

Sandu Frunză – *Symbolic Communication and Seduction* *
- Review –

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Symbolic communication represents an essential dimension inherent in the human being. The volume *Comunicare simbolică și seducție (Symbolic communication and seduction)*, authored by Professor Sandu Frunză, offers a complex and comprehensive picture of the manner in which the symbolic dimension is regained in postmodern society.

The volume is composed of five articles published by the author in several important journals, but this fact does not interfere at all with the continuity of the volume altogether. On the contrary, the main parts of the volume represent different perspectives on the topic approached by the author.

We can identify three key levels in the analysis proposed by Sandu Frunză. At the first level, the author focuses on the necessity of a philosophy of communication that would question the idea that in a media-based society, communication is the main mechanism that generates the construction of symbolic reality. Another essential aspect in Frunză's analysis focuses on the presence of religiosity in postmodern society. His perspective emphasizes the importance of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane in understanding communicational society as a space where secularization does not eliminate the presence of the sacred, but institutes new ways of conceiving it and relating to it, due to the presence of a weak form of transcendence. The "camouflaged seduction of the sacred", operationalized by media communication, is described by Sandu Frunză in the analysis of advertising, and of political communication in particular.

As a starting point for his argumentation, Sandu Frunză employs Aurel Codoban's philosophy of communication, which stipulates that the postmodern society witnesses a change of paradigm from the model of knowledge to the model of communication in the relation with the world and that reality is in fact a communicational construct. Along with the decline of the great narratives, man lacks absolute essence, his identity being created in the process of permanent communication with the alterity.

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Mass media plays a major part in the creation of reality understood as a communicational construct, and also in the construction of the postmodern selves. In this context, the author underlines the necessity of a philosophy of communication, a philosophy faithful to its synthesizer nature that would become not only a theory of communication but also a practice of communication, understood not in its traditional meaning as transmission of information, but as the main factor that shapes interpersonal relationships, or even more, as an “existential act.”

Sandu Frunză analyses the landmarks that allow us to adequately shape the picture of a mediated society. Thus, he considers that the “signification-truth”, the truth which is constructed in the process of communication is the concept of truth that functions in postmodern society. Obviously, this cannot be possible without referencing the concept of “weak transcendence.” The author remarks the fact that along with religion’s liberation from the rigid frameworks imposed by the absolute transcendence, we witness the manifestation of a minimal ethics which allows the rethinking of the communication ethics, an element extremely necessary in a media-based society.

Starting from Aurel Codoban’s analysis of the three models of understanding transcendence (the full, positive transcendence; the empty, negative transcendence; the weak, uncertain transcendence) and of their evolution through the history of philosophy and their impact on the metaphorical understanding of the world as a text, Sandu Frunză observes that the weak transcendence is the model that represents postmodernity. He offers an evaluation of the impact of this model of conceiving transcendence on concepts such as religion, religiosity or sacred. Even if from the perspective of the traditional religious institution this model is perceived as being the sign of a deep crisis, the key of interpretation proposed by the author, inspired from Eliade’s theory of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane underlines the fact that this model represents in fact the possibility of new forms of religiosity, in the context of communicational society.

In order to describe this context more accurately, the author resorts to Aurel Codoban’s concepts of “ontology of the significant surface,” characteristic for postmodernity, a world of significations without consistency, without origin, or depth. Furthermore, he considers that Codoban’s interpretation of laic atheism, as the main creation of occidental modernity, which is actually still a form of religiosity that brings into open new ways of acceding transcendence, concurs with the process of shaping the image of the postmodern world.

Sandu Frunză convincingly argues that the picture described outlines the important part played by the human intervention in the process of construction of reality, through communication. Hence, the transcendence is regained in the permanent pursuit of meaning and authenticity, characteristic for postmodernity.

A privileged space for the manifestation of the weak transcendence is identified by Sandu Frunză in the media culture. Using the anthropological approach of mass media proposed by Mihai Coman, the author emphasizes the presence of a “dilute” form of myth and mythical thought in media culture. He affirms that mass media are much more than a channel of transmission of information or values; they become a cultural system and play an important part in shaping the political and spiritual culture of a community, but also in the symbolic construction of reality.

The author considers that the thought based on a symbolic logic that differs from the rational thought, is not alien to the postmodern man. On the contrary, he claims that man's need for sacred is evident and that the symbolic thought is a human constant. These remarks are essential for Sandu Frunză's undertaking to demonstrate that mass media play a major role in the creation of mythical content and that their functions have the same nature as the functions that were fulfilled in archaic societies by the instances of mythical communication.

In the investigation of the "symbolic dynamic of modernity", the author introduces the concept of "the median space of religious experience", as representing the intersection between the human and the manifestation of the sacred, a space materialized by symbolic structures, imaginative constructs and symbolic actions. This space offers the symbolic material used by the postmodern man in the process of the construction of his own identity. Evidently, mass media represent one of the most important sources of the symbolic content that occupies the median sphere of the religious experience.

In the last two parts of the volume, Sandu Frunză focuses on the field of political communication as representing one of the areas where the myth and the ritual are essential dimensions in the communication process. The author describes the ritualic and mythical construction of political reality especially during the election campaigns.

In the context of the announced death of the areas significant for the human condition, Sandu Frunză underlines the importance of a reconceptualization of communication rather through the lens of a logic of significations, than through the lens of an instrumentalized logic. Thus, Sandu Frunză asserts that the main function of communication becomes that of a depositary and a vehicle of the significant, from the perspective of the human condition, contents.

The author takes Aurel Codoban's affirmation even further by affirming that "communication constructs reality", stating that advertising constructs reality, through "its fragmentary but full of existential engagement stories", through the mythical, symbolic, ritualic, dimensions contained by advertising. The author proposes a balanced position referring to the authenticity of the experience provided by the media culture on the whole, and advertising in particular, stating that "when we affirm that advertising creates reality we refer precisely at its capacity to offer, through damaged or hidden structures of depth, an authentic existence and an experience perceived by the person who lives it as being as high as possible."

With the volume *Symbolic communication and seduction*, Sandu Frunză outlines an accurate and balanced image of the postmodern context where, as Aurel Codoban says, "physical reality becomes more and more a footnote of the communicational reality." At the same time, the perspective proposed by Sandu Frunză provides us precious insights into the way in which "the camouflaged seduction of the sacred" penetrates the field of communication which constructs reality.