

## Review

Sandu FRUNZĂ

*Advertising Constructs Reality*

București, Tritonic, 2014

Sandu Frunză is a well-known expert in religious studies, communication, media and ethics. At the core of one of his most recent books lies the relation between religious thought, mythical thinking and consumerism and his analysis focuses on the sacred and advertising. As stated in his book, entitled *Advertising constructs reality* (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2014), Professor Frunză's intention is to shed light upon the importance of advertising in our daily life, understanding advertising as a means for human beings to rediscover themselves and to find harmony with the surrounding world. This is one of the many books written by Sandu Frunză on the views of the postmodern human being on concepts such as reality, the sacred, and history. Amongst other books written by the same author one will find "God and the Holocaust", "Ethical Reconstruction of Public Space through Rethinking of the Relationship among Philosophy, Religion and Ideology", „Religious Fundamentalism and the Conflict of Ideologies" and "Advertising and Administration under the Pressure of Ethics". These books serve as good academic guides for his students aspiring to receive a degree in the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, where he is currently teaching.

"Advertising constructs reality" can be quite a difficult read for those who are unfamiliar with even basic concepts in communication sciences and philosophy. Yet it is a substantial work that captures and explains notions that are crucial in understanding the field of advertising. I will therefore try to review some of the main ideas that are explained and developed in the book, the aim of which



is to better understand the role of advertising in influencing our daily life. In the first chapter, the author presents advertising as being the last standing bastion for "symbolic and ritualistic behaviors", where a so-called "microcosm" can be created. What he is referring to is the ability of a concentrated story to become a much larger one, with great significance and a variety of meanings; he states this is possible especially in the case of advertising videos. In the same first chapter he refers to the work of other authors, such as M. Paraschivescu and her critical appraisal of Mirela Eliade's literature concerning similar subjects like reality and sacred space and time. Professor Sandu Frunzã also writes about the "Western" human being and his incapacity of understanding both personal and universal history. The author argues that the Western human being is lost on his path towards rediscovering himself and does not see that personal history is in direct and strong connection with all human history. The postmodern human being is lost in his daily routine and cannot overcome the fear of rediscovering life. Professor Frunzã also writes about the incapacity of the "postmodern Western human being" to escape religion. He presents a way out of this crisis by having the Western and non-Western civilizations agree on the "cognitive value of symbols" and accepting religion pluralism. One of the ideas that the author presents is the fact that the myth is a concept that is not understood and, as Eliade presents, the myth is a way of directing the human beings to their real selves. The myth is seen as an alternative as an initiation to that and not as a fairytale.

Professor Sandu Frunzã focuses more on this idea in the following part of his book, where he states what we believe to be a fascinating idea, i.e. the fact that advertising uses something which can be approximated as "the passion for initiation", which he argues is "inherent to human soul". Here, he mentions a specific kind of initiation: "A profane initiation, the messenger of which is advertising" and that relies on new elements of culture. Advertising is presented as "an effort for direction in culture as any initiation plans to be. It reflects and permanently nourishes the symbolic dimension of consumer culture. In a world in which spiritual values are pushed to a subsidiary level, this new culture proposes investing this spiritual dimension into our relationship with things". His conclusion is that advertising is able to shape the individual's way of being and acting and that advertising is an instrument for constructing reality. The human being is also presented in this chapter as being bivalent and scared of new experiences, mainly because of being permanently followed by the idea of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as being a new start. In this chapter, the author also specifies that the media and the fast evolution of communication plays a major role in the life of human beings.

In the second chapter, entitled "Seduction and advertising", Professor Sandu Frunzã explains the complexity of "seduction" as a concept and presents it as not

having only an intimate meaning but also as being the instrument that is "indispensable to the advertising communication, propaganda and biopolitics". He proposes to strip seduction from its negative connotations. The concept thus resulted is the art that presented in the book signed by Mark Jeffereis and entitled "The art of business seduction". In this book, the author states that initiation is resumed in one sentence: "Listen, watch, anticipate, react". Throughout the same chapter, the author brings about the idea of the seducer being seduced, explaining that "seduction is a communication act in which each participant enriches the other's world and at the same time his/her own". In what concerns concepts such as seduction, stereotypes and mythology, he also presents the recipe for being a successful politician as consisting in adaptability on the road to success. The seducer being seduced can be applied to products too. The author claims that "products become the object of seduction and at the same time a seducing object". Later on, when writing about "abundance as original seduction", the author quotes Jean Baudrillard's statement, who wrote that the consumer society did not produce new myths because "it is a society with no other myth than itself". This comes as a help in better understanding the place of advertising in the consumer society.

In the next chapter, entitled "Fetishism, Commodity and Advertising", Professor Sandu Frunzã tries to explain the very important role of the fetishism in advertising, but strips it again of the meanings that do not fit this context, leaving the term with the meaning of exaggerate desire or a special seduction form. Here he talks about overestimating a product or being attached to things above what we can consider to be the rational boundaries. He also classifies them in two distinct categories, pathological and natural. In this chapter, he quotes many authors to help us understand the complexity of fetishism and in order to make it easier for us to understand the differences between fetishism and idolatry and how the two develop. He refers to the literature of both Carmen Bernard and Serge Gruzinski. The author observes how "the advertising creation starts from the representation of objects in the manner of fetishes". Another interesting theory that follows this statement is related to the fact that advertising brings a great variety of objects in the visual culture based on cultural representations "that favor both the communication of pre-constituted messages and the creation of the possibility for new types of associations in the watchers' minds".

The fourth chapter is entitled "Taboo, interdictions and advertising". The term "taboo", which has its roots in the religious domain, is attributed to things that can become as such trough ritualisation. Another idea that is largely developed in the book is the fact that taboos are omnipresent; they exist in any culture and are based mainly on interdictions related to the sacredness. In advertising, the element of taboo is used very often but it is used with a certain level of subtlety so it will no embarrass the audience in any way. The taboo factor makes the product be

presented as a thing that will satisfy the innocent pleasures or the needs of a lesser popularity.

The author continues with a description of connections between taboos and fetishism in advertising, sustaining that the taboo shares the character of the secret fascination of the fetish. The importance of using taboos in advertising should not be neglected. Professor Frunză stresses that “the taboo transgression in the communicational process is realized by using the advertising language to redefine corporality. In this process, the importance of advertisement in the public discourse is primary, because it functions as a source of information, as a social guide, as an instrument that can be used by women, but especially by teenagers, in the development of their own corporality”.

The fact that advertising has a major impact on the lives of the audience makes it mandatory to define a set of rules for its use. In this light, any advertising has to obey a certain set of regulations and limits. The main two objects of the rule are the exposure of human body and the use of subliminal stimuli in advertising. The chapter ends with a discussion about the postmodern totem, which is a “very present element in the existence of the postmodern individual”. As professor Frunză states, despite the fact that the word is difficult to define, it can be understood as rebuilding the “inter subjective connection between man, the world of living creatures, the world of objects, and nature in a communicational process that introduces them in the consumerist culture”.

If in the previous chapters, the author discussed about the marketing and advertising of goods and services, in the next chapter, entitled “Political advertising and the rediscovery of inter-subjectivity in the public space”, he switches to a rather different domain, i.e. political advertising. The main difference is the fact that political advertising is based on different rules, set by political science and political memory, additional to what is known to be the basic advertising rules. Symbols and myths contribute to building these differences. The other elements that are discussed here are the influence of the media and also the “special state of the relation between the media, religion and ideology, between ideological shaping and political action”.

In the final chapter, entitled “Final thoughts: the return of authenticity”, professor Sandu Frunză reviews and brings back to debate some of the concepts that he explained earlier in the book, such as the advertising as an instrument of regaining authenticity. Storing an entire imaginary universe, which allows for the sacred to manifest itself in the life of the postmodern man, “advertising supports the human being in its self quest through reaching harmony with the surrounding things”. Among these ideas he claims that communication plays the most important role in the life of the postmodern human being and that indeed advertising constructs reality.

Concluding, we believe that the book is a very well structured one with convincing examples, bringing its central ideas closer to one's own realities. It can serve as a good support for information in what concerns the way advertising works, its connection with religion, myths and symbols. It is beyond any doubt that Sandu Frunză has yet again managed to brilliantly reflect the life of the post-modern human being in what he portrays to be a fascinating relation with the "phenomenon" of advertising.

**Reviewed by**

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