



# FROM BLINDING TO SOLENOID: BRAIN MAPS, VISIONS, AND DREAMS IN MIRCEA CĂRTĂRESCU'S FICTION

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In Mircea Cărtărescu's latest colossal novels (the Blinding trilogy and the solitary Solenoid), the novelistic conception is associated with a special theoretical platform predicated on terms such as gnostic, fractile, holarchical, asymptotical, spiralled, or termite-like – assumed, at a conceptual level, in a postmodernist or even post-postmodernist sense. The present study examines the validity of these concepts, which render Cărtărescu's recent prose as a partial container of the exact sciences (like mathematics or physics), evincing a comprehensive philosophical conception according to which the novel, as genre, can represent a third or even a fourth dimension in the cultural, human, cosmic space. This is the author's ambitious project, which the present research aims to deconstruct, with a view to highlighting the possible mutations the novel undergoes as a genre under Cărtărescu's penmanship.

Keywords: gnosticism, fractals, holarchy, Mircea Cărtărescu, brain, map, vision, dream.

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“After I finish *Blinding*, I'll have the feeling that I've paid the fare for my journey through this world.” This is what Mircea Cărtărescu, the most famous Romanian writer today, confessed in 2006, during a debate organized in Cluj by the *Phantasma* Centre for Imagination Research.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, he has completed the *Blinding* trilogy: the first volume was published in 1996, the second in 2002, and the last one in 2007. 2015 saw the publication of another novel by this author, *Solenoid*, with more ambitious stakes than *Blinding*, since its narrative underpinnings are metaphysical or downright cosmic.

At the same *Phantasma* debate in 2006, Mircea Cărtărescu leisurely and thoroughly introduced his conception about creation, with particular reference to *Blinding*. Not in vain, one of his statements was that he conceived his writings and his books not like an architect, but like a termite (his art is termitic). Indeed, the construction method applied in the *Blinding* trilogy could be that of a termite (Pharaoh ant), which is an instinctual, innate architect and not a rational, intellectual architect. To help the participants in the *Phantasma* debate understand *Blinding*, Mircea Cărtărescu delivered to them the instruments for analysing, dissecting and deconstructing his own narratives, which I will also present in what follows, by making reference to the author's own explanations.

The first idea underlying Mircea Cărtărescu's literary construct in the *Blinding* trilogy (as well as in other of his

texts) is that of the *Russian doll*: worlds are not one or several, independent from each other, but they are born from one another, out of a germinating élan and in an infinite, continuously dilating progression; hence, his fascination with whirlwinds, swirls and concentric, ritualistic gestures. A living seed cast into the cosmos yields not only a multicephalous product, but also a pouch or a uterus of worlds that regenerate themselves in spectacular manner. Worlds flow or fall, therefore, in cascades. This is another favourite metaphor of Mircea Cărtărescu's, which the author also defines through the notion of *holons* and *holarchy*. *Holarchy* is a concept coined by the thinker and writer Arthur Koestler (1905–1983). The concept was delivered on the world market of ideas in 1967, referring to phenomena and processes ranked as hierarchically arranged organizational structures. A holon is a part of holarchy, i.e. a system that behaves simultaneously as a system and a sub-system; a sub-whole of the Universe (Galaxy), with a stable position in a hierarchy. The idea of (and obsession with) Everything depends on this holarchic view, as Mircea Cărtărescu contends, which is characteristic of the Gnostic thought system. The concentric circles of the worlds do not unfold at random. They have a geometric shape, the spiral, like a stairway from hell to heaven, or the other way around. Gnostic thought has influenced Mircea Cărtărescu also at the level of the subject matter approached in his narratives. The author is fascinated, as a creator, with

the existence of two demiurges, one of whom is good and the other is evil, as are also their creations: *Blinding* is about two twin brothers, Mircea and Victor, epitomizing the two halves of a split, schizoid Self, fractured between good (spirit) and evil (matter) up until their (comm)union and reunification take place at the end of the trilogy.

Another important creative tool for Mircea Cărtărescu is the *asymptotic metaphor*, related to the geometry of spirals, already mentioned above: like the dance of a spinning Dervish, a spiral may plump up the worlds, making them reel, develop and progressively grow. The theory that has exerted the greatest influence on Mircea Cărtărescu, who assumes this influence as a trade mark, is the theory of fractals: that is why during the *Phantasma* debate, the author stated that *Blinding* is a fractal novel. The concept of *fractals* was launched on the world market of ideas by Benoît Mandelbrot, in 1975. The term itself comes from the Latin *fractus* and it means broken, fractured; it is a fragmented geometric figure which can be split into parts that represent miniature copies of the whole. What is a fractal novel, without this term inhibiting our understanding of Cărtărescu's trilogy or necessarily entailing advanced and pretentious mathematical knowledge that might put readers off? Fractals (in the applied, literary sense) are aiding textual instruments that repeat key images, continuously detailing and minutely compiling (like in a jungleoid tracery) a puzzle or a mosaic that becomes a detail for something else; and so on, to infinity. A fractal is a detail that becomes a centre and brings forth other details that become centres. Again, at an inner, fractal level, *Blinding* conveys an infinitely generated detail or details of its creator's mind. Details that become centres and produce other details are necessary for charting an image that Mircea Cărtărescu holds dear: cranial or brain maps, whereby the world can be controlled or it can control the other Worlds derived from it. Brain journeys are commonly found in *Blinding*, either as initiations into the cosmic construct of the world, or as metaphors for ideas of Creation and Books. A visible obsession with the poetics of Mallarmé and Borges has always impregnated this theme developed by the Romanian novelist in contrapuntal manner. The very name of the trilogy is linked to this obsession: *Blinding* (the word) serves as a mantra that is ritualistically repeated, producing thereby enlightenment, Nirvana, the self's entry into the World and into Books. The demiurgic obsession is, in turn, intimately entwined with this mantra: the book is written, has just been written or will once be written by a matricial author, but it will be written directly through his brain map, which is actually the World itself (mantra, mandala).

The three volumes of *Blinding – The Left Wing, The Body and The Right Wing* – have a functional structure, with three narrative layers (much like the layers of an onion): 1. the numinous, epic, picturesque layer of childhood (with its fabulous overtones grounded up into Proustian delights); 2. the realistic layer (with massive disquisitions in the third volume, much ampler than in the other two volumes, on the history of Romanian communism and, partially, of Romanian postcommunism, draped in symbols and figures of authorities)

and 3. the mystical-cosmic layer (or cosmogonic, rather), which the author overtly advocates, proposing, in this case, an interfaith mystique.

Gnostic, fractal, holarchic, asymptotic, spiralled, termitic: all these qualifiers applied to the novel *Blinding* are accurate because the author himself has assumed them not just theoretically, but also creatively, in his writing practice. The fact that this is a postmodern novel of initiation, with a Pynchonian structure and ambition, so to say (Thomas Pynchon is one of Mircea Cărtărescu's favourite authors, acknowledged as a model) is of lesser consequence. What is essential is the termitic architecture of the trilogy and its metaphysical stakes.

*The Body*, the second part of the *Blinding* trilogy, describes the complex structure of the "blinding" manuscript: "For my manuscript, made of living, overlapping, intertwining membranes, is an accurate rendition of my own brain's layering, it's a map, reproduced on a coarse cellulose base, of the interwoven neurons that form the icon of the world within my skull. And over my manuscript, faithfully reflecting every loop, full stop and words I've erased, stretches the vast stellar manuscript, the dust of giant, interconnected neurons, within the Godhead's skull. Thus, the three writing types (neurons, letters and stars) lie glued together like a system of lenses inside the objective of an optical device, through which you could gaze with your entire body at your life." From an architectural point of view, Mircea Cărtărescu presents, in the quote above, the very palimpsest of the *Blinding* trilogy: human matter, aesthetic matter, divine matter (neurons, letters, stars), overlapped, blended, hybridized.

The style of the trilogy is Baroque-postmodern: it evinces an unparalleled stylistic resplendence and a voluptuous imagery. Sometimes, the text appears to have been written almost in a trance. The world of Mircea Cărtărescu, in the *Blinding* trilogy, is vulva, and amniotic fluid, and seminal fluid, all mixed together, and this vision of anatomic seepage works through an idea that the author holds dear: that of the worlds copulating with each other, unleashing the flow and ebb of divinity, focused in a brain that nonetheless performs all the functions of a body. There is a symbiotic relationship between space-time-brain-sex; the brain is always a womb at the same time ("brain with labia," as the author specifies at one point). The world is ceaselessly cerebral-genital. There is no brain that is independent of sex or the other way around: the spirit and the body are contagiously enmeshed with one another and they operate through hybridization.

Mircea Cărtărescu successfully attempts to build a cerebral architecture and an architecture of images in his trilogy: on the one hand, a reasonable edifice, with a thoroughly thought-out structure; on the other hand, a polychrome visual construct. The two interfere and overlap. The story of towns, inserted in the novel, has its own logic, therefore. Bucharest, in particular, is an *omphalos*-city, with spiderlike connections between the earth and the sky, a space of blasting sensations and mind-flesh mazes. Bucharest encompasses a fourfold map: 1. first of all, there is the actual city; 2. next is a city envisaged like the structure of the brain; 3. the third is a city pictured through



literary and imagistic references, like in the drawings of Monsú Desiderio (an enigmatic painter comprising the identities of three visual artists from 16th- and 17th-centuries; Mircea Cărtărescu's choice of this mysterious painter is also relevant for the tripartite, palimpsestic structure of identity, for the architectural structure of the narrative and the connection with *Orbitor*, itself a palimpsest) and, in the undertext, those of Giambattista Piranesi (1720–1778); 4. last but not least, Bucharest is a labyrinthine, overarching network, as if it were composed of Venetian canals (symbolically speaking). The same brain structure is applied to picturesque, hallucinatory cities like New Orleans and (constantly mentioned in *The Left Wing*) and Amsterdam (a matrix-city in *The Body*). New Orleans has a carnivalesque structure (sensory, synaesthetic), interspersed with jazz, voodoo, and metamorphoses. Amsterdam has a cognitively neophyte structure; it is a city of occult initiation, for here people posing as statues camouflage the sect of the Knowers, the initiates who believe that the world is a book that is currently being written.

Throughout the *Blinding* trilogy, there is a plethora of ritualistically resumed leitmotifs that compile an unhurried history of the human body and its schisms. The body is an empire, with countries, areas, realms scoured by seekers. It is in close connection with primary memories, with the first journey undertaken by human beings within themselves and inside their mothers' bodies. Buildings (houses, chambers, gazebos) fascinate the narrator, because they are like bodies. As I already stated, Mircea Cărtărescu repeatedly invokes the painter Monsú Desiderio, with his bizarre, traceried phantasmatic constructions, and Piranesi. This is an emblematic feature of his narrative. In fact, what the author attempts to achieve in *Blinding* (as a textual, literary structure) is an edifice consisting of overlapping layers. The cities of Monsú Desiderio and the buildings of Piranesi are thoroughly detailed in the narrative equivalent of an architectural tracery, but they are fictionalized accounts, consisting of layers of unreality, chrysalis-cities and butterfly-cities, overladen with an enigmatic, cryptic, numinous significance. The figure of the butterfly is contrapuntally and overtly resumed in the *Blinding* trilogy.

The mother's figure also pertains to the bodily imaginary: the narrator-son, who is pregnant (narratively speaking), in-corporates her: the mother is substantial and ethereal at the same time, representing a "gateway," a portal. As a Moira of the universe, the mother weaves a cosmic rug, with a mandala pattern. Although she lives in one of Bucharest's slums, the mother has initiatory links with the world, while her hallucinatory rug is that of a Moira. Therefore, the *Blinding* trilogy builds its text like a three-dimensional icon representing the metamorphosis of a chrysalis into butterfly: from the child that is fascinated by the threads of the incomprehensible world, to the teenager who takes heed of his own body, with its liquors and spirits, with his brain, the future metaphysical lotus. Brain maps obsessively reappears throughout the *Blinding* trilogy: the characters have maps tattooed on or even inserted into their skulls, while Mircea (the narrator) travels through his own brain, managing to regress to the archaic dimension of the

human and unravelling man's psychological origins.

The second part of the trilogy, *The Body*, recounts the history of the Indian Yogi Vānaprashta Sannyāsa, who has experienced enlightenment and metempsychosis and who concentrates within himself (through various transformative powers) the Body and the Brain. Mircea, the child, will be initiated by this man-snake, his revelation being that *blinding* (the word, the mantra and the mandala) is God, absolute light. Mircea, the child protagonist, who becomes an adolescent and, then, a grown-up, is initiated into becoming the very amanuensis of the book entitled *Blinding*. The authorial name extols an assumed literary fate: Cărtărescu the character (and, implicitly, the author) is consecrated, in the novel, as the man who writes *the Book of the World*.

In the *Blinding* trilogy, the author granted equal attention to Illusion (blind) Alley, to Reverie Avenue, Memory Park, Hallucination Station and the Reality District (all of these paradigms and metaphors belong to the author, being listed in the first volume of the trilogy, *The Left Wing*). Although he relies on a flamboyant-hallucinatory style, the architecture of the novel is extremely meticulous and its central idea is hyper-lucid: The World is a Book, and he who writes the Book writes, rewrites or even transcribes the Origin of the World, saving himself thus, ontologically and gnoseologically. Mircea Cărtărescu is the one who writes a Book that regresses to the origins of the human mind and the human world; hence, the metaphysical challenge brought forth by this novel.

The novel *Solenoid* propels further the author's metaphysical ambition first expressed in *Blinding*. It resumes the major highlights of the trilogy's internal architecture: holarchy, the gnostic element, brain maps, the metropolis, the mother figure as mystical cosmic matrix, and mythicized autobiography. But the aim of infinite progression is more ambitious and revealing in this case: what the author is interested in is to render the novel (and literature) as a sort of fourth dimension. *Blinding* is the novel of the third dimension, while *Solenoid* takes the physics and mathematics of the art of the novel further, conceptually speaking. The masters – Mallarmé and Borges – are again encountered in the arborescent intertextual frames of the novel, even though the highest point of reference for Mircea Cărtărescu is Kafka, this time.

Topographically speaking, *Solenoid* is a novel exclusively focused on Bucharest, but in a sense that specifically belongs to Mircea Cărtărescu alone: the map of the metropolis becomes a complex map of the brain, of the collective conscious and unconscious, of the world and of creation. Bucharest is a multi-sensory metropolis, simultaneously rational and irrational, in other words, a syncretic world. The Bucharest metropolis is (or becomes) World and Brain, being built like a "network of galleries in the epidermis of a God," but also like a "Museum of melancholy" (p. 29). Bucharest contains all famous metropolises within itself: Paris, Berlin, New York, London, Tokyo. It becomes a hyper-city.

The *raisonneur* in this book, in this city or in this world is a professor of Romanian (a pariah and an outsider, socially speaking) who, through various methods and approaches, plunges into his own skull and brain, turning them into an

epiphanic neuronal womb (with swarms of selves) that comprises the very structure of the world. The metaphor of the mind as a castle or a palace, where there is always a forbidden room (the monster) is recurrent in Cărtărescu's prose. Everything and anything is related to the idea of a cranial box. The protagonist's self-projection veers into the para-psychological at times. All his occult initiations, all the matrices through which he roams or describes (the town, the school, the house, the room, the library) are extensive or limited brain maps. The books are also brain maps. The act of reading books becomes an esoteric form of trepanning in which the reader's brain map overlaps the author's own brain map (p. 69). Books are envisaged like magical, illuminated skulls that can be opened up, and the brain maps inside them can be taken in through absorption (by the reader). As he perceives books like brain maps, the professor aspires to a hypercubic, supreme book that contains (like in Mallarmé's poetics) everything, through its three dimensions. This is possible also because Mircea Cărtărescu inserts an enigmatic theory of evolution, with a deliberately initiatory intent: after coming out of the mother's body (after expulsion from the uterus), when at a later time the child becomes aware of that exit, he gestates himself inside his own skull, turning it into a kind of uterus.

The penchant for maps, layouts and drawings is reminiscent, in *Solenoid*, of the filigree designs achieved by Monsú Desiderio and Piranesi – two essential figures in *Blinding*, redeployed in *Solenoid* in less poignant form (even though the names of two artists occasionally crop up even here). They are symbolically encapsulated in the world of tattoos, which is insistently tackled, at one point, in *Solenoid*. The art of tattooing on the outside (epidermal) and on the inside (at the level of the cerebral hemispheres, the spine, the lungs, the heart) reminds one of another form of brain maps. Inner tattoos can be made of words, for instance (from the Scriptures, the Qur'an, etc.). Even the mind can be tattooable, until it becomes a solenoid, a structure levitating between the real and the unreal (pp. 219–220).

From childhood to adulthood, everything the character-raisonneur perceives (family, town, landscapes) are visual brain maps that stick to his brain and are summed up there for a specific purpose. Space is consistently reflected on in *Solenoid*. Built in one of Bucharest's power nodes, in an area with magical virtues, the boat-house in which the outsider professor resides as a youth and as a grown-up is perceived as a *topos-omphalos*, as a matrix connecting him to the earth and the world. (p. 80). Deep inside this house there is a solenoid, an interstitial spiral structure, a cosmically reconvered coil that turns the boat-house into an initiatory instrument for undertaking initiatory journeys inside one's own mind (with ups and downs, chambers, towers and cellars). The solenoid is also a mathematical gear that matches together irregular things, balancing them. The boat-house becomes a multi-layered palimpsest, which contains thousands of rooms, all of them adapting to the nucleus represented by the character's brain or by his (cerebral) gaze, which embraces and swallows up everything. The boat-house is also a Borgesian Aleph, margin and centre at the same time, since it does not have a

traditional topography, but consists, for instance, of "mandalas of corridors" (p. 256).

All the buildings in Mircea Cărtărescu's novel are like brain maps or pouch-spaces or hollow-spaces. Whether it is a flat, a house, a clinic, a hospital, a factory, the police headquarters, a cemetery, a college, a mill, a morgue, or a preventorium, any and all spaces are labyrinthine, with ramifications like in some ancient or Gothic mystery-romances, since they all contain, albeit metaphorically or symbolically, a form of necropolis. Bucharest is actually referred to, at one point, as Necropolis (p. 396)!

Since the professor refuses to write literature (in a canonical sense, i.e. to publish it), he becomes a book of books, a supreme manuscript or a manuscript-creature that contains everything that can be contained: neurons, underground networks, mosaics, ramifications. As he is unwilling to write in the traditional sense and to draw a work out of himself, the professor becomes, by leading an inner esoteric life, an alchemical oeuvre. For this manuscript-creature, the brain is converted into the sense of sight; it has the shape of an eyeball through which thinking itself is captured (p. 99). Being secretly initiated and initiating himself in mysterious ways, the professor becomes a cartographer of his own skull, which encompasses the world and literature alike.

The function of the solenoid, as an instrument, is to produce levitation, which may serve as a mystical engine of reconnection to the matrix, including as an athanor. What the fractal was in the *Blinding* trilogy (a unit of ontological and creative measurement) is what the solenoid becomes here and now: a unit of ontological and creative measurement, which unleashes levitation, including in a cognitive sense. The whole novel *Solenoid* appears to be written, from a gravitational standpoint, like a levitation above the life and death of a metropolis, invested with metaphysical and eschatological or soteriological significance (Heaven-Hell). At the end of the novel, the city of Bucharest (a part thereof) levitates mystically.

*Solenoid* is, to some extent, also a delirious or hallucinatory novel. The journal fragments or the dreams the author inserts, from time to time, in its pages are part of his irresistible penchant for exploring brain maps. Dreams are, in fact, brain maps that the author comments on after expressing them (via his central character, the outcast professor). Such a direction is bound to fascinate the gourmets of oneiric Romanian fiction and literature. There are two other authors who turned hallucination into a method and a form of trance. First of all, I am thinking about the prose of Mihai Eminescu, whose texts (which I was overly fascinated with as a young woman) – *Wretched Dionysus*, *The Avatars of Pharaoh Tla*, *Cezara*, *The Death of Ioan Vestimie* – are creatively reworked and continued in Mircea Cărtărescu's novel, through an exciting neo-Gothic narrative form. The funerary, thanatic opulence of the underground topography in *Solenoid* is a homage to Eminescu's prose; the reading prowess of the author who wrote a monograph about Eminescu entitled *The Chimeric Dream* can be sensed here. Cărtărescu amplifies and develops the enigmatic labyrinthine spaces in Eminescu's oneiric short stories. The second author who deliberately writes a delirious-hallucinatory prose (exploring trance-like states),



with thanatological ramifications, is Corin Braga. His novelistic quintet entitled *Noctambulii (The Sleepwalkers)*, from which he has so far published three novels (*The Claustrophobe* – 1992, *The Hydra* – 1996 and *Luiza Textoris* – 2012), as well as his oneiric and meta-oneiric diaries (*Oniria* – 1999 and *Acedia* – 2014) are related, in part, with the approach of Mircea Cărtărescu.

There are a few key characters in *Solenoid*, who are linked through initiatory threads to brain maps – the recurring theme of this essay. Nicolae Minovici is one of them. He experiences thanatological and pre-thanatological art in various stages by attempting to hang himself, with a view to scientifically investigating this process. Minovici's pre-thanatological hallucinations lead him to speculate that the brain contains, in fact, a pair of eyeballs that produce visions. Another hyper-initiated character is Virgiliu, the leader of the sect of protesters. In the esoteric building of the Morgue, he provides Damnation (elevated to the rank of a deity) with his brain, which encompasses the universe, since it has the "hyper-architectonic" structure of a mandala of mandalas (p. 393). The third key character is Nicolae Vaschide: he has a cranial tattoo which represents and contains the World, all the more so since that tattoo continues down his spine. An oneiric practitioner by calling, Vaschide discovers the epiphany that sex is a manifestation of the brain (an idea that is also featured in *Blinding*). Subsequently, Vaschide discovers underground an enormous oneiroid skull, which can catalyze the dreams of those who sleep around it. It is a skull-like world through which Vaschide himself travels, aspiring to arrive in the empty space left by the giant brain of yore, where he encounters a sleeping girl, a divine child whom Vaschide adopts and brings into reality. What Vaschide actually finds is the very core of oneirism: this is why this character dies in a special way – he disappears into a supreme crevasse of dreams. The fourth essential character is Palamar the librarian: he discloses to the professor of Romanian the revelatory Voynich Manuscript, written on parchment in a tongue unknown in the Middle Ages, an illuminated manuscript, in vegetal-alchemical cipher. The fifth initiatory character is a simple man, Ispas. Abducted and taken up into heaven, he returns upon the earth as the prophet of a different dimension and of faith in salvation.

Brain maps are also mediated by another theme in *Solenoid*. The ardent desire for salvation that renders this novel as a metaphysical writing is counterbalanced, in contrapuntal, leitmotif fashion, by another obsession: old age, disease, pain, suffering and death. The sect of protesters revolt and vehemently protest (to the point of self-sacrifice) against extinction. While the sect of Knowers prevailed in *Blinding*, the sect of protesters is featured in *Solenoid*. In the subtext, the novel contains an assumed mystical dimension, symbolically reminiscent of the Buddha's enlightenment and the undertaking of Prince Siddhartha. He discovers ecstasy only after an assiduous and progressive meditation, which he counterposes to the horrors of life (death, disease, old age, suffering). Siddhartha becomes the Buddha only because he reaches ecstasy through mystical, enlightening meditation. The rebellion against death and the ten pages in *Solenoid* on which the only word, written as a

mantra, is HELP advocate, in fact, enlightenment through acute meditation.

The author's plea for the fourth dimension is, again, linked to the idea of brain maps. The projection of the world into four dimensions is a projection of the brain and a new cranial map of utopia. The tesseract, the analogue of a cube in the fourth dimension, is envisaged as a cognitive tool, as a post-Borgesian super-Aleph. Subsequently, from the tesseract, utopia could lead to a five-dimensional world, since the progression of some perpetually added dimensions is a cognitive-ontological phantasm of mankind (pp. 466, 471).

*Solenoid* gathers together the threads, knots, nuclei and ramifications related to brain maps. The skull of the protagonist, the outcast professor, accommodates, in fact, the Bucharest metropolis, in gnostic fashion (since it is a paradisiacal-infernal metropolis). Being contained in this skull, the city plunges into pre-levitation, announcing the mystical exaltation from the end of the novel. Comprising all the matrix-like cities of the world (the famous capitals listed above), Bucharest encapsulates the very destiny of humanity (p. 555). Architecturally speaking, it magically conceals in its underground networks five solenoids which intermittently propel the population into levitation, subjecting the people to an unconscious (rarely, conscious) form of initiation and supra-humanity.

The three manuscript-textbooks in the novel that is in the process of being written are, again, brain maps. Cărtărescu calls this supreme manuscript an "anti-book," its author (the pariah professor) being an "anti-writer" (p. 642). However, because it is simultaneously affirmation and negation, this manuscript is supreme and absolute; above all, it is a gnostic manuscript.

The anguish that ritualistically pervades the novel *Solenoid* – extinction as injustice to the human race – is not left without an equally majestic response. Cărtărescu is driven by the ambition to find alternative, experimental solution for this anguish of humanity. This is the reason why, in the last part of the novel there is an obstinate belief in resurrection and regeneration. In the cemetery-hall near the outsider professor's school, he discovers five fetuses in chronological progression, stored in some cylinders. This is a cranial uterus or a cerebral placenta or a uterine skull that turns out to be the matrix, the cavity, the sphere of the world, the numinous or the fourth dimension. On another level, the new brain of the prophet Ispas (who was abducted into heaven and then returned among humans) is inspired by a matricial race whose mission is to convey messages rebellion against nothingness. Against this backdrop comes the expert initiate Palamar, the librarian. He resumes key concepts espoused by Mircea Cărtărescu (in *Orbitor*), such as holarchy and asymptotic scale, decreeing a para-dimension of the world in which he aspires to insert the professor as an acarian foetus. The instrument that propels him into the acarian paraworld is the solenoid itself. The professor will change, in post-Kafkian fashion, into a mite, into an elected envoy that will be devoured by the other mites and then will return into his human body, having failed in this salvation mission (what counts, however, is intention or the pathway, and not necessarily the end-purpose of the mission). There is, then, the alternative

constructive device of the parable or dream about the girl with more than one heart – yet another metaphor for regeneration, metempsychosis and multiplicity. The novel *Solenoid* is not just a desperate multitext about dying and old age, but also about the attempts to overcome these calamities elevated to the rank of apocalyptic disasters of the human race.

At the end of the novel, the map of Bucharest is redesigned and visualized with the help of solenoids as energetic and pro-mystical nuclei. However, this map of the city is the very brain map of the central character: the professor turns into the city, a skull-city, a brain-like solenoid (pp. 795-799). The overarching metaphor of brain maps dominates this narrative too: the professor's brain and skull are, *de facto*, an athanor and a progressive spatio-temporal structure. Central Bucharest levitates while its outskirts collapse and disintegrate into the abyss.

The initiatory manuscripts to which the professor has access (the book he is writing, Minovici's visionary plates, Vaschide's book about dreams, the Voynich manuscript, to all these being

added the mantra structure of the poem *The Fall*, a mental pre-map of the professor as a young man) form a "Gospel of the mind" (p. 832), emanating from the fourth dimension. The final manuscript will be thrown into the flames, and this combustion triggers enlightenment and ecstasy, at the very point in which the metropolis is split into two: one part will ascend to heaven, while the other will plunge into hell. There is also an intermediate space, the chapel into which the professor withdraws with his lover and his daughter. This is, again, a chapel of cranial extraction.

How should literature be looked at from the fourth dimension, the literature of a posthuman future?! Perhaps as "a levitation above the page, a pneumatic text" (p. 416). Devouring and devoured through brain maps, the novel *Solenoid* (which could be, symbolically speaking, a *Blinding* filtered through a fourth dimension) has internalized and externalized the author until it has turned him into a solenoid structure, into a supreme medium for the readers.<sup>2</sup>

#### Notes:

1. I am using in this text many of the conceptual statements made by Mircea Cărtărescu during the *Phantasma* debate in 2006. For the entire discussion, see <http://phantasma.lett.ubbcluj.ro/?p=3360>. This is debate number 15.
2. This essay is partially akin to the perspective adopted by Andreea Răuceanu in several texts published in the review *Steaua* (2014, 2015, 2016), in which she examines the city's geography in the novels of Mircea Cărtărescu (see the critical Bibliography).

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