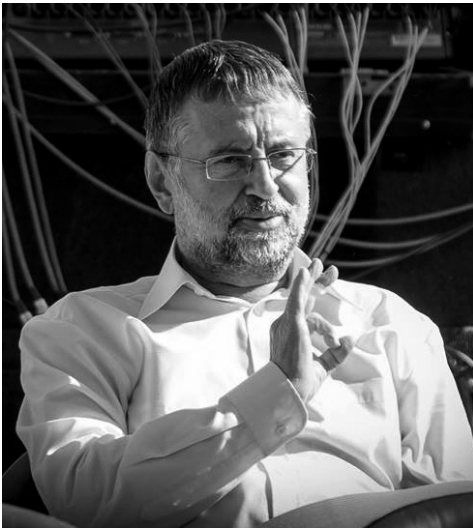

PHILOSOPHY

From Metaphysical Desire to the Desire of Being Desired

An Introduction to Aurel

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Codoban's Hermeneutics of Love



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Introduction

THE METAMORPHOSES undergone by postmodern love compel us to a philosophical reflection on love. The hermeneutics of love developed by Aurel Codoban is a strong argument in favor of the statement that philosophy and communication will become indispensable for the 21st century individual. As technological development will occupy a more significant place in our lives and our concerns, we must expect a new propensity to find the place that philosophical reflection has in our real life, as well as in our virtual life. The new technologies will be a pressure factor that will generate a return to the fundamental questions about the meaning of life, fundamental values, the new meanings brought into existence by the new ways of instrumentalizing reality. This time there will be no re-

course to philosophy as a discipline associated with scientific reflection, it will not be an epistemological approach, as we have seen in the cultural experience of modernity, because it is not knowledge but communication that will reveal the importance of returning to the foundations of life. From the perspective of a hermeneutics of love, such as that developed by Aurel Codoban, we can expect at least two sources of increased interest in philosophy. On the one hand, the centeredness of the body seems to be an important source, with the imperative it introduces in the reconfiguration of the particular elements of the condition of the postmodern man; with the need to rethink the existential dynamics assumed by the relationship between the physical, the social, the personal, the spiritual and the religious world; revealing the importance of love in the proper understanding of life and death interferences. On the other hand, the development of new technologies becomes significant, questioning the human condition and the necessity of redefining it, especially the elements based on the real-virtual complementarity, the improvement of the physical and mental performances of the human being, the rethinking of sexuality and love under the pressure of practices characteristic to the virtual environment.

Love, Life and Death

BY PUTTING postmodern human existence under the sign of transcendence without transcendence, Aurel Codoban's interest is focused on two forms in which it can manifest itself: love and death.¹ We usually say that love is attracted to beauty, so love is mostly related to life. When it is associated with death, it becomes nostalgia, it becomes longing, it is projected as an escape from the bosom of being. It is love that brings the gifts of life and offers itself to life. The most beautiful gift that love gives to life is the listening in silence. Such an active silence helps life ignore the whispers of death, the murmur of passing measured by the rhythm of nature, the funeral dynamics of the ritualization of life. Love is the one that envelops us with the breath of its presence, it encompasses us with its arms to keep us from being tempted by what the poets have described as the sweet kiss of death. In relation to our own life, there is no more faithful spirit than that of love. The fidelity of love is proven by the fact that, once we receive it in our lives, it only requires us to encourage it to watch and keep us in balance. Free from any obligation, love makes us feel free, more hopeful, to offer joy, to refuse the slavery of any kind of sadness and have the power to never bend the knee in the face of death. Such a perspective derives from the way we relate to our existence from the perspective of the relationship between being and nothingness. Love is part of being human and always involves engag-

ing in enriching the being with every love experience individuals undertake. Compared to love, which is the fullness of life, death is just an absence, a lack of being, which has no consistency, although in its absence Western man can no longer define his being, his presence, his fullness. This explains why there are human beings who are content with the simple fact that love exists, thus believing they are safe. This increase in security is one of the primary forces that underlines the role that love plays in someone's life. However, other dimensions can be added to this. I would like to mention here only the relational aspect, the inter-subjective and social dimension of love. One of the forms in which it manifests itself is visible in the act of weeping. If you love, you will never feel that you are crying by yourself, but your negative emotional state will always be accompanied by the feeling of an ineffable presence, which is nothing else but love itself.

This may be a reason to trust those who claim that the desire to love is born out of fear of loneliness. But I have always affirmed that the desire to love is rather born of the desire and the joy of being together. If we want to introduce the theme of fear, then I believe that our life has a deeper meaning if we explore fear on a more profound level and replace the fear of loneliness with the fear of death.

Although the angst in the face of death, as it was approached by existentialist philosophies,² is one of the most productive ideas in the philosophy of personal development, I would rather associate this fear with the feeling of numinous.³ Rudolf Otto explains the experience of the sacred from a double perspective: on the one hand, it offers an experience of extraordinary fascination before the spirit's greatness and infinity that flows into an empirical experience and, on the other hand, equally overwhelming is the failure experienced through the fear of not totally losing yourself in an experience of infinite life.⁴ This fascination, doubled by the shudder before the Absolute Presence, can be used as a metaphor for how love can be experienced on a personal level, depending on the different types of experiences individuals have throughout their lives. Fascination and anguish can also be part of the ritualization of the distance that love helps us travel between the limits of life assertion and the limits of death.

This dimension of total personal involvement is characteristic for the relational subject who has internalized love. With such statements that outline a life and death polarity, I do not want to suggest an interruption of the permanent relationship between life and death as distinct realities, but I want to emphasize that we can control the negative effects of such a common journey (we experience both life and the progression towards death) through the fact that love silently conceals death, fuelling the power of life with its enthusiasm.

Death appears to us as a historical event that intervenes in the life of the individual as a kind of end point only because we judge death strictly from the point of view of the physical dimension of human existence. If we approach this from

a spiritual perspective, we may notice that although it is very comfortable to define death as a landmark for the end of life, the presence of love is an indicator of the concomitance of life and death, even in systems where it is shown to us that at a certain time we reach a point where life and death take on completely different paths, one towards eternal life, another towards death associated with decay and disappearance from the mundane register of existence.

It is not by accident that we find life and death under this form of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Aurel Codoban's reading of Mircea Eliade's texts on the sacred and the profane reveals that the two realities cannot be separated, not only because they reflect a unique human stance but also because with postmodernity we can decipher a concealment of the sacred in the profane.⁵ The emptiness and the fullness, the presence and the absence are symbolic ways of referring to being. From the perspective of an ontology of love, life and death represent different ways of expressing existence, which can be defined through the relation to being. A further understanding can be found in the philosophy of communication if we bring into discussion the role that words and silence can have. Aurel Codoban said that "through the problematics of silence the problematics of being is introduced in communication . . . Silence is the unspoken state of words . . . Silence is the scent of being."⁶ Active silence or the silent listening that love offers us in the face of life and death problematics becomes plausible through a way of thinking that affirms "philosophy's asset of being the first-called to succeed religion . . . it is now the gnosis of a negative transcendence."⁷ In such a philosophy, love becomes a form of metaphysical desire in whose name one can live, but can no longer die.

From Love As Passion to the Sentimental-Erotic-Appealing Postmodern Model

As is the case with personal development masters, Aurel Codoban is interested in revealing a set of rules, norms, codifications that allow us to spot, identify, recognize, and even define love. His approach, however, takes into account the fundamentals on which these rules, norms and codifications can be built. At least three authors should be remembered when talking about the perspective on love presented by Aurel Codoban: Denis de Rougemont, René Girard, and Hugo Friedrich.⁸ Each of them can be seen, in various ways, as spirits that enrich the author's reflections over an extended period of his career as a philosopher and existential counselor. Their ideas germinate his personal perspective on metamorphoses that take place with the passage of the spirit

of Western love from love as passion to love emptied of the meanings of ultimate transcendence and the transformation of desire into pure transcendence.

In a very complex interpretative exercise, the philosopher uses love-passion as described by Denis de Rougemont to reveal what the Western sentimental-erotic-appealing model has become. Love-passion is a valuable resource in understanding what is happening with love in the horizon of Western sensitivity and thought, because, on the one hand, it reveals the special and unique character, the exceptionality of love, and on the other hand it is a concentration of what can be designated as a metaphysical desire, that particular type of desire for transcendence in which the one who loves aspires to an absolute of love and even gets to identify himself and the object of his love with the Absolute. In this way, love is closely related to desire. And in its evolution, it becomes substituted by desire at least in the role of the primary source of the positive energy of desire, whether it is related to pleasure, or to the desire of achievement on a spiritual or religious level. When the religious dimension is brought into discussion by Aurel Codoban, the religious horizon considered is not that of Christianity. Other horizons are considered, such as those of the forms of spirituality remote from the religious practices of Christianity, or forms of ancient philosophical spirituality, such as the erotic imaginary associated with Platonism. Or philosophical reflections such as the one proposed by Spinoza are valued in order to eventually reach the experiences of a desire closer to what is happening today with love, as those derived from the postmodern valorizations of Freudian psychoanalysis. First of all, we have a desire for the mortification of the body and the aspiration towards the realization of desire in the ideal plane of love. Second, we have desire as the foundation of human condition, of the transformation of the body into an instrument of action in order to grow the soul to self-redemption, free from passions and embracing the joys of life. And third, we have desire as associated with the profound psychic structures. It is a type of unconscious which, through phantasms and symbolic thinking, ensures the erotic balance of humans. Human reality is bound to communication and interpretation, everything becomes representation and discourse, no matter the plane in which it exists, always telling us something about desire; embodying, in fact, desire itself.⁹ These ways of analyzing love are relevant from the point of view of the different ways in which love is associated with desire and eventually becomes defined by it, even if, obviously and every time, it takes the form of metaphysical desire.

In order to understand the metamorphoses assumed by the dynamics of desire, it is necessary to understand the nuances undergone by the theme of desire with thinkers who, over time, profoundly influenced the Western discourse on desires, thinkers like Plato, Spinoza or Freud. Thus, we must note that, according to Aurel Codoban, “for Plato, the most important stance is the sky of pure

Ideas, the object of desire; for Spinoza, man is the subject of desire; for Freud it is desire itself, which later on constitutes the subject and object of desire. So, in Plato it is the soul, in Spinoza it is the soul and the body, in Freud it is more about the body, because in modern philosophy the classic relationship between soul and body becomes the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, and the unconscious, the psychical resort of corporality, is primordial to the conscious.¹⁰ Thus, we are exploring some classic theories on desire in order to gather the necessary suggestions for shaping a corporeal theory of desire.

Of particular relevance for the configuration of love in Aurel Codoban's vision is the new ontology of love that is built on the metamorphoses that psychoanalysis brings into the shaping of the postmodern human condition. It is based on the premise that we are witnessing a reconstruction of the human in which desire cannot be fulfilled, and if it is fulfilled, this happens only through symbolic games, through the involvement of the imaginary register of representations. The subject finds itself in a universe of discourse, representation and interpretation in which the other intervenes as a resort from whom an answer is expected, which is expected to leave a mark on language, in which to mirror itself as presence, in a world where transcendence is absent, and life is emptying. In this context, the philosopher notes that psychoanalysis urges us to reject classical theories of love that generally put us in two generic situations: 1) either tell us that we fall in love with someone because we consider him to be beautiful, good, smart, glamorous—as Platonism did; 2) convince us that we find someone beautiful, good, smart, glamorous only because we have already fallen in love with them—as it happens in love as a projection described by Spinoza. Instead, we are offered a third solution: to value our contradictory tendencies that set us between the positive and the negative, between permission and interdiction, in a process of transgression in which we are the beneficiaries of the phantasmatic production of our assessments and live its fascination.¹¹

Describing the sentimental-erotic-appealing model of the postmodern Western world, Aurel Codoban combines the desire for pleasure (even if the passion of love seems to be too diminished) with the desire for transcendence (even if it is a transcendence without transcending). The philosopher overturns the relationship between being and nothingness in accordance with the overturn generated by the soul's taking over of the soul in love as passion. This corporealization of love, emptied of being, is presented as a transcendence towards a negative transcendence, emptied of existence, and finally, as we shall see, the world of love becomes emptied even by the presence of the body. With the experience of love in virtual reality, "the body becomes only a kind of absolute signifier, emptied of determination."¹²

The Games of Desire and the Desire of Being Desired

LOVE BECOMES a game of desire. The consumerist society stimulates the pleasure of consuming, including erotic consumption,¹³ and due to the impact of communication, it seems to be accompanied by an endless consumption urge. This excess of the desire to consume is also reflected in the desire for pleasure that appears to us especially as the desire to be desired. The individual thus enters a roleplay, depending on the object of desire and the intersubjective relationships he projects on them. Roleplaying belongs to a world of representation and to a way in which the imagined subject projects itself on various dimensions of existence. I personally think that these representations are of a single, self-projecting self. However, adopting a different interpretation, Aurel Codoban believes that with postmodernity we are under the sign of a plurality of selves that contravene the authority of a monolithic self. The world of the personal self must be fairly represented in the form of a cluster of selves, which are constituted as multiple instances of our personal reality. This contributes both to the positioning of oneself in relation to one's consciousness and to the positioning of oneself in relation to alterity, which is regarded as a the focal point of one's self. Thus, the philosopher believes that what happens in love is that "in fact, we do not want another, we desire the other's desire, and the desire of the other returns to the subject ego of desire to be desired, to give it a unique identity. Postmodern love is not so much a dialogue, but an echo. The ego is decentralized and pluralized."¹⁴ In this symbolic game, in relation to alterity, occurs a process in which one of the selves defeats or co-ordinates some of our selves, a phenomenon the philosopher uses to reveal an "interpretation of love as a psychic coup d'état, which gives power to one of these selves."¹⁵

This thematization of alterity reveals two significant moments: one in which the soul is the one that establishes the relational structure, and the other in which the body is the one that mediates the language of alterity. On the one hand, we notice that "as long as the soul is in dialogue with total alterity, the body is a simple receptacle of the soul."¹⁶ An entire tradition of love revolves around love as a completion of the soul, as a tool of purification, beauty and enlightenment, without neglecting the body as a bearer, truly temporal, of the nobility of the soul. The soul is connected to the experience of being and to the knowledge of the absolute, of man and of the world that can bring them together, of what we have often called the median space of the religious experience, but also of the existence lived under the sign of what Aurel Codoban considers to be the space where the manifestation of metaphysical desire takes place. Once love manifests itself in the building of reality through communication, love becomes communi-

cation itself, in the process in which we witness the growing importance of communication in regard to corporal communication. In this context, “convergent or simbio-corporal love implies that every communication starts from the body, not from the soul, as in the case of love-passion.”¹⁷ Although passion seems to be a coordinate strongly related to the loving soul, it appears to us rather as a ballast for the body, which tends to replace passion with pleasure. Postmodern man seems to oppose the passive dimension of passion to the active enjoyment of pleasure, of pleasure in its biological dimension, associated with sexuality, but also of the subtler pleasures we associate with all kinds of consumption, including the consumption of spiritual products. Among the consumed products, however, the most visible, of course, is the category of products that we can associate with sexual pleasure. The phenomenon is described by Aurel Codoban as follows: “There is a kind of love-symbiosis—especially in the form of juvenile cohabitation—of limited duration, in which the partner is more of a growing partner, evolving together, and a partner in sexual exercises. Sex increasingly has the character of work without anything mysterious or frightening, of a dexterity that can be learned and needs to be learned.”¹⁸

Despite the fact that the philosophy of alterity has become accustomed to an interpretational key in which alterity was thought, in a very rigorous sense, as an interpersonal relationship based on reciprocity, which is a dialogue that is reflected in language,¹⁹ we find many forms of construction and establishment of alterity, determined by the metamorphoses brought about by communication in the register of postmodern love. In a world where the monolithic ego is replaced by a plural self, or more precisely by a plurality of selves that each individual assumes, it is self-evident that consumer behavior is also changed in accordance with this plurality. Thus,

*in the Western societies defined by overconsumption, the register of signs has changed: there are rather more signifiers than signifieds; we are more credited with the reality of the signifiers. Now sexuality no longer needs a meaning to cover it and masquerade it. It represents itself, it has become its own sign, it is a simulacrum. Before, it needed a meaning under which, as a signifier, it could gain a legitimate reality. Change is possible because the cultural codification has changed, because a new epistemology has been installed, because it belongs as a sign to another text. The new codification is punctuated by corporality and communication.*²⁰

Postmodern love, as a form of interpersonal communication, implies a corporeal communication and takes place at the contact point of the tensions that the new form of codification of body language and generalized communication entails. From the perspective of the new cultural code of love, Aurel Codoban speaks of

a corporeal communication that measures its efficiency, not to say authenticity, by the pleasure produced or obtained. With it, new wishes appear, which, although we can no longer call them metaphysical, are not less desires of the Absolute: the desire for absolute pleasure or absolute narcissism, addressed to our own body, more metaphysically this time, to the body in general, as an absolute signifier. The Twilight of Love means, as for any cultural form, the twilight of a certain type of communication, discourse and vocabulary, but also the emergence of others, which, however different they may be, cannot escape due to the nature of their language, the desire for the Absolute.²¹

Love in its multiple social and personal manifestations²² can always surprise us with its manifestations. Love undergoes a process such as the one experienced by sexuality in the past: the unconstraint of love is just as playful as the games of the mind.²³ Thus, Western man does not need to be anxious in the proximity of the transformations that love suffers. We do not have to hurry to declare love's time of death after failing in the apocalyptic attitude of Western theorizing of all kinds of deaths, fortunately unfulfilled.

Love in its twilight is coded this time by an empty transcendence, by an Absolute emptied of being, desire itself is emptied of being, and seems to establish itself as a form of absolute, even untamed desire, the desire that consumes itself without ever reaching satisfaction. This status of communication and corporeality was preceded by the situation where the tendency of the one who loves is to impose itself as an object of desire in a manner similar to the one in which devotion to the gods could be perceived as a practice of the love of the religious man. Emptied of religiosity, such a ritual behavior is emptied of its own transcendence, and the only transcendence seems to remain that of the body itself, while the only desire that still functions is the desire to be desired. In such a register of alterity, Aurel Codoban asserts that

Desire is a desire in relation to the desire of another, for man constituted as a subject of nothingness, essentially deprived of Being, desires to be the being that is lacking in another, the being which the desire of the other installs it in existence. We desire someone else's desire, we crave to be loved because in the center of our subjective being we are constituted of nothingness. We want the desire because Being is sprayed like golden splashes of stars onto the black surface of the nothingness, or because, just as for the Asian religions, the Absolute has proved to be nothingness.²⁴

Desire reflects upon itself. In this way, the loved one tries to fill something that is felt as a lack or absence of being. The one who wants love resorts to the mediation of alterity as a game of erotic mirroring in which the difference is only the desire to be loved.

Communicating Desire and the Challenges Introduced by the New Technologies

THE FACT that today's entire reality and its knowledge are rebuilt in the context of communication inevitably leads at least to the need to question the ethics and metaphysics of new technologies as they will increasingly influence the way in which we understand the universe, as well as the way in which we understand the individual in relation to himself, the position of man in relation to others, and the position of man in the universe. Rethinking love in such a context is inevitable for philosophical meditation. And we have to expect an increase in the interest for philosophy as a way to position oneself in relation to this existential problem of great intensity.

Aurel Codoban's reflections reveal that an increase in the importance of new technology-mediated communication can even transform love as passion into a relationship based on body language, image transmission, phantasms, gestures that we can perceive in many forms, but they are abundant in the advertising for adults or in matrimonial or erotic advertisements whereby "generalized communication in Western societies besieges us with sex scenes, exquisite bodies, with 'shameless' confessions in the media, phone sex, sex on the internet, neoprene costumes with electrodes, teledildos"²⁵ and many other forms of communication through which the virtual space is presented as the privileged place of the rediscovery of privacy. Most often, those who talk about love in the virtual environment do it in order to tell stories about them in order to prove that they are worthy of love.²⁶

This leads, on the one hand, to a supersaturation of the exposure of body images and, on the other hand, to a withdrawal of the body from the plane of immediate contact, of epidermal interaction, of penetration into the energetic intimacy of the other. Although we apparently have a predominant presence of the body, Aurel Codoban reveals that we are actually witnessing a de-corporealization through the excessive use of the body as language. The body is no longer important in its material form, but as an interface or as a communication tool, thus the body is stripped of its own corporeality, being replaced by its image, which is no longer under the pressure of personal attributes. The philosopher warns us that in the postmodern world "It is believed that this 'body liberation' will lead to greater intimacy. But . . . the bodies seem to be still separate in the anticipation of technologies capable of bringing them in communication (of course sensual-sexual). It is true, however, that the message, not the person, seems to matter, for the moment."²⁷ With an erotic experience mediated by computers or phones, there is a misappropriation of the sense of corporeality in the postmodern mentality. The postmodern imaginary has shifted the emphasis

from the soul to the body, a shift made possible, in Aurel Codoban's view, by a natural logic that charges the body with the fullness of meanings once associated with the soul. In the order of symbolic meanings, the body was full of being, thus gathering all the burden of meaning carried by the soul. More than that, it had the capacity to create proximity to the presence of the other in which a common identity could be created from desire and reaching to love, because the bodies could move the energy of the souls and even capitalize on love as an act of love of the closest encounter. Thus, the body, in its direct interaction with the other, spoke of itself, of the soul, but also of the pleasure and transcendence that it could live together with the other. The body had the capacity to make present in their unfolding the two fundamental types of desire that underlie love: the desire for pleasure and the desire for transcendence. With a love mediated by new technologies, a real relationship is no longer required. Love no longer implies any obligation towards the presence of the other whom you relate to as a human presence that reveals a self with a well-defined identity.²⁸

With the mediation created by means of communication, the body becomes only a means of communication used after it has been stripped down of the contents of the relational subject that ensured the personal identity of the individuals taking part in the erotic game. Aurel Codoban considers this to be the case because

when communication is electronically mediated, but also in other instances of communication, the body has only the identity of an assumption. Electronic means of communication do not allow for unwanted identification. It does not matter who the other person is, it's important for the chat to be surprising. We might be tempted by the idea of a return to the Platonic quest for the 'soul-mate' if this were not about generalized communication, where love reveals its purely relational essence. Even more so, anonymous or masked electronic communication seems to be connected to the idea of something fantastical, imaginary, being a way of signifying.²⁹

This way, a trans-human world is installed that transcends the human horizon not through its enrichment but through its impoverishment, voiding it of the real contents of the erotic experience and the joys of love.

When love becomes a pure relationship in the virtual environment, individuals have nothing but relationships, they enter into a relationship, they no longer participate in the mirage, the phantasms and the transfiguring power of love. However, the philosopher also offers us a reason for not being too pessimistic: "However, we must admit, following certain internet psycho-sociologists, that there is a careful separation between the two areas: on the one hand, sexuality, the multiplicity of bodies and preferences accessible on the internet, and on the

other, those that belong to your private space. Desire, at least in its meaning of transgression and phantasy, seems to persist, or even have a comeback with the generalization of communication.³⁰ Although we seem to gradually move from the physical horizon into the virtual one, the separation between the real world in which we live and the virtual one which we only perceive—it is only a perceived reality—is still sufficiently well-defined, even in the case of the generation which we define as belonging to digital natives. Love must be associated with a register of positive thinking.³¹ The physical world and the virtual horizon are still well defined, so that the virtual imaginary cannot unify the representations of what we can identify as “a world,” even if, gradually, in the future, we will most likely have to take into account the virtual dimension as an existential given, along with the physical, social, personal, spiritual and religious one.

Instead of Conclusions for a Philosophy of Love

THE METAMORPHOSES taking place in the world of desire compel us to an ethical and philosophical rethinking of love. The results of such a philosophical investigation should clarify a few things, including: to what extent the finitude of the corporeal being determines the uniqueness of love in our relationship with the idea of death; how can life be valued by the exaltation of love; to what extent is the biological body placed on a second plane, replaced by the virtual body with the development of new technologies; is there a power characterizing the virtual transmitted through technology as a force that can substitute the satisfaction of desire, the need for love; to what extent the communication of love in the virtual environment changes the paradigm of love as it is experienced by the postmodern man in the everyday reality of his existence, etc.? In the case of such pursuits, philosophy can help rediscover the importance of a person and provide solutions for the person’s reconstruction within communication. It is one of the reasons why I have used several interpretations and some hermeneutical and existential solutions presented in his works by Aurel Codoban as an existential stylist.

The world built on communication gives us a perspective on love in which life becomes an intrinsic value, in that love acts as a factor of balance in the existence of the person who must accept cohabitation in a unique dynamic of death and life. In the “empire of communication,” metaphysical desire is associated with the Logos, and death is emptied of logos. Death no longer appears as a landmark of anxiety that we use in order to enjoy all the things we receive from life. Death is not the darkness according to which we perceive the light of life.

An adequate understanding of life requires an existence within love. Thus, we are facing a metaphysical perspective on love, not one that associates the love of death in its biological register, as it happens in some studies that analyze this relationship in biological or social terms.³² Love does not feed itself on death because love always gives itself, attracting at the same time the return of things and beings onto itself. In such a symbolic register, it is very simple to integrate body mortification, ascetic death, or the mystical passage between worlds into an experience of resurrection—meaning rebirth through the transcendent force of love, through the transcendent force it assumes. That is why we can accept that love is self-sufficient, not in the sense that it is sufficient to itself, but in the sense that love appears as infinite energy by the way it is carried by souls and always brought back to itself.

With the postmodern codification of desire, we note the ways in which communication determines a set of games of desire through which the body is identified as the center of the configuration of any language of love. In this way, the principle of pleasure is associated with consumption, including the consumption of erotic production, to a stage where the body itself is absent from the structure of desire. This way, love is reduced only to the desire to be desired. The two main types of desire, the desire for pleasure and the desire for transcendence, are not absent. Even when they can only be perceived as a form without content, the desire for pleasure becomes self-referential, and the desire for transcendence refers to an empty transcendence, which obviously leads to the emptying of love of existence.

Profound transformations take place with the development of new technologies. These come to interfere with love and the practices of desire. In order to understand the structure of this manifestation of love in the future, it is necessary to decipher the philosophy that emerges in the background of the practices of the desire from the virtual environment.

In the age of digitization of the interpersonal encounter, of the disappearance of the subject as an actor that brings with it the face-to-face presence, the problem of recognition seems to be no longer obstructed by the proximity of difference, first of all because the necessity of face-to-face presence is replaced by an interface that intersects the presence of the other. The identity created in the virtual environment no longer requires physical presence, reciprocity and dialogue, because it seems to exclude violence, conflict, coercion. In a world that seems to be built on the principles of freedom, which is no longer bound by the actual presence of the other, all these forms of pressure exerted on the individual seem to no longer have a factual reality. They can only be manifested as discourse, be it a rhetoric of images, or the persuasive force of the word.

Alterity is no longer conceived in terms of the encounter with the other, because the other is no longer regarded as a goal for us, but rather as a means by

which we strengthen narcissism and the orientation towards oneself. It is true that Aurel Codoban insists that one of the prerequisites of a worthy love is to love ourselves because we could not know how to love others without loving ourselves.³³ With the absence of the other (and the abundance of one's presence), something like the absence of the presence of transcendence happens. As in the case of transcendence, the ontological register of transcendence changes completely; in the case of love, what changes completely is the horizon of identity construction. This no longer requires love as a meeting place for alterity, because alterity is reduced to an object that satisfies the need of the individual to rediscover oneself. Alterity is no longer an end in itself, nor a purpose of the encounter, because it becomes only a very important factor, indeed, of the reconfiguration of the personal self. In order to trigger the process of such a reconfiguration, to increase its rhythm and to increase its efficiency, the post-modern individual most often needs the support of an existential stylist. This is uncharted ground for philosophical counseling, worth developing.

The reflection on love is based on the human need for love. As Aurel Codoban reveals, the twilight of love only refers to certain practices of love. Love must always be renewed, and the philosophical reflection on love must keep up with the metamorphoses that occur in the horizon of love. The need for love is accompanied by the need for philosophy. Postmodern man is called upon to establish it after a long process of announcements of successive deaths—from the death of God to the death of man, after having undergone a profound process of deconstruction of reality, of deconstruction of meaning, of circumventing authenticity.



Notes

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Abstract

From Metaphysical Desire to the Desire of Being Desired:
An Introduction to Aurel Codoban’s Hermeneutics of Love

Aurel Codoban proposes a philosophy of love in which love as a significant surface reveals a world of practices, representations, rituals and the assumption of love content that are under the sign of an occidental Eros evolution towards the desire of being desired. The metamorphoses of love are described through classical theories of desire, which reveal a paradigmatic behavior from the classical age to the postmodern condition of love. Relevant in this sense is the dynamics of the relationship between metaphysical love, life and death; the transformations that take place in the field of desire from love conceived in a manner similar to the religious one, fuelled by metaphysical desire, to love as passion, to the establishment of a love based on corporeality, to the plurality of the self and the emptying of love relations of personal identity of those who engage in the discourse of love and in its communication. With the generalization of the construction of reality in postmodern communication, love is increasingly proving to be rebuilt on an empty transcendence, a transcendence without transcendence, which accompanies the virtualization of love and the transformations brought about by its association with the virtual space mediated by the new technologies.

Keywords

philosophy of love, metaphysical desire, theories of desire, love and death, hermeneutics of love, corporality and communication, electronic communication, twilight of love, Aurel Codoban