald*, tr. Agop Bezerian (Polirom, Iasi, 2005), pp. 192, 234-237. Kabbalistic subjects occur in a variety of studies, not related to *ars combinatoria*, as for example in *The Tree of Gnosis, Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Times*, tr. by author and H.S. Wiesner, (HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1992), pp. 37, 43, 89 n.16, 108, 260. He was first interested in ancient Judaism, which is mentioned in many of his articles, see e.g. Culianu, *Iter in Silvis, II*, pp. 352-366 and was part of the group of scholars who envisioned elements of Ancient Judaism as influential on Gnosticism.

³³ Compare to the description of the early Eliade in Idel, *Mircea Eliade*, pp. 4-9.

³⁴ This Hebrew phrase can be documented as early as the 11th century.

³⁵ *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah* printed by Adolph Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, Erstes Heft (Leipzig, 1854), p. 14. On the twelve commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah* studied by Abulafia see M. Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati, the Kabbalist* (Schocken Books, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, 1999), vol. I pp. 33-35 (Hebrew).

³⁶ *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, *ibidem*, pp. 14-15; Gershom Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic of the Kabbala," *Diogenes*, vol. 80 (1972), p. 190, Moshe Idel,

Language, Torah and Hermeneutics, tr. Menachem Kalus (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989), p. XVI. I have good reasons to assume that he was acquainted with this book of mine.

³⁷ Ms. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Heb. 10, fol. 136b.

³⁸ See Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris, Gallimard, 1964), pp. 206-207.

³⁹ *La Dissemination*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972), p. 344.

⁴⁰ See *Les grands courants de la mystique juive*, tr. M.M. Davy (Payot, Paris, 1950), p. 390, note 50, for exactly the same verbatim translation occurring in Derrida. See also the formulation of George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1975), pp. 60-61. On orphic language see the important remarks of Susan Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991), pp. 33-35. Umberto Eco too refers to Lullian techniques of combination of letters in describing Mallarmé's method of combining pages. See his *The Open Work*, tr. Anna Cancogni (Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 1-23.

⁴¹ See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 182-184, and also Couliano, "Il Golem nasce dall'Alfabeto."

⁴² See Antohi, "Laboratorul lui Culiانو," pp. 26-27, 35-38, 54-55.

⁴³ Couliano refers to Eliade as mystagogue. See the references I brought in my *Mircea Eliade*, pp. 16, 27 n. 94, 95, pp. 50, 227, 248.

⁴⁴ This point has been made already by Giovanni Casadio, "Ioan Petru Couliano, ou la contradiction," *Religion, Fiction, and History*, ed. Antohi, I, pp. 153-167, and Petrescu, "Ioan Petru Culiانو si Mircea Eliade," pp. 410-413.

⁴⁵ See his "The Late Repentance of Horemheb."

⁴⁶ See Patapievici, "IPC: A Mathesis Universalis."

⁴⁷ For more recent discussions of *mathesis universalis* see, e.g., Gerhard Bechtle, "How to apply the modern concepts of *Mathesis Universalis* and *Scientia Universalis* to ancient philosophy, Aristotle, Platonisms, Gilbert of Poitiers, and Descartes," in *Platonisms: ancient, modern, and postmodern*, ed. Kevin Corrigan and John D. Turner (Leiden: Brill 2007), pp. 129-154, or Jean-Claude Dumoncel, *La tradition de la mathesis universalis, Platon, Leibniz, Russell* (Paris: Unébévue 2002).