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## Horizons of the Positivistic Imagination of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Para)Science

### Summary

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a powerful breakthrough of paradoxical positivistic imagination in Western Europe. This breakthrough can appear quite vulgar and primitive in respect to ancient mythology or Christian socio-cultural and religious traditions as eviscerating them, but at the same time in the context of momentary metahistory the 19<sup>th</sup> century is particularly interesting as a period of distinctive socio-cultural, mytho-poetic and parascientific eclecticism during which idealistic (in the context of positivism) maximalism was paradoxically, desperately employed in the attempt to expose “old prejudices” while unknowingly drawing from the same – deep, wide – old cultural mytho-poetic, mytho-philosophical and religious tradition.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the foundations of modern science were laid. However, this was also a time when “cold experimental objectivism” and deeply mythological, even mystical-esoteric, occult contents existed in mutual paradoxical correlation. It was a period of a new brutal mytho-mechanical poetics which gave birth to psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis and even more unusual sciences, now called parapsychology or parasciences which were devoted to the study of the soul and tried to prove its existence and even capture it.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the non-classical philosophical ideas spread, in the context of a particular

meta-psychological fracture the deep human psycho-existential levels were rediscovered which derived from mysterious quasi-metaphysical sources often related to the cosmogonical sphere as well as sexual (which also derived from quasi-mystic depth typical even of the later Sigmund Freud psychoanalytical theory) and other spheres. For example, depending on the parascientific direction, such new terms as melancholy, psychopathology or neurosis, attributed to the hysteria, often have been associated with quasi-metaphysical contents and regarded as certain (“scientifically” understandable) *soul* deviations from (quasi-metaphysical or quasi-occult) the norms. For example, methods of mesmerism and hypnosis showed that hidden, latent psycho-contents, as if some active triggers (one could say – demons) influence, cause neurotic cases.

In this article I will try to focus on parascientific, paraexperimental system developed by Hyppolyte Baraduc, one French scientist of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who would be more accurately described as a parapsychologist; the essence of this system is to prove and demonstrate (visualize) not only the existence of ethereal vibrations, a certain *substance*, which could be called *a soul* or *a spirit*, but also its connection to the universal intelligent cosmic power. Hyppolyte Baraduc is often referred to as one of the

more important pioneers of parapsychology. His system of “scientific method” today is more understood within the context of esoteric meanings, however its interestingness lies in the fact that it represents not the pure mystical occultism but seemingly impartial, experimental science; that part of it (which spread namely in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) which believed that with the help of the pure scientific language it could substantiate the postulates of classical idealism and especially ancient natural history, at the same time paradoxically as if

“demystifying” and “negating” them. Baraduc’s “scientific experiments” are interesting in that they distinctively eclectically reinterpret philosophical tradition of antiquity and especially Aristotelianism and lend to it paradoxical, brutally modern features. In addition Baraduc, just like, for example, the 19<sup>th</sup> century neurologist Jean Martin Charcot in the case of hysteria nosology fixation, has left in his work nonetheless interesting and paradoxical iconography of photographic visualization of ethereal substance or *a soul*.

**Key words:** positivism of 19th century, Hyppolite Baraduc, imagination, parapsychology, etheric vibration, etheric body, soul, antiquity.