

Aurel Codoban – an Existential Stylist: From Desire to Love as Communication Instrument

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Abstract

Philosophical counseling proves to be today among the most complex intervention forms in the postmodern individual's daily life. Aurel Codoban, existential stylist, proposes a way to interpret and act in the existential field. He starts from the premise that philosophy must propose a way of life. He takes on a philosophical practice that builds an ontology of detail in which the fundamental element in the human condition definition is no longer rationality but desire. As existential stylist, the philosopher elicits in his analyses the benefits of philosophical counseling on the love-desire relationship in the context of transformations in individuals' lives along five dimensions as an existential datum of the human being: physical, social, personal, spiritual and religious. In this context, love as a cognition instrument denotes the way postmoderns use the resources of desire for personal development, alterity cultivation, and subject instituting as relational reality. Bringing together erotic desire and the desire for transcendence, love proves to be a transfiguring force in the postmodern world, even if some of the forms we used to associate to love are blurred or metamorphosed.

Keywords: Pre-theoretical, ontologizing, factual life, facticity, self-world, original science, categorial explication, hermeneutics of facticity

1. Philosophy as a way of your life

I propose an encounter with love in a philosophical perspective developed by an existential stylist. He challenges us to understand philosophy as an existential style that should bring balance to our life. This philosophy is designed so that you, postmodern human being, may find yourself in it. If positive results in your professional life were not lacking; if you

live with an innocent freedom everything emotional you take upon yourself responsibly; if you have a living standard above average in your generation; if the educational system has provided sufficient resources but your option for personal development at a new level is still open; if you are comfortable when you look in the mirror but nevertheless you feel that something is not visible enough on your face, that something is missing which you were never willing to admit was absent in your life, it means you are at a stage in your personal development that needs the support of an existential stylist. Philosophical counseling may be a solution to take one more step forward to personal accomplishment and growth together with the others. I do not want to exclude the fact that you may call on a variety of counseling forms for this purpose. But I believe that philosophical counseling is an alternative not to be refused.

One name in the Romanian cultural context that we associate to theoretical reflection and philosophical practice is that of philosopher Aurel Codoban. In his most known book, *Amurgul iubirii*, he states: “I do not aspire but to be an existential stylist”. (Codoban 2004, 15) In view of this statement, Aurel Codoban reveals himself as a hermeneut of love who construes an ontology of detail. The starting point is the relationship between reason and desire. His philosophical reflections on desire are meant to take us out of the traditional way of thinking about existence and invite us to take a road to “recover what was existential and initiatory in the old philosophy, accepting criticism and going from philosophizing to interpreting, because interpreting involves understanding and only understanding may change life. This hermeneutic of love belongs to the ontology of detail as its finality aims to change our life in view of what for reason is merely detail. The ontology of detail in the existential sense, a philosophy reaching its purpose, that of a profane initiation in the absence of any assumed charisma”. (Codoban 2004, 15) Philosophy as a way of life must be understood as a form of life representation in a lived intensity similar to the one described by Nietzsche when he talks about cultural styles and associated ways of life like an art of living. (Nietzsche 1994; Codoban 2011; Bondor 2008) Aurel Codoban does not intend to provide an efficient method to

guarantee results at the end of the road you have followed. His proposal is for a philosophy as a way of life, an existential style.

2. Love and the ontology of detail

The new philosophy proposed by Aurel Codoban is centered on love, because love is the most complex communication way that Western man has developed so far. Considering one of the most famous statements by the philosopher: “communication construes reality” (Codoban 2009), we had to anticipate that love and communication would always be at the base of the existential construction style proposed by Codoban. To him, love institutes significance, it is a mode of existential expression. Even when we deem it the most important of expressions, it still remains among the possible ones. Love, therefore, pertains to a register of interpretation that we achieve in the realm of a symbolic world conscience. (Codoban 2011; Frunză 2014); Frunză 2017a; Frunză 2017b)

Such an understanding of love has its place in the interest zone of Aurel Codoban whom Elvira Groza adequately describes as “a restorer of symbolic messages and trainer of messengers, who proposes a philosophy model that recovers signifying rationality, truth’s perspective as interpretation and world metaphor as cryptic text to talk about being’s absence-presence and about divinity’s silence”. (Groza 2015, 120) In the journey to symbolic systems that he proposes, the philosopher advises to take for main companion not modern rationality but desire, the postmodern opposition of that rationality. Aurel Codoban notes that in the past desire was treated as something secondary, as a detail of man’s feelings as a rational being. With postmodernity, what used to be a detail becomes central in man’s experience. Human nature has to be explained in terms of this ontology of detail. Guided by such companion, we shall learn how up-to-date is the ancient philosophy in which, together with Plato, we find that “the presence of desire tells us that we are not from this world in which we are now but rather belong to the other world, namely to the absolute. Desire is the way in which our hunger for the world of essence as prisoner beings in the world of appearances”. (Codoban 2044, 27) Although this feeling of the absolute is always present in the

Western man, Aurel Codoban proposes being aware of and appropriating a few details that have intervened in the cultural development of the Western man, whom we find at the end of a creation process culminating for the moment in the postmodern thought. Choosing desire is the most important nuance of all accompanying life registers.

So as to understand the complexity of relations involving desire and love understood as a cultural phenomenon, let us remember that philosophical reflections have the tendency to distinguish between desire and love, positioned at two different levels of human being accomplishment. A classical example is that of Jose Ortega y Gasset, who separates desire from love. He opposes desire to love because desire involves a tendency to possess the desired reality, to such extent that it gets to be part of the one experiencing the desire to possess. This explains the fact that desire disappears as soon as it is satisfied, while love is an ever renewing desire, endlessly growing. The philosopher argues the passive nature of desire, which demands that the desired object settle in its world, and the active nature of love *par excellence*, which supposes going out of oneself to live in the other, to assert the other as one's gravity setting the whole existence into motion. (Ortega y Gasset 1957, 11) In this way, a hierarchization of desire and of love is instituted, in which love is always in the privileged place. Such positing of love, deeply rooted in the Christian culture, belongs to the history of the Western spirit and permanently adapts to it.

However, irrespective of the philosophical distinctions that we could make regarding the behavior of the one who desires and of the one who loves, or of the alternatives in the accompanying emotional registers, we cannot ignore the fact that love cannot oppose love and cannot be separated from desire. Among the multiple facets it may display, especially two specific types of desire may account for the way love functions: on the one hand the erotic desire, on the other the desire for transcendence. Both forms of desire appear to be fundamental because they pertain to the existential datum of the physical world – the first of the worlds we can highlight when we see man as inhabiting the five worlds: the physical world, the social and interpersonal relations world, man's internal world, the

spiritual world and the world of the sacred. This world structure that man inhabits with his entire being was showcased by the existential therapy theorizing man's belonging to four dimensions. (Deurzen & Martin Adams 2011; May 1986; Staicu 2017) Given the context of Romanian spirituality, and the fact that Aurel Codoban is a remarkable philosopher of religions (Codoban 1998), I preferred to divide the fourth dimension into the spiritual world and the world focused on assuming the sacred and religion as such. In terms of this existential datum, of the man inhabiting the five worlds, we have to accept that the physical world is a permanent concern to the human being who is at the intersection of several energies under the form of desire.

The erotic desire is based on the fact that existence is a source of pleasure and we have to fully enjoy its pleasures. Among the sources of pleasure, the erotic pleasure is most intensely experienced by the human being. It is physical and metaphysical at the same time, being always accompanied by a symbolism integrating it into a symbolic construction form that favors the unification of the worlds successively inhabited by man. World plurality pertains to the way in which we try to describe, understand and conceptualize the five worlds. Desire is abandoning oneself and returning to oneself at the same time, and this aspect is best revealed in the way man valorizes this dimension of the eros in the daily life.

As regards the desire for transcendence, it also belongs to the physical world. This explains it in close connection to the existential datum of man's finitude. Finding oneself as a finite being in a universe perceived to be either vast or endless, man experiences the need to go beyond the limits of human finitude as a desire for transcendence to the infinity. The desire for transcendence is, in Paul Tillich's terms, a quest for the ultimate reality (Tillich 1961, 3-11), that we normally include in the Western concept of God. It is present in the physical world tightly linked to limited corporality and earthly life finitude. The desire for transcendence is tied to the presence of death and appears often associated to its overcome. The two desire forms, suggestive in the understanding of the physical world, are part of a wider complex of desire that we call love. Often in

symbolic thinking analyses we find references to the proximity of death and love or even to their bound. Love and death togetherness is facilitated, among others, by this encounter of erotic desire and the desire for transcendence in the intimacy of love. We may ask – like Rosenzweig (Rosenzweig 1971) – whether love comes from the divinity and man lives all his loves with God's love over him. Or we may ask whether God is loved with extremely human love extrapolated and totalized in the imaginary of the sacred in divinity – like Feuerbach does. (Feuerbach 1881) Irrespective of the way in which we ask the question, there is no shred of a doubt that we cannot separate the idea of love from the idea of transcending and transcendence, even if we may open a debate on the authentic forms of its representation. Love includes the two desire forms (erotic and transcending), no matter how transfigured its hypostases might appear to us. Aurel Codoban has in mind this “desire metaphysics” when he states that “the Western representation of love is the specific product of a religious sacralization of sexuality, whose interdictions and taboos add to the Platonian ontology of transcendence”. (Codoban 2004, 8) The metamorphoses series known to love reveals an axis that crosses the worlds shaping the personal ego. It is born in the physical dimension and takes an ascending path in the experience of each world to the religious one. In this way one should understand the statement: “in philosophy, love is the shaped, tamed, cultivated desire”. (Codoban 2004, 7) As an existential stylist, Aurel Codoban possesses the art of this philosophical cultivation of the passage through worlds, of unifying ruptures and concepts settling in a germination for an ever new crop, for a growing feeling that life is worth living.

3. Taming desire and raising the subject in communication

One of the resources, in desire theorizing, remains beyond time, the Freudian theory of the libido. (Freud 1961) Eros, be it together with Thanatos or not, is often deemed to be a permanent resource of spiritual energy and personal development. One of the major forces used by Aurel Codoban to build his vision on desire is a personal understanding of Freud's

idea about desire as an organizing and transfiguring factor of the entire human existence. Quite importantly, he notes that in the impulse theory, “desire is in the sphere of what we traditionally call love, because it is linked to sexuality, the protean and metamorphosing nature of satisfying it is probably the most explosive of psychoanalysis discoveries”. (Codoban 2004, 61) The need for love of postmodern man and man of all times is what triggers most complex forms of integrating perspectives of erotic desire and elements of “metaphysical desire” in a joint discourse, with impeccable internal logic – love discourse and its varied spiritualized nuance. This resignification of sexuality leads the philosopher to a new image of the reconstruction in desire dynamics. Desire is valorized as a form of subject’s self rediscovery which becomes actual desire. Such desire celebration is based on a postmodern discourse on the libido as relational communication structure. In terms of love as communication form – proposed by the existential stylist Aurel Codoban – in fact, “desire is the wish to be desired”. (Codoban 2004, 67) The subject construction in relationship with the other is based on the individual’s capacity growing to become both subject and object of desire in a logic of being and nonbeing, presence and absence overlap, of recognized alterity and self-totality.

It is no mere accident the fact that such philosophical perceptions may be found, in various forms, in the motivational literature. One of the most substantive proposals to valorize sexual desire transfigured for personal development, success and even substantial financial gains is that proposed by Napoleon Hill. Erotic desire taming, shaping and cultivation are important to Napoleon Hill for one’s health, stimulated creativity and even genius-quality. Emphasizing the extraordinary power of sexuality when shaped as a transfiguring force, Hill states that “the libido is the highest and most subtle form of human emotion. It increases the mind’s vibration pace like no other emotion and turns the brain’s imaginative faculties to function along the parameters of a genius”. (Hill 2013, 86) In terms of communication, Napoleon Hill posits his analyses against the background of energies put together by the minds deciding to participate in the Superior

Intellect. This way, he opines that erotic energy may participate in the mind-to-mind communication in which the enhanced creativity translates into greater success.

Although as an existential stylist he let himself be fascinated with the various forms of combined feeling and imaginary, Codoban does not go so far in his reflections like Napoleon Hill in valorizing erotic desire. In view of bringing together in the act of love the two types of desire (erotic and transcending) it is significant that he is interested in “setting coded coordinates of interpersonal relationships based on desire (appetite capacity), feelings and sexuality, with the purpose of eroticism (pleasure), in their historical variants and actual status. It is a hermeneutics of interpersonal relationships, interested in the way these relationships have been shaped by the religious and philosophical definition of desire and by their representation in the Western novel series of love types: Greek-Latin eros, Christian agapè, passion-love, Don Juan love, romantic love, confluent love (corporal-symbiotic)”. (Codoban 2004, 13) All these elements that make the subject of the book *Amurgul iubirii* construct the idea of an irreversible transformation: that of substituting the position of the soul in Western tradition by the centrality of the body. Aurel Codoban shows the way previous eras imposed love forms such as passion love or romantic love that generated changes in the rapport body and soul that were reversible. With postmodernity, a phenomenon appears that the philosopher deems irreversible – the subject is born not from rational philosophical reflection but from desire, and through generalized desire as the centre of existence. The soul is no longer the main support, the body is and its new mythology of postmodern corporeity. As a matter of fact, in the spirit of such a mythology associated with science, religious studies abound in texts bringing together religion, nature, the body, medicine and spirituality, in an effort to reunite the natural and the supernatural, the material world and its hidden spiritual qualities. (McDonough 2016; Mironiuc et al. 2017; Untu et al. 2017) In such a context, unlike the unifying tendencies of the soul (and the imagined stories of the soul mates are relevant in this sense), the body brings separation and difference, that is

the alterity, “pleasure reconsiders difference versus unity, diversity versus uniqueness”. (Codoban 2004, 90) In view of philosophy as a way of life, a field of reflection and hermeneutical practices opens to valorize personal development starting from corporal communication and non-verbal communication practices. It is one of the fields in which Aurel Codoban excels as an existential stylist, as we shall see in his studies on gesture semiotics.

4. Love, ideology and political correctness

Aurel Codoban’s reflections are valuable to the understanding of what occurs in the physical world because “our corporal existence is the one that provides the possibility for love, passion as well as violence and domination”. (Codoban 2014, 149) Consequently, the physical dimension is the support to the other worlds, may they be personal, internal or social. The social world of interpersonal relationships may serve personal development as long as it is shaped by the love principle. Thus, the social world combines with the spiritual dimension of the religious and ideological creation. In a world in which intolerance is growing, we may use the tools proposed by Aurel Codoban as existential stylist to promote cohabitation and tolerance, even if we risk getting farther from the philosopher’s intentions. When we highlight such development of Aurel Codoban’s thought, we have to mention that he is not a theorist of multiculturalism and political correctness, but has substantial reflections on art sociology, anthropology of religion, sociology and philosophy of ideologies. So that, showcasing the potentially positive consequences of the resignification of love and ideology relation is benefic to the understanding of the opening that philosophy as a way of life may have.

Let us remember that Aurel Codoban noted: “the feeling of love seems to be universally spread. But we have to distinguish between the feeling of love and the idea of love adopted by a certain society and a certain era. The idea of love represents a set of rules, norms and codes based on which we can locate, identify, recognize and define love. Sometimes reflections on love become the ideology of a society and then we deal with a way of life, an art of love, an ethics, aesthetics and etiquette of

love”. (Codoban 2004, 23) We may notice today a particular mode by which love may be associated to the ideology of the Western society. In philosophy’s view as an existential style, we may valorize this art of combining ethics and etiquette.

In postmodern world, a series of metamorphoses of the sacred occur in social, organizational, and institutional practices, and in inter-human relationships. (Boldea 2017; Rhodin & Mao 2017) The art of love, associated to a way of life and a new world vision manifests in a way that diminishes previous forms but takes over part of the contents of traditional etiquette. In the Western world in which love used to be the organizing factor of the entire existence, we note that love’s central place is taken by the centrality of the respect as a foundational value for social conventions. Respect becomes the central value cultivated in professional environments and involving diverse forms of public cohabitation. Love culture is doubled by the culture of respect, and the choice to position oneself in one or the other culture does not seem simple. To emphasize the new encounter mode between love and ideology, I shall mention that one of the forms of harmonious cohabitation is generated by tolerance practices. In terms of communication, a special phenomenon is asserting tolerance as political correctness. Such a practice of tolerance would not have been possible without an increased importance of communication in the life of postmodern man. Political correctness is a consequence of the development of a tolerance discourse in the communication-built society. As a complex communication phenomenon, it brings about a new philosophy of linguistic practices and of interpersonal relationships construction languages. Considering that “Tolerance is the respect, acceptance and appreciation of the wealth and diversity of our world’s cultures, ways of expression and manners of expression as human beings” (*Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* 1995), political correctness must be associated to the respect and balance that man puts into interhuman relationships. Giving too much emphasis to the extreme manifestations of political correctness practices in certain specific American social and political contexts (Behr 1995), we risk eluding the benefits brought by multiculturalism

and political correctness in the American cultural milieu and subsequently extended as practice to of dialogue in all the regions where the will to construct open societies existed. Its beneficial effect lies first of all in the fact that it represents the indulging eye of tolerance we turn to the other. Its benefits are visible especially in the situation in which, since we do not have something positive to say, we plan at least to have the decency to not say anything negative about the realities we perceive to be different from our normal expectations, irrespective of our usual representations about life and the others. (Edward 2016) From this perspective, as we tolerance, political correctness is the capacity to refrain from doing harm. Political correctness is tolerance. Political correctness is one's assumed wish to do good. It does not function as a threatening *big brother*. It represents the good eye and the wish to do good and the joy to share the world's kindness with those who appear to belong to other worlds but with whom one lives every day. As a practice of tolerance, political correctness does not resemble love, but it teaches us that being good means all or nothing.

Although different from it, like love, political correctness is, in the postmodern terms of tolerance practices, a kind of call from paradise, a nostalgia of the being that comes for each and situates all differently and equally authentically in existence. Let us not forget, however, that the virtue of love may grow until it reaches the paradisiacal state. It can also suffocate us and take us to its hell if, step by step, we go deeper in its extreme and obsessive forms of its practice. Aurel Codoban says that "Excessive love, fetishizing sacralization of the loved object or of love are pathological. Excessive love that we direct to someone unsettles – by infatuation or pride – or leads to misfortune". (Codoban 2004, 11) Likewise, political correctness, when out from the comfort zone of respect, pushes us to the hell of violence and to an empty wish for understanding among people. In interhuman relationships, a sense of measure must be promoted as a constant moral and spiritual growth. It makes tolerance a practice of respect, capable to reach everyone's heart and clear the way for all following it. Tolerance is a complex form of appreciation and self-respect that one gracefully and gratefully turns to the others.

This is the main reason for which we should turn tolerance into a way of life. It must not develop into an ideology nor be abandoned to ideological practices, because they are inclined to take extreme forms. The sense of measure must govern it in all the particular aspects we may find in our daily life. Tolerance must be a way of being and of encountering the other in an existential dialog opening continuously towards respect and reciprocity. The essential is given by the light each one puts into the other to lit one's own life. In the philosophical thought, Levinas provides a constructive view fighting any violence, in which alterity is valorized by the very fact that the Infinite may be read on the Other's face – a good opportunity to bring it into existence. (Levinas 1969) In Christianity, this light was called love, love for the one close to you which is built on the love for oneself. Although routinely it is not associated to love, political correctness is a secular value rising from the urge "but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (KJV, *Leviticus* 19: 18). If we bring into discussion the interpersonal relationships sphere and place it on the grounds of the need to cohabitate, we may note one of the most generous ideas which, although not enunciated for this purpose, is in support of the need to recognize alterity: "What we may hope for from love is to impose alterity, difference, nonidentity and the obligation to recognize it... The alterity we have the occasion to meet is the presence of the other. If there is a place in which the other may be credited, may become a purpose for us not a means, this place is love" (Codoban 2004, 12), states Aurel Codoban in his reflections on the hermeneutic of love.

We are, thus, before an existential style practiced under the sign of presence, ethics and imperative respect. Recognizing the value of alterity includes this existential style built on the value of the human being in intersubjective relationships, even if it already coexists with several existential styles.

5. In lieu of conclusions: desire reconstruction and philosophical counseling

When self-identified as an existential stylist, Aurel Codoban merely proposes an intellectual exercise more often called philosophical counseling. Such a proposal brings a major

benefit to the one accepting it, because it is a type of service of limited circulation on the ideas market, of support and services. Aurel Codoban carries out such an activity as a volunteering service to his community. In this sense, he calls on informal meeting and dialogue frameworks, in the proceedings of the professor of philosophy, love hermeneutics, non-verbal communication or effective communication. In addition, there is his quality of theorist of multiple modes to reconstruct reality in the communication process, which brings additional contribution to his professionalism as an existential stylist. Such a source to improve life's quality and beauty should not be eluded because although it has developed very much in the past years and has penetrated Romania too (Marinoff 2018), philosophical counseling should be seen as a rare blue flower one must enjoy every time one has the chance to access it. Philosophical counseling is learnt over long periods of time, is lived and experimented permanently. A good philosophic counselor is the one who allows being invaded by text complexity to the same extent he/she allows the turmoil of life's complexity. The mystery of texts and of one's own life are useful instruments to decode the unknown in other people's lives, may they be metaphysical crises or simple approaches of philosophical dilemmas marking one's existence. All these ought to be visible but leave gentle traces in the other's world. As a philosopher one cannot enter the other's life and not make your presence felt, as much as one cannot enter the others' souls like you went into mud with your boots. Once the process is closed, philosophical counseling should leave the impression that it came with a flame born in the personal concerns from people's wisdom and the experience of lived life.

Such a flame belonging to natural world but always feeding on its own supernatural resources is, in its turn, love. If you listen to Aurel Codoban's thoughts on love, you will find that love is such a powerful force that is available to you because its source is not outside but deeply rooted in yourself, in the totally special energies born from desire. This explains the fact that love brings you closer to Being, it is manifested as an internal peace of your presence aspiring to reach transcendence. As long as you exist in the physical dimension,

you cannot lose love and love cannot leave you unless you have abandoned yourself. Love brings the graceful state of your presence with all the other beings in the calm energy you use to connect with those you wish to live the same life. Precisely for this reason, we say about love that it is a form to manifest communication. It aims for the depth of each man and each human being, as it indicates the imaginary world beyond finite forms, a model of any connection expansion. In this sense, we need to understand Aurel Codoban's statements which give love the quality of "paradisaal legacy".

However, we must not forget the existential philosopher's statement that "we are witnessing the dusk of love as metaphysical desire. Pushing it on a secondary plane in the love dynamics of this metaphysical dimension leads to a favoring of erotic desire. At the same time with the consecrated centrality of the body in the postmodern experience, "love – or "relationship" – no longer functions based on the archetype model, which was that of the androgyny and soul mate, but rather based on the difference and plurality of egos constituting us. Having thus access to multiple egos of various bodies, the sexual, erotic collector or even belonging to passion-love and romantic love, builds a collection of bodies or even souls that in late postmodernity, different from Plato, keeps them disjoint, does not want to amalgamate as archetypes. From the detail of uniqueness, one moves to the uniqueness of detail. (Codoban 2004, 97)

There is, however, a turning point that we may note as a potential field of desire reconstruction through specific intervention by an existential stylist. As a cognition instrument, love supposes a very complex dynamic. It keeps to itself the possibility to recover a permanent aspiration to transcendence and a presence of the Transcendence in the ideal of this aspiration. It is true this form of metaphysical love, that involves ascertaining the subject in rapport to the absolute, no longer has the face described by Christianity. It did not evade into the postmodern representations of the sacred either. It starts from the reality of the body and its spiritual integration in the ego construction imagined along the five dimensions

(physical, social, personal, spiritual and religious) that appear to us as an existential datum of the human being.

Such a process consecrating the human being, that supposes all existential dimensions, is possible because an indicator of postmodern crisis is the fact that “Personal life has become an open project: sexuality is now accessible in the development of various life styles in which interactions must be permanently negotiated and solved”. (Codoban 2004, 100) It is only now when love is threatened with emptying its metaphysical content, that the accompanying desire and pleasure are not reduced only to sensuality and physical pleasure. Pleasure always has a camouflaged spiritual tension, even if this is not always determining to the contextual significance that pleasure, and love implicitly, may have. This may be a starting point to develop a connection and a dialogue with the way love is understood in the community one belongs to. In such a context, philosophical counseling may create solutions to solve the crisis and may provide instruments to negotiate authenticity.

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