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The Centre for the research of the
imaginary *SPECULUM*, Alba Iulia,
Romania



The ASTRA National
Museum Complex of Sibiu,
Romania



Nicolae Bălcescu Land Forces
Academy, Sibiu,
Romania

invite you to participate in the Conference:

**Images, Masks and Power: the Imaginary of Manipulation in Literature, Arts
and Society**

Venue: ASTRA Museum Sibiu, Romania

Date: May 22-24, 2026

This conference intends to promote an interdisciplinary dialogue on the ways in which images, discourses, and symbolic structures function as instruments of power and social control. The overarching theme, *the imaginary of manipulation*, sends to the mechanisms through which symbolic representations are produced, put into motion and internalized, thus allowing the relations of domination to be perceived as legitimate, natural, or inevitable.

The theoretical framework may have as a starting point the institutional theory of the imaginary developed by Cornelius Castoriadis in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), which argues that manipulation does not operate solely through falsehood or overt coercion, but through social imaginary significations that structure and reproduce social order. Complementarily, Gilbert Durand's analysis of the diurnal and nocturnal regimes of the imaginary in *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* (1960) provides a productive lens for understanding manipulation either as a distortion of the

confrontational, diurnal imaginary or as an exploitation of the integrative, nocturnal imaginary that generates reassuring and “comfortable” illusions.

A second major axis concerns the relationship between power, discourse, and symbolic control. Michel Foucault’s concepts of biopower, governmentality and stratagems (*Discipline and Punish*, 1975; *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. I, 1976) reveal that contemporary forms of manipulation rely less on prohibition and repression than on the fine management of lives, bodies and populations. Within this framework, the imaginary of manipulation takes the form of an internalized panopticon, in which control is exercised through norms, self-discipline and the production of a regime of truth that determines what may legitimately be said, thought and believed. This perspective is further developed by Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and symbolic violence (*The Logic of Practice*, 1980), which show that the most effective forms of manipulation are those that remain unrecognized as such, operating through the internalization of dominant structures of perception and cognition, and transforming distorted realities into accepted norms.

At the psychological level, both individual and collective, manipulation can be understood through archetypal patterns. Carl Gustav Jung’s analysis of the archetypes of the Shadow and the Trickster (*On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure*, 1954) offers key insights into the dynamics of deception and illusion. The manipulator may appear as a projection of the collective Shadow, embodying anxieties related to hidden powers and opaque mechanisms of control, while the Trickster emerges as a central figure of ambiguity, cunning, and symbolic inversion, capable of dismantling and reconstructing reality itself. In a complementary vein, Gaston Bachelard’s reflections on the image and its materiality (*The Poetics of Space*, 1958) make it possible to conceptualize the imaginary of manipulation as a perversion of the image’s revelatory function, whereby images cease to disclose meaning and instead serve to conceal, distort or displace it.

Building on these theoretical foundations, the conference invites to contributions that examine the manifestations of the imaginary of manipulation in artistic, cultural, socio-political, and digital contexts. Of particular interest are analyses of literature and arts as privileged spaces for dissecting mechanisms of control, including dystopian and anti-utopian narratives, the manipulation of language, the fabrication of history, and regimes of permanent surveillance. Equally relevant are studies of theatre and performance, where figures such as the mask, the puppet, or the *Theatrum Mundi* metaphor visualize relations of domination and loss of agency, as well as investigations into the visual arts and the aesthetics of illusion, from the *trompe l’œil* and surrealism to the symbolic function of the mirror as a site of distortion and self-deception.

The session also welcomes critical reflections on contemporary media environments, propaganda, fake news, algorithmic governance, and digital filter bubbles, as well as on conspiracy narratives and their persistence as expressions of deep-seated fears of chaos and loss of control. Attention may further be given to the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of manipulation, including cases in which manipulation itself becomes an artistic strategy or a narrative device, as well as to literary figures of the Seducer—such as Don Juan or Faust—understood as emotional and metaphysical manipulators.

The thematic directions outlined above are not restrictive. Contributions exploring the imaginary of manipulation from other theoretical perspectives, disciplinary frameworks, or cultural domains are equally welcome.

References:

Bachelard, G. (1958). *The poetics of space* (M. Jolas, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press. (Original work published 1958)

Bourdieu, P. (1980). *The logic of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1980)

Castoriadis, C. (1975). *The imaginary institution of society* (K. Blamey, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1975)

Durand, G. (1960). *The anthropological structures of the imaginary* (M. Sankey & J. Hatten, Trans.). Brisbane: Boombana Publications. (Original work published 1960)

Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1975)

Foucault, M. (1976). *The history of sexuality, Volume I: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York, NY: Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1976)

Jung, C. G. (1954). On the psychology of the trickster-figure. In *The archetypes and the collective unconscious* (Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Vol. 9, Part I, pp. 255–272). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Scholars interested in presenting papers (not exceeding 25 minutes in duration) are invited to submit **the Registration form** via email **no later than April 10, 2026**. Confirmation of participation will be communicated via email by **April 15, 2026**.

Prior to publication, all submissions, written in English, French, Spanish, or Romanian, will undergo an evaluation process conducted by the editorial committee. **The selection will be rigorous, as each paper will be subject to a double-blind peer review and an anti-plagiarism detection.** Following this process, the accepted papers will be published in *Incursiuni în imaginar*, the official journal of the Speculum Center, based in Alba Iulia, Romania (indexed in ERIH+, EBSCO, MLA, CEEOL, DOAJ, and Index Copernicus).

Abstracts should be submitted via email to Maria Mureșan at: elimuresan@gmail.com

Participation Fee – A fee of 150 lei/ 30 Euro must be transferred to the following account:

Payments in RON (Romanian participants):

Account details:

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Organizing committee:

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Attention! – Please note that the conference is planned as an in-person event, except for international participants.