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LOST IDENTITY:
Examining the Temporal Atomisation of Social Networks

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ABSTRACT
The human being is defined by time; temporality constitutes our most vital asset. The study of temporality is therefore essential for a comprehensive understanding of any human reality.
This article aims to examine the impact of the atomised conception of time, characteristic of social networks such as TikTok and Instagram, on young people's construction of individual identity. Drawing on Bergson's notion of time as vital continuity, it explores how the disintegration of temporal continuity and the absolutisation of the instant have contributed to a fragmentation of identity and a diminished sense of meaning.

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1. Introduction: The Essential Temporality of Human Beings

An inexorable reality of human beings, despite the claims of transhumanism, is that one day we will die. The Spanish philosopher Rafael Alvira, quoting his teacher Antonio Millán-Puelles, argued that death is the most metaphysical of all phenomena, as it represents the only possibility that can occur at any moment of our lives. Death thus becomes an inevitable and inscrutable event, since we cannot know when it will occur.

Surprisingly, this tragic phenomenon conceals a constructive dimension of fundamental significance. Death, paradoxically, contributes to giving life a sense of meaning. At the conclusion of our temporal existence, death marks a boundary in time and emphasises a key point in understanding the anthropological reality of human beings: time is finite and ultimately runs out.

Realising this point, not merely knowing it, but internalising it at a vital level, entails personal growth, as it confronts us with one of the most significant questions of our lives: What should we do with the time we are given?

This question raises another essential anthropological consideration. Determining how to use our time is inseparable from the search for meaning in life. Only by possessing a purpose that lends significance to our existence can we understand how to spend our time; otherwise, our actions may be undertaken, yet the time devoted to them is wasted, as it has not been integrated into a coherent life project.

A life project underscores the significance of our temporality. As death is inevitable, we come to realise that our time is limited, for we cannot accomplish everything we might wish to do because there are more possibilities than time to realise them. Consequently, we must make choices, dedicating time to certain pursuits while leaving others aside. This renders time our most vital asset. The value of things depends, in part, on the time we devote to them. Thus, when we dedicate time to another person, it engenders a feeling of gratitude, as it signifies that we are valuing them; we are offering them a portion of our time, or, more profoundly, a portion of our life.

As Alvira notes, in an infinite life, nothing we undertake would hold significance. 'If our existence were, as it undoubtedly is now, transient, but we did not suffer death, then nothing that happened to us would have any relevant meaning, since in the infinity of future possibilities, nothing is truly important' (Alvira, 1999, p. 221).

From this, it becomes apparent how death imparts a certain meaning to life by conferring value on time. This, in turn, entails the development of a life project, which involves the search for meaning and the determination of how to use our time. In other words, life as a vital continuity directed towards an established goal. Such vital continuity is therefore inherent to human beings and essential for achieving a fulfilling life. It is this continuity that constitutes the self and our identity depends on the proper integration of our experiences.

In light of this, the study aims to analyse how living within an atomised conception of time, characteristic of social networks such as TikTok and Instagram, affects young people's construction of their current identity. To this end, the discussion begins with the Bergsonian conception of time, elucidating the psychological continuity inherent in human beings. Subsequently, the temporal reality of the instant is examined as a discontinuous absolute that disrupts the temporal continuity of life and is incompatible with the development of a life project, thereby leading to despair and a sense of meaninglessness. Following this, the article considers how the atomised conception of time present in social media, which entails the absolutisation of the instant, produces a fragmentation of temporal continuity. This fragmentation, in turn, erodes personal identity, particularly among young people, who struggle to integrate the moments of their lives, resulting in an inability to wait, a lack of meaning, boredom, isolation and despair. Finally, the discussion concludes with suggestions for recovering lost and fragmented identity.

2. The Psychological Experience of Life as Vital Continuity

Henri Bergson is best known for his notion of time, understood as duration. At the outset of the essay, the French philosopher observes that we tend to equate the nature of states of consciousness, feelings, or emotions with various spatial magnitudes, such as the size of physical objects. He notes that, at first glance, it seems intuitive to compare expressions such as 'in winter it is colder in Burgos than in Madrid' with statements about space, for example, 'the Foster Tower is taller than the Cathedral of Segovia'.

Bergson contends that this type of comparison is mistaken, for when we speak of greater or lesser intensity, we are effectively spatialising those intensities and thereby distorting the reality to which we refer:

> It follows, therefore, that we translate the intensive into the extensive, and that the comparison of two intensities is carried out, or at least expressed, through the confused intuition of a relationship between two extensions. However, the nature of this operation appears difficult to determine (Bergson, 2006, p. 17).

Bergson concludes that, whether we are considering profound feelings or the intensity of superficial sensations, the intensity of all types of feelings 'always consists of the multiplicity of simple states that consciousness distinguishes in them in a confused manner' (Bergson, 2006, pp. 33–34).

From this, the French philosopher asserts the intuition of duration within us as a flow, a succession in which there is no room for simultaneity. No two moments in life are identical; consequently, they are not repeatable:

> Our conception of duration tends to nothing less than to affirm the radical heterogeneity of profound psychological facts and the impossibility for two of them to be completely alike, since they constitute two different moments in a story (Bergson, 2006, p. 140).

As real time in consciousness manifests as continuity and qualitative multiplicity, states of consciousness cannot be measured. 'Moments in real duration do not stop or remain in order to be compared with the next and, therefore, to be measured. Measurable time cannot be real time' (Chacón, 1988, p. 58).

Such an intuition of duration enables us to understand life, both psychological and ontological, as a vital continuity, a constant flow that allows us to speak meaningfully of past, present, and future. In this sense, the present serves as a connection between past and future. The present oriented towards the future constitutes the perception given to action, while the present that reflects on the past constitutes memory. Consequently, within our psychological vital continuity, the instant does not exist:

> The instantaneous never exists for us. In what we call by this name, there is already a work of our memory, and consequently of our consciousness, which prolongs one in the other, so as to capture in a relatively simple intuition as many moments as we wish of an indefinitely divisible time (Bergson, 2010, p. 87).

It follows that the psychological experience of personal identity is necessarily a vital continuity. However, this continuity may be disrupted if our psychological life focuses on anything other than continuity, as occurs in the experience of the moment.

3. Vital Continuity and the Disruptive Nature of the Moment

Vital continuity is indispensable for a fulfilling life. To appreciate this point fully, it is useful to consider Aristotle's reflections on happiness.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle begins by asserting that all human activity is directed towards an end, and that all intermediate ends are likewise oriented towards this ultimate end, which, according to him, must be the good and the best (cf. Aristotle, EN, 1094a1–23). This implies that the ultimate end is what imparts meaning to all other actions, as they are all oriented towards it. Concerning the name of this end, Aristotle observes that, 'almost everyone agrees, for both the common people and the educated say that it is happiness, and they think that living well and doing well is the same as being happy' (Aristotle, EN, 1095a15). Happiness is the perfect good because 'we choose it for its own sake and not for any other' (Aristotle, EN, 1097b1). There are goods that can be chosen for their own sake, such as honour or pleasure, but which are simultaneously desired for what they bring; consequently, they are not ultimate, as they are chosen on the basis of what is believed to be obtained from them, namely, happiness.

Thus, Aristotle establishes happiness as the ultimate end of human life. The Stagirite defines it as 'an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue' (Aristotle, EN, 1098a15). For our purposes, it is noteworthy that Aristotle defines happiness as an activity, rather than as a way of being or a form of possession. What, then, does this mean?

All activity involves at least two elements: development and continuity. Development denotes that an activity is not given at the outset, but rather unfolds progressively through lived experience, through which one gradually attains what one seeks, always maintaining a certain constancy in the process itself. Continuity, by contrast, implies the presence of a common substrate throughout this development, namely the action undertaken and the end towards which it is directed.

The understanding of the end of life, happiness, as an activity implies that a single moment is insufficient to achieve happiness; rather, it requires 'a whole lifetime' (Aristotle, EN, 1098a18). For this reason, Aristotle observes, perhaps surprisingly, that children are not capable of being truly happy (cf. Aristotle, EN, 1100a), since happiness requires both perfect virtue and the experience of a complete life. Children and adolescents have not yet had sufficient time to live in this manner. They may experience feelings of happiness, as Aristotle notes, because children are naturally docile in their passions; however, they cannot attain true happiness until they are able to develop such sustained activity. The challenge for both young people and those with a youthful character lies in living and seeking solely according to passion (Aristotle, EN, 1095a9). As will be shown later, a life directed only by passion precludes the possibility of happiness, for it rejects all forms of activity conceived as vital continuity and attends exclusively to the instantaneous nature of pleasure.

From the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that vital continuity is essential in the activity that constitutes a happy life. A lack of continuity will inevitably affect happiness, since happiness entails following a meaningful path. This explains why individuals who claim to be unhappy often report that they find no meaning in anything. The absence of meaning implies a lack of purpose in life and of vital continuity.

The meaning of our life, which underpins our activity, is that which we absolutise as an end, in relation to which all else is relativised. Upon this absolute, we construct our identity, which is expressed through our living across the time of life.

It is, however, impossible for human beings not to identify something as absolute in life. All human beings have a natural need to absolutise, as Alvira observes, 'What human beings cannot escape is having a relationship with the absolute. Life involves continuous relativisation, but relativisation is impossible without presupposing an absolute' (Alvira and Hurtado, 2023, p. 25).

For these reasons, as the question of the purpose of life becomes diluted, its meaning is lost. Consequently, the projection of living according to a purpose is limited, which implies that, although a certain continuity of life may still be maintained, increasingly trivial and superfluous matters come to be absolutised.

Vital continuity, however, disappears when there is no capacity for projection or retention, that is, when there is no end beyond the present. In other words, the vital project ceases entirely when the present moment is affirmed as absolute. The vital project constitutes the substrate that weaves and sustains the continuity of our temporality and the absolutisation of the moment entails the loss of all purpose and the erasure of meaning.

Furthermore, such absolutisation also leads to the fragmentation of personal identity. All identity presupposes harmony within our lives. This implies that, for a balanced identity to exist, the present must be in harmony with both past and future. Any imbalance in the constitution of identity involves, at the very least, one of the following: a past that has not been integrated into the present; a present that is not lived in continuity with what we have been and what we anticipate for the future; or a projection of the future that is impossible to reconcile with current reality. In other words, life constitutes an integration of past, present, and future (cf. Alvira, 2006, p. 20), and unhappiness arises when this integration fails. Consequently, as will be discussed later, depression has increased with the use of social networks. The integration of life disappears when one lives entirely in the moment, eliminating the possibility of vital continuity.

The moment is a whole that lasts nothing. It is self-sufficient and requires nothing external for its comprehension or constitution. As such, the moment constitutes an experience of totality. Being an experience of totality, there is nothing outside it, so the moment is surrounded by two nothingnesses in relation to itself; otherwise, continuity would exist. As Bachelard observes, 'It cannot transport its being

from one moment to another to make it a duration. The moment is already solitude... It is solitude in its most naked metaphysical value' (Bachelard, 1999, p. 11).

If the moment is an experience of totality, it entails the rupture of all continuity, since an absolute whole is, by definition, incapable of relating to anything else. Every relationship presupposes a common element. For an absolute whole to relate to something, it would require an element outside itself with which to connect. In that case, however, it would no longer be an absolute whole, but at most a relative one[1] . The instant functions as a point that disrupts the flow of temporality and vital continuity:

> The instant is a pure limit; it is a pure point, a point in time (Zeitpunkt). A point in time is not time, nor is it a part of time. The latter is understood on the assumption that time is continuous, composed of increasingly smaller parts of time without ever reaching minimal parts (Inciarte, 2004, p. 100).

Hence, the moment as an absolute entails absolute discontinuity in life. 'The idea of discontinuity imposes itself without the slightest shadow of doubt' (Bachelard, 1999, p. 13). Absolute discontinuity implies that the moment is an independent whole. As noted, there is nothing before or after it; otherwise, it would not be discontinuous, except for another moment that is entirely distinct from the one given. Consequently, every moment must be born and die simultaneously. 'The moment, as a given moment between being and non-being (neither of which it can be reduced to in isolation), is also born and dies simultaneously' (Alvira, 2006, p. 18). Nietzsche observed this phenomenon sharply when he stated that 'in every instant, being begins' (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 305).

Conversely, if the instant entails an experience of totality, it also conveys a certain sense of fulfilment, since a whole is that which lacks nothing. For this reason, every experience of the instant involves living it intensely:

> The notion of the moment, understood as a temporal analogue of eternity, relates to the complete intensity of life. Of course, this notion is not the same as the common or Aristotelian concept of time, which implies the idea of wear and tear, of change. The conception of time as change is, in a sense, incompatible with the notion of the moment, since reality comes to be understood as a mere process (Alvira, 2006, pp. 18–19)

If the instant entails being born and dying simultaneously, and is followed only by another entirely distinct instant, two consequences arise. First, at every moment[2] of life, we absolutise the instant that is presented to us. Second, in each new instant, nothing from the previous or subsequent instant can be incorporated, for otherwise it would no longer be an independent whole. Consequently, a life oriented entirely towards the instant is one that perpetually demands more.

For this reason, the moment entails a vital agony. One experiences an instantaneous fullness, followed by an absolute emptiness that seeks to be filled in turn by another moment, and so on. It is a constant passing in which nothing that is given accumulates, and in which fullness is persistently sought in what is to come. This nothingness surrounding the moment, this vital loneliness, ultimately culminates in despair or depression. A happy life is constituted by continuity; yet fulfilment is sought not at the end of life, but in the given moment. Despair, therefore, results from the incompatibility between our essential vital continuity and the fundamental discontinuity and loneliness of the moment.

It should be noted that the moment is seductive precisely because of its apparent fulfilment. However, this is a false promise, for it is an empty fulfilment: the occurrence of the moment is simultaneously its cessation. Yet, because we are a vital continuity, we seek more, and thus we immerse ourselves even more intensely in the next moment.

In short, our lives pursue happiness, which presupposes a life project that imparts meaning to our temporal continuity. Any experience that disrupts this vital continuity inevitably engenders persistent

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[1] As I understand it, a whole is that which lacks nothing. Given this, there are two possibilities. It may remain entirely in itself, which I define as an absolute whole, enclosed within itself. Alternatively, it may give or generate another, not out of necessity, for then it would lack something, but out of love. This I define as a relative or relational whole. Hence, in theological terms, it is possible to conceive of a Being that is both perfect and relational.

[2] I will later clarify the distinction between the moment and the instant.

dissatisfaction. This, in turn, fragments personal identity, as it precludes the possibility of integrating our lives into a coherent self. Consequently, the moment epitomises vital despair. We will now examine the consequences that arise from this.

4. The Moment as an Expression of Vital Despair and Meaninglessness

Many authors have highlighted the existential problem posed by the inability to project oneself beyond the given, particularly for the constitution of personal identity. As the moment constitutes absolute discontinuity, it entails the total disintegration of life. Consequently, any life oriented entirely towards the moment undermines identity, since it is impossible to incorporate the past that has been lived and the future that is yet to come into the present. Without the space here to explore the full scope or implications of this issue, we shall briefly examine the positions of Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

Kierkegaard maintains that all life depends upon relating to an Absolute, which, in his case, is God. This self-positioning constitutes a foundation in the Absolute, in which the self exercises freedom by choosing the Absolute as existential truth, that is, 'the self lucidly relies on the Power that created it' (Kierkegaard, 2008, p. 34). Depending on the degree to which the self is founded, Kierkegaard asserts that individuals may find themselves in different existential stages. The stage of interest here is the aesthetic stage.

According to the Danish philosopher, it is possible to evade the responsibility that every living being has to synthesise their life. This occurs when, instead of choosing God, the self seeks to ground itself in itself. In such a case, the human being falls into despair, having betrayed the dialectic of their being and rejected God as the reality that enables the synthesis of the spirit. Human beings consequently lose themselves in the immediacy of the moment. 'The man who dispenses with the infinite is a worldly man, who is only in contact with the immediate, who gives infinite value to things that have no importance: wealth, sensual pleasures, honours' (Fazio, 2023, p. 95).

The individual becomes trapped in a temporality composed solely of a succession of moments disconnected from eternity, that is, the absolutisation of each moment, fleeting and transient. Thus, 'the only thing that men do, precisely with such a mad pursuit of the moment, is nothing other than to ruin their own lives and those of their neighbours, and even the moment itself' (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 213). By losing themselves in the immediate, the aesthete surrenders to pleasure and desire, which constitute what is given in the moment. 'The individual is immediate in desire itself, and however elegant and refined, however calculated it may be, the individual is in it as immediate' (Kierkegaard, 2007, p. 170).

However, those who live according to enjoyment do not take themselves seriously, since they orient their lives towards something external:

> The condition for enjoyment is, here too, an external condition that is not under the control of the individual, for even if he says he enjoys himself, he only enjoys himself in enjoyment, and enjoyment itself is linked to an external condition (Kierkegaard, 2007, p. 176).

Consequently, the aesthete, by establishing themselves in the superficiality of life and the externality of pleasure, suffers from a lack of spirit and lacks self-awareness of the ego. Such an individual ultimately identifies with their moods. Hence, living in the moment entails vital instability.

In turn, the aesthete, living in the moment of pleasure, finds it impossible to commit to anything, since all commitment presupposes stability and continuity. Consequently, their unstable life is founded upon self-centredness. Incapable of commitment, aesthetes either lose themselves in the dissatisfaction of the finite or turn to an infinity that, being incapable of specification or realisation, engenders the anguish of an abstract infinity:

> Infinite possibilities are identified with nothingness, since for everything to be possible, there must be nothing that is real. The infinite abstract possibility, the indeterminate whole, is the nothingness in which the human soul is anguished (Fazio, 2023, p. 91).

This superficiality and lack of commitment leads to vital indecision. If one cannot decide upon anything, one falls into boredom and attempts to escape through the arbitrary pursuit of instant pleasure, seeking to overcome the dissatisfaction of one's condition in the empty hope of new enjoyment.

This mode of living results in vital dispersion. To enjoy oneself properly requires being grounded in a continuity in which what is given can be integrated. Those who live in the moment become dispersed because they do not know how to enjoy what is present; for when they have it, they are already seeking something else. Consequently, the aesthetic stage becomes weariness and despair. As Kierkegaard observes, 'Every aesthetic conception of life is despair, and everyone who lives aesthetically is desperate, whether they know it or not' (Kierkegaard, 2007, p. 177).

Heidegger, by contrast, also considers that human beings must take their lives seriously, although with notable differences from Kierkegaard. Unlike the Dane, he argues that the true affirmation of the life project arises only from the acceptance of death as an inexorable destiny, which allows one to live an authentic existence. Not all individuals achieve this. Accordingly, Heidegger distinguishes between two existential planes: those who seek to realise themselves as a life project and those who have forgotten or abandoned this task. The latter occupy the ontic plane, that of the mere facticity of beings.

It is this latter group that concerns us here, for, as the German philosopher affirms, they live without the capacity to plan, becoming hostages to the given moment and leading an inauthentic existence. 'Since in this inauthentic mode, existence is not assumed as my own being that I must construct, as my own possibility, existence is surrendered to the immediate, to the things of the world' (Rodríguez, 1994, p. 103).

The individual is plunged into an impersonal existence, becoming a *one* or a *they*, absorbed by the masses: a *they* says, a *they* does. Such a person lives superficially, allowing himself to be carried along by his surroundings and losing all trace of authenticity. Heidegger describes this condition as follows:

> He is not himself; others have taken his being (...). In the use of public transport, in the use of information services such as newspapers, everyone is the same as everyone else (...). We enjoy ourselves and have fun as one should; we read, watch, and judge literature and art as one should (...). The one, who is no one in particular and who is everyone, but not as the sum of them, prescribes the way of being in everyday life (Heidegger, 2012, p. 146)

This conception entails a series of characteristics specific to the impersonal being. Thus, the mediocre existence of the individual, carried along and absorbed by others, becomes lost in anonymity and impersonality. It is within the impersonal that insubstantial chatter, inconsequential gossip, and empty talk arise, consumed by curiosity, unable to penetrate anything and remaining on the mere surface of all things (cf. Moreno, 2002, pp. 192–193). In this way, 'The individual is everywhere, but in such a way that he has always slipped away from where existence urges him to make a decision' (Heidegger, 2012, p. 147). Such an individual is therefore incapable of confronting their life project, losing themselves in the meaninglessness of everyday life.

This concludes the analysis of how Kierkegaard and Heidegger view those who live according to the moment, devoid of temporal continuity and a life project, and the consequent formation of personal identity. It is not surprising that both the aesthete and the impersonal being display traits similar to those observed in young people who consume social media excessively. Taking the characteristics outlined above into account, we may now examine how these traits manifest today as a result of the atomisation of time on social media.

5. The Atomisation of Time on Social Media and the Fragmentation of Identity

The influence of social media over the population, particularly young people, is undeniable. In contemporary society, to live often means to be constantly connected, and any disconnection is perceived as a form of social isolation. Consequently, participation in the various social networks appears necessary in order to be part of the community.

It is, however, essential to understand the dynamics of these networks to appreciate the impact that their excessive use can have on the formation of personal identity, especially among young people, who are the most active participants in this reality. The preceding section has already outlined some of the consequences that living in the immediacy of the instantaneous has on the construction of the self. Without attempting exhaustiveness, it is important to highlight other problems affecting young people whose sense of self is formed within a social environment saturated by social media, which permeates their atomised experience of time. In addition to the despair and meaninglessness already discussed, these include isolation, boredom, impatience, and hopelessness.

Several studies[3] link the use of social media with depression and anxiety. This association is closely related to the transient nature of social media. Images, like sensations, are characteristic of the moment. There is no mediation; they are apprehended as soon as they occur, which explains why both images and sensations are so closely linked to pleasure.

Pleasure is instantaneous in that it endures only for as long as the source of pleasure exists and ceases when it no longer exists. For this reason, Epicureanism held that pleasure should be experienced intensely in every moment:

> Life, then, must be lived intensely through, precisely, measured pleasure. And pleasure always occurs in the moment. Life, consequently, is gained and lost in each moment. The moment is not a second or a millisecond, but the state of vital intensity of the pleasurable act. In it there is no decay, no change whatsoever. The moment can thus last seconds or minutes. Time passes externally, but not internally (Alvira, 2006, p. 19).

Pleasure, therefore, implies a vital intensity disconnected from other moments.

Because it occurs in the moment, which is pure discontinuity, moments of pleasure cannot be accumulated. Nietzsche (1997) rightly observed that 'all pleasure wants eternity' (p. 318). In this way, all pleasure involves an experience of totality. Living in the moment entails absolutising a totality and, consequently, dispensing with the external, with what is alien to the moment, giving rise to the solitude of the moment.

It is clear, then, how the excessive consumption of social media causes young people to lose their sense of temporal continuity, as they become existentially immersed in the momentary nature of platforms such as TikTok or Instagram. These platforms present their content in the form of an accelerated lifestyle, an absolute immersion in the present moment, generating momentary pleasure that always leaves the user craving more. Life appears entirely fragmented and subjugated to what is offered, thereby constructing a scattered and lost personality that gradually renders it impossible to live in temporal continuity. 'How can different moments establish a succession if life is concentrated only in their mere appearance?' (Alvira, 2006, p. 19).

Without succession, there can be no relationship and, therefore, no other. The loneliness of the moment brings with it isolation from oneself. 'Through a kind of creative violence, time limited to the moment isolates us not only from others, but also from ourselves' (Bachelard, 1999, p. 11). We lose our relational capacity and simultaneously compromise our psychological integrity, since the lack of continuity prevents integration and thus results in a rupture and dispersion of the self.

On the other hand, the moment of pleasure, by always demanding more, never satisfies us, since our desire for material pleasure is greater than our capacity for pleasure. This necessarily leads to boredom.

It is sometimes said that boredom is a good thing. I do not agree with this statement. I do believe that it is positive to know how to disconnect from work and have free time without any plans, which is how I interpret the claim. However, boredom in itself is harmful, as it indicates an inability to relate to the reality that presents itself. 'Boredom is a symptom, a sign of discontent and contempt for what we have before us' (Ros, 2022, p. 26).

'Being bored with something' is not the same as 'being bored'. In the first case, I am unable to pay attention to what is given (everything 'being bored with' implies a correlate), but this does not mean that my mind has lost its capacity for attention. In the second case, my spirit is incapable of devoting itself to anything; it exists in perpetual indeterminacy, imprisoned within itself, unable to leave itself and attend to anything. All boredom is, therefore, loneliness: it is impossible to share anything when I am bored, as I cannot establish any connection with what is external. In the absence of anything external, the bored person experiences a relationship with nothingness:

> The bored person is the one who perceives the passing of time, as such, as a void. It is the pure experience of time, a time that lacks quality, colour, sound and taste. Experiencing the passing of time in which nothing happens (Alvira, 2001, p. 63).

[3] For example, Vidal, C., Lhaksampa, T., Miller, L., & Platt, R. (2020). Social media use and depression in adolescents: a scoping review. *International Review of Psychiatry, 32(*3), 235–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540261.2020.1720623.

In this pure experience of time characteristic of boredom, we perceive nothing beyond ourselves passing with time itself. The pure experience of time is revealed in boredom, in which we encounter the weight of reality:

> Deep boredom rolls through the abysses of existence like a silent fog and levels all things, men, and oneself in a strange indifference. This boredom reveals the entity in its entirety (Heidegger, 2003, p. 31).

For this reason, the dissatisfaction produced by indulging in the pleasures of social media, together with the loneliness inherent in boredom, generates an experience of detachment from life, as one cannot relate to anything that is given. Consequently, the bored person, in the pure experience of time, lives immersed in nothingness. 'Boredom and starvation are concretely a continuity in nothingness' (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 261). This experience of nothingness, which results from the absolutisation of the moment, entails a life of absolute discontinuity. The bored person does not experience life as something new but as an eternal repetition in which it is impossible to establish oneself in a vital continuity, falling into the perpetual repetition of the moment:

> For the bored person, each moment is the same as the previous one: nothing happened in the past, nothing will happen in the future, and therefore nothing passes through the present. In this way, the temporal rhythm that gives life its tenor and makes it vibrate in different ways is lost. Being bored is a way of experiencing time without distinguishing between the present, past and future (Granados, 2012, p. 337).

As there is no plan, given that one lives in discontinuity, there is no hope for the future, as nothing new is experienced; the passage of time is therefore perceived as a suffocating burden. Depression arises as the vital inability to project life towards a future that maintains continuity with the present. When this occurs, the weight of the future overwhelms the individual because it cannot be conceived in relation to the present. A disintegrated personal identity inevitably experiences the loneliness of the present and the weight of a future that is experienced as alien. Those who are bored, therefore, perceive anguish. 'Boredom interrupts the normal passing of time, acting as an affliction that must be cured. Boredom is so painful that no one in their right mind would long for the anguish it subjects us to' (Ros, 2022, p. 25).

Another aspect that arises from this is the impossibility of waiting. It is evident that young people are increasingly finding it difficult to remain attentive to the present. This is unsurprising, as social media encourages them to focus on what is to come without experiencing a connection with the present. The temporal acceleration inherent in social media generates a vital acceleration that makes it impossible to concentrate on the present. This is due to a psychological experience of desynchronisation between the time of the self and social time. 'The indignities of waiting in a culture of the instant, in other words, are also the inconveniences of not being in sync with modernity' (Schweizer, 2010, p. 13). Individuals do not know how to wait because they experience the loneliness of being excluded from the community to which they belong:

> Those who wait are out of sync with time, outside the 'moral' and economic community of those whose time is productive and synchronised, or whose time does not need to be experienced in any way, accustomed as they are to speed. The forced passivity of those who wait expels them from the community (Schweizer, 2010, p. 14).

Although the moment entails vital loneliness, we still seek to relate to others. This gives rise to the dramatic experience of desiring connection while simultaneously inhabiting the island of absolute self-loneliness, foregoing the capacity to wait.

The inability to wait results from experiencing the moment. Those who wait project something into a future that is connected to their present. 'All human waiting manifests itself in the form of a project and a question' (Laín, 1984, p. 545). Thus, all waiting is linked to a vital project:

> Man lives waiting; his future generally consists of waiting. An examination of the effective relationship between the human being and reality shows that this relationship is immediately

> configured in the project. The project is, therefore, the proper and primary form of human waiting (Laín, 1984, p. 535).

However, although the self, as a vital continuity, constitutively requires a link to the future, a project to adhere to, this relationship can never be synthesised in the moment, which is incapable of connecting with anything beyond itself. Consequently, future life becomes a mere possibility, and all waiting is experienced existentially as a lack. 'Those who know how to wait know what it means to live conditionally. But all waiting becomes a lack if we remain in mere possibility' (Köhler, 2018, p. 12).

This perennial lack generates a feeling of hopelessness, as the future cannot be linked to the present self. Without continuity and without a life project, an identity constructed in the moment becomes lost in the void. This agony gives rise to the meaninglessness already discussed.

hus far, we have examined the problems that the atomisation of time on social media, grounded in the moment, creates in the construction of identity. Without claiming to be exhaustive, I will now suggest some possible ways to escape the prison of the moment.

6. Overcoming the Moment and Integrating Identity: Transcendence Through Meaning

The moment demands complete subjugation. Every moment therefore implies absolute immanence with respect to itself. To live entirely in the instant is to be unable to project oneself beyond it. Such a mode of living consists of a constant succession of instants in which it is impossible to construct any form of continuity. How, then, can one escape such a form of slavery? To answer this question, it is first necessary to establish a distinction between the present instant and the present moment.

A moment is not synonymous with an instant. Even in everyday speech, these words are often used without recognising their philosophical significance. Unlike the instant, the moment is not a closed whole; each moment requires a before and an after in order to be understood in its entirety.

When we speak of 'a moment', we establish a temporary suspension: the expression cannot be used without awareness of the past from which we come and the future towards which we are moving. The moment therefore requires a continuity in which it can be established. Hence, 'taking a moment' signifies dedicating part of our time to something else. A part can only be conceived as such in relation to a whole. Consequently, a moment is always in relation to a whole. What is that whole? It is the vital continuity of our temporal existence.

How, then, can we overcome the instant to situate ourselves in the moment? If the instant is the experience of totality, the moment is the experience of continuity. We can only experience the moment when we do not absolutise the present; to achieve this, we must relativise it, that is, limit it. In relation to what? If we are speaking of life, the only temporal limits are death or our life project. Consequently, we can transcend the instant only by relativising it with respect to a vital continuity directed towards an end.

In this way, as indicated at the beginning, the finitude of death highlights the value of temporality. Only by taking death seriously can we transcend the instant and engage with life as vital continuity:

> Death, by placing us in front of otherness, opens up our life and takes it out of its isolation. This is where true time is born, a time that is ex-stasis (being beyond) oneself; time arises in the face of otherness, which introduces the new into life (Granados, 2012, p. 241).

Thus, to transcend the instant, beyond taking death seriously, it is essential to ask ourselves about the meaning of life:

> The search for meaning, for a purpose, involves transcending the present moment, transcending temporality in a certain way, since from the present (and with the help of the past) we project ourselves into the future to give meaning to our present moment. This projection is what allows us to understand our life as a continuum; therefore, the present can only be understood from the past from which I come and from the future to which I am going (Baiget, 2023, p. 18).

Having meaning means knowing how to put things in their place. Putting things in their place implies relativising them. Those who do not have meaning absolutise what they should relativise. Hence, in

order to escape the absolutisation of the moment, its negation is necessary because only negation allows us to perceive the limit. Thus, the affirmation of the vital limit entails knowing how to integrate death as the existential limit of temporality (Alvira, 1999, p. 226). Maturing therefore means transcending the moment, and that is only possible when it is relativised by limiting it; hence, the perception of mortality as a temporal limit helps us to question the meaning of life, that is, to conceive of our existence as a vital continuity.

'Therefore, in order to limit the moment and open myself to the other, it is necessary to deny myself. Only in my denial is there an opening outside of myself' (Alvira, 2001, p. 64).

In contemporary society, there is a concerning paternalism that, although well-intentioned, seeks to prevent young people from experiencing denial. Without this experience, maturity cannot be achieved, for what hinders us from taking life seriously is the inability to integrate denial. It follows that only by taking the other seriously can one properly confront the constitution of personal identity:

> If, by rejecting the other, I do not find myself, but rather find emptiness, that means that in order to find myself I have to do just the opposite: accept the other, or the other person, take an interest, take the other seriously (Alvira, 2001, p. 64).

Consequently, to prevent the fragmentation of identity produced by the temporal atomisation of social networks, it is essential to cultivate the capacity for self-denial. Only through denial can the absolutisation of the moment be relativised. This practice allows the moment to be transcended and simultaneously brings the question of meaning to the fore, thereby restoring vital continuity.

7. Conclusion: Recovering Identity Through Vital Continuity

We have seen how the temporal structure of social networks, grounded in the moment, facilitates the disintegration of identity by absolutising the present and promoting a life experienced as a vital discontinuity. This is why many people, particularly young people, can fall into a state of vital despair, unable to establish meaning in life. The absolutisation of the given moment generates dissatisfaction, which in turn drives the search for impossible fulfilment in the next moment. From this dynamic arises the dependence on social networks, with its associated anthropological consequences: boredom, lack of meaning, inability to wait, and isolation, among others.

To recover the identity fragmented by the discontinuity inherent to social networks, it is essential to deny oneself in order to open up to another. Such openness entails relativisation, and thus the establishment of meaning and continuity in life in accordance with an ultimate end. This is how the integration of our living is achieved:

> A unification of multiplicity or diversity without suppressing that diversity constitutes the essence of order and, at the same time, the essence of life. There can be no life without unity, without diversity, and without unity within diversity (Alvira, 2006, p. 23).

To know how to live is to know how to limit oneself. Limitation entails relativising what is given in relation to a defined end. Without limits, the moment becomes absolute; transcending the moment requires understanding life as a continuity. Only from the perspective of vital continuity is it possible to constitute personal identity as an existential project.

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