Lost illusions in Interwar Europe: nation and self in Robert Musil

Ilusiones perdidas en la Europa de entreguerras: nación y yo en Robert Musil

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Abstract

The work of Robert Musil Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften is not only considered one of the heights of the twentieth century novel, but also constitutes an essay of deep political theoretical depth on the nation and nationalism in interwar Europe. The crisis of the Austro-Hungarian Empire serves as the reason for the author to develop a deep critique of some of the fundamental theoretical foundations of modern political thought. This article shows how the systematic criticism to which essentialist and racist nationalism is subjected in the work is based on a review of two of the philosophical assumptions that make it possible: the linear conception of time and history, and the metaphysics of the subject. The analysis explores the deep relationship that exists in the work between individual identity (the subject) and collective identity (the nation), between the crisis of the modern unitary subject as an autonomous individual and the difficulties of the construction of a pluralist and democratic, inclusive concept of Nation.

Keywords: Nationalism, nationalities, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Robert Musil, collective identity.

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Resumen

La obra de Robert Musil *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* no sólo se considera una de las cumbres de la novela del siglo XX, sino que constituye también un ensayo de profundo calado teórico político sobre la nación y los nacionalismos en la Europa de entreguerras. La crisis del Imperio austrohúngaro sirve de motivo al autor para desarrollar una crítica profunda de algunos de los fundamentos teóricos fundamentales del pensamiento político moderno. Este artículo muestra cómo la crítica sistemática a la que el nacionalismo esencialista y racista se somete en la obra se basa en una revisión de dos de los presupuestos filosóficos que la hacen posible: la concepción lineal del tiempo y la historia, y la metafísica del sujeto. El análisis explora las profunda relación que existe en la obra entre la identidad individual (el sujeto) y la identidad colectiva (la nación), entre la crisis del sujeto unitario moderno como individuo autónomo y las dificultades de la construcción de un concepto pluralista, democrático e inclusivo de Nación.

Palabras-clave: Nacionalismo, nacionalidades, Imperio Austro-Húngaro, Robert Musil, identidad colectiva.

"Das wahre Wist: Wir sind einander nichts"
("This the true National We: We are nothing to each other")

Robert Musil
Die Nation als Ideal und als Wirklichkeit, 1921

1. Introduction

At the centre of the complex and plural process of the "cultivation of culture" that accompanied the emergence of nationalisms in Europe between the wars, both in its multi-ethnic cities and in the "transnational networks" of intellectuals (Leersen, 2006, 2020), there were some significant exceptions. Rober Musil (Klagenfurt 1880 - Geneva 1942) was undoubtedly one of them, developing in his writings a radical criticism of the process of "homogeneizing cultural communities through the conflation of ethnos with demos" (Nimni, 2015:63). His unfinished "novel"- in the sense referred to by Lukács: a "saga of the world abandoned by the gods" (Lukács, 2016: 117) - and also "essay", a palimpsest re-written over more than forty years, *The Man Without Qualities* (*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften,* MOE), appears to describe the life of his protagonist in feverish and simultaneous searches for

both his personality and his homeland (the plot taking place in Vienna, 1913). However, the reader soon discovers that Ulrich, the man without "qualities", without "attributes" of his own, both lacks the *own characteristics* as a basis for his personal identity and the shelter of a *national community* with which he could identify. He is one of those characters, as Rezzori would say, "plural and protean, hounded by world history, who continuously lose and leave fragments of their own "self" amongst the rubble of old Europe" (Rezzori, 2012: 12).

However, with regard to the final moments of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1913-1914), this book also elaborates not just a portrait of the interwar period, but a refined philosophical, aesthetic and political critique of the cultural foundations of modernity, and specifically two of these: the "self" and the "Nation". This is a text that is monumental in its complexity, concerning the loss of the late bourgeoisie individualist ethos with no hope of collective or national salvation, that European "world experiment", which can be read as "a great anti-epic saga of our civilisation" (Magris, 1991: 283, Rogowsky, 1994: 146).

The exceptional magnitude of this literary, theoretical and political pinnacle, its extraordinary spirit of an "open work", unapproachable and, therefore, *impossible* – an authentic "imitazione dell'incompiuto" (Magris, 1999: 213) – provides a good account of the long and intermittent itinerary of its (re)writing, entirely rooted in the different European nationalisms and their fierce conflicts. Begun at the end of 1898, it changed several times in terms of ideas, characters, and plots (Hickman, 1991: 133-166), before the author published the first part in 1930 and the second, *malgré lui*, in 1933. Several chapters would even be published following his death in 1943 and eventually the critical edition by Adolph Frisé would appear in 1952 (Musil, 1953, 1978).

Several epochal vectors are present in this work. On the one hand, the disintegration ("Untergang") of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the emerging question of nationalities. On the other, the exceptional contributions of the new "crisis culture", developing in fin-de-siècle Vienna, with its immense intellectual, academic, and political scope (Marramao, 1977). A tumultuous transition from the old to the modern world and from the latter to late modernity which, beyond any pessimism or optimism, provides a full account of the false solutions that emerge from the horizon of the time, also explored by other authors, whether through an ironic (in Döblin) or tragic perspective (in Hofmannsthal). Inscribed in the extraordinary and strictly speaking "unrepresentable" (Magris, 1982: 80) political and cultural context of fin-de-siècle Vienna (unique in its intellectual wealth), the position of Musil at the heart of the "creative interaction of intellectual circles" in the Vienna

of the time (Timms, 1986: 8) should be recalled. Paramount are his intellectual debts to Mach (upon whom he wrote his doctoral thesis at the University of Berlin at the beginning of the century), Wittgenstein, Kraus, Schnitzler, Freud, Bauer and Hoffmannsthal, in addition to Rilke and Nietzsche, the latter being ubiquitous in his work through the character Clarisse (Cacciari, 1980: 88). Furthermore, the contemporary crisis in mathematics (Cantor, Frege, Russell-Whitehead) should not be overlooked. Or Husserl, as Magris has underlined: *Anzeichen* vs. *Ausdrücke*, that is, openness, contingency, otherness against the mere "expression" of the authenticity of the self (Magris, 1999: 223). The awareness of the polytheist dispersion: life cannot be lived in the Totality, in the System, in the Foundation. That is the confirmation of an irreparable breach between unity and fragmentation, whether individual (the "self"), or collective (the "Nation"), expressed in caustic and not very nostalgic terms. That Nietzschean dictum in favour of finally eschewing biographies in the style of "Mr. X *and his time*", and opting for others like "Mr. X, who fought *against his time*" could well be applied to Musil, the "Invalid des Lebens" according to Roth. If not forgotten, Musil is certainly little read today, and has undergone a sort of "uomo postumo", not just as a fearless author of those "posthumous pages written when alive" (Cacciari, 1980: 22) (Musil, 1957).

However, we should not be fooled by the cheerful clarity of the "Hapsburg Myth", of the benevolent longing for the *Finis Austriae*, for the "World of yesterday", for the idealization of the "familiar synthesis of a harmonious multiplicity" in fin-de-siècle Vienna (Latraverse and Moser, 1988; Molnar and Reszler, 1989). A historical conjuncture sometimes praised as a misrepresented *Die fröhliche Apokalypsen*, at quite a remove by the way from what Hermann Broch understood by this (Broch 1984: 59); an *Apocalypse Joyeux* in the terms of the magnificent Paris exhibition of the Pompidou Centre (Claire, 1983). Nostalgia for the good old days of the Empire against what Magris or Cacciari had already wisely warned against in their day (Magris, 1963; Cacciari, 1980). On the contrary, the effects of the loss of foundations ("fundamentum veritatis", "Grund"), of the unforeseen difficulties in continuing to postulate "We, the subjects" or "our common national identity" in this "drammatico incrocio di eventi e di direzioni diverse" (Cacciari, 1980: 231) should be examined.

In the final years of the Empire, the multinational and multi-ethnic group of that immense and heterogenous "Kakania", to use the terms of Robert Musil, "Imperial and Royal" ("Kaiserlich und Königlich"), from Vienna itself to city "B." in Moravia (Brünn, Brno), where the author spent his youth, became, if not that "Versuchsstation des Weltuntergangs" ("a weather station for the end of the world"), in the brilliant words of Karl Kraus, a tense and

creative artistic, intellectual and political crossroads. A scenario brimming with conflicts and antagonisms, where the tension between the most radical expressionism of the pristine "self" and the crumbling of the latter in the Freudian unconscious, and the conflict between the most essentialist nationalisms grew, such as the feeble and ultimately unsuccessful pulse of a "supranational consciousness" (Schorske, 1979; Janik and Toulmin, 1973: 42). Friedrich Hebbel defined it accurately as "a small world that acts as a testing ground for the whole world" ("eine kleine Welt in der grosse inhre Probe hält") (Fëjto, 2014: 108).

This article shall briefly analyse some aspects that are found in the narrow internal and conceptual connection in the criticism of modernity in the words of Musil, and which is regarded as crucial for a thorough reading of *The Man Without Qualities*. It shall provide a comprehensive account of the great relevance for European political reality of his criticism as applied to individual identity (subject) and collective identity (nation). We shall argue that in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, three essential components of the modern novel, or rather, of the *Bildungsroman*, are subjected to a systematic scrutiny as regards this "symbolic form of modernity" (Moretti, 1987, 1997). These are specifically: 1) The linear and continuous conception of time, expressed through a novelistic plot understood as a diachronic succession of events that culminate- in the case of the classic *Bildungsroman* (*Wilhelm Meister* by Goethe, *Pride and Prejudice* by Austen) - in a conclusive, clear and teleological ending of reconciliation; or rather a more open, contingent conclusion, even as a personal failure of the protagonist, as is the case in the later novel of development (*L'éducation sentimentale* by Flaubert, *Middlemarch* by Eliot); 2) The life adventure of the protagonist as a journey of development ("Bildung") as an independent, free and individual subject, as a construction of his adult maturity in the face of the "mistakes" of youth, as a forge of a singular and unique personality; 3) Socialization in national culture, through the immersion of individual identity in the broadest collective and community identity of the nation and its history, language and territory. Self-development novels are, at the same time, the hero's deeds and the story of an underlying nation as *persona ficta*. They constitute authentic *national allegories* of very different nation-building projects (Bahbha, 1990; Parrinder, 2006). Everything occurs as if the "self" protagonist has emerged only to the extent that he or she sees him- or herself in a "we", in a community of destiny and meaning that delineates the "self" from the "other". Here is the ultimate reason for the crumbling of *individual and national* identities in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* in the interwar period; it is no longer prolonged in the lack of narrative structure and identity of the characters and Kakania itself as a nation, but in the ultimate impossibility of the novel and its irremediably incomplete condition.

2. The Fracture of Historical Time

Firstly, *The Man Without Qualities* radically questions the linear conception of History by employing a narrative of radical discontinuity. This is done in a specific manner that articulates two very different times (Jonsson, 2000: 143); namely: a chronological time and a spatialized and fractured time. Chronological time narrates the succession of events preceding the First World War, which take place in the novel from the summer of 1913 ("It was a beautiful August day in 1913") until the outbreak of the Great War. The latter looms menacingly as a horizon of the reader's expectations and leads him/her to wait for the protagonist Ulrich to be ultimately engulfed, one way or another, by the same warlike maelstrom as Hans Canstorp in *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann. In this temporal dynamic, the biographical, economic (capitalism, exploitation, commodity, competition) and political (the vicissitudes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, State nationalisms and claims to nationhood) events affecting the protagonists play a decisive role. For example, the course of Ulrich's professional life (mathematician, engineer, etc.), the childhood memories of Brno, or activism in favour of full nationhood for Kakania in the plot of *Parallel Action* that underpins the first volume of the novel, etc. However, there is a very different second time, a continuous and spatialized present, comprising different events, occurrences, actions and perspectives of impossible coherence and suture in a linear time in which biographies, historical events and identities fade. Of these two temporal threads, linear time is always subordinate to spatialized time, to the continuous present that harbours different perspectives, levels of reality and infinite possibilities where "everything can occur in some manner".

This tension between the two different times is a key contribution by the text that is reflected in the tension between two narratives or, rather, between the narration and its impossibility: the self-recognition of Ulrich on the one hand, and the impossibility of maintaining a theme for his life, for his identity as Ulrich, the systematic disidentification (misrecognition) of the protagonist, the reiterated impossibility of providing a full and properly biographical account of himself. From the perspective of this second temporality, *The Man Without Qualities* is the account of the *impossible authenticity* of an incomplete man, without a unifying centre and in constant development.

This constantly precarious, constantly deconstructed identification suggests that Ulrich is not only unable to account for his own past but finds it impossible to seek a future of his own, a project or a purpose, let alone the undertaking of an independent personal project: *The Man Without Qualities* is a man who lives in a sort of eternal present. Strictly speaking, there is no history in this novel, as Magris pointed out some time ago (Magris, 1963: 308). Blanchot has provided a definitive analysis in his work *Le livre à venir:* "History, as we represent it and believe we

experience it, as a succession of calmly linear incidents, expresses nothing more than our desire to refer to solid things, to indisputable events unfolding in a certain order; narrative art promotes and benefits from this so appealing an illusion. However, Ulrich is no longer able to enjoy this happiness of narration on the model of which centuries of historical realities are based" (Blanchot, 1959: 171).

In just the span of a year (1913-1914) covering more than two thousand pages of the constantly reworked novel, "life" for Ulrich is a discontinuous and fragmented experience: "irregularity, change, fits and starts, failures to keep track, a collision of objects and interests" (Musil, MOE: 47). Rather than a "life", it seems to be, in the words of Roland Barthes in his *Michelet*, an "organized network of obsessions" which repeatedly leads to an *experiment* in various problems with a multiplicity of perspectives and points of view in constant debate. A difficult synthesis of thought and novel with which the author assumes, consciously, unavoidable risks: "Danger: getting bogged down in theory", "Too many ideas: I make every chapter impossible" (Musil, 1983: 542). Soma Morgenstern recalls, in his memoir *Joseph Roth Flucht und Ende*, what the latter told him after a heated discussion with Musil in Vienna's Museum Café: "You speak like an Austrian but think like a German. Like your friends Benjamin or Bloch. Mere philosophers!" (Morgenstern, 2008: 115).

In this context, it can be observed how in the course of the novel at least three characteristics emerge that break with the modern conception of time (see table 1); in particular: spatialization, timelessness and presentification of experience and reality. The abandonment of linear and continuous time and its correlate, the myth of "Progress", combines with the aforementioned sense of the loss of the past and the future, generating a *continuous present*, or even an, with some licence, *atemporal time*. This instantaneity, so to speak, goes far beyond presentification, as it extends into an implacable plurality of perpetual and multiple presents, into a compression of time that becomes conflict and non-correspondence between those multiple presents. With regard to the feverish search for memory, for roots, for historical foundations, a sort of chronic amnesia predominates in the novel. In spite of any aspiration to permanence and duration, the characters in the book move in a space-time of ephemeral transience. Spatialization and de-temporalization go hand in hand, thirdly, with a plural range of concurrent temporalities and possess different logics that construct not a utopia, in which literary criticism often insists, but, in the terms of Foucault, a *heterotopia*, a heterogeneous space of processes, identities, places and relationships meshed together randomly. "Reality" in this powerful text, the true antithesis of the novel of development, not only shatters and fragments, but updates only some of its infinite potential opportunities (Magris, 1963: 302). Consequently, some of the foundational characteristics of modern history as an act of freedom vanish before the reader: specifically, the existence

of a real past that is knowable and considered as a repository of the evolution and progress of ideas and institutions; the very possibility of scientific objectivity as the sole Truth (for Musil, "es gibt Wahrheiten, aber keine Warheit"), of a coherent narrative as the core of the individual or collective identity of nations and states, the assumption that Reason empowers a causal explanation in the strong sense of the past; and, finally, the conception of the role of history as *magister vitae* and the transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another.

TABLE 1. Aspects of Modernity/Last Modernity in R. Musil, *The man without qualities*

CLASSICAL MODERNITY	LATE MODERNITY
Linear time, continuous, past-future, nostalgia	Timeless time, presentification, perpetual and multiple presents, discontinuity
Memory, experience, permanence, expectations,	Amnesia, spatialization, timelessness, transience
Kronos	*Kairós*
Risk, determination	Uncertainty, openness, indeterminacy, otherness
Utopia	Dystopia, heterotopia
Subjectivity, identity, ipseity, psychic unity, essence, roots, belonging	Otherness, fragmentation, absence, emptiness, negativity, symbolic constitution of the "self", process, *Ichlosigkeit, Möglichkeitssinn*
Avant-garde, criticism, linguistic experimentation, *expressionism*	Parody, irony, *constructivism*
Style, personality	Allusion, intertextuality
Bildungsroman, narrative structure, omniscient narrator	Dislocation, essay, pluralism of perspectives
Signification, signified	Floating signifier
Hypothesis, metaphor, hyperbole	Parataxis, metonymy, metalepsis
Emancipatory teleology, metanarratives	Scepticism, cynicism
Great Narrative, metanarrative	Deconstruction, aesthetics
Ethics, criticism, denunciation	Aesthetics, relativization, moral distancing
Hero	Antihero
Monism	Pluralism
Universalism, Science, Truth	Particularism and universalism, Science and poetry, "truths", contextualism, "Ideology"
Nation, culture, race, community, territoriality	*Heimatlosigkeit*, plural, liquid and superimposed identities, extraterritoriality
Goethe *Wilhem Meister* Flaubert *L'éducation sentimentale* Eliot *Middlemarch*	Broch *Der Tod des Vergil, Die Schlafwandler* James Joyce *Ulysses*

Source: own elaboration.

The loss of the narrative order of the novel, the very impossibility of the author finishing the book, the distancing from the novelistic canons of realism and the *Bildungsroman*, the shattering of that classic anagnorisis of the hero, reach a level in Musil only comparable to what can be found in Proust, Döblin (*Berlin Alexanderplatz*), Mann (*Doktor Faustus*), *Die Schlafwandler* and *A Der Tod des Vergil* by Hernman Broch, or *Ulysses* by James Joyce. Notice, for example, in chapter 122, titled *Heimweg*, ("Going home") in which it is openly stated that "the narration becomes impossible", to put it in later words, although pertinent here, of the *Nouveau Roman* (Robbe-Grillet). The narrator's voice is then indeed read: "men, in their fundamental relations with themselves, are mostly narrators. They like the well-ordered sequence of events because it seems a necessity; and thanks to their life showing them one "course" ("Lauf"), they feel somehow sheltered in the chaos". Ulrich himself realises that "everything has become unspeakable and life no longer follows any 'thread' ('Faden') but extends into the space of an infinitely interwoven surface" (MOE: 650). This is the horizon of an entire era, in the words of Schnitzler in his *Paracelsus*: "Dream and wakefulness, truth and lie converge upon each other. There is no safety anywhere" (Gay, 2002: 21)

3. Ohne Eigenschaften: the Vacuum of Personal Identity

However, all of the above refers us to a second theme of the novel that emerges as we have seen in the thread of temporality. The spatialization of time as well as its presentification extend to a conception of *subjectivity* that is embedded in the epochal figure of the work, that is, Ulrich, *The Man Without Qualities*, or qualities without the man (MOE 608): "Is it not true that experiences have become independent of human beings? This is how a world of qualities without men has emerged ("eine Welt von Eingenschaften ohne Mann"). A world of experiences without anyone experiencing them. In a forced and unthinkable synthesis of Mach and Nietzsche, Musil does not leave the author, or the protagonist, or the improbable reader, installed in a privileged place, looking out majestically from the throne of the horizon of expectations: "the decomposition of anthropocentric relations, which for so long have regarded the human being as the centre of the universe, but which have been disappearing for centuries, has finally reached the own "self" (MOE: 150). At 32 years old, Ulrich only knows in regard to himself that "there is nothing solid for him", "he is situated at a point equidistant from all qualities and in a strange way he is completely indifferent to all of them, whether he possesses them or not" (MOE: 151).

A subject, or the "delirium of many"? To discard the metaphysical fiction of the identical self is the ultimate reason for the constitutive tensions of the protagonist as a man without peculiarities, between "exactitude" and "soul" ("someone who flees as soon as he hears of algebraic progressions"), science and poetry, the "ratioide" and the "non-ratioide". Ulrich, constantly changing course in terms of his life's vicissitudes that deprive him of a stable profession (he goes from soldier to mathematician, then engineer, finally becoming a disbelieving supporter of lost causes), lacks "character" and "personality". There are no glimpses of the least solid personal benchmarks to unify a "personality" (*Persönlichkeit*): not social class, Bildung or "Beruf", and no "calling", anchors, family or destiny either; in short, without roots and without future, without any anchor of salvation and lost, adrift in a state of permanent temporariness (Casals 2003: 317). Ulrich is also homeless (*heimatlösigkeit*): the question of personal identity is the reverse of self- understanding as a member of a national community. Like Franz of *Joseph Roth, Flucht ohne Ende*, "there he was, in the centre of the capital of the world, not knowing what to do". Thus, without foundations, Ulrich becomes less solid but more human. Therefore, "He loathes everything that seems to be immovable, the great ideals, the laws and their small petrified trace, being of a peaceful nature. He does not regard anything as being firm, no self, no order... He does not believe in bonds and everything has a value that only lasts until the next act of creation, like a face that is spoken to and that changes with each word" (MOE: 154). Accountability of an entire era through its petrified version in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, presided over by the old immortal emperor, the benevolent despot who Roth describes with affectionate indulgence in *Radetzkymarsch*. However, unlike Roth, as Magris has brilliantly observed: "Piú che sul momento malinconico, Musil insiste su quello ferocemente dissolutore" (Magris, 1963: 304).

This occurs from the very beginning of the book, in Chapter 1: "Musil reminds the reader from the offset that the world of Goethe is no longer, at that time, simply available" (Luft, 1980: 219). This opens with two impersonal events: a one-day weather report from late August 1913 and a description of the incessant traffic in a large city. There is nothing contextual, family roots, collective history, realistic sociology, or psychological analysis of the characters: from Musil's perspective, human affairs depend on a mere coincidence of facts accumulated at random... Anonymous scenes in which two equally anonymous characters are glimpsed as shadows "treated impersonally (...), whose identity is suggested to only then be denied" (Hickman, 1991: 136).

For these purposes, it is interesting to compare the treatment of family tradition in *The Man Without Qualities* and *Radetzkymarsch*. In the latter, it

is presided over at all times by the portrait of the grandfather, the hero of Solferino who gives continuity to the Empire at the same time as to successive generations of the Trotta: "every year, during the summer holidays, silent dialogues took place between the grandson and the grandfather" (Roth, 2020: 57). Ulrich is described in a very different register: "(...) he looked his father in the face. Possibly everything he regarded as a personal peculiarity of his own was nothing more than a contradiction dependent on that face, acquired at some point in childhood. He looked for some resemblance in it. Perhaps there was. Perhaps everything had been there, race, obligation, personality, the current of inheritance, of which oneself is nothing but a wave, a limitation, a discouragement, the eternal repetition and circular movement of the spirit. All that he hated in the depths of his will to live" (MOE: 693).

Here is the "Austrian" complex that concerns Musil: *selbstentfremdung*, the self- alienation, the impossible authenticity, the guilty conscience of infidelity to oneself caused by infidelity to history, the impossibility of redirecting the actions of the protagonist to an organizational and coherent vector. However, is that not what "historicity" means? A landscape of discontinuity, fractures, "epochal caesuras" with regard to the origin myth, an indispensable correlate of the founding function of the modern subject and its properties: continuity, essence, meaning and truth. The only possibility that arises is that of an aimless condition, a "non-vectorial state": "There is no longer a complete man before a complete world, but a human *something* ("einmenschliches Etwas") that moves within a generic nutrient fluid" (MOE: 217). Hence, Agathe tells Ulrich at a certain point, with terrifying lucidity: "'When you talk to me... It's as if were looking at myself in the pieces of a broken mirror; with you it's impossible to see my entire body'. 'No,' replied Ulrich, without letting go of her hand. 'Nowadays, you can never see your entire body, nor can you move all your body at once, either...'" (MOE: 684)

The Man Without Qualities develops, on these premises, an anti-essentialist conception of subjectivity, that is, it radically dispels the idea that human beings possess a substance, a particular central core expressed in our race, nation, culture, gender, or social class. On the contrary, for Musil the human being is characterized by the absence ("mon admirable absence", as Blanchot would say in *Thomas l'Obscur*), of all inner central core: there is no substance, no identity underlying what we call the 'self', ego, individual and subject. Just a contingent flow of impersonal elements. Musil reformulates for his purposes the concept of Mach (on whom, it should be recalled, he did his doctoral dissertation in 1908 in Berlín) of *Ichlosigkeit*, of the dissolution and loss of the "self". As in *A Der Tod des Vergil* or in *Die Schlafwandler* by Herman Broch, in *The Man Without Qualities*, subjectivity is not determined by the essence of inner freedom, or by society, or by vocation ("Calling", "Beruf"),

but flows in an atemporal heterologous and multiple *Zwischenraum*. Musil continues and radicalizes the journey of the characters of Thomas Mann, which goes from Thomas Buddenbrook, through Kruger and Aschenbach, to Adrian Leverkuhn.

Moreover, for Musil, the dilemma between universalism and particularism, between liberal theses (the existence of a universal essence independent of society, culture and class) and the communitarian alternative (the human being as rooted and immersed in a race, a culture, a nation) is a false dilemma. The problem is that both are indebted to the metaphysics of the subject. Universality, if anything, lies in the *negativity*, in the otherness, in the *anderer Zustand*, in the "condition of otherness" (MOE 365). Musil develops and clarifies the concept of this peculiar vital condition in his superb essay, *Der deutsche mensch als Symptom* (1923), to which we shall return presently for other purposes: "We have many descriptions of the condition of alterity. What is common to all of them could be that the boundaries between the self and the non-self are less clear than is usually assumed and even if a certain investment is made in their mutual relationship... While we take it for granted that the self dominates the world, in the condition of otherness the world flows into the self and mixes with it or transports it to similar things." (MPS, 1393). In the lucid words of Jonsson, "The transgression of the temporal order and the ironic subversion of discursive matrices contribute to the generation of a space of indeterminacy and potentiality that dissolves the mimetic representation of a vital character by moving through a solid external reality" (Jonsson, 2000: 126).

There is a passage in *The Man Without Qualities* that is especially illuminating for what concerns us here: "a countryman has at least nine characteristics: professional, national, state, class, geographical, sexual, conscious, unconscious, private and, above all a tenth characteristics: the passive fantasy of empty spaces. This characteristic affords the human being all but one thing: to take seriously what the other nine characteristics mean, an empty and invisible space inside which is reality, like a small stone city from a children's building game, abandoned by fantasy" (MOE 34). An identitarian vacuum that constitutes the unavoidable background to our late-modern world, an identity that escapes unscathed from the adventures of reason, from the Enlightenment ideal of modernity (Bayón 2009: 259).

It was no coincidence that Ulrich's initial name, in the first draft of the novel, was *Anders* – the Other. His "self" does in fact constitutes a vacuum: "a large, empty, round circle" (that is why he is a man "without character"), just "an emergency substitute for something that is lost" (MOE: 384), and at best, in the words of Barthes, "Un Je de papier". His friend Walter, his antithesis as *dramatis personae*, defines him with impeccable accuracy: "'He

is a man without qualities'. 'And what is that?' asked Clarisse. 'Nothing. Simply nothing'" ("Nichts. Eben nichts ist das") (MOE: 64). Some time ago, Blanchot defined this "nothing" of the *The Man Without Qualities*, this "singolaritá qualunque" as Agamben would say, with prophetic words that require no qualification: "C'est l'homme quelconque, l'homme san essence, l'homme qui n'accepte pas de se cristalliser en un caractère, ni se figer en une personnalité stable" (Blanchot, 1959: 169).

Here is the centrality of the character of Agathe, because of her specular nature in terms of the construction of the protagonist's precarious subjectivity. She is the feminine double of Ulrich, which explains the extraordinary relief of the second part of the novel which, often discarded as a secondary account of an incestuous love, becomes decisive for a thorough understanding of the first volume. Hence the "other self" of Ulrich, whose identity is constructed not through an evolutionary process of self- recognition and search for authenticity but in the mutual denial of any identity that is given in advance. Particularly noteworthy is the opening passage of the second book ("Vertrauen"), in which Ulrich looks at Agathe: "He looked at her face whilst she spoke... That face worried him for some reason. Eventually, he realized that he simply could not identify what he was expressing. There was something missing in that face, something that allows us to draw some conclusions about the person. It was a face full of content, but nowhere at all was anything underlined and synthesized into characterological features as is often the case" (MOE: 677).

From this loss of essence, this "eigenschaftlos" condition, the absence of qualities, of personal particularities or attributes, this temporariness, in short, this "nothing", emerges an ultimate sense of possibility ("Möglichkeitssinn") that contrasts with the sense of reality of a world already and definitively formed. Contingency and indeterminacy expand the horizon supported by the modern tension par excellence between the questioning/establishing of the subject: "everything could be truly different" ("es könnte wahrscheinlich auch anders sein") (MOE: 16). This critical vision of "reality" as potentiality, as openness, contingency and indeterminacy, opens a window of opportunity to be addressed outside the paradigms of "decadence" or the "kulturpessimismus", that is: "as a problem and fiction" (MOE: 16). Hence the Musilian tendency to see the world "as God: in potential subjunctive" (MOE: 19). In short, in Musil, the Nietzschean critique of rationality, due to the scientific counterpoint which was the basis of his formation, does not extend to the Lukacsian question of the "Destruction of Reason", but it does enable a new model for the eventual development of a superior form of intellectual consciousness to be highlighted (Hinz, 2000: 201).

Therefore, in Musil, the subject does not crumble, as Foucault would say, "like a face of sand on the seashore", nor does it simply "disappear" either, but as Manfred Frank has pointed out, in a new turn in his complex vision of the world and of life, and secretly recovering the mystique of Eckhart and of the early Romantics (Novalis, Schlegel, Schleiermacher and Schelling), Musil is different to Mach in one key aspect: "What is decisive is the fact that Mach considers the phenomenon of the human subject a pseudo-metaphysical problem; that is, a phenomenon that does not really exist. Musil argues, on the contrary, that indeed, the "self" is actually found, as Mach has shown, to be lacking its own particularities (without substance, without a solid and independent core of subjectivity). However, that is not why it is reduced to being "nothing at all", that is, mere appearance" (Frank, 2004: 353). Ricoeur concludes in this regard: "What is the 'self' when the subject says that it is nothing? A 'self' deprived of the support of selfhood ('mêmeté')" (Ricoeur, 1990: 196).

A constructivist perspective of subjectivity emerges here (Muñoz 1994: XVI). Musil opted for constructivism, for the search for new languages and new reasons, for a will to value that had not already been a pretext for violence, for experimentalism. This is a major difference with respect to the critical diagnosis on modernity in Broch and Musil, where the former postulates rejection, the latter glimpses an opportunity for reinterpretation (Martens, 2006: 253). Beyond any complacent will of fragment and dispersion, of quiet despair in the emptiness of that "nothing", Musil resolutely commits to exploring the conditions of opportunity and, it could be said, of "narrativity" of a subject in process, or as Julia Kristeva would state, of the *homme non assujetti*, of the *homme-procès* (Kristeva, 1974: 99). Hence the always unresolved creative tension remains subject to the discontinuous thread of the text devoid of a plot line. On the one hand, a human being with qualities, with "character", with "personality", is hyper-*identified*, that is, the mere exogenous expression of a race, nation, class, or profession. On the other hand, a human being definitively deprived of qualities, of his/her own particularities, is *hyper-subjectivized*, an antisocial and therefore pathological being (Jonsson, 2000: 242) This tension opens up the uncertain opportunity to be another, to update some of the infinite possibilities that loom over the course of a lifetime, to navigate existence windward of indeterminacy and contingency. However, at the same time, it undertakes to construct itself with the other and as the other. Such is the content of the second book through the deconstruction of gender in modernity that unfolds within it: "Musil destroys the gentle Viennese femininity of which Hoffmasnthal and Schnitzler were so fond... The true, uncorrupted poetic centre of the world of yesterday" (Magris, 1963: 316). This is the ultimate reason for the complex game of

identity and difference between Ulrich and Agathe ("She will be the one to discover qualities in me"), a transformation "not separated but not united" ("die Ungetrennenten und Nichtvereinten") (MOE: 652). Such is the mystery of the sister: she is the point at which everything converges in precariousness, identity and otherness (Casals 2003: 332).

4. Ungeheimliche Heimat: the Impossible Nation

This article shall now examine the third topic of *The Man Without Qualities* to be addressed: the national question. As shall be immediately appreciated, this problem shares a close internal and conceptual relationship with the two previously analysed in this study (the conception of time and the crisis of the modern subject). Our analysis is based on the hypothesis that the conception of subjectivity as a process, as well as the dichotomies present in the novel that have already been discussed (reality/condition of alterity, human being/qualities, science/art [Luft, 1980: 218)]) are decisive for an account of the tension of subjectivity/identity in the development of the central theme of the plot of the novel. This is collective identity, and specifically collective identity at the forefront of interwar European politics: *the nation*. As Böhme has underlined: "the existential model of the man without qualities is fully valid for Kakania as a whole" (Böhme, 1974: 329). Emerging from the crisis of modernity that occurs under the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, there is a close relationship between the musilian subject of the *Ichlosigkeit* (loss of subjectivity) and the *Heimatlosigkeit* (loss of national identity). Neither an inclusive nation for the Empire as a whole, because of its anti-democratic regime; nor a German cultural nation that does not become anti- Semitic and militaristic. The hypothesis of this study is expressed with absolute clarity by one of the characters in the novel: the nation becomes a precarious community of individuals in the midst of an identity crisis, of the uprooted, the *deracinés,* a "Gemeinschaft der vollendet ichlossen" (MOE: 555).

As has been studied in depth (Bringazi, 1998), *The Man Without Qualities* does not only make the national question in interwar Europe one of its central themes, but specifically presents "Nationalism" as a result of the loss and dilution of subjectivity in the late modern world, as a dossier to resolve the crisis of individual subjectivity through the immersion and flooding of the "self" in the organic totality of a "we" of the essential Nation. Over the lengthy course of the novel, in fact, an exquisite analysis is performed of the main myths of organic nationalism; in short, they can be identified without intending to exhaust the subject:

1. The myth of the nation as *fatherland* ("Heimat"), in which the nativist dimensions of the concept of *nation*, as a place of birth and shared memory that differentiates the us/them, own/other ("Vaterland", "Mutterherde")

2. The myth of the nation as *monocultural community*, enclosed within its (particularist) *Kultur* and in contrast to (universalist) *Zivilisation*, not necessarily formulated based on the themes of *decadence* or *Kulturpessimismus*, and well- hidden between the "high" culture of the ruling classes and the "völkisch" forms of the popular classes.

3. The myth of the nation as the grassroots *German language community*, within an empire conceived as the setting for the essence of language conflict ("klassiker Land der Spranchenkämpfe"). The German language as a defining diacritical element of the nation to be employed in the formation of a pangermanic *Mitteleuropa*.

4. The myth of the nation as a *mass society*, exemplified in the descriptions of the urban world of Central European metropolises (Vienna, Berlin) (which ineluctably recalls *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin) and shared loneliness in the most absolute anonymity ("menslichen Gestaltlosigkeit").

5. Finally, the dominant myth of the nation as a *race*, as a determining factor of the "inner border" in the own/other, us/them, friend/enemy formulation: Arianism and ubiquitous anti-Semitism (violated in the novel eloquently by the relationship between the two servants, Rachel and Soliman).

However, this complex Nationalism-Racism-Anti-Semitism mytheme is articulated in a very complex way in the pages of *The Man Without Qualities* on three aspects of the plot: 1) *Patriotic Action* or *Parallel Action* ("Parallelaktion"), the campaign for the achievement of a shared national identity for the Austro-Hungarian Empire; 2) the claims for self-determination by internal nationalities within the Empire; and 3) the European state nationalisms of the time, namely hegemonic German nationalism.

First of all, therefore, there is the theme of "Kakania", linking the crisis of subjectivity with the crisis/impossibility of national identity: "That incomprehensible and now extinct nation, which in so many things has been an insufficiently recognized model" (MOE: 32). Musil's causticity in this respect discards any longing or nostalgia for times gone by that has several versions and differing intensities, all of them of an indisputable quality, whether literature from the Austrian-German-(Jewish) perspective (Roth, Schnitzler, Zweig, Morgerstern, Werfel, Von Rezzori and Von Doderer) or that of Hungary (namely *Erdélyi történet* by Miklós Banffy). Musil expresses

no signs of a mythification of the Empire but does offer the most caustic of diagnoses: "The sunken state ('versunkene') of Kakania (...) was Imperial-Monarchist ('kaiserlich – königlich') and was truly 'imperial' and 'monarchist'. In writing, it was called 'Austro-Hungarian Monarchy', in common speech, it was simply called 'Austria'. According to the Constitution, the state was liberal, but had a clerical government. It also had a Parliament, which made so much use of its freedom that it was almost always closed; thankfully, there was a state of emergency rule through which crises were resolved without the need for Parliament. Before the law, all citizens were equal, but unfortunately not all were equally citizens. Not only had the aversion against fellow citizens increased to the point of constituting a collective feeling; even distrust of oneself and one's own destiny had acquired a form of deep certainty" (MOE: 33-34).

Especially significant is the ruthless treatment, in chapter 42, of the relationship between the two underlying national components in the bicephalous imperial eagle: "The Austro-Hungarian state sentiment ("Staatsgefühl") was not formed as one might believe by an Austrian and a Hungarian part, which complemented each other and formed a whole, but comprised a whole and a part: the concept of Hungarian state and the concept of Austro-Hungarian state which had its territory in Austria, while the concept of Austrian nationality lacked any homeland. The Austrian existed only in Hungary and there, in the form of aversion, he thus declares himself 'Austrian-but-one- Hungarian-less-this-Hungarian'. In fact, he could not stand the Hungarians, nor the Hungarians the Austrians, and in addition there were also Poles, Slovenes or just straightforward Germans, which generated new internal divisions" (MOE: 170).

All this contextualizes the plot of the improbable claim of *Parallel Action* led by Leindsdorf: "to build the fatherland", "spread true patriotism" (MOE: 146), to realise, in short, the national ideal in Austria-Hungary. The obsession with founding a true "kakanien nationalism" ("kakanischen Nationalismus") and fulfilling the thesis that "human beings can only find their full and true meaning in the community life of a nation". This was the reason why Leinsdorf was enveloped in the idea of forming with the peoples of the Empire a single people, a nation. However, "unfortunately they insisted that they were already forming nations, demanding the restitution of their historical rights and brazenly claiming that the Empire was the prison from which they wanted to be freed" (MOE: 452)

Secondly, this leads to one of the bases of the narrative structure of *The Man Without Qualities*: the *question of nationalities*. *Parallel Action* aimed precisely to counter the claims of varying intensity and very diverse political outlooks of the eleven nationalities within the Empire. Those nationalities not

only had different languages and cultures (and religions), but also could not be divided into clear territorial demarcations and experienced great economic inequalities, such as Bauer underlines in the reference work on the subject: *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Bauer, 1907, 2000: 342). The problem is presented from the offset in all its crudity: "those national struggles that rightly attracted the curiosity of Europe, due to the aversion that some citizens feel against the aspirations of others became clear early on in that state" (MOE: 36). The structure of the Empire was not only based on the domination of Austria over Hungary, and of both over other nationalities or non-territorial minorities (not to mention structural and pervasive anti-Semitism), but ultimately on the only stable link between them: not a political-territorial agreement or institutional design, but the very person of the Emperor "by the grace of God". As Roth ironically states in *Radetzkymarsch:* "No majesty in Europe depends so much on the grace of God and the faith of peoples in the grace of God. The Emperor of Germany shall continue to rule when God abandons him; he shall reign by the grace of the Nation. The Emperor of Austria-Hungry cannot allow God to forsake him. But now God has forsaken him" (Roth, 2020: 186).

To the dismay of the activists of Parallel Action: "if an Austrian was asked where he was from, he could not answer, as would be expected, 'I am from the *Kingdoms and provinces represented in Parliament*', since they no longer exist; he would therefore prefer to say: I am Polish, Czech, Italian, Friulian, Ladin, Slovenian, Croat, Serbian, Slovakian, Ruthenian, Wallachian. These are the so-called nationalisms" (MOE: 450). Musil emphasizes the political aporia of the Austro-Hungarian world: no solution to the question of nationalities was possible without overthrowing the entire regime of the Empire that bore at its core the structural oppression of nationalities: "The kakanien policy of nationalities employed the following method: the government, in alternating cycles of more or less 6 months, either proceeded to punish an insubordinate nationality, or respected it prudently. Over time, even the German 'nationality', which played such an important role in Kakania because it always sought to make the state powerful, began to feel like an oppressed nation!" (MOE: 515).

Thirdly, the different characters in the novel exemplify the main conflicting positions around the national question in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (See Image II). Musil skilfully superimposes the three dimensions: empire, nation and narrative. The crisis of the Empire and the agglomeration of national disagreements and conflicts of a very different nature, render the foundational unity of the realistic novel or the *bildungsroman* impossible. An unstoppable polyphony of multiple voices, agencies and discursive heterogeneity that emerge against the dominant discourse of the Empire renders the forced monody of "kakanien nationalism" chimerical. A short

inventory contains the following variants of nationalism professed by different characters:

a.- *Leinsdorf*: Imperialism, late feudalism, wealthy aristocracy, Austrian-German nationalism. Influence of Fichte and the *Reden an die deutsche Nation*.

b.- *Arnheim*: Prussian Nationalism, pan-Germanism, German Mitteleuropa, German Empire (Germany and Austria-Hungary).

c.- *Stumm*: Militarist and racist nationalism. Apology for the First World War. Pre- announcement of annexation ("Anschluss").

d.- *Leo Fischel*: liberal nationalism, bourgeoisie, humanism, Jewish minority.

e.- *Gerda Fischel*: ("blonde, free, German, and strong, who was nothing like her parents"), anti-Semitic and proto-fascist nationalism.
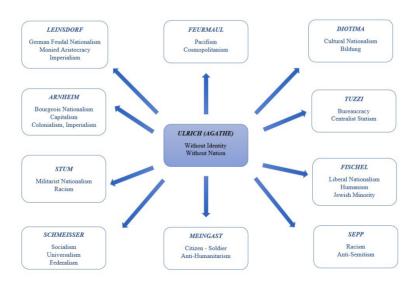
e.- *Diotima*: cultural nationalism, *Bildung*.

f.- *Tuzzi*: Bureaucracy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, highly centralist statist, moderation that gives way to pro-German alignment in the First World War.

g.- *Sepp*: proto-fascist youth, racist German nationalism, anti-Semitism, "anti-Jewish- capitalist student circle".

h.- *Feuermaul*: pacifism, anti-war, cosmopolitanism.

i.- *Meingast*: militarism, "soldier of the nation," "systematically executed cruelty," anti- humanitarianism.

j.- *Schmeiser*: socialism, republicanism, federalism.

FIGURE 1. Ideas about the Nation in *The man without qualities,* by R. Musil. Source: own elaboration.

The thought of Musil on the Nation would be misunderstood if the acerbic passages of *The Man Without Qualities* ("humanistic moments that recall the relations between the core and the nation") entailed the hypercritical abandonment of the idea of nation in the hands of its organic formulations from the State or against the State. To this end, some of his post-war essays are of great interest, above all "Die Nation als Ideal und als Wirklichkeit" (1921) and "Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom" (1923). An exquisite critique of essentialist nationalism is substantiated in these essays. The experience of war, the radicalization of German nationalism, suggests an elaborate line of argument tending to account for the mechanism of national identity generating the European warfare of the time (jointly "with Wilson and the wooden horse of Troy of the fourteen points"): "an intoxicating feeling of having for the first time something in common with every German. Suddenly, one became a particle, humbly dissolved in a suprapersonal event ('überpersonlihes Geschehen') and sheltered by it, experiencing the nation as something truly corporeal, as if mystical ancestral features that had remained dormant for centuries had suddenly awakened, and millions of human beings were suddenly seduced into dying for the nation" (Musil, 2000: 1060).

Musil explores critically and in detail the substantialist concept of nation based on *race*: the generalised "confusion between the concept of Nation and that of race", according to which "the theological misrepresentation that leads to the assertion that human beings are made up of their race, where precisely much of our national idealism consists in that disease of thought" (Musil, 2000: 1064) occurred. In his essays from the 1920s, Musil insists repeatedly on the political connection between organicist nationalism, the nation conceived as a *unanimous organic totality* from the "inner frontier" (Fichte) between us/them, self/other, friend/enemy, racism, militarism and war: "German thought is based both on racial fantasies and a philosophy of sacrifice in the name of that sum of sums that is the state, in an idea of original sin which can only be redeemed by merging with the whole into a gigantic mass. That nothing without feelings, ideas or decisions, even if it is not the nation, is nevertheless the substance that keeps it alive... A 'we' that has no bearing on reality. 'We the Germans', such is the fiction of a supposed community. But *the true 'we' is:* '*We are nothing to each other*'" ("wir sind einender nichts") (my italics) (Musil, 2000: 1070). From this perspective, the nation becomes hypostasized as a collective subject that engulfs individuals and proceeds not only in its external projection as annexation, war, etc. but also extends inwards in the excision of the heterogeneity at the heart of the people, in the search for the pristine purity of a collective subject endowed with a predetermined destiny: "nationalism is only a particular case of forced nostalgia for a faith. The human being can certainly find shelter in a

community. But the community that is a nation, based and closed in on itself, no longer has that support to offer, and seeks it in an underlying dimension, in race, in religion" (Musil, 2000: N 1363).

This critique of the organic nation, in its *Blut und Boden* version, does not imply, however, that Musil extrapolates it in a rejection of the idea of nation *tout court*. Indeed, reprising the theme of "the possibility of being otherwise" ("anderer Zustand"), national identity, as was the case with individual subjectivity, possesses infinite possibilities of political articulation, and Musil, although progressively disenchanted, explores this road with the same deconstructive/constructivist procedure now with respect to the "Nation" instead of the "self". Here, too, there is a transit "from the collapse of a unified tradition to the exploration of emerging forms in modern culture" (Luft, 1980: 235), an attempt to overcome the moment of pure negativity, of the "gar Nichts", of absolute nothingness, in the open and contingent search to "satisfy the demands of univocity without sacrificing multiplicity".

The starting point is "the audacity to postulate national feeling as a 'question', to criticize the nation as an 'ideal' overdetermined as a substantial community, to listen to the political and cultural dimensions that are in the depths of the national phenomenon, that is, to discard a simple escape from the idea of nation to delve into universalist cosmopolitanism, to seek 'a mere morality of Civilization that renounces the beautiful atavism of Kultur'" (Musil, 2000: 1072), leaving the hegemony of national identity in the hands of racist and anti-Semitic nationalisms. Indeed, for Musil: "Those for whom the nation simply does not exist presuppose it too easily" (Musil, 2000: 1060). However, the lesson of the War is very different: "the human being has been revealed to be a surprisingly more manipulable mass than is usually assumed" (Musil, 2000: 1045), a sort of liquid mass, which lives in a "non-vectorial state" ("ungerichteter Zustand"), that "discouraged mixing like iron particles in a non-magnetic field", and in the feverish search for a collective "self", to sink into a mass that provides meaning, a point of reference in a world characterised by uncertainty. "To be precise, the nation is a fantasy ("Einbildung") in all versions that have been offered of it" (Musil, 2000: 1071), but this imaginary Nation has more opportunities than that of becoming a crystallized ideal in the search of solid foundations, of firm ground, "das feste Land" as Herder would say, on which to stand up to the modern (economic, political and cultural) crisis of subjectivity, in the search for "firm points of reference". On the contrary, there is another opportunity, regarding which Musil has doubts, between confidence and despair, throughout a lifetime moving between two wars; namely: "the institutional character of the concept of nation has not been recognized, as something that should be produced, but is considered as something already instituted, which already

exists". On the other hand: "the awareness of what is happening demands that the nation and the state be no longer treated as absolute 'ideals', but as objects that must respond to their purpose.". Concerning *Ideal,* that is, imbued with holistic, metaphysical, biological, or bureaucratic-militaristic oversimplifications, the "Nation", and also the "State" or the "People" are "outdated". However, concerning *political concepts*, "it is necessary to examine them as questions and not as answers, not to see in them deep substrates of phenomena, but complex social phenomena, to consider them not as starting points but sociological results, in other words, as products and not as producers" (Musil, 2000: 1366).

Here is the emergence of an increasingly unlikely "other" national identity, assumed not as a seamless essence, predestined to ethnic cleansing and war, but as a contingent, open and indeterminate process, that "ein Prozess des werdens" as Bauer would state in that regard (Bauer, 2000: 154). Hence the precarious political possibility of another synthesis, of another democratic and pluralistic articulation of national identity. This is the reason why Musil defends the political need for "ideology", required to achieve a minimum of "subjective coherence", and also for the creation of those "bonds that sustain the life of human beings", without which a person would remain an "amorphous", asocial and pathological being. The eventual possibility, in short, of moving from a shattered subjectivity to a shared, pluralistic, non-racist identity.

5. Concluding Remarks

Such is the musilian response to the *Ichlosigkait* of Modernity which extends into *Heimatlosigkeit* in the *Finis Austriae*: the *extraterritoriality* ("Exterritorialität"), the lucidity of looking for valuable aspects, even in what horrifies us, from the condition of "stateless and polyglot à *tout faire"* like that of the protagonist of *Der Tod meines Bruders Abel* by Gregor Von Rezzori. For Musil, the exit from the search for solid foundations of identity in race or nation is as false as the resigned and cynical acceptance of fragmentation, the anything goes, and the closing of horizons. In the search for an "ethics" as an atemporal opening contingent on other possibilities, Musil develops a constructivist perspective, alien to the metaphysics of the subject, which deprives him of shelter and also of any subjective consolation (as "author") or national community (as "Austrian", as "German") in that, therefore, *Unheimliche Heimat*, to use Sebald's words: homeland without welcome, without any warmth.

Lou Andreas Salomé had expressed with stark lucidity the high personal

cost of this rare "unnational" obsession (*Unnational*), in an evocative letter of 1924 ("April") to Rainer M. Rilke, written when the latter had already passed away, that could well have been dedicated to Musil: "now that we Germans are politically confronted with the question of nationalism, I wonder to what extent it might have been fatal for your destiny for if you had felt such strong antipathy towards your condition as an Austrian. It is possible to think that a country, loved in a primary way (the blood community) would have protected you from anxieties, from the condemnation of yourself. In the soil of the homeland ("Heimat"), with its stones, its trees, there is something sacrosanct that reaches into the very core of our being" (Andreas-Salomé & Rilke, 1952: 231).

Beyond Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* by Joyce, in that improbable attempt to reconcile Jewish and Irish identity (Lewis, 200: 48), supported by a "negative notion of Irishness, which allows a place for alterity" (O'Brien, 1998: 243), Musil gradually despairs of finding in the political plasticity of human beings, which facilitates their bellicose and racist manipulation, an eventual opportunity for accommodating plurinationality on a cultural and democratic basis. For him, such a dream, pursued in the field of social sciences by Austrian Marxists like Renner and Bauer (Máiz & Pereira, 2020), was already doomed in interwar Europe. It was nothing more than a hope that had failed twice, both in the First World War and during the latter rise of Nazism, the *Anschluss*, the Second World War, and the postwar Austrian national myth as the "first victim of National Socialism" (Tschiggerl, 2020: 12). Meanwhile, Musil, in distressing economic conditions, continued to struggle with his infinite novel and unchanging theme: "the loneliness that is desperate to one day become welcoming" (Cacciari, 2004: 87).

Many years later, Canetti would recall: "Toute courtoisie lui semblait suspecte. Il ne se sentait pas 'déplacé' en temps de Guerre, il y voyait une confirmation de lui même" (Canetti, 1983: 656). Born in Klagenfurt, neither Czech nor German nor Austrian, a student and itinerant citizen in Eisenstadt, Brno, Brussels, Berlin and Vienna, settled in Geneva and with a mostly Jewish reading public, Musil stands as the highest, tormented literary expression of that extraterritorial, unnational condition, emerging in the time of Europe between wars to which Otto Bauer referred: "little loved and unreliable, in times of national conflicts suspected of treason and turn coat" (Bauer, 2000: 315).

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