Scientia*et*Fides 11(1)/2023 ISSN 2300-7648 (print) / ISSN 2353-5636 (online)

Received: November 4, 2022. Accepted: February 15. 2023 DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2023.007

The Issue of Social Control in Late Modernity: Alienation and Narrativity

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Abstract. This article shows to what extent the new situation in our late-modern societies can see a further deepening of the social control typical of soft totalitarianism we experience in our globalised democracies, through the mechanisms already denounced by Arendt in her The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951): the promotion of rootlessness and superfluity. In particular, the paper focus on what Eliot (1927) called the hollow man or what philosophy and sociology have called the one-dimensional man, the absent subject or the saturated self, which the technological, social, cultural and economic environment in which we live so favours. The article diagnoses the reasons and means by which the alienation of the subject occurs, but proposes narrative and testimony as ways of combating social control of a psychopolitical kind[1].

Keywords: alienation, experience, narrative, testimony, narcissism, postmodernity.

Introduction

Many authors have denounced the situation of harsh *social control* since Gilles Deleuze (1990) established this terminology to name the new

[1] Investigación financiada por el proyecto del Banco de Santander – CEU titulado "Control social, posmodernidad y comunidad política" (COSOPOC) con código B920PR02 // FUSPBC-PPC14/2018.

modes of power domination in societies, the result of the historical alliance between technology and neoliberal capitalism. According to his account, the control of bodies exercised by disciplinary societies, extensively studied by Foucault, gave way to a new style of domination focused on our souls. As opposed to the instruction received in internment centres (schools, barracks, hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, prisons, etc.), in these new globalised societies, the exercise of power was reoriented towards the solicitation and seduction of our freedom. From biopolitics we drifted towards psychopolitics (Han 2014).

1. Neo-liberalism and the crisis of the subject

With the fall of meta-narratives (Lyotard, 1979) and the end of the Cold War brought about by the economic and arms defeat of the USSR, the capitalist bloc lost interest in its moral propaganda to justify the inequality entailed by the *invisible hand* as the only mechanism for redistributing wealth and began to show itself in all its unbridled harshness focusing all its efforts on acceleration. In the Reagan (1981–1989) and Thatcher (1979–1990) era, competition, market deregulation and technological globalisation were promoted. This was confirmed in 1989 by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of the Internet, as John Paul II warned in *Centesimus Annus* (1991, n. 42).

With these expansionist economic and technological drivers, the dynamic stability of growth that the capitalist system requires in order not to collapse was achieved (Rosa, 2010), even at the cost of losses in terms of social justice and the environment (De Sousa Santos, 2021), both of which are widely denounced in Pope Francis' successive encyclicals *Laudato Si'* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020).

Several theorists have interpreted the 21st century as a time of consolidation and growth of this neoliberal drift over the course of the crises that have occurred in the system: Naomi Klein (2014), for example, who has dubbed the mechanism the *shock doctrine*. According to it, successive disasters are used by the system to advance its dominance over the citizens of the globalised world. History would seem to back up this interpre-

tation, as the 2001 terrorist attack in the heart of the American empire served to eliminate *de facto* various rights of citizens, both in the United States and the rest of the world.

All this infringement of privacy and other rights guaranteed by liberal constitutions was justified by *national security*. Guantánamo became a symbol of the practice of torture of certain people in the *general interest*, legitimised through the power of the *media* in TV series such as *24* (2001–2010) or in films such as *Unthinkable* (2010), to give just two examples, and even criticised in documentaries such as *The Road to Guantánamo* (2006) or films such as *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012).

However, as has been repeatedly denounced in the literature on surveillance (Han 2013; Bauman & Lyon 2013; Zuboff 2019), the exercise of state violence was not only focused on the lack of legal safeguards for alleged or potential terrorists, but was refined in the case of all those connected to the network internet in their personal lives. The pact between the US government and the NASDAQ tech companies was one of *surveillance capitalism*. It allowed government agencies to spy on, track and record anyone using digital electronic devices, while guaranteeing companies in Silicon Valley (Google, Apple, Microsoft, etc.) and Seattle (Amazon, etc.) that antitrust laws would not apply to them.

None of this is a secret of the well-informed, but a body of evidence that has even appeared repeatedly portrayed in numerous audiovisual products, such as the TV series *Homeland* (2011–2020), films like *Eye in the Sky* (2015) and *Snowden* (2016), or documentaries such as *Citizenfour* (2014), on the exercise of military surveillance and intelligence. Similarly, the growing power of technology has been widely discussed, not only at the cultural, but also at the social and political level. Examples of this is the beautiful film *Nomadland* (2020), which depicts one of the consequences of Amazon's erosion of the country's social fabric, as described in detail in the book *Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-first Century* (Bruder 2017) or *Fulfillment: America in the Shadow of Amazon* (MacGillis 2021), which makes for terrifying reading on the social and personal disintegration sowed by this large multinational. In terms of the effects of new technologies on people's privacy, we have series such as *Mr. Robot*

(2015–2019) and *Black Mirror* (2011–2019), as well as documentaries such as *The Social Dilemma* (2020).

As we have already read from various authors, the end of the 20th century heralded the era of hedonistic and consumerist narcissism (Lasch 1979; Lipovetsky 1983, 1987) and, as we read in Jappe, there is a relationship between the conditions in which we live in post-modernity – technological ease and neoliberal financial fluidity – and the new modes of domination over individuals: "Narcissism is as closely linked to postmodern, liquid, flexible and "individualised" capitalism – whose most consummate expression can be found online – as obsessive neurosis was to Fordist, authoritarian, repressive and pyramidal capitalism, which found its expression on the assembly line." (2019, 155)

This article will attempt to show to what extent the new situation in our late-modern societies can see a further deepening of the social control typical of soft totalitarianism (Taylor, 1991; Rosa, 2010) we experience in our globalised democracies, through the mechanisms already denounced by Arendt in her *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951): the promotion of rootlessness and superfluity. In particular, we want to focus not so much on the process of isolation and loneliness that appears and increases in individuals in large cities, where a large part of the world's population is concentrated, but rather on what poetry called, even before the Second World War, our condition of the *hollow man* (Eliot 1927), or what philosophy and sociology have called the *one-dimensional man* (1964), the *absent subject* (Borghesi 2005) or the *saturated self* (Gergen 2000), which the technological, social, cultural and economic environment in which we live so favours.

2. The problematic narrative of the self: rootlessness and superfluity in late modernity

A composite feature of human experience is narrativity, pre-narrativity or proto-narrativity (Szutta 2021). We say *composite* because it is the result of the interweaving of a bundle of transcendental characteristics of human experience and action: temporality, morality sociability, intelli-

gibility, self-awareness, etc. (Martínez-Lucena 2008). We are both narrators and protagonists of our own narrative. We are co-authors of ourselves. However, at some point we have lost narrative capacity. We read this clearly in Richard Sennet's *The Corrosion of Character*, which explains the effects of the latest generation of capitalism in the sphere of labour. The subject of late modernity: "lives in a world marked by flexibility and short-term change; this world does not offer much that resembles a narrative, either economically or socially. […] The special characteristics of time in neo-capitalism have created a conflict between character and experience, the experience of disjointed time, which threatens people's ability to consolidate their character in enduring narratives." (Sennet 2000, 29–30)

Narratives wane, spread out, fragmented, and lose relevance and interest in narrating themselves. In everyday life itself, such changes can also be found in love and sexual relations. In his book *Liquid Love*, for example, Zygmunt Bauman (2003) denounced the emergence of a new logic within the bonds between romantic couples. From the Western institutional marriage ideal of *forever*, we have moved on to the individualistic, hedonistic and narcissistic logic of consumption, also in the field of our affectivity. This has taken shape and become more acute in recent years thanks to applications such as *Tinder*, in which courtship is dispensed with for relationships, creating fluid subjectivities, adapted to the panorama of constant change ubiquitously imposed by neoliberalism.

We no longer live in a world full of uncertainty and risks (Beck 1992), not only in economic, employment, psychological, and health matters, etc., but also in the field of relationships. Precariousness goes beyond employment, it affects all our lives and is widespread, as we see portrayed in TV series such as *The Wire* (2002–2008), where its creator, David Simon, even anticipates the ravages of the financial crisis. Bauman already denounced this in his *Liquid Life* (2005). *Bare life*, desacralised (Agamben, 1998), is not only found in the foreigners and immigrants, who are excluded without recognition of rights or dignity, but also in the citizens of the system, who allow themselves to be moulded even in their most intimate dimensions – sexual and familial – as Eva Illouz illustrated by

speaking of the end of love (2021) and the new logics of sexual capital, in which we adapt to the continuous change demanded by competitiveness, efficiency and performance.

The vertigo of this indeterminacy we see in all aspects of our lives, verifying us as merchandise, has provoked, on the one hand, a generalised strategy of consent to the evil that befalls our fellow human beings, based on our own low tolerance of pain, suffering and sacrifice in our own lives.

We live in a *palliative* society, victims of algophobia (Han 2021), which only treats pain from the point of view of analgesia and not from the point of view of dealing with it and its possible meaning by integrating it, even if only as a mystery, as part of one's own life narrative (Grassi 2020). See, for example, how Lola López Mondéjar, a psychoanalyst psychologist, describes the individual adapted to today's system: "The hyper-adapted contemporary individual identifies with infantile invulnerability and omnipotence, denying the more fragile aspects of their self, which ultimately go unnoticed, inventing an illusion of invulnerability to be able to live, one which makes them highly malleable." (2022, 6).

These individuals, normative in our globalised Western environment, and described by the psychotherapist as follows:

> The invertebrate lacks a backbone or notochord, they have no moral axis to guide their behaviour, as they are pragmatic and shape their actions to their immediate interest, without remorse or guilt, since moral behaviour requires a certain level of integration between pleasure and duty, between the moral superego, the ideal of the self and its drives. Moral conduct requires a capacity for renunciation and commitment that is all too lacking in the invulnerable and invertebrate adapted to our liquid modernity. (2022, 154)

The author goes so far as to assert that, in a way, our unconscious normative model is that of the psychopath, as corroborated by some psychiatric literature (Hare 1991; Babiak & Hare 2007; Dutton 2012), along with the large body of television and film production surrounding the subject. We have adapted psychopaths, snakes in suits, financiers or politicians responsible for the financial crises, who have reached the pinnacle of success precisely because our system rewards their way of behaving, of

climbing the social pyramid. Films like *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987), *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000), and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Martin Scorsese, 2013), and TV series like *Succession* (2018–) or the demented *Exit* (2019–), bring into the limelight the stereotype of the businessman or broker who gains in appeal by liquefying his humanity in the system. This is a phenomenon we also see in the world of politics, in TV series such as *House of Cards* (2013–2018).

According to Recalcati's formulation of the psychopathology of our time, the *clinic of emptiness* (2002), the present-day situation of the self is bifrontal:

> On the one hand, the clinic [...] of the compulsive practices of enjoyment, of the need for discharge, of the compulsive drive in which the real, detaching itself from the symbolic, is no longer framed in the unconscious frame of the phantom, therefore, the *clinic of the id without the unconscious*. On the other hand we have the clinic that Lacan defined as "social psychosis", that is a *clinic of solid identification*, focused on excessive identification with social semblants that seems to cancel desire and its subjectivation and in which, the imaginary, by disconnecting from the symbolic, gives rise to hyper-identifications that compensate in some (pathological) way for the liquid loss of subjects without any other ideal references capable of stably orienting their lives. (2011, 37)

On the one hand, the normative subject has a facet in which they have serious difficulties in even understanding the experiences of commitment and guilt, while on the other side of the coin we find a great one-sidedness in imagining oneself, easily conforming to the standards set by the dominant imaginaries (Belmonte 2020).

Thus, this new subjective paradigm of our societies falls much more easily into the two strategies traditionally used by power for social control: rootlessness and superfluity (Arendt, 1951, chap. XIII), which feed back into the inner discomfort that translates into the various symptoms of the pathologies typical of the clinic of emptiness described by Recalcati: bulimia, anorexia, various dependencies, generalised anxiety symptoms in which the patient is unable to understand where the discomfort comes from, etc.

Returning to the aforementioned rootlessness and superfluity, increased by the characteristics of the new normative subject, we are able to distinguish various ways in which these occur. Firstly, greater rootlessness is caused by interpersonal relationships losing the unconditionality and stability they offered at other times in our history, and because, due to the fantasy of invulnerability in which we live, we tend to deny the need for others in order to exist, something that is ontologically wrong. Thus, our narrative identity tends to be monadic and fragmentary, with no other belonging than the diverse, ephemeral, evanescent, imaginary and uncompromised nature so characteristic of the digital (Rendueles 2013) and neo-tribal world (Maffesoli 1988).

Secondly, in the experience of these invertebrate people, we see greater superfluity because our invulnerable and invertebrate narrative eliminates facts considered negative through the cognitive bias caused by this fantasy of invulnerability. We tend to get trapped in what Recalcati calls the *enjoyment of death*, because "our time [...] is the time in which ideals are revealed to be inconsistent, except that of enjoyment (of death) as the ultimate purpose of life" (2014, pos. 217), since in our culture it is unusual for the pursuit of mere pleasure to come up against any limits, with a testimony that introduces the possibility of desire transcending the immediacy of longing and becoming law. As Han (2012, 2021) has argued, we live in a positive society, where culture and society conspire to eliminate any negative elements on the visible horizon, where it seems obligatory to be happy (Ahmed 2010; Béjar 2018; Cabanas & Illouz 2019).

Thus, without living reality in depth, to its ultimate meaning, it becomes very difficult to live beyond frenetic appearance and ubiquitous digital entertainment, and to weave a unified narrative worthy of the human. We are faced with the highly current aesthetics of the smooth (Han, 2015) and the superficiality that involves seeing only the positive, which is in line with our current *narcynicism* (Soler 2007), as a strategy of rationalisation to keep intact the delirium of invulnerability typical of Narcissus (López Mondéjar 2022).

Thirdly, dealing with the rigid side of the psychology of the clinic of emptiness denounced by Recalcati, we find ourselves with a certain fa-

cility to narrate ourselves imaginatively with the support of fashion or the dominant social imaginary of any given moment, through a pre-conscious mimesis, which can generate the sensation that rootlessness does not exist, and where superfluity, far from being a problem, is a virtue, since our eco-system is, by definition, "post-metaphysical" and "neo-liberal", such that superfluity becomes one of the *sine qua non* conditions of the supposed new realism of cynicism and short-term survival.

As we read in Recalcati, nowadays, "enjoyment assumes the form of a categorical imperative that refuses castration: You must enjoy!" (2011, 26). And, although this is a way of life celebrated by sociologists such as Lipovetsky (1992, 2006), it is not true that it is a painless ethic, as he states in the title of his essay *The Twilight of Duty: The Painless Ethics of New Democratic Times*, but it is translated into a new form of malaise in our culture. According to the neoliberal imaginary, our status as turbo-consumers makes us masters of our own tastes and the possibility of their satisfaction (as long as we have money, at least).

However, this capitalist discourse has its counterpart, as it turns us into passive objects of its systemic will to enjoy as has been well portrayed in the dystopian *The Matrix* (Lana Wachowski & Lilly Wachowski, 1999), where humans become batteries of the technological system that drags our experience of the real into a virtual existence, as we have also seen recreated in numerous episodes of the TV series *Black Mirror* (2011–2019), or reality entertainment formats, as we saw in *The Truman Show* (1998) and have continued to see in *Free Guy* (Shawn Levy, 2021), where the character played by Ryan Reynolds makes the ontological status leap from filler avatar in a video-game to real person.

From free subjects we become objects trapped in the limits of our own endemic world of consumption. We are therefore also turbo-consumers in the sense that we experience enjoyment as something detached from any limit, "impervious to amorous, antivital discourse, which is not generated only by consumption but which also tends to consume those who consume, to use the consumption of things as a way of compensating for the disconnection of the subject from any connection with the Other." (Recalcati 2011, 49)

As Critical Theory has denounced on various occasions (Adorno 1951; Marcuse 1964), our society is characterised by the fact that we live an alienated life – to recover the Marxian concept – to the extent that we lose a significant relationship with ourselves, with others, with reality, with work, with time and with space. An interesting formulation of this new situation in late modernity, in which everything seems to have become available and the world has lost its magic, is that of Hartmut Rosa. He considers that Weber's disenchantment, Lukács's reification, or Camus' absurdity, can be reconceptualised as alienation, which is:

> a particular mode of relating to the world of things, to people, and to one's self in which there is no *responsivity*, i.e., no meaningful inner connection. […] In this mode, there certainly are causal and instrumental connections and interactions, but the world (in all its qualities) cannot be appropriated by the subject, it cannot be made to "speak," it appears to be without sound and color. Alienation thus is a relationship which is marked by the absence of a true, vibrant exchange and connection: between a silent and grey world and a "dry" subject there is no life, both appear to be either "frozen" or genuinely chaotic and mutually aversive. Hence, in the state of alienation, self and world appear to be related in an utterly indifferent or even hostile way (Rosa 2018)

A malaise of our times is thus consolidated, which in the case of Hartmut Rosa is the result of the acceleration of life we experience. Looking at our society through the prism of its acceleration (Virilio 1995; Rosa 2010), we find, also from this perspective, difficulties in narratively plotting our own identity and experience in post-modernity. Narrating is always an act that is exercised in time, which is never alien to the cultural construction that is made of it. With the increase in speed, storytelling becomes much more blurred, and everything tends to equalise as the flow of zeros and ones feeds the system. Drama, metaphor and meaning do not work as a stream of zeros and ones that we can accelerate almost to infinity, with new processors seeking to save time, because time is still money, especially for finance. We live in a society that, as Han (2021a) states, looks to *big data* as a model of communication. Information and addition, the mere stringing together of data, are opposed to narration.

Another interesting element to highlight, in terms of the influence that acceleration has on our ability to narrate, is that which we see with memory. In chapter 14 of his *Alienation and Acceleration*, Rosa (2010) poses what he calls the subjective paradox of time, which consists of realising that the time of experience and the time of memory do not necessarily coincide. An example of this is that when we do something we really enjoy, with new, intense and stimulating sensations, time passes quickly, whereas if we try to recover it through memory, we find ourselves with a lot of things to explain and the day then becomes extremely long. The same inverse relationship between experience and memory can be found in the opposite case, when we spend the day doing something boring, repetitive and of no interest to us: then the time feels long as it passes, but when we try to remember what we have done, it barely takes a sentence to narrate it.

However, in our late-modern technological civilisation, these classical long/short or short/long forms of relationship between life and memory are being replaced by the short/short dyad. It is therefore a new kind of time, which leaves no trace in our experience. When sat in front of a video game screen or a working day full of emails and various applications that one must use, surfing social networks, or in procastination, one lives intensely and the hours fly by. However, when we look back on what we have done, there is little to recount. We thus have a time that leaves no trace narratively because we do not make it our own. We live, therefore, also alienated from time.

As Benjamin stated, modernity, in this case late modernity, verifies the richness of the number of *experiences* provoked (*Erlebnis*) by the various *shocks* that everyday life produces in us, while we are increasingly poorer in subjective *experience* (*Erfahrung*). Meaningful narrative had been supplanted by haphazard information and raw sensation in the mass media.

Alienation in late modernity is an intensification of this dispossession of one's own experience, of this narrative poverty, which Benjamin already recognised at the end of solid modernity.

We said at the beginning of the article that narrativity was a bundle of transcendental or originary characteristics of experience: temporality, morality, sociability, intelligibility, etc. That is to say: we live in an

accelerated temporality, in which experiences are multiplied and superimposed in a difficult and vertiginous montage that compromises their intelligibility; we live in a post-Oedipal time, in which solid modernity has given way to *narcynicism*, self-absorbed in a world without an ideal, calling morality into question, insofar as the good we seek is ephemeral and does not allow us to face difficulties; we live in a society where bonds have lost their consistency and are moulded at every moment to neoliberal and digital fluidity, favouring a capitalist discourse that atomises and leads to the new epidemic of loneliness; we live, in short, a life in which, as Gergen (2000) describes, we no longer have an important goal in the face of difficulties, but rather, due to the mutability and inconsistency of everything, we cease to tire in struggle and reserve strength in order to survive, to stay afloat, while we let ourselves drift, like a castaway (or a surfer, perhaps, to state it more positively) who lets himself be swept away by the rough sea of technology, competition, and an acceleration of the pace of life. Today, because of all this, we live a much more superfluous and rootless life.

3. Testimony and narration

Narrative is kept alive by events, which energise time, because they introduce otherness, the unexpected, the incalculable, the mystery into our horizon, awakening in us the desire to make plans, to relate humanly to the other in time, to find meaning, to discover the intrigue of the real in order to transform it, as Ricoeur (1983) tells us when describing the 3 moments of mimesis in his *Time and Narrative*. And it is also through the factual realisation of what happens that we discover the most universal ideals, such as how the Newtonian law of gravitation is said to have arisen from that mythical apple that fell on his head, or how Christianity, a new civilisation that valued every human being, arose from the encounter and friendship of a few fishermen with the man who called himself Jesus. From great events emerged great narratives, great metanarratives, great ideologies, whose greatest mistake was often to forget their origin.

How can we leave this state of alienation and stay out of it? How can we avoid giving in to the fantasy of invulnerability and all our psychological strategies to stop looking at our ontic and ontological fragility?

A preliminary answer to this question can be found in one type of event: testimony. Testimony attests, that is, makes evident, and therefore undeniable, in experience, something that is impossible to comprehend exhaustively from our calculating or logocentric reason, but which fully coincides with the birth and celebration of our desire, as it is the only thing that allows enjoyment to find something on the basis of which to limit itself, in order not to become the *enjoyment of death*, in order to be reborn as a law of existence, vertebrating people with a stiff *notochord* in the search for the ideal. In our tradition, the father is the testimony in favour of this law that articulates our desire.

However, the father, after 1968, can no longer be the Freudian father monopoliser of violence or the place of moral perfection, he is no longer the one who has the last word on the meaning of life and death, and he is even capable of losing power over the ostentation of the latter (Recalcati 2014). The father in our late modernity is an imperfect father, capable of losing power over that ostentation of the final word. It is a kind of testimony whose imperfection is not an obstacle to attesting, to making the impossible present, but rather, its vulnerability is the proof that the father is not the law, but is on the road to the ideal, perhaps a step ahead. The father is not so important as that to which he points: we can go beyond the father on condition that we make use of him.

Another important feature of this Lacanian testimonial paternity is that it does not have to be – although it may be – a father, a mother, a teacher, but it can (also) be a thing, a film, a scene, the reading of a classic, a work of art (Recalcati 2014). What matters is that between the subject and this testimony there is *resonance* (Rosa 2021), an experience that is at the basis of religion and art and that Hartmut Rosa conceives as the antagonistic experience of alienation, in which the connection between subject and object is generated.

Finally, this new paternity, if it happens through a person, is an adoptive paternity, modelled on Saint Joseph, which is therefore aware of its

value as an intermediary, of its incapacity to produce everything that happens through it. Moreover, the high point of paternity is when one is recognised and loved as one is, by one's adult children, who, knowing the father in his vulnerability, love him freely and gratuitously. And in spite of our attempt to analytically unravel here what this testimony consists of, the reality of every event is that you cannot produce it, programme it, protocol it, because it is something that has to happen and remains, if not totally then radically, unavailable. One of the characteristics of testimony is therefore that we can neither force it with certainty nor prevent it completely. But this testimony is also unpredictable in another sense, because when it happens and we resonate with it, we know that it will change us, but we don't know in what direction exactly our change will lead and where our metanoia or metamorphosis will lead us.

Recalcati gives several examples in his books of this *new* paternity, which has notable similarities with Christian paternity – the adoptive father, St Joseph, in the first place, and Christ, the incarnate, poor, fragile and historical son, who requires the acceptance of men to save them – and which, very probably, the history of the West has transformed in a bourgeois and individualistic direction that has little to do with its origins. Recalcati talks about two Clint Eastwood films, e.g. *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) and *Gran Torino* (2008) and their main characters Frankie Dunne and Walt Kowalski, both played by the director himself. Both fit the testimony we have been talking about.

The second one in particular leaves in Thao's experience an event that opens him up to the law of existence, charity, which allows him to leave behind the *narcynicist* environment. Walt sacrifices his life, doing something innocent that he knows will become his immediate death sentence, so that Thao and Sue – and the rest of the neighbourhood – can grow up in freedom, uncorrupted. The selflessness of his gesture is inexplicable, but cannot be denied. The attentive viewer can also easily resonate with the overwhelming power of the human in Walt's father's decision.

Without going into details, we also have testimonies of this kind in: *A song for Nagasaki* (1989), the biography of the converted radiologist Takeshi Nagai, a victim of the American bombing of Nagasaki; in the dia-

ries and letters of Etty Hillesum (1999), which show us how the personal journey and the hopeful search for happiness are possible in such adverse circumstances as the Nazi concentration camps; or in the narratives of many authors like Vassili Grossman, Imre Kertész, Svetlana Alexievich, etc. We even have authors who tell us about the emergence of this humanity in the nihilistic times of late modernity, such as Dan Fante, James Rhodes, Daniele Mencarelli, etc. Because the time of alienation in our days is different from that of Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism and the excesses of violence committed by the Allies in Japan and Europe.

Conclusion

What is clear is that all testimony will require our subjective disposition, and the story of the prodigal son is illuminating in this respect, because the son who has squandered his inheritance and gone wandering only recognises the father's value when he finds himself competing with the pigs for carob.

Costantino Esposito (2021) understands that:

> [...] nihilism is not so much an obstacle, but an opportunity or occasion for the search for truth, thanks to the anti-idolatrous force it has deployed. In a moment in which not only the old values of tradition have collapsed, but also the anthropocentric claim to replace them with the pure will to power, individuals have ultimately become irrelevant, that is, interchangeable or purely random in the great network of the world. And it is here that something irreducible is revealed in its nudity. As if an "I" were asking to be born again, that is, looking for something – a gaze, an encounter, a factor outside itself – that might reveal to it what its very being consists of, rather than calling it to be itself. (2021, 20–21)

The testimony of this new father can also be found today in places of audio-visual consumption such as cinematography and television series. An example of this can be found, for example, in the memorable first special episode of *Euphoria*, entitled "Troubles don't last always" (2x1) (Martínez-Lucena 2022). However, it is important to note here, in conclusion,

that in order to receive and appropriate an audio-visual text it is important to consciously value what is being seen, to make it intelligible without leaving it merely in the neural circuits of the imagination and the unconscious, so that what is seen can guide and articulate the narration of the self and its desire, avoiding the vicious circle of the enjoyment of death.

As we have said, narrativity is a bundle of transcendental characteristics of experience that cannot forget and renounce its intellective dimension in favour of social imaginaries, in which the cultural apparatus multiplies according to a neo-liberal, consumerist logic. To rescue this rare adventure of conscious meaning, we can help ourselves from the sociable dimension of man, struggling collectively to unravel the meaning of these testimonial events and sharing the path with others.

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