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THE HUMAN CONDITION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract: Review of Sandu Frunză's volume *Căutarea autenticității în era digitală. Eseuri despre poezie, filosofie și spiritualitate* (Searching the Authenticity in Digital Era. Essays on Poetry, Philosophy and Spirituality) (București: Eikon, 2023).

Key words: Digital Age, authenticity, human condition, poetry, philosophy, spirituality, Sandu Frunză

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Sandu Frunză's volume *Căutarea autenticității în era digitală. Eseuri despre poezie, filosofie și spiritualitate (Searching the Authenticity in Digital Era. Essays on Poetry, Philosophy and Spirituality)* is a collection of essays that offers the public a reading grid on the phenomena we face in the world today known as the Digital Age. The author being a scientific researcher, philosopher, communication lecturer and lover of the arts, we can assume that the he used the tools of scientific research to reconstruct the old QUEST-type formula, using elements that also belong to the area of communication, philosophy, mythology and spirituality. From the very beginning, the title of this volume suggests that we are confronted a crisis of authenticity in the digital era. Thus, by reading the volume, the reader can reconstruct the author's itinerary in his search and find out, at the end of his demonstrations, the means by which the man of the digital age can regain his authenticity.

The emergence of new technologies and especially artificial intelligence has given rise to a concern about the present and the future of the human being. New technologies have facilitated the development of social networks and multimedia platforms that allow the dissemination and access of a huge amount of information and knowledge, which contribute to the expansion of the global democratization process. Thanks to this development, the world is becoming a place where more and more people have access to knowledge and have the opportunity to specialize and express themselves in the most varied ways. General interconnection and communication strategies ensure access to information in real time and in any corner of the world to visitors and communities connected to communication networks. In addition, the possibility has appeared to build and enter communities of interest according to their passions or research interests of each individual or the groups they belong to. The system that provides online content consumers giving them information and materials suited to individuals' passions and specializations, allows them to build an image, promote themselves, and even try to find solutions to professional or personal problems they are facing. On the other hand, used in excess, virtual communication emphasizes the feeling of loneliness and anxiety that arises as a result of the neglect of unmediated human interrelationship. Our contemporaries feel invaded by the products promoted by IT companies and, above all, by the emergence of artificial intelligence, which seems to annihilate the human personality, replace it or even control it. The emergence of totalitarian

systems that demanded uniformity and unconditional conformity to fascist and communist ideological imperatives increased the anxiety and anonymity felt by the vast majority of the population. To survive under these conditions meant to accept the standard of double thinking and to renounce the uniqueness and diversity specific to the human being. This phenomenon has been extensively documented and presented both in scientific or artistic works that have sensitized the public and facilitated the fixation of these facts in the collective memory. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence now brings back the specter of a force that seems to threaten again the evolutionary prospects of the human being and his capacity to be consistent with himself in any life situation. Therefore, it seems natural to us that man tries either to evade the new communication practices, or to look for an existential situation that allows him to be present in all his acts, with his mind, speech, with his heart, to be honest with himself and the others and to behave in perfect harmony with himself.

Therefore, the author wants us to be authentic and even more, he has the ambition to show how we can preserve our humanity in a super-technological world, a world where nature seems alienated, where any unfulfillment and dysfunction can turn into anguish, a world where we cannot imagine communication without technology, a world in which the crisis of values and the crisis of religious morality is acutely felt, a world that feels threatened by Artificial Intelligence. For this reason, I find it comforting that the author recognizes the beauty of this world marked by the accelerated development of digital technologies and states lucidly: "never in its history has humanity known a higher level of economic prosperity, technological and scientific development and evolution of spiritual creation." On the contrary, they are willing to seek, find and affirm their integrity, their presence with body and soul in every moment of life, as an existential situation. For this purpose, the author proposes revisiting the fundamental themes and experiences assumed by the logic of becoming human and opening up to the metaphysical spheres of self-discovery through poetry, spirituality and philosophy.

Philosophy and poetry are considered by Sandu Frunză to be forms of depositing the sacred and also means of searching and expressing the metaphysical thrill of existence. The author takes the ontology of the sacred, as presented by Mircea Eliade in his works, to show that the sacred functions as an organizer of all existence, beyond the particularities conferred by the human imaginary in different cultures or geographical areas. Thus the behaviors, meanings, types of communication and expectations of individuals

and communities in the digital age are explained. I consider important that the author manages to explain that it is about behaviors and evolutions that have always been part of the human being, have been preserved and continue to exist. He demonstrates that today, this continuity helps individuals to position themselves and react naturally in the conditions offered by new technologies: virtual space, social networks, the need for personal development, the need for balance in the four dimensions of existence, physical, social, personal and spiritual. The author shows that all these can be achieved through various practices such as meditation, contemplation, celebration of love and philosophical counselling.

The well-constructed and argued examples and demonstrations by Professor Sandu Frunză refer to the transformative power of love and the conquest of individual freedom as inner freedom. This approach benefits from philosophical contemplation which can be a means of investigating and viewing reality, in a search for authenticity. Following the footsteps of Mircea Eliade, the author reminds us that this inner journey should have an initiatory dimension, intended to help the individual to approach and accept the various existential situations that man goes through during his becoming. Thus, by alternating or unifying physical and spiritual practices, the contemporary man accepts more easily his position in the relational universe that involves connecting with others as a method of finding the personal dimension. At the same time, the facilitation of human communication through digital technologies demonstrates the human being's need to symbolically regain the archaic structure of the location of individuals or a community at the center of the world and, implicitly, highlights the human being's need to regain the cosmic dimension of his existence.

In Sandu Frunză's view, the contribution of love takes various forms in this process. We recall here the love that begins with the individual concerned with himself and is fulfilled by the actions undertaken in order to produce good in the life of those close to him. This demonstration of the love of others can be broadened and viewed in its social dimension, which involves the construction of interpersonal relationships, relationships with otherness, considering the need for belonging and recognition of individuals and completed with the human need to love and be loved. This way, the author highlights the symbolic value of love that can be communicated and even celebrated, in order to become a constitutive part of the way individuals define themselves and place themselves in the world. Poetry, love, philosophical dialogue, different forms of

communication, spirituality and even the emergence of Artificial Intelligence are considered by Sandu Frunză to be expressions of the human creativity.

Therefore, the author discusses the diversity that has arisen as a result of the development of communication technologies, global economic relations, networking, population and labor mobility, and the need to build relationships based on Cultural Intelligence and Spiritual Intelligence. Sandu Frunză shows that these forms of intelligence develop in the context of their harmonization with human reality, with the need to express its potential and value, and leads to awareness of the need for dialogue and interpersonal and institutional communication. Cultural Intelligence assumes a multiperspective context in which the development of Artificial Intelligence, economic globalization and intercultural connections are included. In addition, cultural diversity today also implies the need for individuals to harmonize with otherness, encountered both in real and virtual space, and, lately, it implies harmonization with radical otherness represented by forms of Artificial Intelligence.

We appreciate the fact that the author brings into discussion the challenges brought to the individual and communities by Artificial Intelligence and clearly demonstrates the fact that humans cannot be completely replaced by robots. Sandu Frunză reminds that, in any community and in any era, the development of Cultural Intelligence is part of the recovery program of our humanity, and also that Spiritual Intelligence is specifically human because it helps us give meaning and value to life. Here are the author's words: „the ethics of technology teaches us that entities such as algorithms, machine learning entities, robots, etc., although they can distinguish between good and bad choices in a moral context, they cannot understand the abstract ethical principles underlying the ethical decision. The entities created by man, which we connect with Artificial Intelligence, are not accessible to live the moral, religious, spiritual experience. The current stage of philosophical and ideological projections reveals that man is the only being capable of developing spiritual Intelligence and being its bearer. Spiritual intelligence involves forms of transcendence and self-transcendence that machines cannot achieve at this stage of their development. As the creator of Artificial Intelligence, the human being keeps spiritual experiences only for himself, for now."

Perhaps to emphasize the impossibility of renouncing human creativity, in the world built on technology and communication, Sandu Frunză does not hesitate to convey messages and suggestions

from other fields of knowledge, from mythology, religion and even the fine arts. We have in mind here his book cover which features a detail from Vincent Van Gogh's beautiful work, *The White House at Night*. Right from the cover illustration, the author suggests an illumination, a deciphering of the meanings of the existential situation of man faced with the challenges of Artificial Intelligence in the digital age and with the need to combine concerns related to technology with creativity and the expression of his humanity, essential elements for the human being and coming from philosophy, spirituality and poetry. Therefore, we can say that the volume *Searching for authenticity in the digital age* serves the author's intention to give us a handy tool when we feel the need to renew the thrill of our humanity.

As I demonstrated in a previous study, *The Odyssey of M. Eliade's Heroes. A meditation on time*, there is an evident parallelism among the concepts we encounter in Mircea Eliade's scientific and fictional works, the concepts of time and space being convincingly illustrated in his short stories and novels. It seems important that in Sandu Frunză's poetry we find the same concern for the transposition of the concepts developed and commented in the works dedicated to philosophy and communication practices, in a form that increases the understanding of contemporary problems and reaches depth through the use of poetic language. The themes of the essays in this volume reverberate in the poems included in the volume *My Sweet Autumn*, (2024), published by the Neuma publishing house. Coming from philosophy and communication, Sandu Frunză's love poem reflects the author's concern to give an account of the world in which we live. The poet tries to explain and offer solutions by talking about the influence of contemporary civilization on the human being and, in particular, on poets and poetry: „In the digital age / Poets will become romantic again / to be able to tell the story / of the salvation of man as man /. The story of our postmodern spirit / of another time / they will build it with the science of placing wood / to light / the secret fire of the digital self" (*Condemnation of romance*). The hustle and bustle of everyday life, the colorless streets and the roar of social networks can sometimes blur the images dreamed or seen before and even the memories. But the voices, the story, the stillness, the silence and the words that magically replace the youthful energy remain. "Leave only my words / Saints / ...Only words / Keep us together" (*Only words*). The poet feels that human relationships, nature itself and the daily tumultuous and communication practices of the digital age can be beautified by the love that vibrates in the souls and bodies of the

lovers. "If only you knew / how much it hurts me / The invisible space that separates us /...In a gallop of manes in the wind / in a cavalcade of wings / descended from the sky / You arrived" (*Distance*). In his humility, the poet recognizes the simplicity of the joy of meeting his beloved, understanding that "Nothing can be more beautiful than / your ankles / caressed by the grass (And your ankles in the grass). However, in order to sublimate the physical dimension of love, the author resorts to images of sacredness and transcendence, "If you had not existed / God would have cried in me / And would have watched over me until your birth" (*If you would not have existed*); „I would like God / to stay a while longer / here with me / ...Only he understands / how much my soul loves you / (*Hymn*). Often, in this volume, the dance of love is marked by the intrusion of the everyday with all its procession of anxieties, noise, speed, weariness and concerns that interpose between the poet and his muses. Thus, the poems seem like a continuous attempt to restore the primordial unity that can be found in all the manifestations of love recorded by the poet. "Eros always comes / from an all-encompassing unknown / and universal / like a sublime shudder, similar / to the trotting of a horse / running in the moonlight / as if only thus / could live and die" (*A sublime shudder*).

Putting together these two ways of reflecting and valuing the human condition under the technological insertion of the digital era in the human life, the author is aware of the complexity of life's trials, as a result of the challenges launched by Artificial Intelligence. The poet and philosopher Sandu Frunză brings in support of his demonstration the possibility of rediscovering the technologies of the self that involve combining the passion for technology with the sublime flight of creativity that comes from poetry, spirituality and philosophy. At the end of his search, the author demonstrates his confidence in the cathartic force of love both through philosophical reflections, mythological references, examples of new communication practices, and through his poetic speech.

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