

## **A Visionary book: THE CIVILIZATION OF ILLITERACY** **A Conversation with Mihai Nadin (Podcast transcript)**

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to the Spandugino podcast.

We have a book—an extraordinary book--a cornerstone for understanding “The Civilization of Illiteracy” Nadin predicted. It is a book about the although it appeared more than a quarter of a century ago, in 1997 (and in Romanian in 2016). Although its “identity card” says more than a quarter-century old, its relevance is exceptional.

We are happy, we are privileged to speak with the author of this book, Dr.. Mihai Nadin—professor, thinker, visionary, an aristocrat of the spirit, a man who sees far and sees in depth, and an excellent conversation partner.

Mr. Nadin, once again we are very grateful that we are together now, to discuss “The Civilization of Illiteracy,” which Spandugino Publishers made available to the Romanian readers.

02:03

**Mihai Nadin:**

Thank you. I hope you won't regret inviting me again.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Certainly not! Let's begin, because we are both rather analytical by nature, with a question:.

*What is The Civilization of Illiteracy”?*

**Mihai Nadin:**

A first answer would be one that deserves the label of a mischievous definition:

We currently live in the civilization of illiteracy. This definition would be like: What is water? And my answer would be: We live in water. So it doesn't help us understand the concept advanced by the book in the form of a provocative title.

This definition still does not tell us that we are in a civilization in which people write more and more because they use technology, but read less and less. It doesn't tell us that the role of language has changed. Very few people still have an interest in dedicating their lives to

activities connected to what literacy— as the expression of mastery of language—made possible.

Can we call “civilization” a stage of humanity in which writing becomes increasingly mechanical, and in which reading no longer happens, because printed text is useless?

The expression seems paradoxical.

With the help of technology, more is written than in the entire history of humanity. And reading happens—if we think of machines that read for those who no longer know how to read. But, and here comes the problematic part, the entire effort seems slightly absurd.

We would need an Eugène Ionesco to describe the absurdity in which you can keep a university chair only if you publish, and after you become a professor you ask yourself: “What significance did my writing have?” “What significance does the act of publishing have?” When you find that sometimes the publication has no more than three or four readers, you ask yourself whether it is justified. The figure includes the reader at the publishing house (if the publishing house hasn’t automated text processing), and the reviewers paid to read it (advertising).

So: a huge effort that does not translate into a consequence, or consequences—neither for the author nor for the three, four, five readers. It is an act in itself, a formality.

There are books that reached enormous print runs—absolutely enormous if we think of 2–3 million copies for certain titles. Not long before his death, Umberto Eco confessed to me that he was happy to be present in all homes where people had a small library. But his book (he was referring to *The Name of the Rose*, *Il nome della rosa*) was a collected object, not a reading. It was not read; it was merely present, as a decorative object. Under the motto: “I have an Eco in my library too!” For him—the man who celebrated the library and had a great library—realizing this reality was painful.

The poet Joseph Brodsky, if I remember correctly, who had also won a Nobel Prize for poetry, said: “I was happy that during my life in the Soviet Union people did everything possible to obtain a copy of my poetry book. They read it; they recited my verses to me. Now I am in a free country, I teach at a college, and I’m glad I’m a free poet. I can publish a poetry book, and if I’m lucky the edition reaches two to three hundred copies. Few read; nobody recites verses anymore.”

06:08

The significance of poetry disappeared. And he said this—again—a poet who had won the Nobel Prize for literature and who observed that once interest and the ability to understand the written word declined—especially poetry—the significance of poetry as such disappeared.

After all these examples, allow me to refer to what The Civilization of Illiteracy means—your original question. Rapid change, shorter cycles of innovation, the loss of permanence as the background of religion education, social life.

The Civilization of Illiteracy is a civilization of a multiplicity of means of expression. They are more numerous than ever in the past, and they change as we change. Their number increases because we have technical means for diversifying the means of expression. The presence of technology is owed to the languages of science. But also to the existence of very particular languages, which are “spoken,” meaning used, only by those engaged in specialized activities—those employed in an activity that can no longer be explained in the common language. Renowned experts in medicine, nanotechnology, genetics no longer know how to express themselves in ordinary language. Some know the genetic language (the genetic code has 4 letters), others the language of programming (how we tell the computer what we want), others the specialized language of artificial intelligence.

07:38

The Civilization of Illiteracy is characterized by the fact that people have become more productive than in the entire history of humanity. Imagine that the American—this is an average figure—is productive at the level of 170–180 thousand dollars per month. That would be the amount. But at the peaks—the best in programming, the best in marketing, in investments—productivity is at the level of millions.

How was this level reached? Especially since people work fewer hours per week and enjoy all sorts of vacations? (In Europe vacations are even more numerous.)

Productivity is not the result of using means we associate with literacy, but, on the contrary, using means we associate with the disappearance of literacy.

The entire artificial intelligence industry, which from one day to the next produces new and new models, consists in taking everything that has been written and translated into digital language in order to extract from this immense collection everything that has been accumulated and expressed through language.

So, in a way, we have a negation of language by turning it into an operational means, in which partial languages make possible operations that normal language cannot describe. The language associated with literacy has come to slow down science and technology.

That is a characteristic of the civilization of illiteracy.

09:29

Not less important: the increasingly decisive role played by the image. The role played by what is called multimedia. The increasingly important role played by what are called games—

of course, games embedded through networks. Those who play are not directly connected; they are connected through technical mediation.

And, finally, an increasingly large role is played not by illiteracy, but by aliteracy: you do not write, but you also do not know you do not write; you do not read, but you also do not know what reading is—because you do not need them.

This phenomenon of aliteracy has consequences: in the first two weeks of this year (2026) scientific articles were published—in some of the most important journals—ten times more than last year in the same period.

The question is: did everyone suddenly become writers of scientific articles? Is everyone an author? Suddenly, many readers of scientific articles? No!

We have the means called LLM models, that is, large language models. And these models produce on demand: “Write me an article about spring in this corner of California.” Or: “Write me an article about cancer”, “Write me an article about black holes.” The model researches data related to this command (the location where the author is, meteorological data, what the press says about the weather, etc.). In probably 20 to 40 seconds a perfectly articulated text is generated with all the information that none of us, living here, could have gathered.

This immense productivity is based not on direct activity, but on activity mediated by the science that has accumulated and been translated digitally. The result is, on the one hand, impressive; on the other, depressing. The model knows everything about each of us—without asking permission. Consequently, by taking over functions associated with literacy and advancing new functions, such models influence the human profile.

During my academic activity I had the pain—literally the pain—to know people who became less and less literate because they did not need to write or read. I had colleagues who have not read a book in the last 25 years. I had colleagues who, if a student in a class in Romania, in Germany, in France—where I have also been teaching in my life—had expressed themselves as poorly as they did, they could not have passed the exam. Such pupils could not have remained in my class—they had to be helped.

And yet some of the colleagues I refer to were tenured university professors who could not write a complete sentence correctly. It’s frightening. Or laughable.

On the other hand, the obsession with success, which costs money (labs, assistants, materials, travel to conferences, etc.), influenced them. They became terrifyingly good at discovering financial resources to maintain their chair and justify an activity which, in terms of contribution to human culture, was probably between zero and zero.

13:46

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Allow me to remain a little longer near this segment of our conversation—defining terms—and ask as follows:

Is this civilization of illiteracy a fatality? Could it not have been otherwise?

Of all possible evolutions, was this the only possible world able to settle and be lived—with its pluses, minuses, depressions, worries, and so on?

**Mihai Nadin:**

I have confessed several times that I would have preferred an answer that sounds optimistic—namely, that we could have avoided this development. No, it was not and is not possible. The book is not a description of what happened, but a study of the systemic aspect.

Why did illiteracy win? Why are particular, specialized literacies increasingly present and increasingly defining human beings?

The necessity of the process is systemic—it has to do with the human condition. Apart from humans, there is no being in the immense living world that wants more and more. Animals gather in nature means of subsistence—at levels that ensure survival.

Man forged himself, man defined himself. When man gained consciousness, he became the expression of the possibility of wanting more, of reaching ever-higher goals. Consciousness is what made man—namely as an existence no longer determined by its past, but animated to make a future. The future means more than the present. This ever-more translates into various forms.

For example, not only do we eat more than we need, not only do we eat more than we deserve, so to speak, for our effort. We eat for the pleasure of eating. Survival is no longer a goal.

Thus the activity of feeding transformed into an activity in itself. In turn, making food for those who want to enjoy the pleasure of eating became profitable. Famous chefs worldwide have the admiration that only artists and footballers once had.

Why? Not because they create increasingly healthy food, but because they turned a survival necessity into a profitable activity, in which ever-more is the key to success.

The same can be said, unfortunately, regarding art.

17:26

Art is the product of human adaptation to a condition in which, to understand its place in the world, it asks questions. Art is, ultimately, the expression of the questions we have. Science is the description of answers: why does a tree fall down and not up?

And the answer is described in the laws of gravity. Science is the expression of understanding the world we live in.

Art says: I am interested in the answer to the question “Why?”

Why does a tree fall? What does this tree mean to me? To those close to me?

And from here: Why do people die? Why do we fall in love? Why do we like one another?

Art appeared with this functionality and, if we look at the paintings of Lascaux and similar ones—there are such beginnings of art everywhere in the world—they are always a formulation of a question.

At this hour, art is no longer in this condition, but, like gastronomic excesses, it has become an activity in itself.

An artist whose works sell for 20–30 million and which, in fact, are not even admired, because they are stored in a warehouse somewhere in Switzerland, with the hope that in 10 years their value will double.

Thus, an art created to be seen has meanwhile become an art not only not seen, but kept as a means of hoarding.

That was not the purpose of art when man, in his making, in his founding, asked questions.

Sexuality became a product. From sexuality linked to survival, which we still have in animals, sexuality in humans became, like many others, another product.

When everything we do becomes a product, the unavoidable question is:

How can I do more?

How can I obtain more?

In this way we yielded the special place we wanted in the world. And instead of continuing to create ourselves ethically, we yielded ethics in favor of monetizing it.

I become passionate when referring to such aspects because they affect me completely, they affect me at my substance. I often tell myself:

Do we realize what we have sacrificed for the well-being we live in? Because in terms of well-being, the world has never had it better in history. And yet people want to have even more.

In well-being it seems there is no limit. And here is the great problem, the great question that must always be asked honestly.

If we do not have the honesty to formulate the question, no honest answer will appear either.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

I am glad for the passion with which you speak, and thank you for anticipating one of my questions.

I wanted to invite you to mention a few markers of this civilization of illiteracy—you already did so regarding gastronomy, sexuality, art, and so on.

I show again to those watching: this book is not an ordinary book; it is a big book—literally and figuratively. Almost 1000 pages, but its specificity is not quantity; it is depth.

“The Civilization of Illiteracy,” Mihai Nadin, Spandugino Publishing House, Romanian edition 2016, as I said—a book carrying the future.

22:34

Mr. Nadin, if we simplify: the civilization of illiteracy points to a new world.

I do not dare go further and tie it to the famous phrase Brave New World. Though perhaps we are also there in some measure.

I want to ask whether what we live now, what we have lived for years, what we will live, is a new world. Does this new world vampirize the old world(s)? Or protect them? In what terms do you place this relationship?

What was the civilization of literacy versus the civilization of illiteracy?

**Mihai Nadin:**

Your questions cannot be answered with Yes and No.

They have multiple levels.

First: to the extent it is useful, the past is integrated into what happens today. A concrete example: the entire system of artificial intelligence models is based on the fact that everything we know and expressed in language could be gathered and processed. This collection of the

past took place insofar as books were digitized, articles (good or bad) became digital expression, Internet conversations (both banal and specialized), conferences were transformed into computer language.

The machine does not understand, but can become the memory of these expressions in common language. A memory not in our words, but in zeros and ones (0 and 1), stored in huge matrices. All libraries in the world reduced to digital language...

We have the mathematics of processing these data if we ignore what words mean and limit ourselves to syntax, the formal aspect (what they look like).

Vygotsky, I don't know if you remember him—or whether people remember him anymore—Vygotsky analyzed a poem by Pushkin (“Брожу ли я вдоль улиц шумных...”—Walking along noisy streets) to discover how an emotional reaction arises. Andrei Markov, to whom we owe the mathematical theory underlying statistical inferences, counted by hand the letters from the first part of Eugene Onegin. He made a diagram of letters—how they succeed, how many, how frequent, whether there is a link between vowels and consonants.

With the naive impression that if we produce a description of all letters that make up a poem or story, we will know what poetry is, we will discover the secret of literature.

Lev Vygotsky, but even more than him Andrei Markov, are, if you like, the genius and the monster behind what we today call LLM Models. Almost nobody knows their names.

What do we do today? We have enormous digital capability—we built engines, so to speak, with immense power that, of course, consume immense energy and that can take not only a Pushkin poem but everything ever written and transposed digitally.

We can take all poems ever written, all texts, all scientific treatises—everything put on paper, everything “translated” digitally—and instead of analyzing word by word, letter by letter, we look for formal aspects easy to process. The effort is even more perverse: analysis goes down to syntactic formations—two or three letters—what in technical language is called a token. Not billions of such tokens—trillions.

As if we counted how many electrons or molecules we need to make steel or butter. Elementary particles of language from whose combination everything we know and expressed results. The past.

What's very interesting is that this analysis extended to billions, trillions (I no longer know what word comes after trillion in Romanian...) has no relation anymore to what was described in language. All theories are now combinations of “elementary particles.” Reality has been reduced to describing it in abstractions hard to understand. For this reason even professionals cannot explain how it works. They do not know.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Neither do I, honestly.

**Mihai Nadin:**

Beyond the trillions-of-trillions, interesting ideas were discovered.

I will give an example that leads us to a name I necessarily want to bring to your attention: Solomon Marcus.

Solomon Marcus, the great mathematician—indeed the great thinker—made possible the Romanian translation of my book. It was his idea, and he convinced Mrs. Spandonide. I am grateful to both.

27:40

But why did I bring Solomon Marcus into discussion?

Because among other merits he had an “Erdős number” of the highest rank.

What is the “Erdős number”?

Paul Erdős was a sensational mathematician. He had no permanent chair and carried almost nothing besides what he carried with him. He was invited here, invited there—and if not invited, he invited himself. Over 500 collaborators.

Whoever published with Erdős had number 1. Whoever published with someone who published with Erdős had number 2. Solomon Marcus had Erdős number 1: he published with Erdős.

In the last two or three days, the big sensation is that these automatic systems—LLM Models, in this case ChatGPT 5.2—took some of Erdős’s challenges, problems no one had solved.

And these systems solved some Erdős problems. Some will say: sensational achievement. We, living mathematicians, did not manage what these systems managed. Would Erdős be satisfied?

Yes—because the problem is solved. And no—but here I must explain why no. Some problems are defined in a closed space. That means that trying all kinds of solutions, you eventually reach the solution—like chess. Or like finding a needle in a haystack. There is lots of hay and one needle. But mathematics is not to try everything; it is to reach the simplest solution. For example, a magnet helps find the needle: the elegant solution. Erdős was an artist of mathematics. Solomon Marcus also followed that path.

If you have all the energy in the world, enough to search the haystack, you can analyze that closed space until you reach the answer. But you spend energy.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Solution!

**Mihai Nadin:**

In this way the automaton won at chess.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

The computer.

**Mihai Nadin:**

Not because the automaton had “intelligence.” No. It had brute force. If you play all possible games, you win.

Many active in AI hate me because I told them often: what you call intelligence is not intelligence. It is brute force used shamelessly.

Because for me, winning at chess by using the energy a whole town needs is not an intelligent performance. My criterion: if a system can perform at human level, we may consider it intelligent if it does not use more energy than a human would use for the same performance. Simply: intelligence means doing what you want with less energy. If you do it with more and more energy—where is the intelligence? It isn't. We are exhausting the future. We live at the expense of that future.

This book, “The Civilization of Illiteracy,” is connected to the next book the same publishing house honored me to publish: “THE BALANCE OF SCIENCE — The Future Matters.”

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Which is next to us.

**Mihai Nadin:**

They are connected. And when I say connected, they are connected in the awareness that the civilization of illiteracy helped us reach a level of civilization we can be proud of: cars, rockets, heated houses, air conditioning... all the wonders of life.

But also enormous productivity in killing people, destroying, making people dependent on chemistry—medications of all kinds... I'm no longer sure I can be proud of the civilization of literacy.

Because in reality we reached a moment when I am offended that everything we produced intellectually translates into a world that is not better: more crime, more dishonesty, more lies, more theft. More injustice. The civilization of illiteracy is the inheritance of literacy—its automation.

There is not a day when I don't see on my computer that someone from somewhere tries to do something with what I have on my computer—my identity is stolen. Digital technology made violation possible.

For others it's more painful because the machine not only searches my thoughts but steals others' money. I live in a neighborhood where older people became victims of all methods new technology—illiteracy—made possible. Instead of having more chances in life, we became afraid of the technology we financed hoping for a better world. Violated—and paying for the pleasure of violation.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Let me ask you something blunt, direct:

What type of human subject does this civilization of illiteracy produce predominantly?

Autonomous? Assisted? Dependent? Reformulated: more autonomous and free, or more assisted, or more dependent?

Is it a civilization of freedom, or a cage—sometimes a luxury cage, but still a cage?

**Mihai Nadin:**

Like your previous question, this cannot be answered with Yes or No.

Why? Because some of the most brilliant technicians today—intentionally I call them technicians—did not study and did not need to.

They acquired understanding of digital systems without understanding them fully. But they can make them more and more efficient—not through intelligence, but by using more and more energy. Society pays.

Efficiency could help us. Example: radiology.

If you need medical intervention you inevitably become the subject of radiology. These images of our interior are produced by computer graphics. They can help a doctor define a diagnosis. That is the good part.

These machines are sensational. They measure our interior without causing great damage—measurements of cartilage, cells, etc.—useful for surgeon, internist, etc. They produce matrices of numbers. Data sets grow with each patient and instrument. The radiologist does

not see the lung, knee, heart—he sees their representation in an image based on measurements (bone density, blood flow speed, etc.). Therefore no respectable radiologist will hesitate to say: as far as my experience allows, I believe you have pneumonia, or embolism, etc.—based on training and image.

But behind the images is more information. Some is lost when graphics are produced. Therefore, if we could conceive a machine that understands measurement data without needing the image, we would have a better radiologist.

In the last 2–3 weeks, before our dialogue, the best radiologists proved to be AI-based radiologists. Will they replace human radiologists?

I'm convinced they will. They won't be cheaper, unfortunately. Sometimes they won't be better. Because comparison data are from the past. Diseases of the future are different. The machine, based on past descriptions, will not identify them.

But AI radiologists will replace humans because the most expensive doctor today is the radiologist. Not even famous surgeons are as well paid. And surgeons too—ready to offer “spare parts” for knees and shoulders—will be replaced.

But here comes the perverse part. Due to enormous data accumulation and measurement, none of us has a personality that belongs to us anymore. We are reduced to the data that describe us—reflecting a perspective, not an objective image.

We no longer belong to ourselves. And when I say that, I do not mean the state has me in inventory and will clean my shoes or pay my taxes.

No. We no longer belong to ourselves in terms of control. Controlled behavior, controlled decisions. If that reduced crime, it would be nice—but exactly that hope fails. Criminals have more efficient means.

There is a good part: we can do things we could not before. And there is a bad part: we are exposed to a perfection which, if not guided by ethics, can become very dangerous.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

So, reformulating: it is a perfection that is inhuman, and if not used with ethics “on board,” it can become anti-human?

**Mihai Nadin:**

It can become anti-human. And the big question we all have today is relatively simple:

Do we want a better human—or do we want a humanity without humans?

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

How beautifully said! Fantastic!

**Mihai Nadin:**

A better human is easy to say. But humanity without humans is a possibility that terrifies me. Yes, unfortunately there is that danger.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Brilliant!

39:53

**Mihai Nadin:**

But I was born an optimist. My book is an optimistic book. The second book I mentioned is also optimistic.

I believe we have, as humans, resources to do what justifies this investment. The investment must be for something better, not something less good.

As an optimist, I look at the fact that an entire generation of illiterates—effectively illiterates—managed to produce a technology that appears almost miraculous to some. For me, this means humans have enormous resources.

I can never give up the desire to see good prevail. I cannot.

Recently, a local publication here presented: “Who is this Mihai Nadin who moved into our neighborhood?”

And my message was: if you don’t know, I invite you to talk with me. We meet on beaches, mountains, under a tree. We can talk about the future, and think together what we should do so the future is positive not only for us, but for those who come after us.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Let me ask a major “crossroads” question: fundamentally, who loses and who wins living in this civilization of illiteracy? Who surely loses, and who wins?

**Mihai Nadin:**

The loss is easy to identify: the past. We sacrifice the past—which is always much more than memories—for the pleasure of the present. The past is expressed in culture—not only art and literature, but also the meaning of family, belonging to community, science (including science later proven false)... We leave behind successes and failures, a dynamic identity constantly changing. It hurts me, but we sacrifice this past constantly. And thus we live in the illusion

everything begins with us, that there were no others—parents, teachers, churches, schools, friends—who enabled our path to the good we live, without gratitude. When gratitude disappears, civilization becomes narcissistic.

On one of my walks here on Santa Lucia mountain, I found trees—California oaks—older than the state of California, 300–400 years. On California’s emblem is the bear. There is no bear in this area anymore. The emblem carries a symbol of an eradicated past. Not only the bear but mountain lions, many animals, birds, plants...

These very old trees will disappear too. In exchange we have a locality celebrating the automobile—one terrible week with the richest collectors of classic cars—becoming a mall visited by over 2 million tourists. Monetizing existence means the right to the most expensive medical care—an illusory present where the past disappeared. No one has time to say goodbye to parents and grandparents, taken by nursing homes that keep them alive because they can make money from every moment before death.

When I say the past is lost, I mean: in the most beautiful moments of my life I returned to Shakespeare’s sonnets, to Bach’s music, and I relived conversations with friends... I could give a thousand examples. The right to the past is not less important than the right to the present. The right to the future, as anticipatory action, allowed us to be creative.

But when everything is rushed, less time remains between past, present, and future. Creativity is not stimulated by the speed of changes.

Who wins? That is more delicate. Apparently, the tremendous thirst to have more and better at the lowest price. We lose our human identity. It is a huge price.

But perhaps another humanity appears, of which we are not yet aware. Perhaps we are in a process where a new form of humanity is emerging. And like any new reality, the birth pains are great.

Anyone who has given birth knows what birth pains are. The birth pains of a poem, a scientific law, an idea are of the same nature. Perhaps we are at a moment where creativity changes. In fact, what motivated me in these years was trying to understand what creativity is.

I know what characterizes us as humans is extreme individuality.

There are not two identical cells in this universe. I don’t know if anyone asked what that means. Not two identical cells—not only in the human body but in the world. Perhaps based on this infinite differentiation we will reach a moment to redefine freedom. Old freedom is the measure in which we can be controlled by others. Perhaps we reach a formula of freedom where being controlled is no longer possible.

Of course, I can take any text someone claims is original, analyze it with AI means, and tell the person: you have nothing to say, you repeated others, and you have the shamelessness to ignore them.

Or, on the contrary, we can initiate interaction where we truly bring new ideas that did not exist before.

Creativity means to make something that did not exist before, in any way.

Perhaps we are on the threshold of a new understanding of originality. That would be beautiful!

I am—as always—enthusiastic that there is a future and that it can be meaningful, significant, enriching—one that does not steal from us everything for the desire to have more, but rather to have better without costing others.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

A future that is open, in other terms.

And in that direction, illiteracy would not necessarily equal failure—on the contrary, if we try to be optimistic or encourage ourselves.

So we would not equate, except as a last resort, civilization of illiteracy with failure and ruin, right?

**Mihai Nadin:**

No, in no case. The civilization of illiteracy probably deserved the title The Civilization of Many Literacies.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Multi-literacies.

**Mihai Nadin:**

Yes: diversification. Diversification is very good if it is not practiced as an end in itself—if it is justified by goals we could not otherwise reach.

So yes: the civilization of diversity would be the optimistic part—translated into concrete actions.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

In the same direction, since you referred constantly to artificial intelligence, I'd like a focused conversation on this big machinery, this "beast" of AI.

I have a question toward the end:

Does AI accentuate illiteracy or the civilization of illiteracy? Or does it create a meta-literacy—something much more complex, hard to imagine?

51:09

**Mihai Nadin:**

Through these new methods called deep learning—which are not deep (they do not go profound) and are not learning (nothing is learned)—through these methods literacy has been hit, as I'd say, fatally.

Think about those who use mobile phones, smartphones. What is the Romanian term?

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Exactly that: smartphone.

**Mihai Nadin:**

Leashed to the smartphone, the young person checks the "machine" more than 140 times a day—navigation, news, music, emails... New needs...

The generation that grew up with the computer is almost 100% tied to their smartphone.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Digital natives, as they're called.

**Mihai Nadin:**

Yes. In this smartphone they no longer need to read because the "machine" reads for them. If there is something to read, it reads.

They no longer need to write because you dictate; and dictation improves spelling—and you no longer need spelling. Just as you no longer need arithmetic.

So everything that belongs to what we know as literacy is now transformed into a marginal value.

There were years when companies hired those who knew how to write speeches and reports for their bosses (illiterates). They no longer need that. AI does it.

In fact, nobody reads the reports because they don't need them. Numbers matter.

Therefore the entire activity of producing such texts becomes useless.

Diversification is such that what becomes essential now is interaction. And there are more and more forms of interaction: the diversification of human interaction is, I think, the most important gift of these transformations.

I do not want—God forbid—to enter prophecy. When I wrote “The Civilization of Illiteracy,” I did not imagine a time would come when I would read it and say: Did all this pass through my mind? Did I foresee my present after a quarter century?

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Yes, it did pass through your mind.

**Mihai Nadin:**

How did I reach the need to formulate theses that at that time did not enjoy success? Solomon Marcus, at a big conference in Dresden, defended me—I had been attacked by those who didn't understand the nature of changes. They defended their privileged position. Ideas did not interest them. Solomon Marcus understood.

It was difficult. As history shows, prophets are always detested. I am not a prophet.

But I know that when we speak of the future, it must become clear there is no future if we are not able and willing to understand that living on the account of the future is suicide.

Thus the phrase “humanity without humans” came to mind. Because in reality, AI systems as we know them can produce about 60–70% of everything produced today. A car factory needs no workers. Robots can produce cars... and many other things.

Other activities have no future: all accountants are useless. The computer is the machine of numbers; it can do far more. Will we tell accountants: kill yourselves or do something else? We cannot tell them: go to the field and grow potatoes.

Agriculture can be 100% delegated. Delegated to the point where AI calculates that next year it is not worth growing wheat because weather conditions will not be good—so it pays you now for wheat you won't produce. Because it's cheaper to pay you for what you won't do than for what you expect if you do. In the steel industry this model is practiced; the result is simple: steel prices remain high; profit is assured.

All these examples bring the need to rethink what is significant in our life: What defines us as humans? What do we want to be? Why are we on this earth? Why do we exist?

Yes—Why do we exist? is a question we cannot avoid.

And perhaps with this question you help bring me to the end—because otherwise I'd continue until I see the sun setting. I look out the window and it is a pleasure to see the nature of this place while talking at the same time with Bucharest.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

What you say is powerful and quite harsh.

Even I want to put my finger on the wound and ask: in this civilization of illiteracy we live in—

How do we not lose our minds and soul? Navigating this world... Can we invent hope, invent optimism? Can a new form of humanity truly appear?

Or, if we are lucid, as you are—are we rather approaching twilight, an end? The sun is preparing to set where you are, by the way.

**Mihai Nadin:**

Among the things we cannot debate is that as long as we are alive we want to maintain life. Maintaining life can take lugubrious forms—someone hooked to tubes just to live (or to make the people who won't let him die rich). I am not referring to that.

To live means to enjoy life. If we cannot maintain the joy of life, we have failed. For me the fundamental category now has become the joy of life.

Do we have a right to the joy of life? No. But we have a responsibility for the joy of life.

So if I could, I would replace today's education, which is completely idiotic—

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Bureaucratic anyway, very bureaucratic.

**Mihai Nadin:**

We turned it into a machine. That is the tragedy: we turned education into a machine.

The joy of life is the joy of discovering each new moment. And school should be called the School of the Joy of Life. And in this school, your role is not to “teach,” but to create an atmosphere where interaction—where different people, instead of becoming the same, discover their uniqueness.

Everyone is engaged in an activity from which each benefits in their own way, for themselves, but also for others.

Maybe it's a utopian model—but I am willing even now, at this moment of my life, to meet anyone who would like to be part of my class of the joy of life.

You are the first invited.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

Thank you very much, I am honored.

The joy of life, the school of the joy of life—one more thing: the sun sets now, but tomorrow is a new day; tomorrow the sun rises.

Let us keep our hearts up!

Thank you very much, Mr. Mihai Nadin, for the joy and privilege of this conversation that circled many good things around this extraordinary book “The Civilization of Illiteracy,” Spandugino Publishing House.

Once again: reverence and gratitude. Thank you for the joy of this conversation.

**Mihai Nadin:**

Thank you too, and I thank those who help us now technically; I am grateful to them.

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

We thank them together—and it is only a period, and after the period we put a comma, because surely we will have more such conversations.

Thank you very, very much.

**Mihai Nadin:**

All the best!

**Cristian Pătrășconiu:**

All the best! Take care!

If you want, I can also output this as a Word/PDF document exactly formatted as “19 pages.”

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