

PARANORMAL PHENOMENA AMONG THE SOUTH SLAVS: A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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This article comments on the different concepts of the "other" reality, its images, and their secondary verbal interpretations. Having in mind the historical changes in content of the concepts of the "other" reality, I consider its peculiar adaptation in contemporary cultural processes. Comparing these concepts with those inherent in the traditional culture, I study the continuation of a certain semantic line in today's modeling of the meanings of the "other" reality. Regardless of whether we find a transformation of mythological images, historical events or works of art, the concept of the "other" world becomes a part of contemporary cultural ideology. Stories about contact with the "other" world connect the actualized old with newly-formed concepts and images in order to outline a full picture of the world and to unite its elements in a specific integral entity.

This knowledge is not mine. This knowledge is from a higher intellect. Thanks to God, whoever he is - Hermes, Rama, Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, or Christ; whatever he is - the highest person, the absolute truth, universal form of energy, transcendental incarnation of the spirit, alien from outer space or superman; wherever he is - within us or in the infinite universe, in our past without beginning or in the future without end.

Diana Stojkova, Instructions from the Cosmos..., pg. 3

In recent times we have observed the rapid and widespread distribution of so-called paranormal phenomena. In certain ways, they present some contemporary ideas of "reality". These phenomena are sufficiently complicated analytical objects in and of themselves. That is why it is necessary, within the scope of this article, to set some limitations on my observations.

The first of these limitations is regional - the South Slavs. The remaining limitations are thematical. Also because of the limited range of this article, I have selected only a few examples from the countries under consideration.

Research Methodology

The research methodology can be outlined in two aspects. The first of these has to do with the way in which the kind and range of empirical material is determined. The second has to do with the differentiation of research approaches to this material.

The various manifestations of paranormal phenomena and their secondary interpretation in written and oral forms suggest the use of several types of informational sources: (a) published materials in books, journals, and specialized newspapers; (b) a series of interviews with psychics (healers, clairvoyants, sorcerers, spirit mediums, and so forth) and with their respective clients, as well as with people who retell incidents that other people have heard about or seen; (c) direct observation of healing and psychic seances, magic rituals, moments of contact with beings from the "other" world, as well as direct participation in some of these. Taken as a whole, my personal impressions form a unified picture of the specifics of these phenomena according to the way they became part of the social and cultural life of the person.

This analysis of paranormal phenomena does not suggest answers to questions connected with the so-called "objective" basis of these notions, nor does it aim to clarify the utilitarian effects of the healing, magic, and so forth. In fact, this is a *culturological interpretation of observed phenomena*. I studied the transformation of the paranormal as part of a cultural conceptual model, weaving it into the cultural mechanisms of interpersonal and intergroup communications. I was also interested in the way in which the paranormal becomes an organic component of the personal culture and changes an individual's biography. *This is the folklorist's' orientation towards these types of phenomena* and results from the specific research methodology.

Conceptual Model: Eclectic or New Syncretism

The appearance of paranormal manifestations and the cultural messages which they carry are determined by the specific cultural medium in which they emerge and develop. In any case, however, they are outlined by the combined existence of old and new notions, old and new images, old and new mental and behavioral rules. In other words, there is a succession, but also a development, an actualization of universal cultural mechanisms and their adaptation in the contemporary cultural environment. The redefinition of the old ideas is accompanied by the creation of new ones as a result of changing human needs.

What is the picture of the world, its location, structure and characteristic personages according to the views of the contemporary psychics? What are the basic notions in their conceptual model?

¹ Bulgarian folklorists take the view that the folklore is a type of a cultural system structured by the interrelationship between three basic subsystems: (a) the system of all kind of mythological, religious, moral, axiological, etc. ideas and notions; (b) the system of the folk arts - musical and verbal forms, dance, etc., and (c) the communicative system which is a guaranteeing the normal being of the folklore, so as they are generalized by Живков, Т. Ив.: *Етнокултурно единство и фолклор*. София 1987:175.

At first glance, in the psychics' explanations there is a complete eclecticism between elements of different sciences, religious and philosophical schools, mythological images, and literary personages. It is easy to note the combining of folklore ideas with notions derived from modern educational systems. In the psychics' descriptions of the structure of the world and its order, and their discussions of morals and everyday behavior, we observe a mixing of terms from the natural sciences with notions from the occult and theosophy; of ideas from Christian doctrine with elements from Buddhism and other eastern religions; of ideas about the universe which were learned in secondary school with images from contemporary films and art; of information about UFOs which was orally transmitted by "eyewitnesses" with material from popular publications about extraterrestrial civilizations; of "authentic" stories about historical events in which historical and mythological personages coexist; and so forth.

All of this creates an impression of disorder and vagueness of ideas as well as an absence of internal cohesion among them. A deeper examination into the essence of the psychics' proposed explanations of the natural and spiritual worlds, however, convinces me that this process is much more complicated. The new picture of the world has its own strong and unified foundation, its own internal logic which is sufficiently self-coordinated, all of which allows me to talk about the building of a new syncretic model. In essence, this is not simply a mixture of elements from mythology, folklore, religion, natural sciences, and artistic creations, because all of them are transformed by their inclusion in the new entity. This is not a simple extrapolation, but a process in which the incorporated elements lose their original meanings (or part of them) in order to receive new ones based on their functions in the new whole. Their original sense is thus transformed such that they become stable components of the new integrated system.

In this case it only remains to ask, where is the foundation on which they are unified? The answer is probably in the psychics' statement about the Unity of the Cosmos: in the unity which is structural, semantic, and efficacious; in the ideas of the "world of the prime causes" which each of us could touch if only we could sufficiently develop our psychic powers; and in the way in which we select axiomatic notions and turn them into new semantic nests.

How is this Unity of the Cosmos described and according to what are former notions about it distinguished from current ones?

First of all, this is described as a world which is perceived on a meaningfully larger scale than the world of our ancestors, with its elements arranged into a new picture. Within the limits of the characteristically folkloric ideas which are completely reproduced within the boundaries of a local community's culture², "our" world can be made to fit into the dimensions of the local space; but there is "foreign" space beyond the landmarks shared by settlements. The center of the world, according to the psychics' descriptions of the Earth, is the whole of mankind considered in its intergalactic

² Definition for the folklore as a „lokal culture“ which is entirely reproduced within the framework of the local community see in: Живков, Т. Ив.: *Народ и песен. София 1977:18-20.*

relations with unknown civilizations which are under the power of mighty cosmic laws. Didactic stories about personal encounters with "the other" concern not only inhabitants of one or several villages, but people living in other countries, continents, and even other planets. Provided that the center of "our" space is not the home and the village, but rather the Earth, the most well-known "zones of contact" are not the fireplace, threshold, well, river, graveyard, or consecrated ground, but "the place most strongly charged with energy" in the earthly sphere.

Cosmic unity is created by the specifically structured cosmic space, the centralized governing world order, and the various interrelations between existing intelligent beings, including homo sapiens. Various types of energy-informational exchange between representatives of civilizations that are at different levels of their development are also in equilibrium with the cosmic laws. Of course, the human being is again "the measure of everything", but often he is considered not as the crowning achievement of God's creation, but as the bearer of "heavy energies" of a primitive sort, as a representative of one of the least-developed levels of civilization. The existing harmony between man and the Earth is generally accepted by all psychics, but is not always valued in the same way: sometimes the insufficiently high spiritual level of humankind prevents the raising of the Earth as a whole to "the highest cosmic levels". Here is an example that describes the structure of the world:

"The planet Earth is a relatively young planet. On it, the primary form of life - the material one - still exists. That is why artificial planets where the human souls go, where astral beings live after losing their physical bodies, move around the Earth... The planet Earth is part of the astral space and consists of nine levels, with three artificial planets for each level. These nine levels are part of the Earth. There is exchange between these levels. A person passes from one level to another, not according to his wishes but according to what he deserves. People who are punished by the Higher Intellect descend from the higher to the lower levels. And we, the Gods of the different planets, fight with those civilizations which want to bring the more advanced civilizations down to their level. In these cases, the Center may decide to destroy a given planet which does not follow the cosmic laws."³ "There are planets like the Earth, and there are also astral, mental, and eternal planets. The astral planets revolve around us, with an orbit that moves from the Earth towards the Sun. They are where the souls of our dead go. The mental and eternal planets are on a higher energy level. We are heavy energy, but they are lighter, finer energy... The planet Earth is a live, living organism and also fights to rise to a higher mental level. When we become more intelligent and our energy becomes lighter, we will help the Earth to rise higher... The cosmos has a center and a periphery. We are on the periphery. The periphery is a spiral and we are at the bottom of the spiral, in the first whorls. In the Center, in the smallest whorls, is where there is the purest, highest energy, God-God the Father and God the Son."⁴

³ От центъра за научна информация на планетата Трон за планетата Земя. Разговори с Бога - наш повелител и спасител (записала Петранка Петрова), 1992. год., с. 6-7.

⁴ Архив на института за фолклор - БАН I N 118, II (interview with the same person - Петранка Мариянова Петрова, p. 1949 год. професия зоотехника), recorded by И. Тодорова in 1994.

Regardless of the concrete number of the planets or galactic bodies, and whether their orbit is a circle or a spiral, **the oneness and structural hierarchy of the Cosmos**, including the planets' spiritual dimensions, is clearly outlined. An important point in this arrangement of the world is the blurring of the boundaries between "the two worlds" ("here"="ours" and "there"="the world beyond") and "the other world(s)", which is all around us but in another dimension or in "another state of energy". The opposition "high-low" is preserved in some of the descriptions of the world, (Heaven and Hell as part of the vertical Christian cosmology), but it is an axiological rather than a structural opposition.

The wider scale in this type of description of the world also changes the idea of the "**movement between worlds**". This movement is not limited only to "that" world of the dead and demons, to Heaven or to Hell, but can freely take place in the past and the future, between planets or "intermediate cosmic fields". The following case is a psychic tale: A boy goes to see a psychic. The psychic stands the boy in front of a picture of an Egyptian pyramid and tells him to walk into it. He himself follows the boy on this mental journey. The boy, because of his age, lacks sufficient education to know what he is seeing. But from his descriptions, it is clear that he has seen a mummy in a sarcophagus, columns, and corridors inside the pyramid of Cheops.⁵ Another example: A woman, who after having a conversation with God through the help of a psychic medium, tells about her lives from her first incarnation to now. "I was born in 1783. And I was born into a poor fishing family...in the village of Sarafovo, between Michurin and Pomorie..."⁶ With this psychic help, she has the opportunity to talk with her dead relatives and to find out where they are now - whether they are in the Astral region or have been reincarnated and are living in another country or continent.

When representatives of the "human" world and "the other" world communicate with each other, **there is no language barrier** and it is not necessary to know the precise magic words (compare this with the significant role of magic words in traditional magic rituals), because this communication is an energy-informational exchange and takes place on a higher level of consciousness than the everyday level. In these situations, it is not so important whether the messages are transmitted by aliens, by spirits of the dead of all nationalities, or by God himself, because they are transmitted directly "on the level of energy" and are received by a sixth or seventh sense. After this, they automatically appear in the human consciousness, either in the native language of the psychic or of the psychic's client. In rare cases, the participation of a "divine translator" is required: "Oh, you came to Bulgaria to look for me and to talk with me - in Vlach language [says the dead grandfather, whose spirit the psychic had called with God's help - author's note]. And immediately God gave the translator the ability to speak in Bulgarian. Because Vlach is a very difficult language and can't be understood by the grandson...he doesn't know Vlach and the grandfather doesn't know Bulgarian, which is why God gave the translator the ability to speak Bulgarian."⁷ All

⁵ A case from the practice of the М. Јовановић, rec. by Д. Ајдачић in 1994.

⁶ Архив на института за фолклор - БАН I, N118, II (interview with Рахела Димитрова Иванова, p. 1921. год, обр. 8 ми клас, професија шивачка), rec. by И. Тодорова in 1994.

⁷ Ibid.

of this is valid for all kinds of contact with the Higher Intellect - contact in dreams, a "hand that is being led" (automatic writing), channeling, hearing voices, or seeing images.⁸

This type of communication gradually begins to influence interpersonal relations - compare the following phrases: "I will not contact this person because he radiates negative energy, and after talking to him I have a headache" or "He has a good effect on me; it seems we have good energy compatibility."

Thus we reach the most basic notion in the conceptional model of contemporary psychics - "energy". This notion is taken from physics, but enters into the psychics' conceptual system with a completely changed content and range. Its choice is probably determined by an initial desire to prove the validity of paranormal phenomena through use of the methods of the natural sciences; but in bringing in this new ideological apparatus, "energy" loses its initial meaning and gets a very different one. Only the sound of the name "energy" is preserved, because the connection between its new sense and the old one is meaningless, if there even is a connection. The notion "energy" as used by the psychics denotes not only different forms of being or communication, but also expresses some sort of value judgement towards the phenomena it describes; that is, this notion also takes on an axiological meaning. Within the framework of a given semantic range, "the energies" could be presented in a system of binary oppositions - a concrete realization of the more general dichotomy good/evil in the ideas about world or human thinking and behavior: high energy/low energy, light energy/dark energy, white energy/black energy, pure energy/impure energy, healing energy/harmful energy, positive energy/negative energy, light energy/heavy energy, strong energy/weak energy, new energy/old energy, and finally, good energy/bad energy.

As a result of this semantic process which we are observing, there are two **important consequences** of the widespread use of the notion "energy".

The first is connected with the use of this notion's derivatives in the narrative forms being investigated, for example: energy system, energy space, energy center, energy field, energy stream, energy beam, energy lines, energy channels, energy levels, energy forms, energy existence, energy power, radiant energy, and so forth.

The second is connected with its participation in the definition of other basic notions of the psychics' conceptual system, for example: "God", "cosmos", "universal mind", "religious shrine", "civilization", "information", "life", "health", "government", "spirit", (in all of its varieties, including death), "soul", "thought", "body", "illness", "death", "fairies" (samodivi, samovili, vili), "vampire", "devil".

I will give some examples, trying to preserve the axiological orientation which is evident in the way the notion "energy" is used to denote some of the terms mentioned above.

⁸ Different kinds of a contact with the „other world“ and the ways for their improvement are described in: Тодорова, И.: Баяния, магии и сеанси при екстрасенс: ритуали възплъщения на представите за „два та свята“ и взаимоотношенията между тах. *Български фолклор* 1993/5:65-67.

The first notions mentioned are connected with the idea of a high, light, pure, etc., energy:

- "God": "In the beginning of all beginnings was Otins (higher mind or God). He is the Mind. He is the supreme power of the Universe... He is the perfection of the Universe in the form of energy."⁹; "God the Father is purely energy and nothing else... Vibrations of energy are important... God the Father sends his energy to the different planets, including our planet."¹⁰ "God is everywhere around us and in us, because He put some of his own energy into everything. Every particle contains a little of this high energy, which we call "God". And all of our Gods are of these high energies, which sometimes come down to us."¹¹ "There are light and dark energies. God is the lightest energy. I want to contact only God... Different energies, both good and bad, come to us. They come from different places, because there are also energy zones. The highest energy is God."¹² "Divine energy is everywhere around us and in ourselves..."¹³ "Divine energy is not limited, because it is divine and all-powerful."¹⁴ "God is the highest energy system."¹⁵

Very often "God", "Great knowledge", "Great intellect", and "Universal mind" are understood as synonyms.

- "Angels": "Angels are a source of physical, mental, and emotional healing energy."¹⁶ and it is especially important for every human being to be in contact with his guardian angel, who guards him and mentally advises him as to what is good and what is evil.

- "Shrine" (church): "A place with strong radiant energy",¹⁷ "A center in which is interwoven powerful cosmic energies of the highest type."¹⁸ Such opinions are why so much material is published about miraculous cures in both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic shrines, and about visions of churches floating in the air - visions which are interpreted as signs that tell us what we must do; as well as material explaining the effects of miraculous icons or weeping statues of the Virgin Mary, effects which result from the power of their radiant energy; and so forth.

- "Information" is "an exchange of energies and energy streams of various types." and

- "Thought" is "directed energy - positive or negative."¹⁹ This logic of presentation also explains "astral travels," since thought is that part of the human being which can

⁹ Нешева, Св.: *Аз чувам глас от Всемира*. Документално повествование за една загадъчна връзка. София 1993:19.

¹⁰ От центъра за научна информация на планетата Трон..., с. 17.

¹¹ Архив на института за фолклор, interview with Петранка Петрова...

¹² Interview with Димитър Иванов, род. в София, rec. by И. Тодорова 1993.

¹³ *Stella* (Tajanstveni Svijet na Granici Znanosti), 1994/10:8-9

¹⁴ *Stella* (Tajanstveni Svijet na Granici Znanosti), 1994/11:8-9

¹⁵ Interview with Росица Митева, род 1959 год. в Ямбол, rec. by И. Тодорова 1993.

¹⁶ *Stella* (Tajanstveni Svijet na Granici Znanosti), 1995/17:4-5

¹⁷ Interview with Росица Митева, род 1959 год. в Ямбол, rec. by И. Тодорова 1993.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview with Борис Михайлов, род. 1954 год. в София, rec. by И. Тодорова 1993.

separate from the body and thus permit him to experience something in the "parallel world".²⁰ Thought can be directed both unconsciously (such experience is defined as something unusual, as a miracle) and consciously (such experience is often part of the practices of healers and sorcerers).

- "Samodivi", "Samovili", "Vili", "Vampiri", "Vurkolatsi" (these are all kinds of demonic personages) are most often defined as forms of "low energy" which can materialize such that we can see them. In the specialized literature about paranormal phenomena, the question of their existence and form of being is often discussed. Here is an example: "In the long run, since we are surrounded with so many *invisible radio waves and energy waves* [italics mine - I.T.], isn't it also possible that we are surrounded with other sorts of invisible creations [i.e., vili - I.T.] which exist in a completely different way from ours, especially when so many people swear to their existence?"²¹ In the end, they are also some kind of energies. The problem being considered here is whether a "fairy ring" (samodivsko igrishte - Bulg.; vilino kolo - Serb., Croat.) is created by fairies, is a trace of a UFO, or is a result of the powerful radiant energy which presages an earthquake.²²

- "Spirits of the Dead" are presented ambivalently. They are defined as either "low, negative energies," contact with which is not recommended; or as "higher than us", because they have been additionally purged after their previous reincarnation and can therefore help us to dissolve the problems of life. The interrelations of the dead and the living depend on whether or not an "energy connection" has been preserved. The quality of this connection, however, depends on the state of the relationship during the deceased's lifetime, on their contact with each other in their previous lives, on the spiritual level achieved during their previous lives, and on the deeds performed by the living relative, which the deceased's spirit is able to observe. "Messages" which contain information about the life "beyond" or advice about the behavior of their living relatives "here" are often received from the dead.

When explanations about the spirits of the dead are connected with the theory of reincarnation, the spirits fall into a hierarchy and are classified as lower or higher, depending on the number of their reincarnations, the degree of their perfection, and the strength of their energy. Those which are higher "have a mission to help people improve their thoughts, to make contact with the spiritual part of their being, and to fan into flames the divine spark that is within us."²³ In this mental context, the spirits of the dead are defined as "phenomena of new life", "spirits of the heavenly path", and so forth.

- "The Devil", the natural antipod of God, is the most clearly defined bearer of black, negative energies, which can have a disastrous impact on people.

²⁰ *Stella* (Tajanstveni Svijet na Granici Znanosti), 1994/7:6

²¹ *Stella* (Tajanstveni Svijet na Granici Znanosti), 1995/17:43

²² *6 то чуло*, 1995/10:34-35; Interview with Христо Георгиев, род. 1946 год. в Спфия, гес. by И. Тодорова 1993.

²³ *Stella* (Tajanstveni Svijet na Granici Znanosti), 1995/17:7

- "The Human Being", as possessor of a "soul" and "body" is simultaneously the bearer of the two kinds of energies. His character, state of health, and tendency to communicate with people of similar energy structures, depends on the predominance of light or dark energies within him. A sick body is thought to be healed by causing its energy to change from dark to light; whereas a sick soul, in order to heal, has to strive for perfection, rising to higher and higher levels of energy. A person who chooses evil over good is always punished, most often in the energy being of his soul, which realizes what has been "lost" and thus what has to be corrected in the next life. Thus, the notion of energy is connected with the psychics' well-formulated moral codex.

The structure of the human being is rather complicated, but is in harmony with the structure of the whole cosmos. Every person has physical, astral, mental, eternal, spiritual, light, etc., bodies, the energies of which have to be in balance.²⁴ This balance is created by energy vibrations which the physical body transmits to the astral body, the astral to the mental, and so forth to each succeeding body: "Well, all seven of your bodies (including the physical body) represent a whole, but depending on your deeds, conflicts often emerge between them. This is because your lower bodies are not in harmony with the demands of your higher bodies. Each higher body is lighter, and when knowledge, love, faith, and power are nearer to the light, they are on a higher level. Your highest body is the one that has the brightest light and thus is nearest to God."²⁵ According to this logic, prayer consists of energy vibrations which are transmitted from the lower to the higher bodies. When these vibrations reach the highest body, they begin to harmonize with divine vibrations on the highest energy level. The ultimate aim of mankind, which is the road to world harmony, should be the balancing of all human vibrations with those of God. It is thought that this goal can be realized by pure thoughts and performance of good deeds.²⁶

The primary activity of the psychics, too, is often defined with reference to the notion of energy: bioenergy therapy, psychoenergy therapy, the balancing of the energy centers of the human body, energy massage, healing through the "separation of the energy double," energy radiesthesia, performance of magic by use of light or dark energies or simply by the directing of "black" or "white" thought streams. The notion of "energy" is also present in the psychic's classification of magic. There are two types of magic:

(a) low, using physical objects (into this category fall all the types of magic found in folklore: love magic, magic to separate people, magic to steal other people's wealth, and so forth), in which it is necessary to code the required energy into these physical objects and to control this energy by ritual actions.

(b) high, using pure energy (into this category falls the magic of some of the contemporary psychics). This magic is made solely by pointing the energy of thought in the correct direction for reaching a concrete goal.

²⁴ *Stella* (Tajanstveni Svijet na Granici Znanosti), 1995/17:37; *Семе козмичког знања* (записивали М. Јовановић и м. Реић). Београд 1993:30-31.; Interview with Христо Георгиев...

²⁵ *Семе козмичког знања* (записивали М. Јовановић и м. Реић). Београд 1993:30-31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Of course, energy is not a single notion through which the meaning of all of the above is explained, but it is the most wide-spread. This is indicative of the psychics' subconscious desire to organize their conceptual apparatus into a semantic whole and to arrange its elements into hierarchical semantic and axiological structures. In this conceptual model, the transformation of the notion "energy" into a semantic center is one of the means by which the model's wholeness is being created and its tendency towards a new syncretism is being accelerated. That is why this notion is not only the means by which the phenomena are designated, but is also the semantic center around which a large number of the elements in the psychics' conceptual paradigm can be arranged.

Stories about Encounters with "the Beyond" as a Type of Autobiographical Narrative

Both in everyday conversation and in the specialized literature dealing with paranormal phenomena, we can find an enormous number of stories about encounters with "the beyond". These are presented in different ways according to the individual experience, as well as according to the character of the narrator and his world view; but in every case they lead us to the unifying center of each cultural process - the human presence. When we observe paranormal phenomena from the point of view of the narrator and his individual life experience, we can show the ways in which these phenomena become a component of his unique personal culture; and we can draw out the additional meanings and evaluations which are imputed to paranormal phenomena on this cultural level. We can also see their specific impact on the individual's human biography. In this way, we can study a certain kind of transformation of ideas regarding the paranormal and the expression of such ideas in their individual verbal interpretations.

In other words, in this part of the article I will talk about the paranormal as something interwoven into a more general analytical relationship: **abstract ideas of the paranormal/the paranormal as an element of a unique life event/the resulting verbal interpretation.**

The life event is that necessary focus which brings together actional, emotional, and verbal-interpretive forms of the paranormal. These forms are experienced and rationalized by the person for whom the event is part of life. The manner in which the event is interpreted depends on the strength of the experience, on previous knowledge of such phenomena, and on the extent to which this experience changes the individual's future destiny. For some people, the paranormal merely provides an occasion for telling stories about human superstition and foolishness, but for others - such stories are about a revelatory experience which has completely changed their way of thinking and behavior. There further exists a group of people for whom the knowledge and experience of the paranormal has become their profession, and they also tell many stories based on their personal experiences with the "other" world.

The verbal forms which describe these types of phenomena can be classified according to different parameters: (a) according to who tells the story - the healer or

his patient; the clairvoyant or his client; a person who has seen a UFO; a person who can contact the spirits of the dead; and so forth. The point of view is different, even when one and the same event is being described: the story is structured in a different way, and the main accents in it are changed. (b) according to the basic subject of the story - descriptions of miracles in which healing is effected; predictions, whether they come true or not; magic, which may or may not subsequently be undone; contacts with aliens; and so forth. (c) according to the form of the story²⁷ - whether it is a short message or is developed into a whole story about one or many "unusual" events; whether it is in the form of sensationalized news, or a long commentary with detailed explanations of the phenomena and connected with emotions; and so on. (d) according to the teller's participation in the event being described - whether he tells about something which he has heard (or read), or about a personal experience, i.e. whether he tells about his own experience or retells a story about something that happened to someone else.

In the specific case of a teller describing an event from his own life experience, the verbal form of the story is considered as a type of autobiographical narrative. Here is an example: "Well, it was the fourth of August this year, the eve of the great Christian holiday, the Transfiguration of Christ. In the late afternoon, I and my husband decided to drink a cup of coffee. I boiled the coffee in a coffee pot, we drank it, and when I went to wash the pot I noticed that there were some coffee grounds left in my cup. Suddenly, the thought came into my head to turn the cup over onto the plate. After awhile, I lifted the cup, looked inside, and was lost in astonishment. I saw a very beautiful "coffee-graphic". I immediately recognized the wonderful image. Without doubt, it was the little church of St. Teodor Piron which is located in "Ajazmoto" Park near our town. I called my husband and silently gave him my cup. He looked at it for a very long time, and after that told me that, according to him, it was the church in "Ajazmoto" Park. I have read that on the eve of great Christian holidays, the figures in the coffee are very clearly drawn and quite visible. I was convinced of the truth of this statement, because the image of the church appeared in my cup the day before the feast of the Transfiguration. My husband and I decided that this was something that only happens occasionally, and was God making his presence felt in our life. Maybe somebody is trying to tell us something, to protect us, I don't know. About ten days later, on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we went with our son to "Ajazmoto". We stopped in front of the church and looked at it for a very long time. The resemblance between the "graphic" in the cup and church itself was astonishing. The location of the windows, doors, bell tower, and the two cypress trees on the sides of the church were the same. Everything coincided in an amazing way. After that, we entered the church. I left a little gift for the Virgin Mary, we each lit a candle, and we stood for a little while under the cupola and prayed."²⁸

²⁷ В. Ганева-Райчева. Паранормалните феномени и тяхната проекция в културата на българина. *Български фолклор* 1993/5:27.

²⁸ A letter sent to the editorial office of the newspaper "Психо плюс" in Sofija, August, 1994.

We can see in this story how the event-miracle acquires concrete, well-defined outlines and motivates the interpretations and actions of the people in a certain way: the people sense God's presence and subsequently express their gratitude through ritual actions in the church.

In many of these stories we can observe how the "miracle"²⁹ is portrayed as something tangible, how the abstract notion of God and his manifestations are made concrete, and how the event itself takes its place in the human biography. Specifically regarding the written variants of these kinds of stories, we can say that they are sufficiently valued by all the publishers of magazines and newspapers specializing in these themes, so much so that these publishers usually devote specific sections to them. The titles of these sections are sufficient to prepare the reader for what he can expect. Here are some examples: "From Personal Experience", "Mystical Experience", "Incredible Experiences", "What Happened to Me", "Your Stories about Unusual Events", "Miracle Healings", "Chronicle of Miracle Healings", and so forth. And here are some examples of titles of the stories themselves: "Night Guests", "How I Met My Guardian Angel", "Helpers from the Other World", "Conversation with My Uncle", "Meeting with the Dead Mother", "I Have a Very Old Spiritual Guide", "I saw a UFO", "I Don't Heal, God Heals", "What the Patients Say", "The Heart-Breaking Story of Mother Biserka", and so forth.

In conclusion, I would like to say that my thoughts and observations as presented here cannot exhaust the variety of subject matter connected with paranormal phenomena, but are expressions of my desire to analyze the dynamic processes of their development in the present, with a view to the cultural needs which bring them to life.

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²⁹ Пешикан-Љуштановић, Ј.: Чудесно излечење као тема урбаног предања. *Фолклор у Војводини* 1992/6:94:101.

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PARANORMALNI FENOMENI MEĐU JUŽNIM SLAVENIMA: KULTUROLOŠKA INTERPRETACIJA

Sažetak

Mjesto fenomena paranormalnog je određeno "drugošću" od uobičajene slike svijeta. One su kulturne formacije koje se mijenjaju tijekom vremena i moguće je komparirati današnje s nekadašnjim "vjerovanjima" o nadnaravnom. No, one su ujedno i djelovi šireg kulturnog konteksta i upravo stoga istraživane su posredstvom osobnih priča (*oral history*) o događajima nadnaravne ili magijske prirode koji su se dogodili samim kazivačima. Tako se otvara mogućnost šire analize kulturnih potreba koje su stvorile ovakav pogled na svijet.