

Aurel Codoban, *Filosofia ca gen literar* (Philosophy as a literary genre)

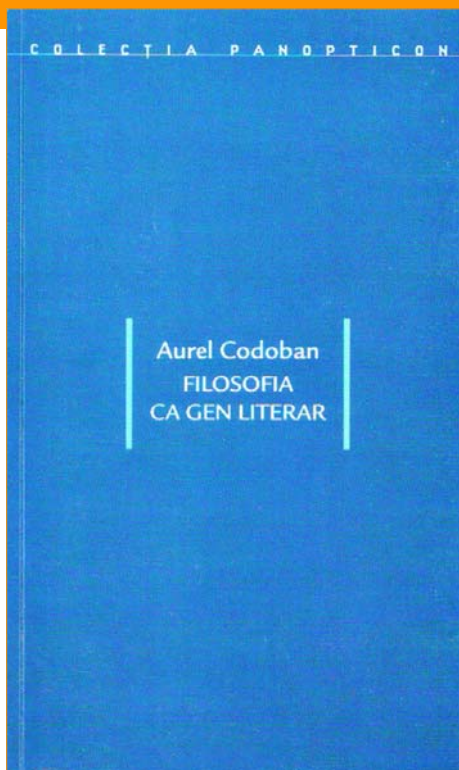
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During the twentieth century, the expression “the death of...” has been frequently employed.¹ The death of art, of the author, of metaphysics and philosophy in general has been proclaimed. Nowadays, we have been told that nation-states, politics, religion, ideologies have died too, just as well as local cultures did under the highest commands of globalization, or rather under the strong impact of had by the media in this process. Such an obsession of the end has lead to various inquiries, but the most adequate were those bringing to light the dynamic structures who define the historically different areas of human living and creation.

The importance of these reserches rests mostly on the inter- and meta-disciplinary use of methods and significations, in which the context, the metatext and the subtext uphold an open interpretative horizon. Such an interpretative horizon assumes that the understanding and the explanation are not being reduced to static historical principles, but they admit the open structures with various permutations among the elements and the relations, in quality as in quantity. The book of Professor Aurel Codoban “Philosophy as a literary genre” follows this direction. The book it’s a work of meta-philosophy and not a history of philosophy in the traditional sense. Precisely for this reason the reprinting adds two new chapters illustrating the dynamics of the previous version and the lack of an intervention in the fundamental structure of the book.

The book was due to appear in 1984, but being intercepted by the communist censorship it appeared only in 1992 at Dacia Publishing House in Cluj-Napoca, comprising, because of financial difficulties, just three chapters of the present edition.

The fourth chapter of the new edition, “Notes for a phenomenology of philosophy as literary genre in the romanian culture”, has initially been published as a collection of articles in different Romanian literary journals. The last chapter, “Philosopher and



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journalist, the synthesis of an ostensive ideology”, although written after long after the book was finished, still gains a place in the book because of open structure. As I already pointed out, this chapter is the confirmation that the interpretation system proposed by the author a few years ago is still functional, despite the many changes taking place in our culture.

The interaction with the whimsical moments of history did emphasized the book's value, and not the number of the sold copies; nor the reviews of the first edition did establish the value of this book, but the open inquiry explaining the philosophical discourse in the changing cultural field.

First of all, I would like to remark some phrases in which the author addresses the reader, as explanatory instances of the relation between the author, his work and the reader. These instances can be understood only in relation to the other works of the author and in the context of the author's academic and everyday discourse.

“Philosophy as a Literary Genre” rests greatly on irony. The ironic sentences map a network in which the author is always reversing the literally meaning into a new one, in order to unveil the reader's naïveté by introducing the philosophical speech as literary genre, speech that is neither mythology, religion, literature, science of nature, nor human science nor the science of the absolute. “The irony is co-originary with the philosophical discourse, which represents, through its nature, a reciprocal critique of both logic and meaning, but never taken to the limit. The irony plays the role of the conscience, the only true ironical instance, because the irony stands out for the world as well as for itself” (85). This is why the sentence “our inquiry into metaphilosophy and philosophy of culture will probably not satisfy many readers, without completely pleasing at least one of them” (11) is written to focus our attention on the fact that the lack of satisfaction or lack of fulfillment derives from the reader's expectation for the author to prescribe “the obligation for the philosopher to write poetical or novelistic, to use metaphors rather than concepts”(11). In fact, the author supposes that the naïveté of the reader and his lack of understanding mislead him into believing that philosophy is mere literature, ignoring the fact that “barely recognizing, in principle, the quality of both philosophy and contemporary literature as literary genre, we will discover that in fact their pragmatics and signifying types are quite different”. The lack of fulfillment and the reading's lack of satisfaction derive from the reader's inability to abandon the old classical customs of philosophical discourse, as well as the horizon of the “ontological naïveté” in which he is kept, in other words, the reader's inability to comprehend that the signified (*le signifié*) can easily slide down under the signifier's layer (*le signifiant*), at the level of the cultural background.

The reader's lack of satisfaction and frustration are not the consequences of the author's way of writing, but they are to be found in a dysfunction of the interpretive system of the reader as such, by ignoring the fact that philosophy is a process, a continuous way, a search for truth, wisdom and meaning and not a reduction to principles, neither an absolute or a scientific research, nor a literary phantasma. The expression “the philosopher as journalist” is only an ironical way of saying that, if the visibility itself is possible by entering the mass-media system, then the philosopher appears to be a journalist. The “philosopher as journalist” is not using already-made persuasion formulas, but rather unveils the means by which the ritualized and imagined mythologies are generated. “The philosopher as journalist” is not a media agent, but the one who interrogates the world of communication and, by making a statement on the digital side against the traditional analogical side, “is able to provide the critics of seductive and manipulative images”.

We can find in this book many sentences on the major thematizations in philosophy, a topic which the author has already developed in his Ph. D. thesis.² The author takes into consideration three major thematizations in the history of philosophy: the thematization of “what is”, of the *thing itself*, dominating Antiquity and the Middle Ages; the thematization of *knowledge*, that is of the idea, in the Modern Times, and the third, the thematization of the *communication*, of language, underlining our contemporary era. The image of these three thematizations forms the daimon of the text, each theme giving place for the understanding of a philosophical age, on the limit between mythology and rituals, in a way in which the philosophy still remains philosophy, “as literary genre”, without becoming literature.

The meta-philosophical inquiry is structured by focusing on the expression “...as literary genre”, as the main standpoint in the author’s philosophical speech. Although the fact that the expression has a frequent use in the book, the signified does not allow us to think the philosophical text as being a literary fragment, and the meanings of the expression are involved in different areas of the cultural general discourse, as well in the history of the culture. The comprehension of the philosophical discourse as “literary genre” gains more consistency through the analysis made in the first three chapters, where we can determine step-by step the importance of the philosophical discourse among the other cultural discourses in the history, the inner process through which philosophical discourse is brought to reality, as “a deeper comprehension of a meaningful praxis”, and the condition and the exercise of philosophy in the postmodernity. The complexity of the book shows a juxtaposed architecture of elements in which the philosopher, his discourse, the communicational environment and the cultural background, all along with the constitutive events, project a deep texture where we can trace in the cultural history the complete itinerary of the philosophy as literary genre. The author defines a differential identity for philosophy, revisiting its cultural past in the cultural general discourse. The identity of the philosophical discourse does not evolve through a perpetual actualization of a same structure or philosophical inner image, but from the differentiation movement the philosophy effectuates in the culture’s dynamics, and so its general speech appears in different periods of time and from various reasons as being of literary genre. The recurrence of the signifier as “literary genre” does not imply a reiteration of the same and unique signified, because the signified liberally slides under the signifier, and the signifier reconstructs itself over and over in different cultural areas, by a differential process, engaging a signifying praxis at the limit between a multiplicity of significations and a single meaning, between the sacred and the profane, scientific knowledge and literary creativeness, reference and self-reference. With no intention of practicing a “literary” discourse, the philosopher proposes such a discourse, in order to build his own identity through differential movements, difference who plays with the unique meaning of the scientific speech and the multiplicity of meanings in literature. The philosophy operates by reducing the multiplicity of literature’s meanings and, in the same time, by enriching the meanings of the scientific discourse. The differentiation takes place in the context of the three thematizations in philosophy and within the dynamics of the other cultural discourses. We assume that the first characteristic of this book is to point out the *cultural situs of philosophy*, in the history of culture. The philosophy’s place in the sphere of culture draws an itinerary populated with significant marks, placed under the signifier of “philosophy as literary genre”.

The final chapter should be probably considered the first one, because without being conclusive, it shows how the reality does appear as an actualization of the virtual

potentialities, showing the path from where we were left yesterday, in the horizon of the media, on the way to the effectiveness of the present day. The book reminds us that philosophy has yet a meaning, even through the digital era, and in a participative critical manner to the language-machine who ritualizes the mythology and image manipulative seduction, inside the organized field of visibility. The author initiates us in the philosophy “as literary genre”, translating in a very elegant manner, into the universe of the possibilities of the virtual world, the fact that philosophy means a continuous process, a reductive method to the proliferation of images, and at the same time a growing of the simple meaning of the computational logic. The philosopher seems to be an action oriented person, like an artist and a performer, going back and forward between the mythology of late modernity and the ritual of mass-media communication, avoiding any kind of theoretical fixation or already-made interpretation. The philosopher exists always in an interstitial, vector-oriented, paradoxical and differential position, immersed in the digital environment in which it can generate “a communicative image of life”. “The philosopher will have to make from his own life a performance, even more than the artist who works with his own body, and from the events of his life he will have to create a happening” (147). He will have to act like this, because he always did this, “because the philosophy as philosophy can be only a common work of meaning and logic, of word and gesture” (105). We see that in each thematization philosophy works as philosophy, when we are able to identify “the possibility of a meaning as the highest category of the rationality”, when philosophy finds resources for an autonomy of its discourse, in comparison with the other cultural voices, when “philosophy only joins the human on the path from Gods to Being. Speaking between the silence of the Gods and the silence of the Being, the philosophical discourse belongs neither to gods, nor to Being”. (106)

After finishing the reading of this book, you may ask yourself if the book is not only a simple semiotic reading of the history of philosophy, and if the lack of explanatory notes does not cover a massive takeover of full developed ideas and researches, but this would be futile once you have discovered that philosophy could only have an ever-changing appearance that can not be dismantled through annotations and bibliography, or through static analyses. And if you are able to realize that the author did succeed in convincing you about the metamorphic reality of both philosophy and philosopher, metamorphose realized with the play of differences and not repetition, then it's up to your ability to reach for new crystallizations or dissolutions inside the structures of philosophy, in a critical open work. Or simpler, you can just plug yourself to the media universe in order to map and analyze the interstice where the mythologies and rituals of late modernity deposited their digital capital. Whatever you will be doing, you may always rediscover the non-sacred way of initiation through philosophy, in which “only the philosophy regains the human for him, by introducing him to the being”.

Notes:

1 Book Review translated into english by Răzvan Țabrea

2 Published as “Structura semiologica a structuralismului” (The Semiological Structure of Structuralism), by Dacia Publishing House, Cluj, 1984.