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TECHNICAL CIVILIZATION, BOREDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN JAN PATOČKA

Civilização técnica, tédio e responsabilidade em Jan Patočka

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Resumo: Este artigo apresenta análises de Patočka sobre o tédio, tanto em si quanto em relação à sua filosofia e - em outro plano - aos debates contemporâneos sobre o tema. Primeiramente, apresentamos seus estudos fenomenológicos da década de 1940 que desenvolvem uma descrição do tédio como um estado de espírito que, negativamente, ajuda a averiguar em que consiste o cumprimento na vida humana. Em segundo lugar, apresentamos as considerações posteriores de Patočka sobre o tédio como sintoma de problemas arraigados na civilização técnica, bem como os conceitos de sua filosofia naqueles anos que sustentam suas posições. Por fim, descrevemos as ideias de Patočka para superar a crise e consideramos o que esses desenvolvimentos filosóficos podem nos dizer.

Palavras-chave: Jan Patočka, fenomenologia, tédio, filosofia da história.

Abstract This article presents Patočka's analyses of boredom, both in themselves and in relation to his philosophy and -on another plane- to contemporary debates on the topic. Firstly, we present his phenomenological studies of the 1940s, that develop a description of boredom as a mood that, negatively, helps ascertain what fulfilment in human life consists of. Secondly, we present Patočka's later considerations on boredom as a symptom of deep-seated problems in technical civilization, as well as the concepts from his philosophy in those years that sustain his positions. Finally, we describe Patočka's ideas for overcoming the crisis and we consider what these philosophical developments may say to us.

Keywords: Jan Patočka, phenomenology, boredom, philosophy of history.

For many years, and isolated in Prague for political reasons, Jan Patočka developed an original philosophy based on a phenomenological research mostly based on a dialogue with Husserl and Heidegger, and which included an extensive analysis of contemporary civilization and its crisis. In this context, we find several considerations on boredom.

In this contribution, I would like to present the concept of boredom within Patočka's attempt of a philosophical explanation of our times. However, we need first to describe his analyses of boredom some years before, in the 1940s. More situated from the perspective of phenomenological analysis and existential philosophy, they help understand the philosophical reasons that make boredom, according to Patočka, a sign of civilizational decay. From this, I shall describe Patočka's notion of boredom as a symptom

of the crisis in our civilization, dominated as it is by the “empire of everydayness”¹. Secondly, we’ll see how this empire is a result of the principles underlying our world. These principles are at the root of the eclipse of a crucial human dimension, namely responsibility, and which results in orgiastic explosions. Then, on a third level, we’ll describe how these analyses are grounded on Patočka’s theory of the three movements of human existence, which helps understand the reasons why contemporary boredom the sign of such a crisis is. Finally, we’ll have a look at the possibilities of overcoming this situation.

1. Boredom in Patočka’s writings in the 1940s.

Before his analyses of boredom in technical civilization, Patočka studied this mood from a phenomenological standpoint, more centered on the study of human existence. These considerations are present in two manuscripts from the 1940s: *Studies on the concept of world*², that contain the longest analyses, and *Phenomenological Theory of Subjectivity*³.

To a good extent, these developments can be taken as part of a description of the life-world, in the sense of Husserl’s *Lebenswelt*, a concept that Patočka had studied and appropriated for his own philosophy in his 1936 habilitation thesis *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*. These analyses were continued in the 1940s, although in a conceptual frame increasingly distanced from Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, which Patočka gradually took for subjectivistic. Boredom, in these texts, is considered as one of the moods in which the world is disclosed to human existence.

The most extensive treatment appears in chapter 22 and 24 of the *Studies*. There, Patočka describes boredom as a negative experience, opposed to fulfilment (*vyplnění*). In chapter 22, he asks whether, in the face of experiences of negativity, it can be spoken of fulfilment in life at all. Boredom is analyzed as one of these experiences of negativity, along with anxiety (*úzkost*) and pain (*bolest*). However, boredom is for him rather a sign that negativity may not be the primary feature in human existence (against Heidegger, explicitly mentioned in these pages⁴). Boredom, then, would point, in its negative character, to the primacy of fulfilment.

This can be seen, by contrast, if we consider childhood and youth. There, it seems that there is no separation of the self. Rather, there seems to be an identification, a unity, with the “flow of life”. In this context, “the meaning of life is somehow found before any search, it is the very eternal, luminous, radiant life”⁵. This, also, is the reason for our longing for youth: “Something profoundly past is present to us as a proof that in life there are prodigious possibilities, even if utterly imperceptible”⁶. Boredom, indeed, attests this plenitude as something missing:

¹ I do not focus here on his references to boredom within a context which clearly relates to a strict explanation of other authors, namely Heidegger, like for instance in PATOČKA, JAN. *Úvod do fenomenologické filosofie*, Prague: Oikoymenh, 2003, p.103. In our references, we will use the Czech (or German or French) original texts whenever possible. When available, translations into Spanish, English or French will be indicated. If not stated otherwise, translations from Czech in the quotes are my own.

² PATOČKA, JAN. “Studie k pojmu světa”. In: CHVATÍK, IVAN, FREI, JAN, PUC, JAN. *Sebrané Spisy 8/1. Fenomenologické spisy III/1*. Prague: Oikoymenh, 2014, pp.70-173. French translation: PATOČKA, JAN. “Études sur le concept du monde I”, and “Études sur le concept du monde II”. In: *Cahiers philosophiques. 1945-1950*. Translated by Erika Abrams. Paris: Vrin, 2021, pp.45-90 and 91-166.

³ PATOČKA, JAN. “Fenomenologická teorie subjektivity”. In: *Sebrané Spisy 8/1. Fenomenologické spisy III/1*. Prague: Oikoymenh, 2014, pp.174-291.

⁴ For example, in p.125. The German philosopher is considered very often in the *Studies* and in *Phenomenological Theory*.

⁵ PATOČKA, JAN. “Studie k pojmu světa”, p.116. French: “Études sur le concept du monde II”, p.101.

⁶ PATOČKA, JAN. “Studie k pojmu světa”, p.116; French: “Études sur le concept du monde II”, pp.101-102.

For example, profound boredom –which transforms all being into a dry skeletal mechanism of immense indifference–, does it not show that contact with the living center of natural life –of universal life at all– is lost?⁷.

In chapter 24, boredom appears within the context of experiences where fulfilment is absent. It is asked whether every negative experience is about an absolute void. Here, Patočka states (with Heidegger⁸) that profound boredom unveils entity in its being, and he adds that it is the “infinite entity” that it unveils. This happens because in profound boredom an infinite non-fulfillment is lived, a non-fulfillment by infinitude:

Profound boredom, infinite boredom is, however, possible only by virtue of the fact that infinite non-fulfillment, non-fulfillment by the infinite (*nekonečná nevyplněnost, nevyplněnost nekonečnem*) is lived⁹.

Later in this chapter, boredom is analysed in contrast to desire (*touha*). Thus, bored people are not exposed to the “attacks of desire”. Boredom and desire are experiences of a void (*prázdnota*), of something missing; but boredom lacks the “wings” (*okřídlení*) of desire¹⁰. It is true that desire can emerge from boredom, but only if boredom is not absolute. In this regard, Patočka differentiates between four types of boredom: 1) a feeling of idleness, for which passive life is equivalent to void; 2) a feeling of laziness, in which the very idea of action (*činnost*) generates repulsion; 3) a feeling of fatigue, linked with the second one, here the idea of action provokes a feeling of weakness; 4) a feeling of exhaustion (*vyčerpávanost*), that “every source of real, pure, elevating and fulfilling life are exhausted, and that everything that may come can only be of mechanical, automatic nature”¹¹.

Therefore, boredom shows, *per negationem*, what a fulfilled life is¹². In a fulfilled life, the movement of the self is evident; when life is unfulfilled, the self must give itself impulse, as a *vis a tergo*. In this sense, Patočka also distinguishes between three forms of being active: 1) that in which being active is self-evident; 2) that in which activity needs to be provoked by the self, that acts as a “whiplash” to motivation; 3) that in which obstacles need to be overcome (though these obstacles are not purely internal, as in the second case).

In these classifications, boredom is taken as a mood that, in some cases (those that do not involve exhaustion) can provoke a response from the self. This idea of boredom as a call to action can be found also in *Phenomenological Theory of Subjectivity*. In this work, Patočka differentiates boredom from a mere “absence of mood”¹³. In the absence of mood, there is no manifestation of a unified world, while in boredom the world does appear. Likewise, in the absence of mood, life appears as formless, while in boredom there seems to be an “enduring tone” that asks for a response from us, that gives impulse to life.

To sum up, these writings show that boredom is a topic that goes through Patočka’s philosophical biography. These analyses from the 1940s are relevant for the phenomenological study of boredom. Specially, they are relevant for the recent field of boredom studies, organized around the International Society for Boredom Studies (led by the Spanish philosopher Josefa Ros Velasco¹⁴). For example, Patočka’s classification of boredom can be related to Ros Velasco’s differentiation of four types of boredom. According to whether they have their cause in the subject or the environment, and

⁷ PATOČKA, JAN. “Studie k pojmu světa”, p.117; French: “Études sur le concept du monde II”, p.102.

⁸ According to the Czech editors, Patočka refers to Heidegger’s consideration of boredom as revealing “being as a whole”, in *What is Metaphysics?* Heidegger, Martin. *Was ist Metaphysik?* Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1949, p.28.

⁹ PATOČKA, JAN. “Studie k pojmu světa”, p.125; French: “Études sur le concept du monde II”, pp.111-112.

¹⁰ PATOČKA, JAN. “Studie k pojmu světa”, p.128; French: “Études sur le concept du monde II”, pp.115-116.

¹¹ PATOČKA, JAN. “Studie k pojmu světa”, p.128; French: “Études sur le concept du monde II”, p.115.

¹² PATOČKA, JAN. “Studie k pojmu světa”, pp.128-130; French: “Études sur le concept du monde II”, p.116-117.

¹³ PATOČKA, JAN. “Fenomenologická teorie subjektivity”, p.233. Boredom is mentioned also in p.230 (reviewing several German works on sensations) and p.273 (considering Sartre’s theory of emotions).

¹⁴ ROS VELASCO, JOSEFA. *La enfermedad del aburrimiento*. Madrid: Alianza, 2022.

according to its duration, there is: 1) situational boredom, 2) chronic situational boredom, 3) individual chronic situational boredom, and 4) profound boredom¹⁵. In particular, Ros Velasco's differentiation between boredom as related to a certain situation and profound boredom can be related to Patočka descriptions; particularly, his fourfold classification of boredom types. Likewise, Ros Velasco speaks of boredom as a symptom that action needs to be carried out¹⁶, which can be related to Patočka's assertion that boredom can be a whiplash for action. Consequently, even if we do not consider Patočka's later considerations on boredom, his phenomenological research of the 1940s have a place in contemporary studies.

However, in my view, these considerations are fully understood in relation to his later analysis. Indeed, in a sense, his point of view about boredom (as an experience negatively related to fulfillment, that can generate exhaustion but can also be a call to action) helps understand his later analyses, more focused on the social, historical and civilizational level.

2. Boredom and the "empire of everydayness".

Boredom (*nuda*) appears later in Patočka's philosophical biography, in several writings which analyze technical civilization. It is explicitly dealt with in his last work: the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*¹⁷ (from the 1970s). However, it is also implicitly present in some earlier writings where the term "boredom" is not mentioned but in which the description of society has the same basic patterns. This is the case of "Supercivilization and its Inner Conflict" (from the 1950s), as well as "Reflection on Europe" and "The Spiritual Foundations of the Present Age" (from the 1960s).

In establishing this connection between civilization and boredom Patočka follows consciously a tradition, as he refers to Pascal and Kierkegaard¹⁸, as well as Durkheim¹⁹. Regarding his own analysis, Patočka connects boredom and civilization to a thesis about the general character of our societies, namely: the empire of everydayness.

Indeed, for Patočka boredom is today a pervasive phenomenon due to the prevalence of everydayness. This is because our societies are dominated by the idea that the highest values are those linked to the everyday concern for one's life. This comes as the result of thinking that life is all that counts ("life", here, understood as the bare fact of living, of having one's basic needs provided for). This provokes the need of a strict work discipline to carry on the production process. This process, in turn, requires repetition and uniformity day after day.

Consequently, a true "imperialism of everydayness" emerges²⁰. Social life is organized as a gigantic system for increasing production, and personal human life is taken as a moment within this system, a "relay"²¹. This provokes an increased discipline of all

¹⁵ ROS VELASCO, JOSEFA. *La enfermedad del aburrimiento*, pp.30-31.

¹⁶ For example, in chapter 7. ROS VELASCO, JOSEFA. *La enfermedad del aburrimiento*, pp.225-246.

¹⁷ ČÍ. PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, Praha, Oikoymenth, 2007, pp.54, 98-100, 103; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*. Translated by Iván Ortega Rodríguez. Madrid: Encuentro, 2016, pp.99, 161, 163, 167. "Reflexión sobre Europa". In PATOČKA, JAN: *Libertad y sacrificio*. Translated by Ivan Ortega Rodríguez. Salamanca: Sigueme, 2007, pp.187-220; "Duchovní základy života v naší době". In: CHVATÍK, IVAN, AND KOUBA, PAVEL (eds.), *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky. Péče o duši II*. Prague: Oikoymenth, 1999, pp. 9-28; "Los fundamentos espirituales de la vida contemporánea". In: PATOČKA, JAN, *Libertad y sacrificio*, pp.221-248.

¹⁸ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.98; *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.161. There is an English translation of the Essays:

¹⁹ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.88; *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.147.

²⁰ This term is not Patočka's but coined by an interpreter of his philosophy: Alexandra Laignel Lavastine. However, in my view, it reflects well what is at stake in Patočka's analyses. This author also has an interesting explanation of the relationship between everydayness and violence in Patočka, one of the topics we consider here. LAIGNEL-LAVASTINE, ALEXANDRA. "Jan Patočka: L'Europe, ou comment résister à l'impérialisme de la quotidienneté". In: LAIGNEL-LAVASTINE, ALEXANDRA. *Esprits d'Europe. Autour de Czeslaw Milosz, Jan Patočka, István Bibó*. Paris: Callman-Lévy, 2005, pp.127-237.

²¹ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.109; *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.178.

people in society, which involves uniformity and monotony. Consequently, dullness becomes pervasive and boredom occurs:

Boredom is not something irrelevant, it is no “mere mood”, a private feeling oneself in a certain state; to the contrary, it is the ontological status of a humankind that has subordinated their entire life to everydayness and its impersonality²².

Another manifestation of boredom is the “disappointing realisation” of old-age dreams²³. Thanks to the development of techno-science, now we can fly, we can go into space, and we can even think of postponing death indefinitely. However, the result is that those realised dreams have become part of the dull everydayness. For instance, the skies are no longer the symbol of the infinite towards which we tend, and which orientate our activity as an immobile eminent referent²⁴; now they have become simple facts and data on which we count, and by no means fulfil the promise of plenitude they used to embody:

The most refined discoveries are boring as long as they do not lead to the exacerbation of the Mystery hidden behind that which is veiled to us. The powerful penetration of human thinking unveils with a vehemence so far never dreamt of; immediately, however, this penetration is taken over by everydayness and by the understanding of entity as something fundamentally already unveiled and clear; this understanding makes of the mystery of today the empty talk and the triviality of the next day²⁵.

In all this, however, the empire of everydayness does not seem to eliminate all intimation of something different. In particular, a lack of the “festive” dimension is felt and different attempts to fill the void are carried out. This is the case of the staging of great collective celebrations in communist countries, as indicated in Patočka’s essay on supercivilisation, written in the 1950s²⁶. These celebrations are typical of the “radical supercivilisation”, that is, the one which does not keep any domain of human life out of the scope of total rationalisation, and which the Czech thinker identified with the communist regimes (as opposed to “moderate supercivilization, which he saw in western liberal democracies). In radical supercivilization, consequently, they need to find substitutes for the celebrative aspects of those forms of life that had purportedly been suppressed:

In the realm of life, this insufficiency of radicalism is shown in the reception of the opposition between the festive day and the everyday, between the extraordinary and everydayness, an opposition whose elimination is a dream of radicalism. De facto, radicalism acknowledges the limits of its rationalism. It establishes a sort of new religion in the place of the old one, which is a religious hybrid; it implicitly recognises religion in the general sense of the term. Demonstrations of social force, of glory, in which society becomes divinised, the elevation of its exponents to super-human heights (*de facto*, even if not *de iure*), the cult of its heroes, the cultivation of legends, the emergence of unrealistic stylizations of manners of living (...). All this are strange phenomena in rational supercivilization, alien to its

²² PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.98; *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.161.

²³ PATOČKA, JAN. “Reflexión sobre Europa”, pp.210-217; “Duchovní základy života v naší době”, pp.18-24; Spanish: “Los fundamentos espirituales de la vida contemporánea”, pp.233-241.

²⁴ This is the role of the heavens in *The Natural World and Phenomenology*. Cf. PATOČKA, JAN, “Přirozený svět a fenomenologie”. In: KOUBA, PAVEL, and ŠVEC, ONDŘEJ, Ondrej. *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky 7. Fenomenologické spisy II* Prague: Oykomenh, 2009, p.220; Spanish: “El mundo natural y la fenomenología”. In: SERRANO DE HARO, AGUSTÍN (ed.). *El movimiento de la existencia humana*. Translated by Agustín Serrano de Haro, Teresa Padilla and Jesús María Ayuso. Madrid: Encuentro, 2004, pp.13-55, p.35.

²⁵ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.100; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.164.

²⁶ PATOČKA, JAN. *Nadcivilizace a její vnitřní konflikt*. In: CHVÁTÍK, IVAN, and KOUBA, PAVEL. *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky I. Péče o duši I* pp.243-302, pp.255-257; Spanish: “La supercivilización y su conflicto interno”. In: *Libertad y sacrificio*, pp.105-186, pp.122-125. This essay has been analysed regarding Weber’s influence (as far as the notion of “rationalisation” is concerned) and in the light of civilisation studies. Cf. HOMOLKA, Jakub. *Koncept racionální civilizace*. Prague: Togga, 2016; ARNASON, JOHAN P., et al., *Dějinnost, nadcivilizace a modernita: studie k Patočkově konceptu nadcivilizace*. Prague: Togga, 2010.

most proper principle (...). The radicalism of supercivilization has then a natural affinity to acts of a sudden and discontinuous nature²⁷.

Furthermore, this is not the only example of how the non-ordinary is present in the empire of everydayness: it can be seen also in “moderate civilization”, in the non-communist world. Thus, in his later writings, Patočka widens the focus and sees this lack of the festive also in the “west” and considers other ways of “filling the void”; this is the case, for example of the lifting of social taboos²⁸. Perhaps these phenomena are less “institutional”, but they are equally symptomatic of a shortcoming in the apparently total empire of everydayness.

Therefore, boredom is, in our technical civilization, or supercivilization, a phenomenon linked to the prevalence of everydayness. It appears as a consequence of the strict imposition of discipline in our lives, which renders difficult any “fulfilled” life in the sense of Patočka’s 1940s texts. Boredom, everydayness and technification are also related to the need to keep some sense of the festive and extraordinary, albeit in explosive or artificial ways. Still, what can be the philosophical —particularly, existential— roots of this situation? This is the topic of the next section.

3. Everydayness, care for the soul, responsibility and orgiastic explosions.

Boredom, then, is a sign of the empire of everydayness. However, if this empire is something to worry about, it is because boredom and everydayness are the sign of more profound dynamics. These have been taking place over the last centuries and in our days have reached their peak. This process is the progressive eclipse of an ideal that has given form to human history and to Europe, namely: care for the soul, which involves responsibility. This ideal has been substituted by another ideal, that of domination. And this, in turn, has provoked the empire of everydayness and the phenomena of boredom. But then, this entails severe consequences, as another key dimension, the orgiastic, is left without the “modulation” of responsibility. Let us consider these points with some more detail.

3.1. Responsibility and Care for the Soul

The term “responsibility” is a consequence of the capability within human existence to go beyond the given and the aims of maintaining life. With this, we are set before the totality of the world, as well as the totality and unity of our lives. Here, we need to find sense, and be responsible for our decisions. It is us who are faced before our finitude and before the problematization of the meaning of human existence. In this dynamism, human beings are not left alone; to the contrary, they are vowed to the others in a movement of self-giving, which means a true encounter with the infinite, a “becoming infinite through finitude”²⁹.

Responsibility, as conceptualized by Patočka, is closely linked to Heidegger’s authentic existence. In fact, for the Czech philosopher responsibility is the outcome of “choosing” authenticity when we are confronted with the opposition authenticity-inauthenticity of human existence. However, Patočka thinks that a complete enough understanding of human existence must go beyond this opposition. As a result, a complex conception of role of responsibility in human existence and human history is developed.

²⁷ PATOČKA, JAN. “Nadcivilizace a její vnitřní konflikt”, pp.255 and 257; Spanish: “La supercivilización y su conflicto interno”, pp.123 and 125.

²⁸ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.85; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.143.

²⁹ Cf. PATOČKA, JAN. “Přirozený svět a fenomenologie”, pp.231-233; Spanish: “El mundo natural y la fenomenología”, pp.49-51. There is an English Translation: KOHÁK, ERAZIM, *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989. See also: KARFÍK, FILIP, «Unendlichwerden durch die Endlichkeit». In *Unendlichwerden durch die Endlichkeit. Eine Lektüre der Philosophie Jan Patočka*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, pp.71-81.

In this patočkian understanding, some dimensions of our existence are not ruled by the opposition authenticity-inauthenticity. This is the case of those spheres of humanity linked to being accepted into the world—in the sense of being primarily integrated into it—and striving to keep life. Furthermore, whole periods of human collective development have taken place fully within this realm of life-maintenance; in those societies, the concern for authenticity was not present.

This difference according to the presence or absence of responsibility for authenticity is related to the difference that our philosopher establishes between “history” and “prehistory”. As indicated in the *Heretical Essays*, history happens when life’s meaning has become explicitly problematic, whereas previous societies—established within a given certainty concerning meaning—are prehistoric, no matter how complex they may be. True, there is a difference between a-historic and pre-historic societies, where the latter are more complex and problematicity may there be “almost” attained. But historicity strictly speaking appears only when the problematicity of life’s meaning is explicitly present to human beings. Only when meaning becomes problematized does responsibility—and hence authenticity—have a place in human life³⁰.

Therefore, when the human potentiality for living authentically (and responsibly) emerges, history begins. This happened for the first time in the city-state of ancient Greece (which may be one of Patočka’s most contested claims). It took place within the realm of free men interacting in the *polis* and distancing from the tasks of maintaining life³¹. Especially—regarding our subject—it meant that the ecstatic became “modulated” by responsibility. From then on, the moments of relief were to be integrated within a human life that sought to be founded in intellectual intuition. Patočka calls this project of life in responsibility “care of the soul”, referring to Democritus and Plato.

In Patočka’s explanation, care for the soul is the care for this part of us that is capable of distinguishing between truth and falsity. It means for our philosopher an intensification and concentration of subjectivity who is set beyond the given, either to contemplate for a brief instant the totality (Democritus) or to liken itself to the immutable being (Plato)³². In both cases, there is an emergence of a “stronger” subject who is responsible before himself and before being. However, our philosopher pays more attention the platonic interpretation of care for the soul. Here, care for the soul is deployed in three directions: onto-cosmological (understanding totality), socio-political (seeking a community according to truth) and “psychological” (caring for the ultimate destiny of the soul)³³. Therefore, we are under the guide of an all-encompassing project that involves an ambitious view on human life, called to be carried out in the intuition of the truth.

Care for the soul, as far as its socio-political project is concerned, has taken different forms in human history. Each one was the result of the catastrophe of the former³⁴. The first form was that of the Greek *polis*, the second the Roman Empire and the third one was the Holy Roman Empire. In all of them, the main idea was erecting a community according to true life, and—at least as far as the ideal was concerned—it was the responsible subject who was placed before this unending task.

This project was, for sure, not that of an individualistic of “self-sufficient” subject in a modern sense, even less a “disengaged” one (to use the well-known term of Charles Taylor). But it meant a profound intensification of the individual. This individualization

³⁰ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, pp. 121-122; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, pp.196-198.

³¹ The influence of Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* is clear, as Patočka explicitly acknowledges in the *Heretical Essays*. It is even more evident in Patočka’s own translation of the first three essays into German. PATOČKA, JAN. *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, pp. 17-18, 25, 36; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, pp.46-48, 57, 73. For Patočka’s own translations of the first essay into German: PATOČKA, JAN. “Vorgeschichtliche Betrachtungen”. In: *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky 3. Péče o duši III*, pp. 517-547; pp.536-537.

³² PATOČKA, JAN. *Platón a Evropa*. Prague: Czech Academy of Sciences, 2007, pp. 78-92; English: *Plato and Europe*. Translated by Petr Lom. Stanford (CF): Stanford University Press, 2002, pp.75-89.

³³ LOM, PETR. “Foreword”. In: PATOČKA, JAN. *Plato and Europe*, pp. xvi-xviii.

³⁴ PATOČKA, JAN. *Platón a Evropa*, pp.90-91; English: *Plato and Europe*, pp.88-89.

reached an extreme intensity with medieval Christianity, when the soul was set before a loving God and undeserved Grace. This opened an abyssal distance between the soul and God that made the individual soul become acutely aware of his/her individuality³⁵. Nonetheless, this relevance of medieval Christianity should not lead us to think that he was a “Christian thinker” or even less that he was simply nostalgic. For Patočka, medieval Christianity was certainly an immense development of subjective life, but it was not the only one; and more importantly, renewing care for the soul and responsibility today does not involve a hopeless attempt to go back in time.

3.2. The ideal of domination and the eclipse of responsibility.

However, a turning point takes place in the passage from the Middle Ages to Modern Times; especially, with this revolution in our way of seeing things brought about by the emergence of modern natural science. With regard to responsibility, the problem begins when the ideal of care for the soul enters in competition with the ideal of domination³⁶: of becoming “Masters and possessors of nature”. This new project gained momentum in the following centuries and has continued until the present. Today, this ideal dominates and has taken the form of the technical understanding of being –which for Patočka corresponds, to a good extent, with Heidegger’s concept of *Gestell*—³⁷.

This ideal of domination, and the technical understanding of being, operates in such a way that it comes to seem as if maintaining life is all that counts. Apparently, all that matters is affirming our position in the world. All we need to do is to assure the means for guaranteeing a better tomorrow, in the sense of a better provision of means for maintaining and affirming life. At the same time, this whole improvement and “optimizing”-system becomes something that functions for the sake of itself.

Patočka does not deny the immense advantages of technical advances. However, he does think that there is a problem, namely: that the prevalence of everydayness obscures the ideal of responsibility. Assuring the means of living is all that matters, and with this the idea of living in search of a deeper meaning becomes more and more incomprehensible. The task of seeking for the absolute and being responsible before oneself becomes more and more eclipsed. Thus, we get once again to the “imperialism of everydayness” described above, now seeing its roots in an ideal of domination that has led responsibility to the margins.

4. The eclipse of responsibility, everydayness, boredom, and orgiastic explosions.

Now, the prevalence of everydayness brings about other disquieting phenomena, due to its effect on other dimensions of humanity. To understand this, we need to consider that for Patočka there is another polarity in human existence, along with the above described of authenticity (or responsibility) and inauthenticity. This second opposition is the one between everydayness and orgasm. Against the requirements of maintaining life, there are momentary situations of ecstatic relief, in which we are taken away from the endless cycle of laboring. Human life alternates between moments of discipline and moments of “escaping it all”. The first pole is inevitable due to the requirements of labor, and the second is an outlet for repressed vitality.

These two oppositions (authenticity and inauthenticity, everydayness and orgasm) have interacted differently in the development of humanity³⁸. Particularly, a crucial difference can be seen between “historical” societies and “prehistoric” ones. Thus,

³⁵ This interpretation of medieval Christianity was analysed in detail by Jacques Derrida, although in my view (and others’) he overemphasized the importance of these analyses. DERRIDA, JACQUES. *Donner la mort*. Paris: Galilée, 1999.

³⁶ PATOČKA, JAN. *Platón a Evropa*, p.91; English: *Plato and Europe*, p.89.

³⁷ LOM, PETR. “Foreword”. In: PATOČKA, JAN. *Plato and Europe*, p.XVIII.

³⁸ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, pp. 87-101; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, pp.145-164.

in prehistoric life the care for authenticity (and hence responsibility) is not “activated”, and therefore human existence is wholly situated within the limits of life-maintenance: between everydayness and orgasm. Everydayness occupies most of people’s lives and is placed under the reign of the sovereign, who is part of the cosmic order of meaning, given from time immemorial. As to orgasm, it is present in cultic celebrations; in this manner, it is integrated in human life within the encompassing realm of the given global meaning proper to non-historical humanity.

In historical times, orgasm has been modulated by responsibility. The ecstatic moments were integrated in a life that was responsible before itself and before that transcending source of meaning to which it was referred. This source was firstly the Law in the Roman Empire or the divine Revelation of the medieval times³⁹. Likewise, as seen above, this modulation by responsibility involved the development of individuality, which reached abyssal proportions with medieval Christianity.

However, in modern times responsibility has been eclipsed. But the opposition between everydayness and orgasm is still very much in place in the “imperialism of everydayness”. Therefore, the need for relief from the burden of labor discipline is very well present and acting within human existence. Nonetheless, now the difference is that we no longer have responsibility encompassing the drive to orgasm (as in previous “historical” times), since care for the soul has been left aside in favor of care for domination. Furthermore, the labor discipline, and its burden, is more demanding than ever: it is an increasing overarching mechanic dynamism that includes each one of us as one more integral element among others, a “reel”⁴⁰.

As a result, orgiastic explosions shaken, from time to time, the monotony of everydayness. This is the deep reason for the presence of the festive within discipline which was described above. Either it takes the form of enacting some kind of festivity that may reproduce (unsuccessfully) the reality of the extraordinary⁴¹; or it takes place in straightforward explosions, as in the present lifting of sexual taboos and other related phenomena⁴². Thus, boredom in our societies makes it visible that everydayness cannot by itself embrace all the dynamics of human life, and it shows that the longing for relief needs to find outlets:

The falling into things, into taking care of them and into being bound to life has as, an inevitable pendant, a new wave of orgiastic immersion. The more modern technoscience penetrates as the proper relationship to the entity, the more it binds into its circle all the natural as well as all the human..., the crudest is the retaliation of orgiastic enthusiasm...⁴³.

Moreover, boredom and orgiastic explosions are symptoms of nihilism. This happens because everydayness can only offer a finite and partial meaning, while human life can only live within the horizon of absolute meaning⁴⁴, even if it is problematized. This is why the realization of age-old dreams has been disappointing, since the promise of absolute meaning embedded in these dreams is exchanged for something ordinary and hence partial, limited to the narrow margins of life for life’s sake.

Certainly, it is true that in prehistoric societies there was global meaning without responsibility. But for Patočka this, for us, is no longer an option. Once we have gone

³⁹ PATOČKA, JAN. *Platón a Evropa*, p.91; English: *Plato and Europe*, p.89.

⁴⁰ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.109. Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.113.

⁴¹ PATOČKA, JAN. “Nadcivilizace a její vnitřní konflikt”, pp.255-257; Spanish: “La supercivilización y su conflicto interno”. In: *Libertad y sacrificio*, pp. 123-125.

⁴² PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.85; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.143.

⁴³ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.99; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.162.

⁴⁴ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, pp.53-54; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, pp.97-98.

beyond the threshold of problematicity, we cannot go back. From then on, either absolute meaning is referred to (albeit within a problematized horizon) or we get stuck in partial meanings which amount to no meaning.

However, if nihilism is such a worrying phenomenon, and if human existence needs absolute meaning, it is because of the innermost fabric of our existence. To understand this, we need to take one step further and present Patočka's theory of the three movements of human existence.

5. Boredom, nihilism and the movements of human existence.

5.1. Human existence as movement, the three movements and finality.

The theory of the movements of human existence is developed along the 1960s, in dialogue mainly with Aristotle and Heidegger. For our Patočka, human existence has to be understood, in Heidegger's terms, as the realisation of possibilities. It is true that Heidegger did not carry out the analysis of existence beyond a certain point, as he had other aims, related to ontology. However, Patočka thinks that a further consideration of the inner structure of human existence is necessary. And for this, he finds that the concept that best suits human existence as realisation of possibilities is a "modified" version of the Aristotelian notion of movement as change and development⁴⁵.

Leaving aside the differences between accidental and substantial change, Patočka thinks that movement in Aristotle is essentially a process of self-realisation, of "coming to be". In it, the entity is being formed through the acquisition of different attributes. Now, if human existence is the realisation of possibilities, and if we become more and more specified throughout the process, then this existence can be understood as movement in the "Aristotelian" sense just described. Using a more Heideggerian terminology: it may be said that for Patočka the inner "fabric" of *Dasein* (in its existing as realisation of possibilities) is a self-realisation movement. That is, the essence of *Dasein*, *Existenz*, is ultimately movement. Only a "correction" to Aristotle is needed here; namely, the elimination of the permanent substrate. Therefore, the kind of being that we are is completely constituted by movement itself; each one of us, in our innermost ontological root, is a continuous process.

Furthermore, for Patočka there is a directionality in its movement. In this, again, he is coherent with the Aristotelian idea of movement oriented to ends, and finally to a final end. But if this is so, it may be spoken of a full development of human existence, or to the contrary, that it can be thwarted. Therefore, there are the possibilities of plenitude and frustration, which helps understand why everydayness and boredom are something to be worried about. Still, this becomes better understood once we consider the specification of the movement of human existence as three movements.

Thus, Patočka differentiates "three movements" of human existence. In a sense, it could be said that they are one, and sometimes it is spoken of "the" movement of human existence. There are reasons for this. The three movements are certainly interrelated and harmonized in the manner of a polyphony⁴⁶, and they all are the self-realisation of the existent individual. But still, they can be differentiated (they are a true polyphony) and they point to diverse dimensions of human life. They are the movement of rooting and acceptance, the movement of defense or expansion and the movement of penetration or truth.

In the first movement –whose paradigmatic case is the mother-child relationship– we are accepted into the world. Here, the world is given and disclosed to us

⁴⁵ PATOČKA, JAN. *Tělo, společenství, jazyk, svět*. Prague: Oikoymenh, 1995, pp.102-104; Spanish: "Lecciones XVII-XX de *Cuerpo, comunidad, lenguaje, mundo*". Translated by Iván Ortega Rodríguez. In: *Aporía - Revista Internacional De Investigaciones Filosóficas*, (3-Especial), 2019, pp.18-47.

⁴⁶ PATOČKA, JAN. *Tělo, společenství, jazyk, svět*. Prague: Oikoymenh, 1995, pp.104-105; Spanish: "Lecciones XVII-XX de *Cuerpo, comunidad, lenguaje, mundo*", pp. 21-22.

in the form of a realm of acceptance, and the temporal dimension that prevails is the past, the world being disclosed as existing from time immemorial.

In the second movement, we collaborate with others in the development of the human world. Here the world appears as a realm of labor, cooperation and competition. The prevalent temporal dimension here is the present, and the world appears to us as the realm of everydayness. This is also the domain of Heidegger's inauthentic existence, as we are driven to everydayness, to being focused on our daily tasks; here, as well, is the domain where human individuals —and relationships — become objectified as they are seen as co-operators or competitors within an objectively world given "out there".

Finally, in the third movement, we take distance from the given and are placed before totality. Here, the world is opened in such a way that leaves the human existent before the problem of meaning and with the possibility of explicitly questioning for it — and in this lies the origin of Philosophy, Politics and History—. This third movement is also a movement of self-giving: we stop defending "our world" and "our life" and we become free to give ourselves. This is described by the Czech philosopher sometimes as a self-giving to the other and sometimes as delivering ourselves to totality and the being-manifested of the world. And in the first case, we reach our infinitude by giving our finite being to the other:

I place my life into the other without carrying out the movement of a return from him to myself but rather giving myself to him. I constitute myself in creating the other⁴⁷.

Therefore, if in the first two movements we are tied to life, in the third movement we take distance from "bare life". Moreover, this distancing is described in terms of an elevation and even of a "leap". Patočka uses the Czech word *vzdech*. With it, he points to an upswing⁴⁸ impulse: a leap, an elevation by virtue of which we are raised from the realm of life-maintenance (or raise ourselves, both meanings are implied). From the standpoint of this being raised, directing oneself again towards everydayness can only amount to a decline (*upádek*).

In this upswing movement, the infinite can be set as the horizon of a quest which is a transcendence, or better, a transcending from the given. And this is a continuous movement that never has an end in any transcendent entity whatsoever (despite the permanent temptation to end the movement in some sort of absolute entity as Patočka thinks that even Plato was tempted to do with the transformation of the insufficiency of this world into a reference to a world of ideas as positive entities). Indeed, Patočka emphasizes the negative character of this transcendence, to the point of even characterizing the end of this movement in terms that refer to negative theology and go back to the Renaissance mystics and the philosopher Nicholas of Cusa⁴⁹.

5.2. The prevalence of the second movement and the thwarting of human existence.

Now, with all this, we can see that in our civilization there is an overemphasis of the second movement. This movement tends to obscure the confrontation to problematicity. Indeed, it may be said that, in the prevalence of the second movement,

⁴⁷ PATOČKA, JAN. *Přirozený svět a fenomenologie*, p.227. The quote is taken from the English Translation: "The 'Natural' World and Phenomenology", In: KOHÁK, ERAZIM. *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, p.262. For the conceptualisation of this self-giving as delivering oneself to the others or to the opening of the world, see: FREL, JAN "Se dévouer à l'autre. Modalités de la transcendance chez Jan Patočka". In: FROGNEUX, NATHALIE. *Jan Patočka. Liberté, existence et monde commun*. Argenteuil: Le Cercle Herméneutique Éditeur, 2012, pp.107-114.

⁴⁸ This term is proposed by Ivan Chvatík, director of the Patočka archive in Prague (private communication).

⁴⁹ PATOČKA, JAN. "[Tělo, možnosti, svět, pole zjevování]", In: KOUBA, PAVEL, and ŠVEC, ONDŘEJ. *Sebrané Spisy 8/2. Fenomenologické spisy III/2*. Prague: Oikoymenth, 2016, p.308. French: PATOČKA, JAN. "[Corps, possibilités, monde, champ d'apparition]". In: *Papiers phénoménologiques*. Translated by Erika Abrams. Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1995, p.122.

negativity is obscured in favor of an extreme focusing on the positivity of vital ends and the means required to their fulfilment. This trend is exacerbated in today's technical civilization, and this does not seem to take place without consequences, according to Patočka's referred phenomena of boredom and orgiastic explosions.

Thus, the theory of the three movements sheds light on the deeper roots of the present crisis, of which boredom is a symptom. It also shows why this is such a big problem, as we are being forced to live below our most proper trend, that is: living in the openness to a problematic but absolute meaning; in openness to totality, to the world as such and to the very mystery of the donation of being. For this reason, the prevalence of everydayness makes us leave unfulfilled our innermost vocation as human beings.

Furthermore, Patočka's analyses from the 1940s offer a wider frame for understanding these phenomena. Firstly, if boredom is a mood that negatively refers to fulfilment—as stated in 1940s' *Studies*—, then a prevalence of boredom in a civilisation dominated by everydayness and maintaining life is a sign that these social traits can render us farther from our plenitude. And secondly, if boredom can be—as said also in the *Studies*— a stimulus for action, a “whiplash”, then it can be better understood why the absence of possibilities for meaningful action may provoke orgiastic explosions.

6. Overcoming the empire of everydayness: sacrifice and the “solidarity of the shaken”.

Nonetheless, Patočka does not limit himself to the “diagnosis” of our civilization. He looks for solutions. We need to find ways of recovering the obscured dimensions, especially responsibility or “Care for the Soul”. It is, in fact, such a recovery that Patočka seeks when speaking about the need for a “new spirituality” for our times⁵⁰.

For our philosopher, there is a way to counter the imperialism of everydayness, which must involve shattering the technical understanding of being. This cannot consist of an intellectualistic act of redressing reason, as Husserl thought, but it cannot consist either of waiting for a new understanding of being to arrive, as in Heidegger. It needs to be a special act or behavior that, in itself, points to an understanding of being different from the technical one⁵¹.

This act is sacrifice (*obet*). It involves sacrificing oneself in the name of something situated on a higher plane. But then, as the technical understanding of being apprehends everything on the same level—that of the available for its use—we find that sacrifice for something higher cannot be integrated into the “economy” of this technical understanding. Still, the fact is that sacrifice takes place. There are people who sacrifice themselves. There are acts and behaviors that cannot but be described as “sacrifice”, whose understanding “requires” this concept. Consequently, we have a breach in the prevalence of the technical understanding of being. There is at least one area that cannot be conceptualized as technical optimization for the sake of life-maintenance (of “bare life”). Consequently, there is something we can do to counter the empire of everydayness and its subsequent boredom, instead of just waiting for a “god” that saves us, accepting that all lies in the history of Being⁵². In Heideggerian terms, it may be said that Patočka does think, against Heidegger, that we can do something to change the history of Being.

Nonetheless, Patočka acknowledges that not all that is today called “sacrifice” can provoke such a transformation. It can be spoken of “inauthentic” and “authentic”

⁵⁰ PATOČKA, JAN. “Duchovní základy života v naší době”. In: *Sebrané Spisy 2, Péče o duši II*. Prague: Oikoymenth, 1999, pp.27-28; Spanish: “Los fundamentos espirituales de la vida contemporánea”. In: *Libertad y sacrificio*, pp.246-248.

⁵¹ See Patočka's four seminars on Europe, especially the third and the fourth: PATOČKA, JAN. “Čtyři semináře o problému Evropy”, In: *Sebrané Spisy 3, Péče o duši III*, Prague: Oikoymenth, 2002, pp.405-423. Spanish: “Cuatro seminarios sobre el problema de Europa”. In: *Libertad y sacrificio*, pp.317-348.

⁵² PATOČKA, JAN. “‘Sólo un Dios puede salvarnos’ Introducción, notas y coloquio a propósito de la entrevista a Heidegger en *Der Spiegel*”. In: *Libertad y sacrificio*, pp.349-385 (There is no published Czech original available so far).

sacrifice⁵³. The former is in the name of goals such as the improvement of humanity, or progress, which in the end amounts to reaffirming everydayness; the latter, to the contrary, entails a surrendering of the self —one’s projects, one’s future, position, and even one’s life— for something higher than everydayness. Only the latter can be the transformative action the philosopher of Prague is looking for.

It is true that Patočka did not specify much regarding a more concrete description of this sacrifice capable of transforming the understanding of being. Notwithstanding, he did give some examples. In effect, he refers to people so diverse as Oppenheimer and Sakharov on one side, and Solzhenitsyn on the other⁵⁴. They gave up their securities in the name of a horizon of meaning which couldn’t be apprehended within the technical understanding of being. Thus, Solzhenitsyn chose to speak for the downtrodden in the name of a worldview, for those forsaken in the progress of “humankind”, and he did so by referring to a religious horizon (which was supposed to be overcome). As for Oppenheimer and Sakharov, they did not refer to a particular horizon of meaning but pointed to the insufficiencies and dangers of technical civilization. Thus, seemingly isolated and minute actions like these ones may open a breach in the technical understanding of being and propitiate the emergence of a new one.

Still, there is another type of experience considered by Patočka and which also receives the name of sacrifice. It is different from the one just described though certainly related to it. It is not the experience of those who sacrifice themselves, but of those of are *sent to sacrifice* in the war front. And there —in the ruin of all the pre-existing horizons of meaning, inscribed in everydayness— they discover a mysterious donation of meaning. This is what our philosopher found in the experience of many soldiers in the First World War, drawing especially on the writings of so diverse authors as Ernst Jünger and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin⁵⁵. They saw that the narratives of meaning which had put them in the front were reduced to nothing. However, some of them were not left with pure nihilism but experienced a “mysterious positivity” of meaning:

Both Jünger and Teilhard emphasize the upheaval by the front line, which is not an immediate trauma but a fundamental transformation of human existence: war in the form of the front-line marks humans forever. A second common trait: the front line is horrifying and everyone in the trenches is eager for rotation (...), yet *in the depth of that experience there is something deeply and mysteriously positive*. It is not the fascination of the abyss and the romance of adventure; it is no perversion of natural sentiments. The person on the front line is gradually overcome by an *overwhelming sense of meaningfulness* which would be hard to put into words. It is a feeling capable of persisting for many years⁵⁶ (my emphasis).

This positivity could not be identified with the ideals of everydayness they left behind (the “ideals of the Day and the Peace”, as described in *Heretical Essays*). Nonetheless, it was an experience of meaning, even of absolute meaning, where the whole landscape of values became transformed in light of this new positivity⁵⁷.

According to Patočka, here we may as well find a way of overcoming the dominion of the technical understanding of being, as this meaning cannot be apprehended within

⁵³ PATOČKA, JAN. “Čtyři semináře k problému Evropy”. In: Chvatík, Ivan, and Kouba, Pavel. *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočka 3. Péče o duši III*. Prague: Oikoymene, 2002, pp.413-416; Spanish: “Cuatro seminarios sobre el problema de Europa”. In: *Libertad y sacrificio*, pp.328-333.

⁵⁴ PATOČKA, JAN. “Hrdinové naší doby”. In: *Sebrané Spisy III, Péče o duši 3*, pp.186-190. Spanish: “Los héroes de nuestro tiempo”. In: *Libertad y sacrificio*, pp.343-348.

⁵⁵ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, pp.108-111. Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, pp.177-181.

⁵⁶ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.110; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.179. The quote is taken from the English translation: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Translated by Erazim Kohák. Chicago: Open Court, 1996, p.126.

⁵⁷ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.114; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.186. Patočka here refers to psychologist Kurt Lewin in LEWIN, KURT. “Kriegslandschaft”. *Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie*, XII, 1917, pp. 440-447.

everydayness and the technical understanding of being. Nevertheless, here the problem is how to go beyond the realm of individual experience and make it a “social” one. This is not an easy step. Indeed, these experiences were, for the most part, forgotten after the war. Even worse, they became mostly integrated into fights for a “better future”, which is fully understood within the horizon everydayness (as it aims at “improvement”, at “progress”, at a “better functioning” of life). This happened even in the “war against war” of pacifism⁵⁸.

However, Patočka resists a pessimistic conclusion, and points to the possibility of “socializing” this experience of the front in the circumstances of the present. This possibility is that of the “solidarity of the shaken” (*solidarita otřesených*). It is the solidarity of those who have been shaken in the faith in the meanings of everydayness. They are shaken either because they are on the front line of the present war—which continues in other “nonbelligerent” forms that involve, nonetheless, a total mobilization⁵⁹—, or because they remain in the rear guard but share this experience. True, we can only speak about the possibility of such solidarity. But if it happens, it will function as a Socratic daimon which warns against the totalisation of the technical understanding of being and its concomitant mobilization. However, this solidarity will avoid giving positive indications, presumably because this would involve going against the negativity and problematcity of the experience, a characteristic that for him is the only one capable of countering the empire of everydayness:

The solidarity of the shaken can say “no” to the measures of mobilisation which make the state of war permanent. It will not offer positive programs but will speak, like Socrates’ *daimon*, in warnings and prohibitions. It can and must create a spiritual authority, become a spiritual power that could drive the warring world to some restraint, rendering some acts and measures impossible⁶⁰.

Therefore, there is for Patočka a possibility of going beyond the current crisis. However, it requires a high level of discipline. We need to assume that it is about a fight against a permanent trend to decay into everydayness⁶¹. And it demands from us to be ready to face our finitude. It remains open whether it will be possible to go beyond the present decay. And this question is addressed to Europe, which for our philosopher has in its germ the ideal of care for the Soul and responsibility:

The possibility of a *metanoesis* of historic proportions depends essentially on this: is that part of humanity which is capable of understanding what was and is the point of history, which is at the same time ever more driven by the entire positioning of present day humanity at the peak of technoscience to accept responsibility for meaninglessness, also capable of the discipline and self-denial demanded by a stance of uprooted-ness in which alone a meaningfulness, both absolute and accessible to humans, because it is problematic, might be realized?⁶².

6. Conclusion

To conclude, we may say, in the light of the preceding exposition, that for Patočka it can be no question of adapting to everydayness and accept boredom, lest we are led to nihilism: we need to act. However, it is by no means evident that we shall be able to do so. His conclusions are hard. There seems to be no middle ground, no possibility of “compromise”. That would mean giving up our upswing impulse (*vzmach*). Indeed,

⁵⁸ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.111; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.180.

⁵⁹ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.116-117; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, p.188-189.

⁶⁰ PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, pp.117-118; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, pp. 190-191. The quote is taken from the English translation: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, p.135.

⁶¹ PATOČKA, JAN. *Platón a Evropa*, pp. 9-12; English: *Plato and Europe*, pp.1-4.

⁶² PATOČKA, JAN. *Kačírské eseje o filosofii dějin*, p.68; Spanish: *Ensayos heréticos sobre filosofía de la historia*, pp.117-118. The quote is taken from the English translation: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, pp.75-76.

boredom and orgiastic explosions are the sign that something important is being mutilated. For the Czech philosopher, keeping us in the path of responsibility is a fight (*boj*), a challenge that we need to take.

This fight to live in responsibility may seem an impossible task. Still, it may seem less so if we remember that at the end of his life Patočka did not seem to have any expectation of a “big scale” change, but he did have hope in the action of little groups who would share the experience of being shaken. This solidarity of the shaken seems a more feasible way, though certainly not an easy one. It consists of seemingly minute actions, but they do not fit into the ideals of everydayness and thus shaken its understanding of life and being. In fact, this was, to a good extent, the path taken by some of his students, and it inspired the action of dissident groups in late communist Czechoslovakia. It was especially the type of action described by Havel in *The power of the powerless*⁶³: speaking in favor of the unjustly processed and creating a sort of “parallel polis” where different values could be held⁶⁴.

Today, state communism is no longer a reality except for a few countries. However, technical civilization goes on and the empire of everydayness is very much in place. If anything, we are even more driven into the dynamics of technical civilization, as some recent studies show. For example, Patočka scholar Lubica Učník has researched on the application of Patočka’s concept of supercivilization (and more generally, technical civilization) for contemporary issues like education or algorithms⁶⁵. We may mention the possibilities of these analyses, as well, for considering human life in today’s increasingly concentrated population in large cities⁶⁶. There, technification, rationalization and objectification of human life, along with a true “mobilization” in the terms of the *Heretical Essays*, take place. It is reasonable to guess that boredom, combined with the absence of possibilities for more meaningful lives, is also present today. In this sense, we may refer here once again to the writings of Josefa Ros Velasco and, more generally, the research of the International Society of Boredom Studies (<https://www.boredomsociety.com/>) founded by her. In particular, the Spanish philosopher points to the fact that boredom is truly an “illness” that may provoke violent outbursts if no meaningful action to face the causes of boredom is carried out. This can be closely related, once again, to Patočka’s considerations of “orgiastic explosions” in technical civilization. Therefore, Patočka’s analyses are worth being taken into account. Perhaps it is time to ask ourselves whether our technical age may not be having us paying a toll and maybe it is good time for us to think if something can be done. It may be a good moment to consider again his proposal of a “solidarity of the shaken” and to imagine ways to carry it out today. Here, the voice of someone who lived in a time where his positions seemed condemned to oblivion may be of help.

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⁶³ HAVEL, VÁCLAV. “The Power of the Powerless”. In: *Open Letters (1965-1990)*. New York: Vintage, 1992, pp.125-214.

⁶⁴ HAVEL, VÁCLAV. “The Power of the Powerless”, pp.193-196.

⁶⁵ UČNÍK, LUBICA. “Neoliberalism and Jan Patočka on supercivilisation and education”. In: *Phainomena* 26(102), pp.153-175; “The Allure and impossibility of an algorithmic future: a lesson from Patočka’s supercivilisation”. In: *Studies in East European Thought* 73(6), pp.1-22.

⁶⁶ ORTEGA RODRÍGUEZ, IVÁN. “A Solidariedade dos abalados de Jan Patočka e sua possível leitura para nosso tempo”. In: *Geograficidade*. v. 12 n. 1, 2022, pp.62-74.