Sociology of the Contrapuntal: The Holocaust and the Rhetoric of Evil

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ABSTRACT

The essay dwells on the construction of a sociology of the contrapuntal that revolves around the social and symbolic patterns concerning the representation of mass human annihilation, as in the case of the Holocaust. In this view, Roger Silverstone's metaphor of media contrapuntuality – inspired by the analysis of some narrative masterpieces focused on imperialistic and colonial exploitation – may support the development of a sociological pathway supporting the analysis of the "rhetoric of evil" historically permeating the reflection on the refusal and the oppression of Otherness. Contrapuntuality deals with communication, memory and identity, since the rhetoric patterns of media discourse are shaped not only by the negative issues, but also by good deeds and intentions that rarely are attractive to journalists. The proposal of such a sociology of the contrapuntal, inspired by the counterbalance of good and evil in the public sphere, complies with the increasing complexity of our mediascapes, in which mass massacres and identity annihilation, including the Holocaust, are constantly media represented, in line with the need to contrast cultural marginalization and existential displacement.

Keywords: media, displacement, Holocaust, memory, contrapuntuality

INTRODUCTION

The essay deals with the relationship between sociology, memory and cultural displacement, inspired by the commemoration by the European Commission President von der Leyen of the victims of the Holocaust delivered on 27th January 2023, in reference to the construction of a wider European community founded on the struggle against antisemitism and racism: *"*Remembrance is not an aim in itself. We must go a step further. We must foster Jewish life. Europe can only prosper when its Jewish communities prosper too. We will work towards a European Union free from antisemitism and any form of discrimination. For an open, inclusive and equal European society" (von der Leyen, 2023). By the same token, the essay deals with the sociological and communicative patterns of the Holocaust in the annual celebrations of the liberation of Nazi camps through memory and information. As a result, the International Day of Holocaust remembrance represents the will to remember the slaughter of six million Jews in Nazi concentration camps, in tune with a public narrative which involves mainstream and digital media.

The communicative paradigms inspiring these celebrations seem to foster Zygmunt Bauman's interpretation of the Holocaust as the result of the "logic of modernity" in order to shed light on the social, cultural, religious and economic factors at the basis of Nazis persecution (Bauman, 1989). In this view, Bauman's interpretation of the Holocaust can be set within the wider sociological framework of fear and risk, as Erving Goffman (1961), Ulrich Beck (1992), Jean Baudrillard (1993), Richard Sennett (2013) and, more recently, Frank Furedi (2018) point out, in conjunction with the ethical approach also provided by Hannah Arendt (2006) in reference to the "banality of evil" in total institutions. This is why memory complies both with rhetoric and narration, in line with the communicative stereotypes and platitudes of the connected society highlighted by Roger Silverstone (2007: 85-90),

in reference to the contrapuntal patterns of media representations, as the dialectic of good and evil and the topic of cultural marginalization may significantly shape the infrastructure of contemporary public sphere. As von der Leyen (2023) assumes, *"*We cannot remain silent when injustice takes place, when massacres are committed. We have to call out antisemitism, antigypsyism and all forms of hatred and discrimination – be it on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability".

As Silverstone (2007: 85) points out, Edward Said refers to the "contrapuntal as a metaphor addressing the structured complexity both of his own experience of exile and of the nature, principally, of the novel in nineteenth-century, imperial, France and Britain", with particular regard to the narrative relevance given to emarginated, downtrodden and exiled people. In this view, the metaphor of the contrapuntal provided by Silverstone enables a different and more attentive analysis of the media rhetoric inspired by the representation of evil and the celebration of good, as the need to narrate and understand the persecution and the annihilation of the Other often complies with the media tendency to counterbalance the perspective of analysis, so as to understand why the Holocaust has to be considered "a test for modernity", as Bauman (1989: 6-12) does. This scientific effort should aim at constructing the epistemological paradigms of a sociology of the contrapuntal that ought to dwell on the symbolic and narrative investigation of those actions of identity removal and discrimination that colonial policies, military invasions and mass slaughters have emphasized during the nineteenth and twentieth century (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). In this perspective, the metaphor of the contrapuntal can provide some useful epistemological keys linked to the complexity of our media scenario and the urgence of bestowing our narration with the fundamental cognitive and ethical elements provided by memory and heritage (van Dijck et al., 2018; Boccia Artieri, 2012; Appadurai, 1996).

CONTRAPUNTUALITY AS A COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY

Marginalization, displacement and representation seem to inspire Silverstone's analysis of contemporary media landscapes, as the innovation of communicative processes appears increasingly supported by the myth of connection and reticularization of experiences (Livingstone, 2007). Assuming that every communicative act may concern political and strategic implications, Silverstone deals with the role played by morality in the era of mainstream anxiety and hyperconnected exchanges, thus debunking the narrative aporias lurking in the media-sphere, especially in reference to the public discourse concerning the risks of integration and inclusion (Silverstone, 1994). By the same token, cosmopolitism and pluralism seem to belong to the rhetoric of "politically correct" that often hampers the acknowledgement of the risks stemming from the failed osmosis between the local and the foreigner, despite the attempts of supranational institutions to support integration, as Bauman (2004) repeatedly pointed out in his most recent works dedicated to the future of the European Union.

Silverstone focuses on the media marginalization of cultural and social minorities, in a time ruled by the instantaneous sharing of images and contents, despite the increasing isolation of social actors and the digital projection of individual and collective experiences. What does cosmopolitan mean in the era of the secondary modernization probed by Ulrich Beck (1992)? How has inclusion to be set within the social patterns provided by Jürgen Habermas (2007) and Anthony Giddens (1990)? What role does marginalization play in the era of mainstream narratives investigated by Frank Furedi (2018: 207-236) in reference to the globalization of risks and uncertainty? All these questions seem to be taken into account by Silverstone in *Media and Morality* (2007), inspired by the need of investigating the fading away of morality and ethics from the contemporary communicative scenario (Dayan, 2007), in a time characterized by the growth of immigration, ethnical prevarications, new conflicts and the radicalization of poverty and exploitation:

> The cosmopolitan individual embodies, in his or her person, a doubling of identity and identification; the cosmopolitan, as an ethic, embodies a commitment, indeed an obligation, to recognize not just the stranger as other, but the other in oneself. Cosmopolitanism implies and requires, therefore, the reflexivity and toleration. In political terms it demands justice and liberty. In social terms, hospitality. And in media terms, […], an obligation to listen, an obligation which I will suggest is a version of hospitality (Silverstone, 2007: 14).

In media terms, the "obligation to listen" implies the obligation to inform, represent and express, despite the logics of gatekeeping and agenda setting that still nowadays rule the infrastructure of the public sphere (McQuail, 2013). This is why the metaphor of the contrapuntal gains a significant sociological relevance in Silverstone's mediology, especially if we take into account that the author takes inspiration from Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and his cultural analysis of some celebrated novelists, such as Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad and Albert Camus, to the extent that they succeeded in depicting the side effects of imperialism and colonization, along with the social inequalities stemming from slavery and discrimination (Silverstone, 2007: 88-89).

In this view, literature may support social criticism and cultural inquiry. Thus, the distance between civilized and uncivilized people may be interpreted as a lag of collective perception and media representation. In Silverstone's perspective, cosmopolitism and inclusion are social processes that ought to be radically embedded in the "mediapolis" that new and old media shape within the open environment of daily exchanges, in which a new rhetoric takes form to express the stereotypes and commonplaces with the power to symbolically construct our social reality. Thus, the metaphor of the "contrapuntal" effectively expresses the mediatized complexity of our media-sphere, especially when communication implies reading, hearing and interpreting. The tenet of the contrapuntal, taken from the musical sphere, is inspired by the permanent counterbalances that public and institutional communication have to pursue to give voice to the contradictory events forming the ecology of information that we deal with, assuming that every informative input consists in textual patterns (Altheide, 2014, 2002).

This is why the literary analysis carried out by Edward Said in reference to the development of imperialism can provide some reliable heuristic tools to investigate the so called "rhetoric of evil" that both Richard Sennett (2008: 1-15) and Zygmunt Bauman (1989: 18-27) analyze through Hannah Arendt's writings. The contrapuntal is the result of a long process of intellectual meditation and emotional sedimentation, as some novels emphasize: "The generic argument is that literary texts both are, and therefore must be read as, contrapuntal. And indeed contrapuntuality, if there is such a word, emerges as a product of the reading rather than writing, since the writer might not be aware of the otherness against which she is writing" (Silverstone, 2007: 88). Silverstone makes reference not only to the "sociologically identifiable subtexts" present in some important novels of the late eighteenth, nineteenth and even twentieth century, but also to all those textual products, including the informative ones, that contribute to the symbolic construction of our environment through the representation of those contradictions that exalt the struggle for life and need of resistance in dire straits. Therefore, it is possible to switch the metaphor of the contrapuntal from a narrative dimension to a sociological context starting from the epistemological role played by reading as it evolves through digitalization, at a time of misleading, unidentified forms of exploitation and colonialism (McEwan, 2018; Loomba, 1998):

> But the contrapuntal also consists in the presence of oppositional and resistant writing, which in a colonial and post-colonial environment appears against but also alongside that of the mainstream. And finally the contrapuntal appears as a way of characterizing the process of reading in which novels are read again and read differently as time passes and cultures change. The significance of the contrapuntal lies in its doubling (or trebling or quadrupling), and the presumption is made that there is an identifiable integrity which is constituted, but at the same time disturbed, by that doubling (Silverstone, 2007: 88).

In this view, reading implies a permanent process of interpreting and semantic renovation through the acknowledgment of the mainstream dimension of our narrative patterns and interpretative paradigms (Wolfe, 2016: 131-169). While dwelling on the "oppositional and resistant writing" engendered by mainstream narrations, Silverstone provides an insightful sociological approach that resides in the interpretation of the "mediapolis" as the result of centripetal and centrifugal communicative thrusts, in tune with the need to juxtapose political and economic interests and public engagement. Our digital complexity confirms that the informative relevance of the "rhetoric of evil" complies with the semiotic attention paid to all categories of marginalized subjects who rarely find their place within public narrations, thus highlighting the "contrapuntal" dimension of public representations. The media translation of reality is usually inspired by the exaltation of risks and disasters, in line with the sharing of dematerialized simulacra that have the power to replace factual happenings with their iconic trace, as Baudrillard arguably posited: "Today the whole system is swamped by indeterminacy, and every reality is absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and simulation. The principle of simulation governs us now, rather than the outdated reality principle. We feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacra" (Baudrillard, 1993: 2).

The simulacrum of evil represents the most significant media keystone of our society, as the contrapuntal fascination of communication resides in the very balance of bad and good stories. This is why memory ought to play a central role in the sociological investigation concerning the construction of our collective identity, as Silverstone (1999: 128) points out in *Why Study the Media?* "To study the media's relationship to memory is not to deny the authority of the event which is the focus of recollection, but it is to insist on the media's capacity to construct a public past, as well as a past for the public. The texture of memory is intertwined with the texture of experience". The recollection of memory deals with the search for identity and the construction of a public discourse that might be as attractive as shareable from a civil point of view, as in the case of the Holocaust, that from a sociological perspective represents a fundamental example of contrapuntal narration, as the analysis of the Holocaust provided by Silverstone demonstrates. Assuming that "memory is struggle", it is possible dwell on the contrapuntal paradigms of the mediapolis in which we are imbued, since the relationship between memory and

information may engender a series of narrative pathways founded on the need for collective acknowledgement and public identity recollection (McIntyre, 2019; Curran, 2012; Chomsky, 2002).

THE HOLOCAUST AS A TEST OF MODERNITY

> We suspect (even if we refuse to admit it) that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body. What we perhaps fear most, is that each of the two faces can no more exist without the other than can the two sides of a coin (Bauman, 1989: 7).

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Zygmunt Bauman rebuts the stereotype of the Holocaust interpreted as a mere aberration and as an unexpected and unforeseen drift from the main road of civilization and progress. On the contrary, the Holocaust should be set within the development of modernity and its profound contradictions, effectively highlighted by Ulrich Beck (2016: 141-149) in reference to the side-effects of the "secondary modernization". Considering the Holocaust as a "test of modernity", Bauman pays new epistemological attention to the origins and the causes of the Holocaust, starting from the socio-cultural reflection on Adorno and Horkheimer's "dialectic of enlightenment" (1972: 1-34). In this account Gerson and Wolf (2007: 11) argue that "the focus in sociology, much as in other disciplines, was on perpetrators rather than on victims as researchers grappled with the threat the Holocaust posed to Enlightenment ideals". Bauman's epistemological effort revolves around the perimetral definition of "sociology after the Holocaust", along with the symbolic aporias of our social complexity and its identity short circuits. To the extent that the Holocaust is definable as "a test for Modernity", the array of narrations, testaments, movies, diaries, documentaries dedicated to the persecution of the Jews represents the communicative legacy and contrapuntal information concerning one of the most dreadful massacres of the twentieth century, as Bauman points out:

> The unspoken terror permeating our collective memory of the Holocaust (and more than contingently related to the overwhelming desire not to look the memory in its face) is the gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust could be more than an aberration, more than a deviation from on the otherwise healthy body of the civilized society; that, in short, the Holocaust was not an antithesis of modern civilization and everything (or so we like to think) it stands for (Bauman, 1989: 7).

While recollecting the tenet of the "memory of the Holocaust", Bauman aims at impeding the interpretative simplification of the Nazi persecution of millions of actors marginalized for cultural, racial, sexual, eugenic reasons. In this view, the practice of memory can reveal the need for social identity and criminal acknowledgment (Murray, 1991). To say that the Holocaust cannot be considered as "an antithesis of modern civilization" means that progress implies development and improvement, but also cynicism, individualization and indifference, especially when ideological and political myopia lead to the annihilation of life itself (Palmer and Brzeziński, 2022). Therefore, sociology should frame such events within the institutional context which produced the theory of the "final solution" through the dissemination of camps that had to be functional to the criminal plan arranged by Eichmann and all the Nazi entourage.

The sociology of the Holocaust provided by Bauman seems to anticipate the sociology of the contrapuntal posited by Silverstone, even because it interprets the persecution and assassination of the Jews as a sociological fact so closely related to the civil, political, cultural, urban and social conditions ruling Germany in the first half of the Twentieth century. The Holocaust was not an incident of the history, but a consequence of society, as Bauman sharply contends: "The Holocaust has exposed and examined such attributes of our society as are not revealed, and hence are not empirically accessible, in 'non-laboratory' conditions. In other words, I propose to treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society" (Bauman, 1989: 12).

Since the sociology of the Holocaust has never really been developed, the sociology after the Holocaust deserves to be investigated and implemented. To the fore is the meaning of the civilizing process that Norbert Elias (1978) intelligently analyzed without neglecting Max Weber's "vision of rationalization" that seems to foreshadow the myth of bureaucratization and organization pursued by Adolf Hitler at a paroxysmal level. This is why the Holocaust has to be interpreted as a relevant sociological field, in line with the "contrapuntal" representations provided by the array of narrations and movies dedicated to that unbelievable human disaster. The sociological keywords of the Holocaust are neither violence nor persecution, but civilization and modernity, as Bauman clearly argues:

> Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's *sufficient* condition; it was, however, most certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern

civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable. "The Nazi mass murder of the European Jewry was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also the organizational achievement of a bureaucratic society". Just consider what was needed to make the Holocaust unique among the many mass murders which marked the historical advance of the human species (Bauman, 1989: 13).

The dialectics of sufficient and necessary conditions permeates all the theoretical reflections on the great and inescapable human contradictions, starting from the persecutions of Jews. As a result, the memory of the Holocaust entails the narration and the communication of the Holocaust, as Silverstone recalls in *Why Study the Media?* in reference to the role played by memory in our hyperconnected world, since "the texture of memory is intertwined with the texture of experience. Memory is work: it is never shaped in a vacuum, nor are its motives ever pure. Memory is struggle. And therefore it is wise to struggle over memory" (Silverstone, 1999: 128). The practice of memory is often interpreted as a mere recollection of facts and events, despite the fact that memory is more than knowledge and memorization. Assuming that memory is "struggle", Silverstone emphasizes the cognitive dimension of such a process of knowledge, in which identity and the imaginary converge to shape the collective imaginary of the world.

Time and space cooperate to probe the contradictions and aporias of the human race, especially when evil inspires mass murders. It is no accident that the narration of the Holocaust is closely related to the tenets of social justice and cultural restitution, as every form of reparation risks being inadequate and inappropriate (Bajohr and Löw, 2016). Silverstone's invitation to "consider the Holocaust" (Silverstone, 1999: 128) implies the need of justice and information about one of the greatest tragedies of the modern world, as Robert J. C. Young said (2016). Hence the analysis of the Holocaust through a sociological approach that might mitigate the emptiness of human existence, in line with the therapeutical force of memory: "Of course the media cannot be silent. And we must not be allowed to forget. But what should we remember and who has the rights of narration and inscription?" (Silverstone, 1999: 128-129).

The struggle for truth requires information and reliability of sources, insofar as ambiguity, mystification and opacity may hamper the process of documental restitution. In this view, Adorno's considerations on history and truth inspire several epigrams of *Minima moralia* shedding light on the contradictory and contrapuntal patterns of human deeds, as remembering means also pain and suffering: "The expression of history in things is no other than of past torment" (Adorno, 2005: 49). Memory is struggle and torment, as we find out every year during the celebration of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (27 January) that turns into a media and informative globalized topic. The media narration of Nazi cruelty turns into the attempt to sublimate the force of evil and debunk that "rhetoric of evil" that Silverstone (2007: 56-79) focuses on while asking for a better convergence of media and morality. In this account, Hannah Arendt's writings help us to understand the origins of evil and its social effects, as Sennett (2008: 286-296) also highlights. More specifically, it is important to emphasize that the rhetoric of evil is closely related to the "meditation of evil" (Silverstone, 2007: 61) imposing a sharp reflection on the communicative pathways that propaganda and coercion follow, often inspired by banalization and Manicheism. Indoctrination needs communication and persuasion, as Arendt points out in the epilogue of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958):

> The point is that the impact of factual reality, like all other human experiences, needs speech if it is to survive the moment of experience, needs talk and communication with others to remain sure of itself. Total dominion succeeds to the extent that it succeeds in interrupting all channels of communication, those from person to person inside the four walls of privacy no less than the public ones which are safeguarded in democracies by freedom of speech and opinion (Arendt, 1958: 495).

To the fore is the ambiguity of communication in the presence of ideological and instrumental purposes which only the contrapuntal effort of research and narration can rebut, in the era of symbolic and semiotic overload (Craig and Tracy, 2020; Boltanski, 1993).

TOTAL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY: STIGMA AS A SOCIOLOGICAL KEYSTONE

The definition of the Holocaust as "a test for modernity" provides a series of sociological insights functional to the construction of a sociology of the contrapuntal probing the relationship of good and evil in contemporary media narrations, starting from the dynamics of discrimination and rehabilitation concerning marginalized and unrepresented subjects. When cultures are on the margins, media risk drawing on banalization and simplification, thus fostering a sort of representative standardization in tune with audience expectations. This is a symbolic tendency cleverly depicted by Ulrich Beck in his posthumous book, *The Metamorphosis of the World* (2016), about the sharing of digital "politics of invisibility":

> Global risks are fundamentally characterized by the problematic of invisibility. This problematic of invisibility is intrinsically connected to the problematic of power. In order to analyze the new landscapes of relations of definition, it is useful to introduce a time-diagnostic dualism between a *natural* ('given') invisibility of highly civilizational risks and *manufactured* invisibility (politics of invisibility) (Beck, 2016: 99).

The more cultures appear as marginal and peripheral, the more media tend to reduce the emphasis on the differentiation and diversification, as Beck duly underlines in reference to the manufactured politics of invisibility and visibility that deal with the dynamics of agenda setting (McQuail, 2013). The contrapuntal narration of our globalized civilization should revolve around the fluctuation between risks and advantages stemming from the process of technological sophistication that engenders all those symbolic biases ruling our hyperconnected environments (Castells, 2009). Hence the attention on life conditions within and without the total institutions including camps, barracks, asylums, covenants, in which the cult of individual personality still yields to the dogmatic respect of norms and rules. Goffman's (1961) analysis of total institutions from the perspective of the mechanisms of exclusion and violence helps us understand the processes of annihilation of personal identity, as the possession of a stigma (either physical, cultural, behavioral or psychiatric) may itself determine the confinement and repression of posited diversities. In fact, the interpretation of stigma as a medium of "spoiled identity" has opened up very important epistemological pathways concerning both sociology and literature, as Goffman himself demonstrated in *Asylums* by means of several literary quotations. The convergence of literature, cinema and sociology highlights the numberless ways of representation of the behavioral rules imposed inside a total institution, since every social gathering has to be considered as a community, including the one constructed in a coercive way, as in the case of the inmates recovered in mental hospitals:

> A community is a community. Just as it is bizarre to those not in it, so it is natural, even if unwanted, to those who live it from within. The system of dealings that patients have with one another does not fall at one end of anything, but rather provides one example of human association, to be avoided, no doubt, but also to be filed by the student in a circular cabinet along with all the other examples of association that can be collected (Goffman, 1961: 303).

Hence follows the need of investigating the way interned people adapt themselves to the specific norms of the total institutions, including Nazi concentration camps. As Goffman emphasizes, the underlife of a public institution is often characterized by a series of primary and secondary adaptations inspired by the urgency to survive within a coercive regime and to cope with the array of risky situations that might jeopardize the cohabitation with the other inmates. These are social and relational phenomena profitably described also by José Saramago in *Blindness* (about the confinement *extra moenia* of people suffering from a blindness outbreak) and Primo Levi in *If This is Man* (focused on his imprisonment in Auschwitz). The analysis of the adaptations imposed on inmates in hospitals, asylums, barracks and concentration camps sheds light on the sociological premises of total institutions and confinement. As Foucault underpins in *Discipline and Punish* (1979: 73-103), the strategy of control always complies with the social instinct to isolate and redeem those subjects who can represent a source of treatment and disorder.

In this view, the experience of the Holocaust can be described as one of the most dreadful and diabolic experiments of social cleansing by means of the technological and managerial development of Nazi Germany. *Schindler's List* (1994), *Life is Beautiful* (1997) and *The Photographer of Mathausen* (2018) are good examples of the "contrapuntal dimension of mainstream narration of the Holocaust", but not so clearly of the Holocaust as a consequence of modernity. The contrapuntal dimension of mainstream narration of the Holocaust resides precisely in the fluctuation of good and evil that always characterizes great human tragedies, since solidarity clashes with cruelty and generosity collides with cynicism. Those and other movies describe the need for contingent adaptations to unexpected conditions of life, as Goffman deals with the contingent adaptations of both inmates and soldiers in the same contexts:

> It should be quite plain that primary and secondary adjustments are matters of social definition and that an adaptation or incentive that is legitimated at one period in a given society may not be legitimated at a different time in its history or in another society. […] In American internment camps, access to a prostitute is not conceived of as a need to be honored within the establishment; some German concentration camps, on the other hand, did have this wider view of the essential and characteristic need of men (Goffman, 1961: 194).

Movies, diaries and literary narrations provide an array of descriptions of those primary and secondary adjustments that allowed people to cope with the process of identity annihilation, especially in the case of the cultural, religious and social displacement that marginalized subjects underwent because of their identity drift and cultural mismatch, thus making inclusion and integration an unfair challenge. The polysemic patterns of languages

allow us to unveil the unseen depths of human consciousness, to the extent that the constructions of nationalism and imperialism also resides in the marginalization of languages, religions and symbols. To the fore is the collision of the rhetoric of evil and the search for truth, that – for instance – Richard Sennett (2011: 3-44) investigated in reference to the confinement of Jews in the ghetto in Renaissance Venice. The coercive confinement of "detached people" in a ghetto has produced the gloomy imaginary of the Jews persecuted and stigmatized, as Shakespeare lyrically depicted in *The Merchant of Venice*.

The metaphor of society as a collective body shows not only a positive and functionalist influence, but it might be related to the growth of the sociology of the masses, with the focus on the laws of imitation and the criminal dynamics engendered by *The Lonely Crowd* probed by David Riesman (1950). This metaphor has of course lost its epistemological force in the era of connected globalization, but it has legitimated the exclusion and segregation of a series of publicly stigmatized subjects over the centuries, until the "final solution" supported by Eichmann through the segregation of Jews outside the urban boundaries.

Unlike the camp, the ghetto had the function of safeguarding the "collective body" of the Jewish community and, in the same way, of making segregation a sort of social and cultural protection from external interferences. The pogroms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries exalted the practice of violence as a popular reaction, as Bauman constantly outlines in reference to the Jewish persecutions. Thus, the confinement of persecuted people outside the city limits paradoxically highlights the need of conserving the "collective body" of society, in line with the planned endeavor to remove the spurious and stigmatized elements. Once again, Sennett's analysis of the Renaissance Venetian ghetto highlights the practice of cultural confinement seen as a social need, in tune with the politics of visibility and invisibility that gain new forms in the contemporary society:

> The belief in organic community, a belief held in opposition to the forces of modern capitalism, thus came in more modern times to be embodied by those who were marginal; segregation was made into a positive human value, as though the segregated had been kept from contagion. Ghetto-space was idealized as 'real' community, as an organic space. The Jews of Renaissance Venice were the first to think of their segregation as containing, ironically, this positive virtue. (Sennett, 2011: 7)

Despite the ideological drifts of the twentieth century, the experience of the Renaissance ghetto still provides useful cultural insight to better understand the contrapuntal patterns of the contemporary narration of segregation and isolation, along with the fear of contagion that we all underwent during the Covid pandemic, in which isolation was often described as the only way to survive and cope with the uncontrolled spread of a virus that has profoundly transformed social and relational interactions (Boccia Artieri and Farci, 2021).

MEMORY AS THE SIMULACRUM OF OUR INFORMATIONAL PATHWAYS

Ahead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, recalled the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto on 19 April 1943, along with other revolts against the Nazi regime in the concentration and death camps in Treblinka and Sobibor or the Bialystok Ghetto. Her message emphasized the resistance of Jews against the Nazis and their system of physical confinement and suppression. Speeches and communications delivered every year on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day share a sort of memorial narration tending to unveil an alternative side of history and exalt human solidarity among those who shared such a traumatic experience, in line with the social and cultural impact of collective traumas highlighted by Jeffrey C. Alexander (2012). Resistance, opposition, resilience, aggregation, solidarity, courage, are some of the keywords that seem to inspire this contrapuntal representation of the Holocaust, as von der Leyden comments: 'Still today, and forever, we can learn from the strength, courage and the determination of these poorly armed Jewish fighters and partisans, who carried out revolts successfully against all odds, and an almost certain death. They fought in the name of justice. They were determined to fight back" (von der Leyen, 2023).

The metaphor of fight despite all opposition inspires an array of communicative products focusing on the Nazi assassination of millions of Jews, gipsies, homosexuals, disabled persons discriminated for their own social and cultural identity. The Nazi justification for the mass extermination of these groups went beyond "social and cultural identity" - it was primarily racial cleansing and eugenics. Their fight ought to be our fight, to the extent that the unification of Europe cannot be jeopardized by the rare but alarming outbursts of antisemitism, nationalism and racism (Habermas, 2012). The countless alarm bells punctually emphasized by the media impose the sharing of remembrance as a civil medium, in line with the need for debunking stereotypes and commonplaces about the alleged passivity of the victims: "Antisemitism led to the Holocaust but did not end with it. Antisemitism is again on the rise in Europe. So is Holocaust denial, distortion, trivialization, which is fueling antisemitism and has corrosive effects for collective European memory and cohesion" (von der Leyen, 2023). The construction of the

European Union depends on real inclusion, respect and truth, even though the "lure of technocracy" investigated by Habermas (2015) does not facilitate the circulation of information and the economic justice that are fundamental to the pursuit of the European endeavor. This is why the rhetoric of evil is often counterbalanced by the tale of good deeds and charity so carefully depicted in *Schindler's List* and *Bastards without Glory*. These movies exalt not only "how fear works", but also how love can redeem, as Beck emphasizes in *A God of One's Own* (2010) in reference to the confinement of Dutch Jews in the death camp in Dachau.

The humanitarian relevance of life within the concentration camps deals with the contrapuntal relevance of the relationship between media and morality investigated, before Silverstone, by Robert M. Baid, William E. Loges and Stuart E. Rosenbaum in a volume edited in 1999, *The Media & Morality*, in which they "explore the relationships between the media and the subjects of press attention, audiences, and advertisers and attempt to define the obligations of the media in these relationships. In most cases the assumption is that the greatest risk is harm to audiences, or to the public" (Baid et al., 1999: 13). Media risks usually depend on unreliability of sources and manipulation of information, along with the narrative bias that may alter or modify the public and journalistic representation of historical events. Hence follows the need to reflect on the fear of the foreigner and the displaced at a time ruled by media simulacra and connected representations, as Sennett (2011: 27-42) does through the analysis of the modern process of ghettoization and Baudrillard (1998: 87-98) argues in reference to the transformation of history into media simulacra (Latouche, 2016, 2019). More specifically, Baudrillard's metaphor of "the perfect crime" revolves around our anxiety for virtualization and simulation that we claim to achieve by the illusion of public engagement through mainstream images. In this context, the "removal of the Otherness" is only a consequence of our individualized socialization: "Whether denied by racism or neutralized by different culturalism, those cultures were faced, at any event, with a final solution" (Baudrillard, 2008: 123).

Even though Baudrillard deals with the side-effects of cosmetic surgery, it is no accident that the replacement of bodies with their iconic simulacra is closely connected to the social perception of the other and the aesthetic paradigms already observed by Guy Debord (2014: 7): "As long as necessity is socially dreamed, dreaming will remain necessary. The spectacle is the bad dream of a modern society in chains and ultimately expresses nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep". In this account, the physical removal of the other and, in some cases, of self, implies the substitution of reality with its partial narration, in tune with the symbolic selection of signs, information and contents, as Scott Lasch (1979) emphasizes in reference to the cult of mass narcissism. What does Baudrillard mean by "the right to difference" and cultural universalism? Does he deal with the symbolic backlash engendered by media hypertrophy and communicative complexity? The "final solution" evoked by Baudrillard in reference to the "perfect crime" of reality accomplished by television is one of the most relevant sociological insights inherited from Hannah Arendt's philosophical thought, as the replacement of life with its changeable simulacra implies the underestimation of the existential uncertainty linked to post-modernity (Villa, 1992).

Thus, the final solution recalled by Baudrillard seems to hint at the loss of working identity the Second World War left us, as Arendt (1998: 9) seems to underpin: "The human condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence". Human existence depends on the objects and meanings imposed by craving for consumption that is inevitably triggered through consumption and its symbolic fueling. The removal of Otherness is fostered by the physical and psychological shifts produced by the myth of sterile alterity that aims at discriminating, isolating and confining all those subjects stigmatized for their lack of cultural compliance. To the fore is the physical confinement of prisoners within prisons and other surveillance structures, as Baudrillard underlines in *The Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993 [1976]) in reference to the historical dimension of such social endeavor:

> A simple examination of the evolution of the death penalty in 'materialist' terms (of profit and class) should leave those who wish to abolish it in perplexity. It is always through the discovery of more profitable economic substitutes, subsequently rationalised as 'more humane', that the death penalty is curbed: hence prisoners of war are spared in order to be made slaves; hence, in Rome, criminals were sent to the salt mines; hence the prohibition of duels in the seventeenth century, the institution of forced labour as a corrective solution, the variable extortion of the labour force and the ergo-therapeutic retraining of the Nazi camps. There are no page miracles anywhere: death disappears or subsides when the system, for one reason or another, has an interest in it (1830: the first extenuating circumstances in a trial involving a bourgeois). Neither social conquest nor the progress of Reason: just the logic of profit or privilege (Baudrillard, 1993: 36).

Once again, the "therapeutic" function of forced labour evokes the array of movie and literary representations inspired by the Nazi management of death camps, in which the invisibility of death excluded the practice of violence in its most paroxysmal dimension, as Bauman repeatedly points out in *Modernity and the Holocaust*. In this

view, the metaphor of the Holocaust as "a test for modernity" seems to match Baudrillard's interpretation of violence as the result of "the logic of profit or privilege" that unfortunately belongs not only to present times, but more extensively to human civilization. It is no accident that the documentary and movie representations of the Holocaust are closely related to the force of images and their emotional impact, to the extent that the images testify to the cruelty and the inconceivable planning of such huge massacres, as in the case of the Twin Towers attacks in New York. In other words, mainstream and digital technologies determine the replacement of reality with its iconic reflection, as broadcasting makes virtualization and simulation two fundamental narrative and semiotic processes of our contrapuntal communicative patterns (Postman, 1993).

Nonetheless, political interference, economic exploitation and military supremacy cannot be considered as a mere heritage of the past, since oppression and violence are still practiced with the purpose to marginalize and suppress the Other, as we currently see in the Russian-Ukraine War. Only shared images make our world true and alive, as Baudrillard cleverly realized about the media rhetoric of our time, ruled by the use of metaphorization and metalepsis, which is a figure of speech consisting in a particular and rare metonymic process in which a word or a phrase from figurative speech is used in a new context. Broadcasting has the power to turn absence into presence, as Silverstone arguably notes: "In this, Jean Baudrillard was right when he argued that the Gulf War did not take place. Television intervened. It did not connect. Technology can isolate and annihilate the Other. And without the Other we are lost" (Silverstone, 1999: 137).

The exclusion of the Other may lead to annihilation and oppression, as the array of narrations focusing on the misfortune of Jews across the centuries shows: "By constructing cultural traumas, social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations, not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering, but may also take on board some significant moral responsibility for it" (Alexander, 2016: 3). Technology can even sharpen the process of discrimination of marginalized cultures that we undergo in the era of hyperconnected relationships increasingly attuned with symbolic and visual standardization (Touraine, 2021). "Without the Other we are lost", despite the several attempts of some populist politicians to stigmatize the tenets of inclusion and respect of the Other. The sophistication of evil rejected the recourse to public and unjustified violence within the camps, as the project of the final solution required more sophisticated means of annihilation and suppression. Likewise, in postmodern narrations violence must not be displayed, in line with the treacherous ambiguity of a post-modernity characterized by the end of great narrations. The risk of this communicative tendency is mere habit, since "technology can annihilate distance in the opposite way. It can bring the Other too close, too close for us to recognize difference and distinctiveness" (Silverstone, 1999: 137).

CONCLUSION

Just as Silverstone's metaphor of the contrapuntal deals with the representation of cultural exclusion and civil oppression, Bauman's analysis of the Holocaust demonstrates that it is possible to focus on the dialectics of good and evil, inclusion and exclusion, oppression and social redemption from a sociological point of view, with specific regard to the persecution of the Jews in the twentieth century. This sociological approach deals with the communicative and emotional impact of such collective traumas, along with the ethical narration of daily life debunking the stereotypes of the "rhetoric of evil" exploited by pundits and politicians, but also the occasional scholar.

Bauman showed that the Holocaust can be investigated as a sociological laboratory to analyze not only the drift of rationalization and the effects of reification on human beings, but also the representative complexity of such human annihilation. To the fore is the narrative counterbalance between negative factors and positive deeds, as information often deals with alternative stories or concealed elements (Higdon, 2020). Roger Silverstone's metaphor of the contrapuntal enables us to frame narrative and media representations from the point of view of the discriminated, the poor and downtrodden, often depicted by literature and movies. The sociology of the contrapuntal should deal with migration, displacement and oppression, as in the case of those colonial and postcolonial actions described by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*. This is an aspect thoroughly probed by Silverstone: "Displacement and settlement; permanence and instability; the welcoming and the rejection; migration is marked by contradiction and not a little conflict. Migrants leave, arrive, stay and move on. They have few rights of passage. And their displacement, changing through the generations, leaves a trace across culture, like that of snail on a wall" (Silverstone, 2007: 82).

Since migration can be compulsory and coercive, it has relevant social effects in terms of inclusion, discrimination, displacement. Nonetheless, the human myth of the foreigner is one of the most significant cultural displays in history, as in the case of the Jews confined within the Renaissance Venetian ghetto. Narrative contrapuntuality resides in the counterbalance of the social premises founding old and new phenomena of cultural marginalization, so as to contrast the media rhetoric of evil through the narration of resilience and resistance. The contrapuntal representation of the Holocaust has recourse to the uncovering of the private dimension of spoiled

existences, whose individual and collective drama still lives through the force of memory, even before the Nazi dominion. For instance, Roberto Benigni's movie, *Life is Beautiful*, insightfully emphasizes the contrapuntal dimension of mainstream communication that can combine "alternative imaginaries" and "memories of the past" (Silverstone, 2007: 96). The epistemological force of the metaphor of the contrapuntal resides in the mainstream dimension of such a representative effort, in which the recollection of identity, truth and ethics complies with the polyphonic patterns of collective traumas, since "diasporic cultures can only be understood in their relationship to the multiple contexts of cultures that are both present and absent" (Silverstone, 2007: 98).

Antisemitism and racism are two historical scars that in the nineteenth century led to political and institutional short circuits, as in the Dreyfus Affair, defined by Hannah Arendt (1958: 10) "a kind of dress rehearsal for the performance of our own time". A few decades later, the Nazis demonstrated that evil can be rationally planned and managed on a mass scale, thanks to the high degree of technological and functional sophistication fueled by modernization. These are some of the issues that a sociology of the contrapuntal might investigate, so as to strengthen the convergence of sociology and Holocaust studies (Gerson and Wolf, 2007) and shed light on the rhetoric of evil and good that often permeates our daily media narrations, in a world ruled by new forms of discrimination and confinement and ghettoization that a sociology of the contrapuntal and displacement ought to investigate further (Somayaji and Dasgupta, 2013).

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