# Narcissism and Biopolitical: for an Affective Sustainability in Gloomy Times

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### Abstract

Studies on the socio-environmental risks are frequent. Scientists warn that if no immediate action is taken, life itself on the planet will be in danger. This research aimed to identify and analyze, under the focus of Social Psychology and the Philosophy of Difference, experiences of affective sustainability in the urban space. Adopting a methodology strategy of oral history, we sought to follow the reports of participants linked to a Superior Institution of Studies who were willing to share the affective impacts resulting from your urban relation in a pandemic station. The reports were analytically organized in two axes: 1. Deterritorialization and fears; 2. Narcissistic frustrations and biopolitical restrictions. The results show that the first perceptions were marked by surprise, anguish, and fear. It concluded that affectively sustaining this experience is still a challenge for collectivity in its interface with the cities.

*Keywords:* affective sustainability, pandemic, narcissism, biopolitics, contemporary

## NARCISISMO E BIOPOLÍTICA: POR UMA SUSTENTABILIDADE AFETIVA EM TEMPOS SOMBRIOS

### Resumo

Estudos acerca dos riscos socioambientais são frequentes. Diante deles, cientistas alertam que, caso não sejam tomadas providências, é a própria vida no planeta que estará em perigo. Esta pesquisa objetivou identificar e analisar, sob o enfoque da Psicologia Social e da Filosofia da Diferença, experiências de sustentabilidade afetiva no espaço urbano diante da emergência da pandemia. Adotando a estratégia metodológica da história oral, buscou-se acompanhar o relato de participantes vinculados a uma Instituição de Ensino Superior que se dispuseram a compartilhar os impactos afetivos da relação com a cidade em estado pandêmico. Os relatos foram analiticamente organizados em dois eixos: 1. Desterritorializações e medos; 2. Frustrações narcísicas e restrições biopolíticas. Os resultados mostraram que as percepções iniciais diante do contato com a pandemia foram marcadas por afetos de surpresa, angústia e medo. Concluiu-se que sustentar afetivamente esta experiência comportou desafios relacionais colocados à coletividade em sua interface com as cidades.

*Palavras-chave:* sustentabilidade afetiva, pandemia, narcisismo, biopolítica, contemporâneo

## NARCISISMO Y BIOPOLÍTICA: POR LA SOSTENIBILIDAD AFECTIVA EN TIEMPOS OSCUROS

### Resumen

Son frecuentes los estudios sobre los riesgos socio ambientales. Ante ellos, científicos advierten que, si no se toman medidas inmediatas, es la vida del planeta la que estará en peligro. Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo identificar y analizar, bajo el enfoque de la Psicología Social y la Filosofía de la Diferencia, experiencias de sostenibilidad afectiva en el espacio urbano ante la emergencia de la pandemia. Adoptando una estrategia metodológica de la historia oral, se buscó seguir los informes de participantes vinculados a un Instituto de Enseñanza Superior que estaban dispuestos a compartir los impactos afectivos de la relación con la ciudad en estado de pandemia. Los relatos fueran organizados en dos ejes: 1 Deterritorialization e miedo; 2. Frustraciones narcisos e restricciones biopolíticas. Los resultados muestran que las primeras percepciones del contacto con la pandemia fueron marcadas por la sorpresa, la angustia y el miedo. Se concluye que sostener afectivamente esta experiencia comporto desafíos a la colectividad en su interface con la ciudad.

*Palabras-clave:* sostenibilidad afectiva, pandemia, narcisismo, biopolítica, contemporáneo

"It'll pass." Such a statement became recurrent in the first months after the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. The year marked world history in several aspects, evidencing the difficulty of nations to intervene in a populational health problem that spread around the globe. In technology and public health, science was responsible for outlining studies and interventions that supported the fight against the pandemic through communication technologies and studies on vaccines and treatments. In the social environment, where relationships manifest more accentuated, the affective marks produced in the population are still being identified. They will continue to affect relationships for many years, with it being the responsibility of the Human and Social Sciences to carry out an extensive investigation of them.

Faced with the prevailing unstable and unhealthy situation, the present study aimed to identify and analyze the description of relational micropolitical initiatives directed towards affective sustainability in the urban space. Adopting a theoretical perspective that transited between Social Psychology (Birman, 2021; Rolnik, 2000, Sawaia, 2020) and the Philosophy of Difference (Deleuze, 2000; Foucault, 1967/2014, 1999), the problematizations regarding the pandemic turned to the experimentation of affections and relationships in this context, emphasizing two notions that gain a diagnostic function in the present: narcissism and biopolitics. In this study, we assume the idea of diagnosis circumscribed by Foucault (1967/2014), highlighting the relevance of accepting the present time as something to be understood in its multiple faces, details, and expressions. For the author, when faced with emerging situations that are difficult to understand, it is necessary to launch into the elaboration of a "diagnosis of the present" (Foucault, 1999 p. 34) and, in this process, "no longer to proclaim a truth which would be valid for all and for all time" (Foucault, 1999, p. 34), but to focus on the "functioning of individuals in their relationships with one another" (Foucault, 1999, p. 47) with their peers, their time and the events that cross them. Therefore, the study started from the hypothesis that the gross deterritorializations engendered by sanitary biosecurity measures, especially directed at the urban space, produced feelings of fear, anguish, and frustration that put in check a supposed narcissistic security based on private life and individual decisions.

Aiming to understand an event that broke out and reached a global population contingent, the study is justified by giving visibility to the report of experiences emerging after the news of the pandemic and the actions or paralyzation it engendered in the affective and relational life. For that, two moments were outlined. In the theoretical part, the effects of the pandemic are problematized, referring to the processes of deterritorialization of organized life until then, their impacts on the psychic constitution of the citizens, and the biopolitical interventions of health care that aimed to manage the body, avoiding its contagion and death. In the empirical part, reports of daily initiatives are presented regarding the affective confrontation of the pandemic, highlighting the potentialities and limits the participants put into practice in their daily lives to construct affective sustainability in this journey. Recent studies (Birman, 2021; Sawaia, 2020) show how much the spread of pandemic effects is directly linked to ecological

issues. We resort, then, to the notion of affective sustainability, addressed by Mansano and Carvalho (2016, p. 707), who define it as the possibility of "sustaining the body in its power of affective variation instead of passively absorbing the demands for regularity, prescription of affections and accelerated degradation of nature, arising, in large part, from the socioeconomic order."

At the end of this trajectory, it will be possible to show that the pandemic experience, unprecedented in our contemporaneity, was initially marked by anxieties, doubts, frustrations, and the most diverse fears that shared space with conquests, experimentations, and relational potentializations. This broad affective range opened ways to sustain the experience uniquely and, at certain times, succumb to the pain. This showed that human life still lacks studies on the affective amplitude that can be triggered when faced with borderline situations such as a pandemic event of proportions not seen in recent history.

**Confrontations between narcissism and biopolitics in the pandemic context: theoretical contribution**

Undoubtedly, we are immersed in a subjective experiment (Safatle, 2020) that triggered a collective effort (from the population, sciences, governments, and institutions) to expand the power of affecting and being affected by new living conditions and relationships caused by the pandemic. In his words: "the fate of your body, your death are parts of an experiment in social technology, in a new form of management" (Safatle, 2020, p. 3). From the start, it became evident that the pandemic scenario laid bare radical social inequalities and demanded other sensitivities, connections, and experimentation of the individual and collective existence. It was the opening to support unknown and unusual affections brought by an event that absorbed us (Deleuze, 2000) without leaving gaps for its rejection. Deleuze (2000) said: "In every event, there is the present moment of realization, the one in which the event is incarnated in a state of affairs, an individual, a person, the one we designate by saying: here it is, the moment has arrived" (Deleuze, 2000, p. 154). More than two years after its declaration, the pandemic scenario remains uncertain despite advances in science in the development and application of vaccines around the globe.

The urban space is commonly the scene of the most diversified affective experimentations. Due to its changing characteristic, it invites its inhabitants to contact disparate sensations that request meaning-making for the encounters experienced in the personal and public spheres (Rolnik, 2000). However, accustomed to following daily routines that, preferably, do not generate instabilities in the organization of previously outlined activities, defensive survival strategies are activated that seek to soften or neutralize the most dissonant and uncomfortable effects.

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived, shaking these defenses that are markedly narcissistic (Carvalho, 2014), self-centered, individualistic, and reluctant to observe rigid social rules. Without prior notice, the world's population was faced with abrupt deterritorializations (Gil, 2020) that shook organized institutions, a fact that broke with established routines in at least

three spheres: work, family, and social relationships. What are the effects of these ruptures? Currently, we are still in the process of understanding them. Gil (2020, p. 3) collaborated in this comprehension when he stated: "The deterritorialization and, today, the virtualization of all social, cultural, existential contents, have led to a fundamental imbalance, opening a gap between the new virtual reality that progressively imposes itself in all domains and the 'traditional values' on which the social and collective life was based."

In any case, it is possible to consider that even before his declaration, daily life on the planet was marked by generalized impasses in relational, economic, social, and affective terms (Žižek, 2020). Immersed in a world that tended to privatize affective relationships (Sennett, 2014), the distrust about unknown people and strangers took over the cities, which were organized so that public spaces were used as mere throughways, reaffirming the risks that encounters represented in the social imaginary. This social conformation that considered city life dangerous and private life safe was crossed by capitalist values anchored in production and consumption. Their organizational bases disseminated subjective components that fed back on them, such as individualism, fear, isolation, and emphasis on individual performance anchored in the pursuit of personal success.

This framework cooperated to outline an exacerbated and naturalized contemporary narcissism, which values self-performance through performance, and the sharing of idealized images about one's existence, which proliferate in digital social networks that have become, in recent years, the new locus of socialization. This opened space for market exploitation of a way of life adept at consuming goods and adhering to "standard profile kits according to each market orbit" (Rolnik, 2000, p. 20). These profiles became desired as the only possibility of social inclusion in an already weakened relational world.

Capitalist narcissism is characterized by Carvalho (2014, p. 83) as the "loss of objects of libidinal investment and subsequent reinvestment in the desiring being itself, acquiring, itself, the configuration of an idealized totality." In this defensive idealization, restricted affective circuits, traced by the subject and rigorously followed in a daily life that does not admit the presence of unforeseen or strange situations, gain importance. This strengthens control over encounters disregarding the other and the common well-being (Hardt & Negri, 2016). Carvalho continued (2014, p. 147): "the narcissistic totalization implies an exclusion, which corresponds to the exclusion of the other, an expression that here, generically, refers to all the others with whom we share life in society." Little by little, an affective misery was constructed that supposedly served as a guarantee of protection against the unpredictable effects of the irruption of the other in each one's life. In other words, it is about the hegemonic rise of private life in the shared daily life of populations. Against this trend, Hardt and Negri (2016) rescue the notion of "an ecology of the common" that is "centered equally on nature and society, on human beings and the non-human world, in a dynamic of interdependence, care, and mutual transformation" (Hardt & Negri, 2016, p. 196).

When the pandemic arrived, in principle, its seriousness could not even be considered from a common shared record since the problems resulting from it tended to be reduced to the individual sphere. The global severity of the pandemic could also not be admitted due to evoking the radical ruptures with the well-defined narcissistic totalization amid the capitalist socioeconomic organization. However, its effects proliferated quickly, one of the most notable being the prohibition of small pleasures and decisions anchored in individual preferences, exercised independently that came to be controlled by sanitary and biosafety measures. Therefore, from one day to the next, we witnessed a collapse of the individual and narcissistic world marked by small decisions about oneself that now had to consider, in an imperative way, the existence of the other and the collectivity (Hardt & Negri, 2016; Foucault, 1999). The narcissistic subject no longer answered for themself. They were immersed in a scenario that highlighted the radical presence of the other. Carvalho (2014) highlighted the developments of "wounded narcissism in what it centrally constitutes: its idealized expectations focused on itself" (Carvalho, 2014, p. 137).

Gil (2020) showed that the spread of technologies, added to the arrival of the pandemic, precipitated a "deterritorialization that shook and dismantled traditional references" (p. 4) since it removed the routine circuits of paths and activities, individual preferences, private whims and decisions that, until then, were up to the individual. What was left? A body abruptly removed from its narcissistic dome, which, exposed to contamination and death by the virus, began to be incisively managed by instances of biopolitics that acted on both complex activities and the most commonplace ones. It is noted that biopolitical practices have long been part of the current social organization, especially in the governmental sphere. Their presence has been detected since the 18th century and is widely studied by Foucault (1999). Since then, in the face of the dangers that plagued life in cities, a new power strategy was directed "to the living man, to man as a living being" (Foucault, 1999, p. 289), what Foucault called the "biopolitics of the human race" (1999, p. 289). Then, in the same work, Foucault characterized it as:

> A set of processes such as the proportion of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, and so on. It is these processes – the birth rate, the mortality rate, longevity, and so on,...] which, in the second half of the eighteenth century, become biopolitics first objects of knowledge and the targets it seeks to control (Foucault, 1999, p. 290).

Thus, a type of power is expanded and disseminated that places the individual and populations under the sights of a sanitary and governmental administration that affects the body and the community's health. Respecting the differences that mark each season, the pandemic shows direct intervention in estimating and controlling the risks of contamination and death that affect the population. Using various scientific sources, governments across the globe began to monitor the people to minimize the spread of contamination by COVID-19 and its variants. As a result, several health interventions were adopted, which made the narcissistic

subject leave the scene. In its position was placed the health of a widely monitored collective that should be obedient and disciplined to facilitate the control carried out through restrictive sanitary measures that especially involved isolation and social distancing. In the words of Gil (2020), "confinement was not and is not a time of growth and joy. With the deserted streets, the silent cities, the house we shut ourselves in does not exactly constitute a place of enthusiasm and creation" (Gil, 2020, p. 6).

Which body are we talking about in the pandemic scenario? About the one that started to be monitored and controlled in different dimensions of their daily life: hygiene, physical contact, food, sexuality, work, and movements. To a large extent, the health area carried out these control devices. Foucault (1999, p. 291) reported that in the biopolitical scenario, there is a direct intervention by medicine that has the "main function will now be public hygiene, with institutions to coordinate medical care, centralize power, and normalize knowledge. And which also takes the form of campaigns to teach hygiene and to medicalize the population". Measures mostly adopted exclusively in hospital contexts, such as the systematic use of masks, frequent hand washing, and disinfection of objects and surfaces with alcohol gel in the appropriate dosage became required in public spaces shared by ordinary citizens and in homes. Thus, places where a kind of populated solitude previously existed, composed of a wide range of people with no bond or affective bond, became spaces in which the presence of the other is seen as a threat. The other appears in the social imaginary as a risk that can no longer be denied and must be systematically monitored (Gil, 2020), considering that the "feared, imagined, hallucinated contagion was the only event that conditioned emotions and everyday gestures" (Gil, 2020, p. 6).

From the narcissistic and self-centered body, adhering to personal whims that suffered the least amount of external interference, it migrated to the public biopolitical body, monitored and controlled by the State whereby, in some cases, faced with the refusal of a particular subject to perform obligatory sanitary procedures, it started to be feasible to use the police (Foucault, 1999). There was brutality in the passage from a selfish desire to biopolitical control. This situation generated defensive responses, as in the case of denialism in the Brazilian reality. In this attitude, there is a tendency to minimize the rates of proliferation of cases and the severity of contamination, disseminating the statements that 'life goes on' or 'let's adhere to the new normal' in an attempt to shield sovereign narcissistic privacy in the face of the pandemic: privacy marked by the conviction of self-sufficiency and ignorance of the collective condition that characterizes life in society (Safatle, 2020).

Taking advantage of the wreckage of a wounded narcissism but ready to recover defensively by denying the seriousness of the pandemic, the economy followed its course. It was operationalized by several government officials and businesspeople who circumvented restrictive measures and encouraged full-time work in person (Birman, 2021) and, on certain occasions, remotely. In any of the situations, the denialist psychic defense was present through the demand for an immediate return to the routines of the previous life. However, when analyzing the statistical data of cases and deaths, it was practically impossible for this to happen without the

mass vaccination of the population. Annoyed and frustrated, the narcissistic subject, as previously characterized, found themselves faced with the confirmation of the restrictive reality arising from biopolitics and against which they wage their struggle to this day. Birman (2020, p. 91) highlighted: "The prohibition of touching, kissing and caressing, which are embodied as bodily proximities and which characterize our style of existence in *ethical* and *aesthetic* records, affect us much more than individuals from countries guided by Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Asiatic traditions." This precipitated the most diverse expressions of pain and suffering.

It was in the midst of this confrontation that the notion of affective sustainability gained relevance in this study. It can be said that, to a large extent, the contemporary capitalist scenario has restricted the possibilities of experiencing affection and urban encounters, keeping entire populations connected to the pursuit of survival but also away from the narcissistic satisfaction that opposes sanitary measures. This situation created political impasses that exposed the risks that affected the continuity of life on the planet. Studies in this direction (Beck, 2010; Stengers, 2015) showed that the continuous threat to life on the earth had already been affecting humans and had worsened during the pandemic (Birman, 2021). How can we get around this scenario that, despite the imminent gravity, is still far from being accepted with the seriousness necessary to overcome it? How can we detect the subjective and affective effects of unsustainability installed in the urban social and relational field? How can we rehearse collective exits for this pandemic situation of such brutal contours?

Even though we are in a pandemic, identifying and sustaining the affections that enhance life and relational ties are today's significant challenges. It is about considering the relational dimension of existence and triggering "the encounters that suit us" (Deleuze, 2017, p. 49) or, in other words, seeking encounters that increase the power to affect and be affected, despite the emerging adversities. It can be said, therefore, that the production of affective sustainability is immediately political, as it implies potentiating effects that the participants of the encounters share. It refers, then, to two dimensions: the continuous variation of the potency of the bodies in the meetings; and the willingness to recognize and seek encounters that enhance life in common.

At the beginning of this argument, we presented the analysis of a scenario before COVID-19, outlined in components of narcissistic subjectivation that were essentially suffocated by the biopolitical power of restricting contacts and individual decisions about the organization of life, the presence of an installed collective suffering. Also undeniable are the daily practices that rehearsed ways out of this embarrassing situation of affections, valuing an affectively sustainable existence. Amid these disparate affects, we will give space to the testimonies of the participants who report their reactions and actions when faced with the effects of the pandemic.

## Method

The option to carry out a qualitative study was taken here because coexistence and occupation in the urban space is something complex and, for this very reason, generates a series of questions that require an appreciation of their affective and relational dimensions. Therefore, we followed the ideas of Deleuze (2017), who affirmed the importance of problematizing encounters. When they are intense enough, these generate questions and trials of responses that make up a problematic field populated by discomfort and disparate affections. Attentive to the problem of the pandemic and the knowledge it has put into practice in everyday life, participants willing to report on their impressions and actions in light of the declaration of the global pandemic situation were invited and selected.

In all, testimonies were collected from 15 people who agreed to share their experience, freely describing, as recommended by the methodological approach to oral history, the following points: the COVID event, the feelings experienced, and the main actions carried out in everyday life. As a general characterization, the participants of both sexes were between 19 and 45 years of age, belonged to the middle socioeconomic class, and had some connection with the public university located in the state of Paraná that hosted the study, whether as a student, graduate, or professional. The reports were collected after approval from the Ethics Committee, ensuring the measures regarding secrecy in identifying the participants, including changing the names by which they are referred. Institutional affiliation was the main inclusion criterion since the study aimed to access an audience prone to expose a critical view of this event. It should be said that this connection significantly impacted the reports that will be presented, primarily due to the expanded analysis of emerging social facts and a significant concern with their political consequences in urban interactions.

The testimonies were collected between April and December 2020. The part of the results selected to be discussed in this article was organized and analyzed in two axes listed from the theoretical framework adopted in the study, namely: 1. Deterritorializations and fears; and 2. Narcissistic frustrations and biopolitical restrictions. Based on the concepts of deterritorialization, narcissism, biopolitics, and affective sustainability, the fragments selected for analysis were defined by considering the Foucauldian strategy (1967/2014) of carrying out a "diagnosis of the present" (Foucault, 2014, p. 34). To do so, according to the author, it is necessary to carry out an approximation of the experience and, on it, carry out "a work of excavation" (Foucault, 2014, p. 41) of the experience to enable a situated analysis of the emergency conditions and social developments that gave consistency to the problem studied. The results presented below hinted at actions and potentialities that were updated in the face of the limits placed on the daily life of this challenging crossing.

## Results

Faced with this global event with a collective impact on the subject's relationship with the urban space, sharing the first perceptions and practices related to affective experiences was

simultaneously marked by pain, fear, and surprise. Guided by the hypothesis raised in this study, which seeks to understand the effects of gross deterritorializations engendered by the sanitary biosecurity measures primarily aimed at the urban space, the qualitative results of the study presented here were systematized in three tables. These were composed by the general characterization of the participants, whose names were modified to guarantee the anonymity of their data, as well as by the summary presentation of the results obtained and organized in the two axes already specified above.

Table 1 presents the participating subjects and their general characterization, divided into three elements: social segment, specifications, and quantity.

**Table 1**

*Study participants*

| Social segment | Specifications | Quantity |
|---|---|---|
| Total participants | | 15 |
| Age group | 19 to 29 years | 6 |
| | 30 to 45 years | 9 |
| Gender | Men | 4 |
| | Women | 11 |
| Education | Undergraduate student | 4 |
| | Graduate | 3 |
| | Postgraduate candidate | 7 |
| | Postgraduate | 1 |
| Study Area | Human Sciences | 13 |
| | Applied Social Studies | 2 |

Table 2 presents the main results of Axis 1, called deterritorialization and fears. For that, the two analytical categories were separated, detailing in each of them both the synthesis of the data collected and the investigation results arising from the theoretical part of the study, which was used in the discussion presented in the next section.

**Table 2**

*Axis 1 Results: Deterritorializations and fears*

| Analytical Category | Data | Conceptual Reference |
|---|---|---|
| Deterritorializations | – Withdrawal from closed spaces | Deleuze (2017) |
| | – More frequently staying in residences | Gil (2020) |
| | – Working from home | Safatle (2020) |
| | – Substantial decrease in social contacts | Sennett (2014) |
| | – Little contact with the open spaces of the city | |
| Fears | – Contamination | Gil (2020) |
| | – Contamination of close people | Birman (2021) |
| | – Proximity to death | Latour (2020) |
| | – Prolongation of the pandemic | Butler (2020) |
| | – Uncertainty about the future | |
| | – Subsistence | |
| | – Side effects of isolation and distancing | |

Table 3 details the two analytical categories that makeup Axis 2, followed by the results systematized in the empirical part. The third column lists the theoretical references studied and used to discuss the data in the following section.

**Table 3**

*Axis 2 Results: Narcissistic Frustrations and Biopolitical Restrictions*

| Analytical Category | Data | Conceptual Reference |
|---|---|---|
| Narcissistic Frustrations | – Forced adaptation to biopolitical constraints | Descola (2020) |
| | – Substantial decrease in urban displacements | Carvalho (2014) |
| | – Reorganization of consolidated habits | Sawaia (2020) |
| | – Impossibility of individual decisions regarding routines | |
| | – Restrictions not adhered to by the community | |
| | – Affective unsustainability | |
| Biopolitical Restrictions | – Adherence to biosecurity measures | Foucault (1999) |
| | – Fatigue in relation to biosecurity measures | Santos (2020) |
| | – Absence of effective government plans | Agamben (2020) |
| | – Lack of perspective on the resumption of the urban space | Descola (2020) |
| | – Abandonment of consolidated habits | |

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**Discussion**

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**Axis 1: Deterritorializations and fears**

Deleuze (2017) defined deterritorialization as the movement that runs through society's rigid stratifications and organizations, breaking with coordinates of language and existence, therefore operating the loss of consistency of the best-known territories. Starting from a social field primarily organized in norms and rules, it can be considered that, to a large extent, the pandemic provoked a series of deterritorializations (Gil, 2020), sometimes brutal, as it precipitated ruptures in how existence was organized until then. It so happens that the prevailing social organization, for a long time, has produced disciplinary marks on bodies (Foucault, 1999) and on their way of relating with others, with nature, and with the city. These marks open spaces to problematize emerging discourses, urban relational practices, and the mobile forces they put into combat (Foucault, 1999).

When this organization suffered a shock of this magnitude, in January 2022, there were more than 22,505,547 people infected and 620,000 deaths in Brazil; multiple consequences can jeopardize the flow of activities routinely carried out in urban space (Sennett, 2014). This is what can be seen in Lauro's statement that reports his initial feelings: "*I see myself immobile, alone, lost in a current of immobilizing thoughts that circle inside me. And it's hard for me to smile, relax and think clearly*" (Lauro, participant, 2020). Accepting an event that precipitates this sense of abrupt deterritorialization (Gil, 2020) brings to the fore the feelings of anguish generated by ignorance in the face of the lived experience and its possible destructive effects. In this scenario, "the subject lives in a bubble that encapsulates time, the instant becomes the only event, which tends to become the reference" (Gil, 2020, p. 3).

The images of danger and contagion were also present in this first moment of deterritorialization. Carla said: "*The feeling is that at any moment I could be passing the virus on to someone in my family. Thoughts that I could be directly responsible for their deaths plagued me in a way that isolated me from them at home*" (Carla, participant, 2020). As we can see, territorial loss was present in public and private spaces. Even though residences gained a protective function in the pandemic, becoming places of isolation, this did not prevent their loss of territorial consistency, since now the housing territory was occupied full-time and in a regime of forced and continued coexistence, distant, therefore, from its previously given routine use. The pressing suffering resonated among other participants, such as Fernanda, who said:

> This week has been extremely difficult, due to all the mood swings and the lack of resources to deal with it all. I cried a lot this week and it really helped relieve some chest pain. I don't really know where it comes from and how it settles, but it has been very frequent and the state of inertia does not allow me to look for new resources (Fernanda, participant, 2020).

This opens up another temporal perception that, despite the feeling of inertia, may provoke learning processes about oneself, the other, and shared life. As a result, Latour (2020,

p. 6) pointed out: "For the first time in years, a billion people, trapped at home, find this forgotten luxury: time to reflect and thereby discern what normally and unnecessarily agitates them in all directions."

Another sensation described in these first months of the pandemic refers to activities that, once carried out in a safe territory, enter into a kind of collapse. Living with and meeting people in ordinary activities became challenges to be faced and overcome, as Joana reported:

> The day I went out alone to the market and saw people in their cars wearing their masks, I felt like I was in danger. It was before trade liberalization and there were already too many cars circulating in the streets, too many people shopping in the market. I was anxious, I couldn't follow a logistic while shopping. I felt like an idiot. I went and returned to the same corridors [. . .]. The delay and confusion made me more and more anxious, and I felt that the market was getting more and more crowded. Arriving in the car was a relief (Joana, participant, 2020).

Also, regarding the first experiences of going to the market, Cecília reported:

> During the week I had to go to the market, but soon after I arrived, I started crying desperately because of the situation. The market was full and the establishment, irresponsibly, did not control the entry and exit of people. Also, there were a lot of people wearing masks inappropriately. I wanted to cry inside the market. It seemed that people had no idea of the gravity of the space we were in. I went back home and broke down; it was the first time this had happened. I don't want to feel that anymore (Cecília, participant, 2020).

The deterritorialization and emptying of spaces for possible public or commercial encounters was the most evident and reported by the participants, perhaps due to their recurrent frequency in their daily lives before the pandemic. Agamben (2020, p. 16) pointed out: "Even sadder than the limitations on freedom implied by the provisions is, in my view, the degeneration of relationships between people which they can produce." Deprived of their territorial routine, the participants experienced affective and spatiotemporal disorganization.

Faced with the risk that was present from then on in these well-known territories, the perception of the passage of time gained different contours. This is how Sabrina described it:

> I don't know if it is due to the lack of quality of sleep or because of the experience of the days being all the same but time seems to be experienced as a continuum lately. No segmentation seems capable of distinguishing the days and hours. Tomorrow will be just a new yesterday, just like today and the day after. I feel alienated from everyone, including myself. It was strange to go outside during the week to visit the dentist. It felt like I didn't need to be there, even though I did. It gave me a feeling of excess, as if it were an extravagance. While I was on the street, I heard two girls passing by: 'Let's go for a drink?'. I was doubly sad; for me, who was not going to "for a drink" and for them, who were going (Sabrina, participant, 2020).

Faced with the still low rates of cases and deaths in 2020, when compared to the following year, 2021, the fear of death was already markedly present, as reported by Antonio: "*The feeling is of the arrival of death, wide open*" (Antonio, participant, 2020). The expression of risk also appeared in José's speech: "*Leaving home has become like jumping with a parachute without knowing for sure if the cloth parachute is enough*" (José, participant, 2020). Carvalho (2014) pointed out the individual's direct and irreducible link with the social, evoking the processes of subjectivation that cross it. In his words, the subjects constitute themselves in the social relationship, internalizing "components of subjectivation, incorporating them into the psyche."" Impotence, fear, and pain were shared in the different global regions and started to be expressed in everyday life, as reported by the participants. Cecília mentioned the people who insisted on having face-to-face meetings in this subjective sharing of components: "*I understand the desire to go out. I ask myself if I'm being hypocritical in criticizing them mentally, because just as they are going to gather to celebrate, I go out to buy bread at the bakery. Is this a fair comparison? All I know is that I haven't seen anyone in over 100 days, I haven't gone for a walk, I haven't gone out to dinner, I haven't gone out to meet a friend*".

The affective consequences of these first impacts of deterritorialization can be glimpsed in the sequence of clues provided by the participants: Julia related her experience: "*Insomnia and nightmares (in the five years of the undergraduate course I didn't have episodes like that); it made me reflect on how the pandemic affects a body in different ways, both positive and negative*" (Julia, participant, 2020). Mary's words were even more illuminating: "*Difficulties to talk about the experiences, fear of going crazy, desire to remain silent, tiredness*" (Maria, participant, 2020). Martha also manifested suffering: "*Pain. I cry while brushing my teeth. I look at my face and open my mouth to brush, and automatically tears start to come out. It's screwed up*" (Marta, participant, 2020). Sabrina said that the affectations resulting from deterritorialization are manifested in the body: "*This has been a difficult week. Perhaps the hardest so far. Towards the beginning of the week I felt quite anxious about the current situation and what is to come. My heart racing a little and difficulty breathing. Difficulty concentrating on work activities*" (Sabrina, participant, 2020). In a more radical vein, Paula stated: "*I'm not going to do it, but I understand the increase in suicide in this scenario*" (Paula, participant, 2020). Insomnia, nightmares, crying, anxiety, and fear marked the reports of this first axis. Considering them, it is worth following the analysis provided by Santos (2020), who questioned: "Whether we will be able to learn" something from the affects experienced in the pandemic "is for now an open question" (Santos, 2020, p. 28). Future developments may offer more clues as to how we will approach and overcome this experience. In this direction, Latour (2020, p. 3) warned: "The pandemic is no more a 'natural' phenomenon than past famines or the current climate crisis are. Society has long outgrown the narrow limits of the social sphere." The deterritorializations and fears reported in this first axis hint at this overcoming and offer an initial challenge in elaborating the event posed to the populational collective.

**Axis 2: Narcissistic frustrations and biopolitical restrictions**

Public healthcare practices adopted by governmental spheres were disclosed differently by public administration strata (municipal, state, and federal) from the pandemic's beginning (Safatle, 2020). This, in part, generated confusion about the importance of following the protocols and undermined the population's adherence to preventive measures that were essential to control, from the outset, the proliferation of cases. The participants in this study quickly noticed the difference in the attitude of the governmental spheres and the population faced with the risk, which generated a series of frustrations and fears. This is what Sabrina reported:

> *Reality is like this, when something is not, everyone thinks it is; when it is, everyone thinks it is not. An exhausting game that is annoying me already. I learned that the Rio de Janeiro championship has returned. São Paulo should return soon as well. And the Brazilian championship already has a date to start. That's it. A big cry of 'follow the game' in the middle of a match where everyone is stealing from everyone else. No penalty, foul or ball going out. It's a crazy thing. And the victory, what will it be? Death?* (Sabrina, participant, 2020).

Rogério also showed these differences in the population's understanding of the severity of the pandemic:

> *When I leave the house, I see more people wearing masks, more people on the streets too... In the bar next to the house, which already receives more people drinking their cans together as if there was no problem in the air... This makes me very angry; the ironic smile of those guys thinking that all this is an exaggeration makes my blood boil, to the point that, when I arrived home reporting this to the people, I punched the wall. I hurt my hand, which made me regret this quickly* (Rogério, participant, 2020).

Rogério showed that the other, also composed of their narcissistic convictions, often presents denialism explicitly and unacceptably.

Narcissistic impasses and frustrations then began to gain ground in relationships and interdictions that impacted socially, politically, and psychically since they all depended on the care actions assumed (or not) by the collective. Butler (2020) stated: "The virus does not discriminate. We could say that it treats us equally, putting us equally at the risk of getting sick, losing someone close, and living in a world marked by an imminent threat", a finding that our participants also reached. José presented his analysis:

> *The number of deaths has been decreasing. For days the newspapers have shown the moving average decreasing. I confess that I feel relieved by this; it seems that the situation wants to calm down. But deep down, we know it's not like that. The origin of the virus (and I am not just talking about the biological origin, but the social one) in the overpopulation of the earth aligned with a pulverized existence, at least in Brazil, of individuality, shows that the problem is not in the virus itself, because we are the virus(es). In that sense, I feel a false relief because the problem is not just there, but 'here.' In people, in the lack of isolation, in the lack of understanding it as a movement of compassion, solidarity of*

*an essentially social nature. I feel like I'm feeling the obvious, that they really want us dead, dead with a little breath of life, the breath needed to open stores and go to the mall, to die after a few purchases. The economy cannot stop* (José, participant, 2020).

In the exposed fragment, the participant showed awareness of the wounded narcissistic condition present in this historical moment of biopolitical control. The pulverized existences prevent collective and consistent action aimed at stopping the pandemic. Also, in the words of Butler (2020, p. 2): "The virus alone does not discriminate, but we humans certainly do, shaped and moved as we are by the married powers of nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and capitalism."

The biosecurity measures also shook close affective relationships, marked by actions and personal preferences. Renata said, "*I had bought a birthday present for my boyfriend, but there was a huge problem with delivery and they canceled my purchase. Now his birthday has already passed. And in addition to not being able to celebrate together, I couldn't give him anything as a present*" (Renata, participant, 2020). It is noted that contact with close people, still preserved in capitalist impersonality, was partially broken.

This disruption also reached family relationships. Exposed to the fear of the risks that fall on themselves and on the other, the distancing was a generator of suffering that evidenced the impotence and narcissistic pain due to perceiving themselves as vulnerable. José said:

*I have been gripped by fear, my father relaxing his isolation has terrified me. I feel like I'm playing Russian roulette, where going out on the street means bringing a loaded gun with me, but I never know when it will go off. I feel sad because I'm not able to convince him, not able to make him understand how I feel. To a certain extent, this lack of care for people reminds me of a kind of lack of love, I know that's not it, but this idea comes to mind. It's destabilizing* (José, participant, 2020).

For Descola (2020, p. 2), "There is nothing new in the fact that infectious diseases circulate throughout the world; What is striking about the present form of globalization is the speed with which it happens." The risks of this speed of propagation, in part, generate the sadness reported by Antonio, who did not see himself in a position to intervene in the protection of close ones.

In this direction, the body gave several signs of its limit when faced with isolation. This is what Cecília demonstrated:

*This feeling of a sedentary lifestyle bothers me a lot, even though I stretch daily, being in front of the computer all day makes my body uncomfortable. I really miss walking, even without some final destination, just walking. It seems that there is no physical exercise at home that overcomes this feeling that walking gives me* (Cecília, participant, 2020).

The pain generated by losing the right to come and go is also evidence of narcissistic suffering (Carvalho, 2014). Joana gave this visibility:

*My body craves movement, and it is stressed. It was a cry, an imperative: 'Move!' but I see my partner doing his jumping jacks in the living room and I feel this is not what I want. I want to run in the parks like before. Going out to exercise used to be my refuge. The time when I dedicated myself only to myself. Now I have to compete for space for my body to move with the sofa, the chair bought exclusively for working from home and the children's toys* (Joana, participant, 2020).

In this fragment, the participant's narcissistic frustration becomes evident, indicating the territorial losses suffered, and the constraint of coexistence forced by social isolation. Agamben (2020), in an analysis that generated several controversies, questioned the rapid willingness of the population in different areas of the globe to give up "freedom of movement" (Agamben, 2020, p. 27) with risk as a parameter. This adherence to the new biopolitical rules draws attention, as their implementation is guaranteed by the strategy of spreading fear and insecurity, already circulating as components of subjectivation, which have now been intensified. Gil (2020, p. 7) also cooperated in this analysis by stating: "The dreaded, imagined, hallucinated contagion was the only event that conditioned everyday emotions and gestures."

Another facet of this narcissistic pain can be perceived in the reports of loneliness, helplessness, and impasses. Julia said:

*It's painful to have to make an effort and tell yourself not to give up, that little by little the micro changes the macro, the feeling is antagonistic. At the same time there's a feeling of guerrilla warfare, fighting against the established, reinventing new ways of living. While there is also a feeling of impotence, of wanting to give up, perhaps becoming what the power wants is less work, being a mere consumer, individualistic, unconcerned with the other (whether human, or nature itself), an ordinary person* (Julia, participant, 2020).

Julia's questions antagonize the individual plane with the collective, emphasizing the impasses installed: the pandemic is placed as an immediately political event, as it generates questions and demands collective responses (Latour, 2020). Among these impasses, Sabrina reported:

*Virtual meetings with friends are still happening, but... You know? I know that it can be attachment to a former design and that it may not be possible to experience it again, for countless reasons. What bothers me is the period of deprivation or the uncertainty about what will come and how it will be from now on? I don't know. It's as if I'm trapped in a time rift where I can't even define whether what grieves me is what's left behind or what's ahead. Maybe it's the two things that meet in the now. The present is unbearable. But we bear it* (Sabrina, participant, 2020).

Deleuze (2017) showed that the problem to be faced in the field of affection, composed of both happiness and sadness, is also political. In their different shades, joy and despair are experienced in mixed ways, demanding a difficult learning experience that involves sensitivity to select what enhances or destroys. Rescuing the author's words, it is about bodies "striving to *organize encounters*" (Deleuze, 2017, p. 290).

Perceiving oneself as fragile faced with the severity of the pandemic, far from vaccines or treatments, consolidated itself as a blow to the narcissistic domain of one's existence installed until then. Maria recognized this:

> *Precariousness in dealing with the pandemic issue, precariousness in the survival of a large part of the population, precariousness in relationships, given that, with so much going on, the exercises of being together become necessary and sometimes difficult, affective precariousness, taking into account that, in many occasions, it seems that the only feelings possible in my body are fear and anger* (Maria, participant, 2020).

Again, it is clear that this first moment was marked by a mixture of feelings, combined with the difficulty of selecting and prioritizing the encounters that could generate some happiness. The reports show that fear was widespread and, in the words of Sawaia (2020, p. 4): "It is in this fluctuation of emotions, repeated at each stage of the pandemic, that we experience one of the most macabre times in the history of Brazilian public health. There is fear, a lot of fear, with a hint of hope and discreet happiness, which helps us to persevere in existence".

The narcissistic body managed by biosecurity measures suffered frustrations that broke the autonomy until then exercised in everyday life (Agamben, 2020). In this direction, labor relations gained evidence. After all, from an economic point of view, "life could not stop," (Butler, 2020, p. 3) which led Butler (2020, p. 5) to warn that "the employee must go to work to be able to live, but the workplace is where their life is put at risk". This appeared in Patrícia's report: "*The responsibilities at work overloaded me and made me feel pessimistic. Together with the care routine with a mask and disinfection, as well as the comments and even paranoid behavior of colleagues, it seemed to suck my optimism and energy*" (Patrícia, participant, 2020). Carla complements this statement: "*Afraid of being fired and at the same time blaming myself for worrying about it, about jobs and money, contributing to maintaining the logic (…). I feel that I'm molded all the time by a 'should' and 'should not' that are much more recurrent than before*" (Carla, participant, 2020). Also, regarding the relationship with work, Joana reported:

> *The demands of work build up, the families I serve are undergoing greater suffering. I often lose track of what my personal life is and what my work is. Working from home, even though it guarantees my safety and the safety of my family, often ends up giving me the feeling that everything is a task, everything is an obligation* (Joana, participant, 2020).

These fragments show a suspended life, a body widely administered in subjective regions that were once autonomous and the obligation to work, without guarantees of prevention, each instrumentalized by governmental and private biopolitical instances, in which the cost is high, especially for the West. According to Birman (2021, p. 88), "we were socialized as individuals in completely different ways, guided by hygienic and social norms that are quite different and even opposite to these." Added to this are the contamination and death rates reported by the media,

which made Maria find it "*very difficult to sleep and disconnect when faced with the challenges of work and the news that I see all the time*" (Maria, participant, 2020).

The participants also mentioned the political situation in the country and the confrontations with the administration of the biological condition. In this direction, Julia reported: "*I reflected a lot on events and how they are related to politics and how our bodies are seen; it doesn't matter whether we are well, it matters whether this body works, consumes, produces!*" (Julia, participant, 2020). In line with this report, Santos (2020) mentioned the presence of a productivist quarantine that was installed even before the pandemic, a "political, cultural and ideological quarantine of a capitalism closed in on itself and that of racial and sexual discrimination without which it cannot subsist" (Santos, 2020, p. 32). He added: "The quarantine caused by the pandemic is, after all, a quarantine within another quarantine. We will overcome the quarantine of capitalism when we can imagine the planet as our common home" (Santos, 2020, p. 32). The confrontations between narcissism and biopolitics hint at the new challenges possibly faced post-pandemic.

### Final Considerations

The pandemic highlighted some disruptions that radically mark affective and relational life. The findings of this study present a profile of these changes. Through the theoretical problematization of the conflicting relationship between narcissism and biopolitics, intertwined with everyday experiences, we arrived at some considerations: First, the relevance of the different areas of knowledge in understanding this radical experience, especially Health Sciences (with its commitment to making preventive measures, vaccines and treatments viable), Information Sciences (with its precise interventions aimed at popularizing communication technologies), Engineering and Technology (occupied with rapidly generating oxygenation devices for patients) and the Social and Human Sciences (which provided keys to understanding this moment in our history). All of them are protagonists that facilitate passing through this pandemic, especially in comprehending what is presented as a result in axis 1, which gives visibility to deterritorializations and fears. Contrasting with a scientific approach to the emerging situation, what can be observed in the reaction disseminated by society, was the presence of what is conventionally called denialism, which gained different discursive formats such as unfounded convictions, prejudices, and the general disregard for the emerging social reality, each of them, to a large extent, resonating with the widespread defensive fear faced with threats to life that have marked recent years.

A second consideration concerns the polarization during the pandemic between those segments of society that recognize a collective dimension and other sectors that stick exclusively to individuality, often defining life in society by the mere sum of individuals. In this way, the advent of the pandemic propagated a collision in the social environment between different forms of conceiving collective life. A worldview centered on the individual, which tends to disregard the presence of the other in their daily actions, has defensive narcissism as its predominant subjective component, which, as we saw in the second axis analyzed, is faced with the biopolitical devices of management aimed at the well-being of the collective.

Thirdly, it is worth considering the relevance of the political participation of public universities in the adherence and production of knowledge directed toward facing the pandemic, which was evidenced by the participants in the testimonies analyzed in the two axes. Through them, it is possible to put in motion the construction of plural narratives about the experience, giving particular emphasis to the everyday way in which it was lived by anonymous people who had to face, in their daily social life, the possibilities and limits brought about by this radical historical occurrence. In addition to the official history recorded in indexes and government actions, there is a need to give visibility to the micropolitical stories that tend to be condemned to silence and disappearance.

As a fourth consideration, we emphasize that the transformations arising from this dark experience are yet to be made known and will require a collective effort to accept, analyze and overcome that can only come from the power to sustain the disparate affections experienced in these pandemic years. This is an elaboration that will take place in the private sphere; however, that will also require a collective effort to deal with the marks of fear, defensive narcissism, death, and insecurity due to the social vulnerability that the pandemic has made radically explicit, as seen in the testimonies.

Finally, we emphasize that, despite the systematic disqualification which focuses on science, a fact that has become evident across the globe and particularly in Brazil, it is essential to insist on situated and multidisciplinary scientific production. In this direction, new studies on the personal transformations brought about by such a dark experience are needed, using different perspectives of analysis to comprehend and access a future that is still totally uncertain but could be systematically marked by new pandemic experiences.

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