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Review of the Volume *"Publicitatea construieste realitatea"* [Publicity Constructs Reality] by Sandu Frunză

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Abstract: *This paper is a review of the volume "Publicity Constructs Reality. Essay on the Human Being, Religion and Publicity in the Consumer Society" published by Professor Sandu Frunză at Eikon Publishing House in Bucharest, 2023.*

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The volume of Professor Sandu Frunză, recently published in 2023 at Eikon Publishing House in Bucharest, gives me the opportunity to illustrate the way in which the spiritual tradition recovered in postmodernity becomes a way of signifying the real, in such a way as to bring back the myth, the magic, the totem, the taboo to the attention of others, through modern or postmodern institutions, such as that of publicity, which do no other but exploiting the power of archetypes and symbols.

In a society that is based on what we could call the asceticism of the indefinite acceptance of totality, without questioning anymore the role of the Divine - for example through the presence of the Great Mother, in the form of all things and phenomena - the sacred symbols suffer an interpretative adrift, becoming power-images, intended to attract attention, to arouse passion and legitimize appropriation - becoming, in other words, publicity.

The book of Professor Sandu Frunză brings into discussion the fact that in contemporary society we are rather talking about a dissolution of the relationship with the Divinity and a marginalization of this One, not of an elimination of the Divinity nor of a transcendence of the anguish related to the presence of the Divine, but of its marginalization, its exile into the trivial, into the utensil, meant to fulfil a pragmatic, utilitarian task, that of attractor of perception and instigator of a desired action by the manipulator of phantasms, the one who takes the place of the old experts of the sacred, bureaucratically becoming the expert in communication, in advertising or in public relations.

Religious symbolism, in order to attract and to generate and use phenomena of consciousness for commercial purposes, is taken up by publicity and by digital culture in general as a symbolic construction of reality, offered under the sign of the fragmentary in advertising. Publicity, the author of the volume in question tells us, generates a new eschatology - that of the seduction of the immediate, of transforming reality into artefacts, into consumer goods, intended to be devoured by the individual consumer.

From the totality of existence, of all possibilities of being, the force of desire extracts for the viewer's consciousness a fragment/a cutout from reality that it presents to us as being in a form of imperialism of values, abundance having the role of an originary seduction. Abundance is, after all, another term used in a culture dissociated from the relationship between subject and object, in its traditional sense - in a post-semiotic culture - an expression of the originary totality to which the individual is called to have access through consumption.

The author of the volume talks about fetishism, about commodities and advertising, but also about taboos and prohibitions in advertising, as well as about the exploitation of the need itself of detaching from objects for themselves and the transformation of objects from consumable goods into symbolic goods, which not only attract attention but deliver, through their presence, the promised paradise from the publicitary discourse. Paradoxically, detachment from objects as having a value in themselves is realized by hypervaluing the brand image of products that are not consumed for their pragmatic value but are captured by the individual in the sphere of his own existence, sipping their essence in a vain attempt to fill with meaning one's own existence, excluded from the act of signifying by the very adherence to the interpretative pact that places the receiver of the publicitary discourse in a subordinate position to the advertising offerer.

Professor Sandu Frunză tells us about taboo, fetish and transgression, in relation to the prohibitions and ethical correlations of publicity. The object is transformed into its opposite, inverting the semiotic relationship between Me and the Other, as being actually an exploration of the Otherness that must be devoured, consumed, to become our own. The volume speaks about the recovery of totemism in publicity, about totemic representations in publicitary discourse and, at the same time, about the rediscovery of intersubjectivity.

An example from the book of Prof. Sandu Frunză is that of political publicity, which is nothing but an institution of the political, as a privileged relationship with Otherness. Otherness is deconstructed to the status of fellow citizen of the other, and living together is regulated by the institution of the political. Living together disappears as mystical fact, becoming a political one, the empyrean of metaphysical relations with the Other descends to the Acropolis and from here to the Agora, as the absurd theatre of the political relationship with the other. In order to be consumed, however, this political relationship must be presented to the individual as having not only a celestial origin but also as being the storehouse of the divine nectar - which can however be squeezed from the banality of talk shows..

The process of social construction of reality is a semiotic one, through which the Self justifies itself in front of the Other, but also justifies the other in front of the consumer's own subjectivity of the reality virtualized by publicity. However, from a certain perspective, there is no "other" *per se*, but a construct that the individual applies to everything that appears to be a non-self, and the role of publicity is to break the semiotic dissymmetry, making the alterity, the non-self, and the subject's own self, to become indistinct, both

melting into the non-substantiality of the image, of the icon, which imposes itself on the real.

Investing the other with being is first of all an act of appreciating the other's presence by detaching a significant fragment from one's own consciousness, thus investing the other with being, precisely from your own being, this being the core of the process of social construction of reality, the Other appearing in consciousness only when this Other is invested with responsibility, in a manner similar to that described by Levinas.

The investment of the Other with being is, at the same time, an investment of the Self with being, and the publicitary act makes possible a surrogate relationship between Me and the Other, which, however, uses symbols of a religious nature - but still invested with the power to create this semiotic bridge between Self and Otherness.

Even if these presented aspects did not completely follow the line of the lecture of the book of Prof. Sandu Frunză, these ideas were inspired by the lines of his volume, and by the expressive power they store in. We therefore strongly recommend to anyone interested in the numinous symbolism masked in the pragmatic publicitary act, to discover this in the book of Professor Sandu Frunză.

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