

# Allegorical Dissections of Capitalism: A Post-Modern Reading of José Saramago's *The Cave*

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**Abstract:** This research paper delves into José Saramago's *The Cave* (2000) to examine the intricate thematic landscape that highlights a reality dominated by the proliferation of replicas and appearances. These phenomena appear to challenge and potentially supersede traditional values, particularly those intertwined with familial and occupational relationships. Within this narrative, Saramago deftly crafts a world where the influence of neoliberalism supersedes all other guiding principles, giving rise to a new paradigm of meaning shaped by the omnipresence of replicas, thereby blurring the boundaries of the so-called real world. This paper endeavors to position Saramago's narrative firmly within the framework of postmodern allegory, shedding light on the broader cultural and philosophical implications of his work. This reading of the novel primarily reveals that the prevailing system in social relations and human consciousness is capitalism, where mechanisms of discipline enforce subservience through contracts that benefit the Center, as seen in the book involving Cipriano's goods. Saramago foreshadowed a surreal, digitally-focused reality with the allure of social media, exacerbated by the pandemic landscape. We are surrounded by simulacra and anesthetizing influences. Saramago's reinterpretation of Plato's cave allegory involves journeying into the cave to escape a world of illusion and surveillance. Interactions with others help us perceive ourselves, emphasizing human values and rationality while criticizing the reduction of human existence to profit generation and technological spectacles.

**Keywords:** Allegory, Saramago, Capitalism, Post-Modern, Social Critique

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## 1. Introduction

In line with George Orwell's portrayal in *1984*, a world characterized by comprehensive surveillance and total control reflects a totalitarian regime wherein the ruling authority exercises absolute dominion over individuals, extending from their tangible actions to the realm of their thoughts. George Orwell drew inspiration from the immediate post-World War II landscape, with particular emphasis on the German and Russian instances. These nations exemplified the totalitarian archetype, stifling any form of dissent and punishing it swiftly. These governing entities assumed complete control over the entire apparatus of the state, quashing any alternative political entities and dictating directives across all facets of public and private

existence. Even literary works were compelled to adhere to the party's prescribed narratives. Orwell encapsulated this totalitarian essence within the framework of a novel.

However, as the 20th century progressed, a transformation unfolded, ushering in a novel paradigm of authority. Following World War II, state governments were increasingly influenced by economic considerations. As expounded by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, instances, such as that of Germany, saw the formation of state structures rooted in economic imperatives due to the devastation and dismantling of their political infrastructure. These states did not coalesce around a social contract or a system of legal norms but rather around an indispensable financial order. This model proliferated, driven by the inherent tendency of liberal capitalism to continually expand

its sphere of influence. According to the principles of the German neoliberal schools, the optimal function of the state was perceived as refraining from intervening in the economic sector and instead allowing the market to autonomously establish its equilibrium. State policies were devised to abstain from interfering in economic markets, intervening only when necessary to prevent the emergence of monopolies.

## 2. Philosophical and Socio-Political Backdrop

Walter Eucken's 'ordoliberalism' and the concept of a 'social market economy' provide an illustrative embodiment of this paradigm. Eucken's ordoliberalism, a distinctive German iteration of traditional neoliberalism, posits that the state's role is to create the political framework conducive to the flourishing of economic liberty. In contrast to laissez-faire, which had been observed to foster the emergence of cartels and an excessive concentration of power by the 1930s, ordoliberalism seeks to circumscribe the economic authority of individuals, corporations, and associations. This is actualized through the establishment of a legal and institutional framework that safeguards private property, enforces contractual obligations, upholds liability, ensures free market entry, and maintains monetary stability. The state's function is to cultivate a well-functioning competitive "Ordnung [2]" (order), within which private actors can operate without frequent discretionary state interference.

While not of German origin, Friedrich Hayek's ideas wielded substantial influence on the global neoliberal ideological landscape. He held close ties with the Mont Pelerin Society, an institution dedicated to the promotion of classical liberal and neoliberal ideologies. In his seminal work *The Use of Knowledge in Society* (1945), Hayek argued that the price mechanism facilitates the sharing and synchronization of localized and personal knowledge, enabling society's members to pursue diverse and intricate objectives through a principle of spontaneous self-organization. He juxtaposed the price mechanism with central planning, contending that the former allows for more rapid adaptation to specific temporal and geographical circumstances. [6]

Ludwig Erhard, a prominent German economist and political figure, is renowned for spearheading West Germany's post-war economic reforms and the ensuing economic recovery, often referred to as the 'Wirtschaftswunder' or 'economic miracle.' [13] During his tenure as Minister of Economic Affairs under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer from 1949 to 1963, he championed the concept of the 'social market economy,' which continues to underpin Germany's economic policies in the 21st century.

The influence of these ideas reverberated across Europe in diverse ways. The world in which neoliberalism eclipses other governing principles is the world vividly depicted by José Saramago in his novel *The Cave*. Saramago frequently employs an initial foray into the fantastical in his speculative

fiction, typically introducing premises that have extensive universal implications. For example, in *Blindness*, an epidemic of blindness engulfs an entire city; *Seeing* explores a scenario where nearly the entire population votes with blank ballots, challenging the principles of democracy. In *Death at Intervals*, death ceases its activities, and for months, no one passes away. In *The Stone Raft*, the Iberian Peninsula detaches from the European continent and drifts independently in the ocean.

Conversely, in *The Cave*, the initial premise is firmly grounded in reality. It portrays a society where the economy firmly dictates the prevailing rules. It is essential to emphasize that this is not a mere abstract concept but rather an authentic reflection of our existing world. Throughout the narrative, every facet of life is contingent upon economic factors and the principles of the market. Any element that fails to yield a profit or does not directly impact economic processes is consequently relegated to the realm of insignificance, often being disregarded or replaced. This is a phenomenon that Foucault scrutinized, particularly in his analysis of Ludwig Erhard's address in Frankfurt following World War II. Foucault delves into the implicit connotations of Erhard's statements, elucidating how the imperative of averting the specter of a new totalitarian regime is offset by the establishment of economic freedom. This economic freedom serves, to some extent, as a mechanism triggering the formation of political sovereignty, as Foucault suggests, "The economy produces legitimacy for the state, which guarantees it. In other words – and this is a genuinely important phenomenon, certainly not unique in history but, at least in our era, rather singular – the economy creates public law. [3]"

Much like George Orwell, Saramago constructs a world, or more precisely, a city. In this city resides the Center, which constitutes the epicenter of all power, albeit without the enigmatic shroud seen in *1984*. Within this society, everything is overt, governed by market laws and logic. Any element that does not align with the operations of this system falls outside the Center's sphere of interest. Saramago, akin to Orwell, undertakes the task of scrutinizing reality and then accentuating its features. Consequently, distinguishing between the realms of invention and reality can be a formidable endeavor. The only viable method of navigating this narrative terrain is to remain faithful to the initial premise and apply it consistently throughout the narrative: the laws of the market delineate the world being portrayed, consequently influencing its geographical features, mechanisms of repression, societal constructs, language, and the choices made by its characters. In this world, individuals have a solitary avenue for their existence: by aligning with this system, as existing outside it proves to be an arduous, if not impossible, endeavor. Work remains the sole conduit through which individuals can integrate themselves into this system and, by extension, the Center.

## 3. Capitalist Critique in *The Cave*

Cipriano Algor and Marçal Gacho serve as the novel's

initial characters and are among its primary protagonists. Marta Algor, Cipriano's daughter and Marçal's wife, later joins this central cast. Cipriano, as the familial patriarch, is a 64-year-old artisan specializing in manual pottery craftsmanship, producing ceramic items such as plates, amphorae, and pitchers. His production methods adhere to traditional techniques, rendering his creations as antiquated relics. In response to a significant decline in consumption, the Center ceases to commission Cipriano's products. In Saramago's depicted world, such artisanal work falls out of favor and finds no place in contemporary consumer demand. Products are beholden to market dictates, and any deviation from this norm results in their obsolescence. This juxtaposition between the past and the present significantly influences the characters' lifestyles and the hierarchy of their relationships.

In examining the characters' lifestyles, a notable disparity in terms of time management emerges. The Center is emblematic of ceaseless activity and unwavering continuity, with operations persisting around the clock, even during nocturnal hours, often in an imperceptible manner. Conversely, Cipriano's work encompasses intermittent breaks. The narrative dedicates extensive chapters to the meticulous placement of figurine molds intended for sale at the Center by Cipriano and Marta. Furthermore, Cipriano's work is a source of profound satisfaction. For him, it transcends mere income generation; it is a wellspring of pride. Work serves as the means through which Cipriano perceives his role in the world, and he is unable to envision an alternative way of life. In moments of perceived business failure, he even contemplates suicide.

### 3.1. Marxian 'Labour'

In his seminal work *Capital*, Karl Marx elucidates 'labour' as a fundamental, inherent aspect of human existence, encompassing the interaction between human forces, natural forces, resources, and abilities. Marx underscores the role of 'human consciousness' in distinguishing human labour from that of animals, emphasizing the imaginative aspect of human labour in the creation process. Satisfaction derived from one's work is thus one of the defining features of traditional vocations like Cipriano's [8]. Chris T. Schulenberg's reading of *The Cave* includes this emphasis on creativity and uniqueness, "Inspiration requires a personal independence on part of the artist that Globalization's uniformity discourages in its quest for the most desirable (economic) product. [11]" In contrast, Marçal, employed as a guard at the Center, never exhibits any contentment with his role. His justifications primarily revolve around the notions of honor and the ethics associated with his uniform, as opposed to deriving pleasure from his work. The department head, with whom Cipriano explores the prospect of selling terracotta statues to the Center, readily admits that his utility is contingent upon the Center's requirements and acknowledges that he may eventually be discarded like a product.

Isaura Madruga, the woman with whom Cipriano develops

a romantic attachment, is compelled to seek employment due to her widowhood. She commences work at a small store located outside the city, where she is tasked with sales and packaging. In response to Marta's inquiry regarding her satisfaction with the new job, Isaura's response is notably succinct: "You get used to it. [9]" The author's commentary further underscores the magnitude of this sacrifice. These elements collectively illuminate how the pleasure derived from work and the accompanying satisfaction are intrinsically linked to 'outdated occupations' that flourished in an era preceding the Center's ascendancy. Affection between individuals remains insulated from the Center's logical framework, instead harkening back to echoes from a bygone era. Notably, the Algor family, consisting of the father and daughter (and the mother during her lifetime), who have perpetually toiled in the kiln, exhibits a significantly stronger bond than the tenuous connections prevalent within Marçal's family, individuals aspiring to immerse themselves in the Center's environment. The world of traditional occupations, epitomized by the Algor family, is now relegated to the annals of history and teeters on the brink of extinction.

Marçal Gacho occupies the role of a security guard at the Center, yet he lacks a residential status within its confines, dwelling outside the city's precincts. He patiently awaits an anticipated promotion that would grant him residential privileges within the Center. It is imperative to underscore that the geographical proximity or distance from the Center engenders a hierarchical structure. Those ensconced within the Center's boundaries wield more substantial influence than their counterparts dwelling on the periphery. This disparity in location bestows the capacity to make determinative decisions that exert palpable ramifications on the lives of those situated outside the Center. If Cipriano were to devise an alternative trading mechanism, potentially identifying a market for his crafted figurines that would enable him to perpetuate his work, the hierarchical relationship between the two characters could conceivably attain parity. In such a scenario, Cipriano might gain the legitimacy and fortitude to reject residing within the Center.

### 3.2. Hierarchies as a Capitalist Outcome

This divergence constitutes a notable distinction between *1984* and *The Cave*. Orwell's narrative is marked by an absence of decision-making autonomy. In Saramago's work, conversely, the veneer of decision and personal agency is perceptible. However, a deeper exploration reveals that this semblance of choice and self-determination is intrinsically tied to the Center. Those existing beyond the Center's confines are devoid of prescribed regulations to adhere to, in stark contrast to the residents. Orwell's Big Brother vigilantly scrutinizes the mental anomalies of his subjects, and their existence, and consequently, the degree of control exerted upon them, is inextricably linked to their capacity to withstand the pervasive thought regime imposed upon them.

Saramago's narrative brings out the hierarchy of places as per their geographical status. In the opening two chapters of

the novel, Saramago presents a vivid depiction of the landscapes beyond the city limits. This geographic structure exhibits a resemblance to an onion with concentric layers. The outermost layer is known as the 'Green Belt,' where areas dedicated to cultivation can be found. This region is characterized by gray-green and rusty greenhouses, fostering the growth of crops underneath. Subsequent to the Green Belt is the 'Industrial Belt,' equally dominated by the color gray, which pervades throughout much of the narrative. In this layer, the structures appear to increase in size over time, and the network of factory pipes seems to multiply. Beyond this zone lies an area that appears devoid of any activity except theft, where trucks traversing the road cutting transversely through the layer often face blockades and robberies. The frequency of thefts results in the huts of these thieves gradually encroaching upon the road. Finally, a no-man's land stands as a demarcation separating the huts from the city and, by extension, the Center. The city encompasses various facilities, entertainment venues, residential districts, and warehouses for the storage of incoming goods. At the extreme periphery of this multi-layered configuration, approximately thirty kilometers from the city, lies a populated region that is alternately referred to as the countryside or a cluster of houses adjacent to a foul-smelling stream. It is within this area that Cipriano and Marta have made their home.

As mentioned previously, the social hierarchy between individuals is intrinsically linked to their proximity or distance from the Center. This same principle is applied to geographic locations: those dwelling in the periphery hold no significance for the Center. This inhabited area becomes a forgotten space, even less substantial than the huts concealed by the thieves. In order to gain insight into the wielded power, one must explore the inner workings of this structure and examine the nature of the relationship between the city and the Center. This relationship forms an inseparable connection between the two entities, rendering the existence of the city contingent upon the activities of the Center in terms of daily life, rhythms, diversions, and, significantly, control.

### 3.3. Capitalist Modes of Control

Marçal, who serves as a guard, exemplifies this feature. In this context, should one hypothetically envision the Center as a mere corporation, albeit on a grander scale, it could be conceivable that the Center might employ guards for its protection, akin to any commercial enterprise encountered in a European city. However, the role of the Center's guards is far from that of safeguarding a conventional business. This becomes evident from the early stages of the narrative, as Marçal's responsibilities extend to social life control. In the concluding chapters, as Marçal, Marta, and Cipriano ascend an elevator to the thirty-fourth floor of the Center and gain a vantage point overlooking its inner operations—nightclubs, shopping centers, and social gathering spots—Marçal explicitly acknowledges that even the elevator serves as a tool of control. The life within the Center demands oversight, and this scrutiny extends to facets extending beyond the

surveillance of entrances to shopping centers. It encompasses the regulation of social life within the Center. Cipriano's exploration of the Center's many realities as he partakes in daily walks is met with immediate notice by a guard who scrutinizes his documents and advises him to abandon his curiosity in favor of other activities.

In the seventh book of Plato's philosophical discourse *Republic*, specifically within the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon, a scenario is presented in which several individuals find themselves confined within the confines of a cave. These individuals are compelled to be physically restrained, their visages oriented towards the interior wall of the cave. Their limited mobility constrains them to maintain their visual focus strictly forward, thus affording them only the capacity to perceive the shadowy projections originating from objects in the external, authentic world. Notably, within this context, one individual successfully extricates themselves from these physical constraints, thereby effectuating their departure from the cave's confines. In doing so, they transcend the state of perceptual ignorance that is emblematic of solely perceiving the representations of tangible objects. Within Plato's philosophical framework, the veritable realm of perfection is situated within the domain of abstract ideas. In contradistinction, the empirical world we inhabit, often referred to as the sensible realm, is postulated as a mere facsimile or reflection of the transcendent realm of these ideal forms.

In a comparative context, Saramago's allegorical narrative emerges as a contemporary reinterpretation of Plato's renowned allegorical cave. Within the narrative framework, individuals are compelled to embark upon a transformative sojourn into a metaphorical cave. This existential venture leads to the apprehension of the metaphorical chains that have hitherto constrained their existence. In this contemporary allegory, the Center serves as an emblematic counterpart to Plato's cave. Within the precincts of the Center, individuals endure a condition of physical confinement, ostensibly protected by an illusion of security, albeit under the pervasive scrutiny and surveillance of external authorities. This concept is conspicuously exemplified through the following illustrative passage:

"In this swiftly moving environment, elevators fulfill a role that extends beyond their traditional function, serving as an ancillary instrument of scrutiny," articulated Marçal. To this, Cipriano Algor inquired further, seeking clarification: "Do the guards, sensors, video cameras, and other surveillant apparatus not suffice for this purpose?" In response, Marçal affirmed, stating, "Given the passage of tens of thousands of individuals through this precinct on a daily basis, the imperative of maintaining stringent security measures remains. [9]"

Furthermore, the Center incorporates the presence of law enforcement and the military, which is only briefly alluded to in the context of the roadblocks that Cipriano fears. As he drives his van toward the Center, Cipriano encounters a truck that has overturned and caught fire, with the army and police en route to the nearby huts, presumably to apprehend the

alleged thieves and arsonists. Upon later reflection, Cipriano gains a revelation: the purported thieves could not have set the truck ablaze, suggesting that it may have been the army and police who initiated the fire to establish a valid pretext for pillaging the huts.

The unemployed populace residing in disadvantaged urban areas or similar forms of overcrowded housing alluded to by Žižek finds a parallel in the literary realm of Saramago. In Saramago's narrative, these individuals are specifically embodied as the denizens of what he terms "shantytowns." It is imperative to acknowledge that these shantytown residents exist outside the bounds of the small village where the pottery business is situated, as well as beyond the purview of the adjacent urban center, and notably, they do not pertain to the geographical expanse designated as the "Industrial Belt" in the narrative. Saramago characterizes these shantytowns as "disorderly conglomerations of makeshift huts, constructed from a heterogeneous assortment of predominantly impermanent materials, serving as rudimentary safeguards for their inhabitants who grapple with substandard living conditions, seeking refuge from the external elements. [9]" It is worth emphasizing that the residents of these shantytowns, by way of illustration, lack any discernible commercial engagement with the Center, as they remain estranged from the collective consumerism that characterizes the merchandise proffered within this precinct.

### 3.4. *Pervasiveness of Capitalism*

A particularly disconcerting aspect pervasive throughout the entire novel underscores the expansive nature of the Center. The Center represents a living entity that continuously proliferates, both in terms of its physical width and vertical height, with subterranean sections perpetually under excavation. Its mass extends outward, encroaching upon the no-man's land. The Center and the huts confront each other, as the destiny of the Center entails engulfing all within its purview. The sole region that may mount resistance is the Industrial Belt, which, as posited by Saramago, similarly exhibits a tendency to expand. The perpetual expansion of the Center signifies that none can consider themselves beyond its sphere of influence. To such an extent, the concluding choice of the protagonists necessitates their withdrawal to a distant locale. However, given the omnipotence exerted by the Center throughout the novel, the notion of an "outside" of this sphere of power is rendered implausible.

Shopping malls have become a focal point of interest for philosophers and cultural critics due to their intricate ramifications on society, consumer culture, and the human experiential domain. Prominent philosophers, such as Jean Baudrillard and Herbert Marcuse, have undertaken investigations into the manners by which consumer culture, driven by the forces of capitalism, fashions the desires and conducts of individuals within these commercial precincts. Baudrillard, in particular, propounds the notion that the shopping mall epitomizes the hyperreal, representing a realm where simulated encounters and commodities hold sway.

Some contend that these malls are culpable in the standardization of urban landscapes, giving rise to what urbanist Jane Jacobs termed "the death and life of great American cities." The philosopher Walter Benjamin, too, delved into the influence of architecture on human encounters, a perspective that can be aptly applied to the design of shopping malls. Philosophers have delved into the actualized experiences of shopping malls, drawing from the philosophical discipline of phenomenology. They probe the modes through which individuals perceive and engage with the mall milieu and investigate how these spaces mold human subjectivity. The philosophical oeuvres of thinkers such as Gaston Bachelard on the poetics of space and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on corporeal perception hold relevance in this context.

In delineating the desolate and vacuous dimensions of contemporary spaces, Zygmunt Bauman directs our attention to the shopping center, a locale he characterizes as a "placeless place." The sociologist posits that within the domains of consumerism, individuals encounter "an offering that no 'genuine' external reality can furnish: the nearly flawless equilibrium between liberty and security. [1]" Within these spaces, the conventional notion of chronological time becomes blurred (one remains oblivious to whether it is day or night); nevertheless, the dominance of consumerism persists. In regard to the "sanctuary of consumption," Beatriz Sarlo, in her work "Scenes of Post-Modern Life," contends that the shopping center serves as a convenient component for the modern-day nomadic lifestyle. Once an individual has navigated through a shopping center anywhere across the globe, they are equipped to "utilize any other, in another city, even one foreign, where the language and customs remain unfamiliar. [10]" In essence, what reigns supreme in this global expanse adorned with universally recognized brands is the ability to negotiate transactions, equipped with an accepted currency and a common lingua franca for communicating with vendors.

The concept of 'extraterritorial culture' purports to be inclusive, yet it subtly conditions and confines individuals by inundating them with images and representations of simulacra. These simulacra are presented as idealized aspirations for personal fulfillment. But what are the nature of these dreams? Sarlo elucidates this phenomenon:

"Cultural icons dream, and we, in turn, are dreamt by these cultural icons. We find ourselves freely envisioned by magazine covers, posters, advertisements, and fashion. Each of us discovers a thread in this narrative woven with universally shared desires, promising to guide us towards something deeply personal. The volatility of modern society finds its equilibrium in the realm of dreams, where we navigate the 'language of our social identity' by employing patches borrowed from various sources. Culture conceives of us as a patchwork quilt, a collage of fragments, an unfinished whole wherein one can discern the era of origin for each component, its provenance, and the archetype it aspires to emulate. [10]"

Throughout the allegory Saramago maintains this

"ideological tension [12]", between the ideal of a society where man is a central element (at the expense of objects and images that have taken center stage in capitalist society) and an awareness of the impossibility of escaping this contemporary world of images and representations.

In this manner, the market formulates desires that it then 'dreams' and extends to us. Our identity is fragmented to align with the dictates of fashion as the guiding principle. Consequently, these postmodern phenomena, as expounded by Anthony Giddens, are interwoven with shifts in subjectivity and global social organization, transpiring "against a disconcerting backdrop of high-stakes uncertainties [5]". According to Genosko [4], Guattari's insights show us that, the information channeled to us via the media, the array of devices that envelop us, and even our familial interactions do not primarily transmit ideas, meanings, or models of identity; rather, they constitute interconnected components within systems of social control.

Faced with this situation, one can discern a prevailing sense of resignation accompanied by skepticism and a distinct lack of enthusiasm on the part of the character toward this novel world. What Cipriano discovered was a profound feeling of estrangement from the environment, one engulfed by virtuality and artificiality, wherein the beaches, landscapes, fish, and other facets of nature were but artificial simulations:

"What else did you encounter during your exploratory journey?" Marta inquired. "Well, after the admission fee and the subsequent provision of a raincoat, a cap, plastic boots, and an umbrella, you proceed to a dressing room. A voice over the loudspeaker instructs you to don the attire, including the boots, raincoat, and cap. Subsequently, you enter a corridor where people are lined up in rows of four, with ample space between them for mobility. We retraced our steps, and suddenly, snow began to descend. Initially, these were scattered flakes resembling tufts of cotton, gradually intensifying. They fell in front of us like a curtain that barely permitted a view of our fellow visitors. Some persisted in keeping their umbrellas aloft, which only exacerbated the situation. Eventually, we arrived back at the dressing room, where a radiant sun greeted us." Marçal expressed doubt, "A sun in the dressing room?" "By that point, it had transformed from a dressing room into what resembled a field." Marta inquired, "And did these sensations seem genuine?" "Indeed," came the response. "They are nothing out of the ordinary compared to what one experiences in the outdoors every day. Tomorrow or the day after, I plan to head to the beach," Cipriano Algor declared. "I've already been once," Marçal mentioned. "What's it like? A tropical setting, sweltering heat, and tepid water." "What about the sand?" "There's no actual sand; the ground is made of plastic, though it appears authentic from a distance." "But, naturally, there are no waves." "That's where you're mistaken; they've incorporated a mechanism that generates waves just like the sea." "You don't say." "I do. It's astonishing what people can devise." "Indeed," Marçal concurred, "it's

somewhat disheartening. [9]"

In this quasi-metaverse, a life enshrouded in simulacra of reality, Cipriano has no intention of continuing. Paradoxically, Marçal, who aspired to dwell entirely within the place where he worked, is ignorant of certain "entertainment" options provided by the Center. In essence, the grand Center was not constructed to safeguard the working-class inhabitants. Its true concern lies with lucrative customers who persist in consumption and profit generation, underpinning the profit-centric logic of the capitalist system.

Evidently, the prevailing system is capitalism, manifesting in both microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions, within social relations and human consciousness. Amid this pervasive power, mechanisms of discipline are discernible. The means through which an economically dominated world enforces subservience are governed by contracts, which are rooted in the sole conceivable good, that which benefits the Center. The contracts or declarations required by Cipriano upon delivering his goods underscore the citizens' allegiance to a system wherein the Center presides over every facet of their existence. As Andrew Laird observes, "In Saramago's novel, there is no end to the deceitful illusion of the gigantic commercial Center which is one of the two worlds presented in the book; the other world, emblemized by Cipriano Algor's pottery workshop, is in a rapid state of decline. The workshop represents a way of life which is less and less under our control, as plant and animal species become extinct, professions become redundant, languages lose their speakers, and traditions lose their meaning. [7]"

The exclusivity clause, binding Cipriano to abstain from entering into commercial relationships with other suppliers, emphasizes the dominance of the Center. Although it may appear almost redundant given the absence of alternative buyers for his products, the prohibition serves as a means of regulating conduct. In a world where existence and rights are contingent upon economic integration with the Center, this clause functions as a mechanism to prevent any citizen from seeking alternatives to the prevailing system. The episode involving Cipriano's office underscores a critical aspect: the conception that the Center resembles a tribunal wherein individuals are assessed based on their economic behavior. The hierarchy within the Center establishes a framework wherein individuals are subservient to their superiors, yet simultaneously subject to the judgment of consumers. In this paradigm, consumers establish the rules and possess the authority to condemn individuals or enterprises deviating from the prescribed norms.

Hence, we find ourselves at the extreme of what Foucault scrutinized within the German neoliberal school: "The market economy does not subtract something from government; rather, it indicates constitutes the general index under which the rule intended to define all government actions should be placed. [3]"

## 4. Conclusion

It is of significance that in the early 2000s, Saramago

foreshadowed elements of the experience many individuals are encountering in 2023: an increasingly surreal reality, somewhat numbed by the allure of likes and approvals on social media, further accentuated by the current pandemic landscape, where the necessity of physical distancing has grown paramount. It is a world where the potential to detach from an exclusive reality exists, providing a form of solace amidst the rigors of daily life, transcending the facile propagation of animosity and prejudices, which can yield incalculable repercussions. This serves as a testament that, now more than ever, we reside within a cave enveloped by simulacra and anesthetizing influences. As Žižek observes, contrary to the situation thirty or forty years ago, today no one contemplates the future as fascist or communist, we have accepted that “global capitalism” is here to stay [14].

In the philosophical realm of Plato, the individual was required to depart from the cave to attain enlightenment. In the allegory reimagined by Saramago, as elucidated throughout this discourse, the subject was compelled to journey into the cave to unshackle themselves from the illusory world of appearances, wherein they were ensnared and subjected to pervasive surveillance. Saramago's narrative instills in us an awareness that it is through our interactions with others that we sow the potential to perceive ourselves. When Marçal, the son-in-law, directs his gaze towards Cipriano, this act initiates the process of dispelling a foggy and obscured perspective.

Saramago, as a maestro of linguistic craftsmanship, does not furnish a definitive resolution within the storyline; rather, he beckons to the reader to cultivate a discerning consciousness. He illustrates that space yet exists for the preservation of human values, such as those intertwined with familial connections and the necessity for a universal benchmark, epitomized by rationality, to counterbalance the emphasis on material possessions and profit. Furthermore, a profound critique emerges against the propensity to diminish human existence into experiences predominantly fixated on profit generation and the spectacles facilitated by technological advancements.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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