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Brazil Moving Backwards: Same Crisis, Different Scales

Moving from reception to retrospection, Markus Vinzent (2019) asks how one can write history in an "ana-chronological" way. Instead of moving forwards, from the past to the present, he wants the story to move backwards in time. In this alternative vision, the historian dislocates the cursor from the past to the present and inverts the chronographic arrow of time. Moving backwards in time, from the present to the past, "just as the miner is going down the vertical tunnel in a corf",[1] historical research starts right now, and right here. It is, therefore, necessarily and inevitably "presentist". The past becomes layered with loads of meanings as the historian moves backwards and brings the rubble from the past to the surface. My questions are related to Vinzent's. They are not "ana-chronological", however, but "katachronical" – they narrate the catastrophic political situation in Brazil. I want to look at the collapse of the country and understand how, in the span of a decade, the "land of the future" turned backwards, turned to its dictatorial past to rewrite it so as to change its future by poisoning the present with anti-democratic agitation. Can one invert "Whig history" and give a presentist account of institutional decay? Can one look back at the past from the point of a view of a possible, almost messianic future that is gone?

In this chapter, I want to outline a theoretical framework that integrates three different, but complementary perspectives on the political situation in Brazil. With historians and sociologists, I will first reflect on the role of events and the sequences of events that have punctured institutional stability and inaugurated a new political cycle (I). It opened with the uprising of social movements on the 6th of June 2013, culminated with the election of President Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 and found its provisional conclusion with the invasion of the capital on the 8th of January 2023. With sociologists and political scientists, I will next reconstruct the sequence of crises that have led to the collapse of the system (II). These crises do not just happen.

1 Markus Vinzent. *Writing the History of Early Christianity.* Cambridge 2019, 4.

They are fabricated and are a means of doing politics through provocations. Finally, with sociologists and philosophers, I will reinterpret the situation from the point of view of an empirical philosophy of history that replaces the sequence of events and the accumulation of crises into an encompassing interpretation of the epoch (III). Pondering if the social change of the last years warrants talk about epochal ruptures and civilizational change, what I thus will present is a *Zeitdiagnose* that takes the question of time seriously, almost literally, and analyses the same situation from three different disciplinary perspectives that work with different temporalities.

1 Three Temporalities

Populism in Action

I am a sociologist, not a historian. I have lived through the upheavals that have projected Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a minor figure and rabble rouser with extremist views, from the backbenches of parliament to the presidency of Brazil in 2018.[2] To understand how that was possible, one needs to return to the protests of June 2013, which constitute a genuine watershed in Brazil's political history. It all started with a protest against a small increase of twenty cents of the bus fare in São Paulo. The police reacted with brutal violence. Then, quite suddenly, mass protests spread through the country. One million people took the streets. During the "June Days", young people lived through an "impossible revolution". Little by little, however, the mobilisations were recuperated by the Right. As elsewhere, the Brazilian spring turned into a harsh winter. The Right, which had not taken to the streets since the 1964 military-civil coup, were able to massively mobilise against the reigning Workers' Party (PT). The cultural hegemony of the Left was lost. Millions of ordinary people, dressed in the official shirt of the football team, flying the beautiful green-yellow flag, found themselves in the streets singing the national anthem. Dilma Rousseff, the president and candidate of the Workers'

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[2] The political situation in Brazil has led social and political scientists (including myself) to change their research agenda. There's a plethora of "analyses of the conjuncture". Written at different times, analysing different moments (the June revolt of 2013, the impeachment of President Roussef in 2016, the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018), the following analyses are among the best and the most representative: Jesse Souza, *A radiografia do golpe.* Rio de Janeiro 2016; Leonardo Avritzer. *O pêndulo da democracia.* São Paulo 2019; Rosana Pinheiro-Machado. *Amanhã vai ser maior.* São Paulo 2020 and Marcos Nobre. *Limites da democracia. De Junho de 2013 ao governo Bolsonaro.* São Paulo 2022.

Party, was re-elected in 2014, but the defeated candidate contested the results, which led to an "Americanisation" of Brazilian politics.

The FIFA World Cup in 2014 brought nothing (apart from an anti-terrorist law) and ended with a humiliating 7–1 victory of Germany against the national team. A massive corruption scandal exploded in 2014. It involved a vast network of kickbacks, bribes and money laundering that implicates the leadership of the Workers' Party. Sergio Moro, the judge who led the investigation, became an instant folk hero. In 2015, the crisis of the "subprimes" that had engulfed the United States (2008–2009) and the sovereign debt crisis that had pushed Europe into disarray (2010–2011), arrived on Brazil's shores. The years of economic growth were over and the country entered a long and serious economic crisis. The ruling elites, both the old and the new, were no longer willing to sustain a social-democratic government and revolted with an "investment strike". The media latched on to corruption scandals and contributed to the emergence of an anti-political climate.

In December 2015, an impeachment process was opened against president Dilma Rousseff, not because of corruption or embezzlement, but because of an unorthodox fiscal manoeuvre. In August 2016, she was removed from office. The Left denounced the impeachment as a parliamentary coup. Michel Temer took over as interim president from 2016 till 2018. He pushed through a series of radical labour reforms. The impeachment led to an "asymmetric polarisation"[3] – asymmetric, because it is the Right wing media ecosystem that radicalised while the Left ran out of ideas. Right-wing media outlets, websites and social messaging networks (especially WhatsApp) have been more successful than their left-wing counterparts in creating a propaganda network that spreads fake news, hate speech and violent discourses against minorities. As the Right radicalised and polarisation spread from the elite to the people, the whole political spectrum was dislocated to the right. Sergio Moro, the judge who would later become minister of justice under Bolsonaro, removed "Lula", the former president of Brazil and leading candidate of the Workers' Party, from the presidential running, condemning him to prison. The military warned that a possible release of Lula could lead to dire consequences. The elections of 2018 divided the country in two antagonistic groups. Running on a platform of conservative social values, anti-corruption measures and economic liberalisation, Jair Bolsonaro attacked the liberal-democratic consensus and promised to defeat "communism". He won the elections with 55 percent of valid votes.

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3 Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts. *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics.* Oxford 2018.

In four years' time, Jair Bolsonaro has upended the New Republic (1988–2018). Through the use of populist tactics and stratagems, he has fabricated one crisis after another and sown chaos in the hope that in the midst of confusion he could declare a state of emergency and stage a *coup d'état* (against himself – like Louis Bonaparte in 1851 in France or, closer to us, Fujimori in Peru in 1992). Although the last years have been emotionally and existentially tasking, from an intellectual point of view, they have been exhilarating. In the social sciences, crises, pandemics and revolutions are, perhaps, the equivalent of experiments in the natural sciences. Everything that was stable, almost natural and taken for granted, is up for grabs. In times of social destruction, the social construction of representations, institutions and systems becomes conspicuous. Whether one wants it or not, the turn of events forces one to analyse current events in real time. Politics is on every one's mind and all one talks about. As one obsessively checks the latest news, the atmosphere becomes charged with threats. Events accelerate and crises detonate. As the country crosses one dangerous threshold after the other, advancing towards the abyss, anxiety sediments into the body and blocks the future.

Analysing the Situation

I want to try out some ideas for a sociological analysis of situations of political volatility. If one understands a "case" as an "idiosyncratic combination of elements or events,"[4] then Brazil between 2013 and 2023 is my case. I am thinking about Brazil, but want to construct a theoretical framework that may also be applicable to other countries that have been or are still facing similar situations of institutional instability. I will not go into historical detail, but will reflect on the role of temporality in a sociological analysis of the present.[5] With Karl Mannheim,[6] the founder of the sociology of knowledge, I understand "the situation" as a complex totality in which a multitude of actors and factors work together or at cross purposes in a particular moment. To understand the situation in all its complexity, one must multiply the perspectives and try to integrate them in an encompassing vision that is capable of disclosing the multiple factors that are all operating at the same time. The perspectives and narratives are first and foremost those of the actors who, each in their own way, define the situation to find their bearings in a chaotic and problematic reality that affects them directly. The actors come up with their explanations of

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4 J. Clyde Mitchell. Case and Situation Analysis. *The Sociological Review* 31:2 (1983): 187–211, 188.
5 The journal *Temporalités. Revue de sciences sociales et humaines* gives a good overview of how social scientists deal with questions of time both at the theoretical and empirical level.
6 Karl Mannheim. *Ideology and Utopia.* London 1936, 164–191.

what is happening around them. They mix anecdotes, stories and bits of news into a rambling narrative that is ideologically overdetermined. It says as much about them as about what is happening in the world.

The interpretations of the analyst are interpretations of the second order: they are systematisations of the inchoate interpretations of the situation actors have picked up from different places, including the media, into more or less coherent world views. These worldviews are encompassing subtexts that structure the explanations actors give of what is happening in their lifeworld and the world at large. In the current conjuncture, anarchism, liberalism, socialism, conservatism and populism may be considered the main worldviews that structure the narrations of the actors. It is not clear whether populism has to be considered a "thin ideology", discourse, a style or a logic of political action.[7] With its binary opposition between the people and the elites, it is probably best considered a logic of polarisation that aims to win the elections democratically (in a first moment) to undermine the rule of law and establish an authoritarian regime (in a second moment). Through comparison of the different narratives, the analyst offers a reconstruction that is both hermeneutic and structural. It is hermeneutic, because it makes sense of the stories by relating the fragments to larger complexes of meaning till they eventually crystallise into coherent world views. It is also structural, because the visions of the world that the analyst hermeneutically reconstructs are multiple. Taken together, they form a system of visions, volitions and unconscious perceptions that structure the interpretations, explanations and actions of individual and collective actors.

These interpretations of the first and second order that constitute the situation as a whole can, in turn, be reconfigured and incorporated into various scientific systems of explanation that have their own coherence and their own procedures to make sense of the events that are taking place. History, sociology, anthropology, political sciences, philosophy, economics, linguistics and psychology all have their own systems of relevance (vocabularies, theories, methodologies, bibliographies) that determine which explanations and interpretations are valid, according to their own frame of reference, and which are not.

In scientific explanations that connect common sense to worldviews and worldviews to various disciplinary frames of reference, we are thus necessarily dealing with multiple hermeneutics in which texts are continuously inserted into larger wholes and circulate between various milieus (journalism, academia, activism, politics, everyday life) till they somehow miraculously find a temporary

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7 Benjamin Moffit. *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.* Stanford 2016, 20 – 36.

coherence that makes sense of the situation. This coherence of the analysis of the situation can be undone by the next sequence of events that call for a rearrangement of the interpretations and explanations. It is important to note that in politically charged times where everything is in flux and in crisis, it is not just the analyst who offers interpretations and explanations. Everybody does. The analyst may be more aware than the common folk of the multiple layers that go into the diagnosis of the situation. At the end of the day, s/he also may be overwhelmed by the complexity of the situation, surprised by the events and given over to fear and anguish.

Events, Cycles, Civilisations

In the wake of Fernand Braudel's famous article on the *longue durée*,[8] it is customary to analytically distinguish three *durées*, each representing a different cut in the flow of time, associated with a different velocity of social change. The first cut is the short cut in which history appears as a sequence of often dramatic events that succeed each other rapidly and puncture everyday life. This is the history at the level of the individual, as one finds it in traditional histories of wars, battles, insurrections and revolutions and in the chronicles of witnesses and commentators who are living in turbulent times. As a member of the Annales School, Braudel wants to steer history away from the rhapsody of events. He therefore proposes a second cut that takes in a longer span of time and brings into the focus periods, conjunctures and cycles, which have a lower turnover than events. This variation of the temporal scale, from the short span of biographical time (measured in years) to the registration of cycles (measured in decades), is also a passage from the micro-level of actors to the meso-level of institutions and the macro-level of societies. To access this level, the analyst has to gather data from different moments and aggregate them in statistical series, like Kondratieff's cycles, for example, that register the variations of social and economic activities over longer time spans. Underneath of the periodic fluctuations of social life, by means of a third cut, Braudel seeks to uncover a deeper, structural level underneath of societies where change is much slower, so slow that it can be compared to changes of mountains, glaciers and rivers. As it often takes centuries for social, cultural and civilisational change to come through, this level only becomes visible if one looks at the *longue durée* of history.

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8 Fernand Braudel. *Écrits sur l'histoire.* Aris 1969, 41–83.

Braudel's three cuts in the flow of time operate through "variations of scale."[9] The variations of temporal scales that open up or restrict the time frame of the analysis usually also come with spatial variations. The three cuts allow one to travel back and forth along a "time line", bringing into view change of individuals, societies and civilisations as one increases the distance. They also bring into view different spaces (cities, countries and whole regions, like the Mediterranean that was at the centre of Braudel's research). As one varies the resolution, different lands come into view. It is the same land, of course, but seen at different scales. When one opens up the temporal horizons and travels through space, one sees different things that change and move at variable speeds. With a short cut, one sees the turbulence of history with rapid changing sequences of events; with the middle cut, change slows down at the same time as it widens. Change becomes less spasmodic and more rhythmical. With the long cut, change almost comes to a standstill. Hundreds, if not thousands of years of slow, almost immobile structures form the stable background against which events and conjunctures take place.

Braudel rightly notes that sociologists work with different conceptions of time: "Their time is not ours,"[10] he exclaims. Indeed, while history deals with the entire time span of human history, sociology only deals at most with the last centuries, typically with the last decades or even the last years. While it looks at social change, its investigations tend to focus on the present. Its actors are contemporaries. They are alive, one can observe and even interview them. Sociologists don't have to wait till the witnesses pass away to enter into contemporary history. They can and have to return to the past, not so much to find out "how it really was", but to discover how the past is still active in the present. For sociologists, the past is most often a past that has not passed and that continues to haunt the present. The turn to history is presentist. Even when they take the long view of history, it is to understand the actuality.

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9 Jacques Revel (ed.). *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience.* Paris 1996; Bernard Lahire. La variation des contextes dans les sciences sociales. Remarques épistémologiques. *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 51:2:2 (1996): 381–407.
10 Braudel. *Écrits*, 75.

2 Events and Narratives

Event-Structure Analysis

The question how one can relate agency to structure[11] has been at the forefront of social theory.[12] In the 1980's, various theoretical formulations that proposed to overcome the split between micro-sociologies that analyse action and interaction in situation and macro-sociologies that investigate social structures and social movements emerged almost simultaneously. Different versions have been proposed, but the ones that interest me here are the ones that directly or indirectly go back to Fernand Braudel and consider temporal structures as points of articulation between micro-agency and macro-structure. In the *Constitution of Society*,[13] Anthony Giddens is centrally concerned with the integration of the lived durée of the daily round, as analysed by phenomenologists (Schütz) and interactionists (Goffman), and the longue durée of social institutions and systems. He starts with situations of "co-presence" in everyday life (encounters between persons that can last from a few minutes to a few hours) and shows how regular streams of action are collectively regulated by symbolic representations, normative orders and political legitimations. By following cultural injunctions that regulate their actions, the bodily constraints of time and space are overcome. Actions can be coordinated across time and space and integrated in a temporal sequence that connects past, present and future generations in a single chain of collective action. As the actors pursue their ordinary actions of everyday life (they go to work, fall in love and marry), they reproduce or transform the social institutions and systems that have acquired stability over time. This may not be their intention, the reproduction or transformation of institutions and systems (like class structures, state systems or the institution of the family) are nevertheless the inevitable consequence of the actions they accomplish in the short span of their life.

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11 "Event-structure analysis" (ESA), as practised by Griffin, is not a theory of structuration, of de- or restructuration, but a formal, computer-assisted procedure for the narrative analysis of events, see Larry Griffin. Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis, and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology. *American Journal of Sociology* 98:5 (1993): 1094–1133.

12 Jeffrey C. Alexander and Bernhard Giesen. From Reduction to Linkage: The Long View of the Micro-macro Link, in: Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, Richard Munch and Neil Smelser (eds.). *The Micro-Macro Link.* Berkeley 1987, 1–43.

13 Anthony Giddens. *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration.* Cambridge 1986.

In his celebrated book on social acceleration, Hartmut Rosa also brings in temporal structures as the hinge that connects the time of everyday life (*Alltagszeit*) to biographical time (*Lebenszeit*) and historical time (*Weltzeit*).[14] Following a classic line in sociology about the social, cultural and historical construction of temporal structures, which synchronise social practices, he argues that in modernity life as a whole has been accelerated and has led to a tighter integration of systems, persons and activities. Failures of synchronisation, caused for example by train delays, strikes, terrorist attacks or mere prevarication, challenge the routine rationality of everyday life. Driven forwards into the future by technological and economic change, the temporal structures that coordinate social actions of individuals into social institutions and systems speed up the pace of daily life and induce rapid social change that ruptures the continuity between generations. When different generations have different experiences and live in different times, the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" increases. Different pasts, presents and futures collide with each other. Eventually, the acceleration of social change within society leads to a change of society. We're entering a new epoch in which social change is accelerated to the point that the integration of everyday actions, biographies and systems can no longer be assured. Unmoored from the natural rhythms of the lifeworld, the social systems are spinning out of control. Societal change is so fast and uncontrolled that history becomes directionless. The future is cancelled by hyperacceleration and humanity enters a state of an eternal, chaotic present.

With Anthony Giddens and Hartmut Rosa, we have introduced temporal structures as a mediating device that allows the analyst to connect agency to structure. The synchronisation of activities across space and time is what connects local encounters to the reproduction of social structures. The gap between the short and the long durée is thereby overcome, at least in theory. What happens now if one takes up the same question and starts wondering with historians and sociologists how events are related to structures and, more particularly, how events can lead to historical bifurcations and change structures in a relatively short span of time.[15]

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[14] Hartmut Rosa. *Social Acceleration. A New Theory of Modernity.* Translated by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys. New York 1995.

[15] The question of how small events can affect large structures is central in sociological accounts of "turning points" and "bifurcations". See William H. Sewell. *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation. Chicago* 2005; Bessin, Marc, Claire Bidart and Michel Grossetti. *Bifurcations. Les sciences sociales face aux ruptures et à l'événement.* Paris 2010; Ivan Ermakoff. The Structure of Contingency. *American Journal of Sociology.* 121:1 (2015): 64–125; Robin Wagner-Pacifici. *What is an Event?* Chicago 2017.

The dislocation from agency to events introduces contingency, singularity and accidental becomings into the picture. Events can be defined as situated occurrences that have a definite beginning and end, and also some causal impact on the next sequence of events. Etymologically, an event (from *ex* and *venire*) is an occurrence that happens, comes out of and is caused by something, and results in something else. In between the original coming out and the eventual outcome some occurrence happens that changes the course of action, of the narrative and, possibly, also of history. An event A happened. It could as well not have happened, but given that it happened and was made to happen, there's a difference between what came before and what came after the event. When an event changes the course of history, it becomes a historical event. With W. Sewell, a historical event can be defined as "a ramified sequence of occurrences that is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that results in a durable transformation of social structures."[16]

Events may be repeated. They may be spontaneous or organised into sequences of events so as to create a moment or, possibly, even a social and political movement. Occasionally, social movements succeed in their endeavour to transform social structures. Small events (e.g. the suicide of a street vendor in Tunisia, an increase of twenty centavos of the bus ticket in São Paulo, the killing of a Black Man by the police in Minneapolis), can have large effects on the system. When occasional change becomes periodic, a sequence of events may initiate another sequence of events and inaugurate a new cycle in which dramatic events that puncture routines become more regular. When this happens and agitations take on a more rhythmic character, the institutions may lose their regular power. When instability becomes the norm and crises accumulate, events may trigger a phase-change from the micro level of the situation to the macro-level of systems. The contingency and openness that characterises a sequence of events is now also to be found at the level of social systems. They enter into flux and social change at the systemic level becomes possible. In the absence of a philosophy of history that promises a radiant future, nothing guarantees, however, that systemic change is progressive. As we will see later, social agitation and social movements may lead to the social and systemic disintegration of society.

The Return of the Event

Under the spell of the Annales School, historians neglected events for a while. History was supposed to investigate "deep currents", not the "foam of history". But

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16 Sewell. *Logics*, 228.

then, partly as a result of May 1968, events made a return on the scene.[17] They did not come back in the form of the nineteenth century "histoire-bataille", though, frowned upon by Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel. Battles, coronations, elections, insurgencies, revolutions, assassinations, terrorist attacks and other momentous events that are perceived by the participants and observers alike as important historical occurrences are now analysed from various perspectives (microhistory, pragmatic history, network analysis, etc.) that investigate in detail how situated actions can change social structures. The French Revolution,[18] May 68,[19] the fall of the Berlin Wall,[20] 9/11[21] and the invasion of the Capitol in Washington in 2020 are such momentous and consequential events that mark "turning points"[22] that change the overall direction of a historical trajectory. Turning points occur by chance or choice; in all cases, they are made to happen and cannot take place without action.

The consequential events that mark a turning point, open forks and cause bifurcations are analysed retrospectively by the historian. To reconstruct what happened, s/he looks back not only from, but also forward to a particular moment in time and constructs a historical narrative. Paul Ricoeur[23] has shown that all historical narratives entail the "emplotment" of events. The historian must insert the heterogeneous events into an ongoing story that demarcates and articulates beginnings, middles and ends into a dynamic narrative. To do so, s/he must actively select the significative occurrences that precede the event, explain the consequent by its antecedents, and chain the whole sequence into a narrative with a dramatic plot. It is important to note that the emplotment of the story is of the second order. To make sense of the events, the actors themselves who directly participate in the events or follow these from a distance also need to configure the events and insert them in a story line with a beginning, middle and end. To the extent that the historian's narrative reconfigures the "prefiguration" of time as it is experienced by the actors, it comes at the end, when history has already been lived, experienced and told as "his story" or "her story". Singular events that seemed to

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17 Pierre *Nora*. Le retour de l'événement, in: Jacques Le Goff et Pierre *Nora* (eds). *Faire de l'histoire I. Nouveaux problèmes.* Paris 1974, 210–227.

18 Sewell. *Logics*, 225–270.

19 Boris Gobille. L'événement Mai 68. Pour une sociohistoire du temps court. *Annales HSS* 2 (2008): 321–349.

20 Andreas Glaeser. *Political Epistemics. The Secret Police, The Opposition and the End of East German Socialism.* Chicago 2011.

21 Wagner-Pacifici. *Event.*

22 Andrew Abbott. *Time Matters. On Theory and Method.* Chicago 2001, 240–260.

23 Paul Ricoeur. *Temps et récit.* Paris 1983.

mark at first a turning point in history can at a later stage appear as a minor moment in the story. It is only when the dust of history has settled that the story can be stabilised into history.

Pragmatist historians provide a more processual account of history that brings situated actions to the fore.[24] Switching from history as it's been made by the actors and narrated by the historian to "history in the making", they focus on the "buzzing, booming confusion" experienced by the actors. Instead of effacing the contingencies and uncertainties of the moment in a linear account of the events, they focus on the multiple and often conflicting interpretations of the situation by the actors. The actors may be participants or observers, but often times they are both. In any case, in modern societies, events are "mediatised". Before they enter history, they enter "actuality" as it is reconstructed and relayed in real time by the media that transmit the news.[25] The media do not only register and relate facts. To the extent that the facts that go into the news are amplified by radio, television, newspapers and now also in real time by social media, the media produce events. Even more, the actors themselves produce and stage events made for the media. This does not mean that without media, there would be no events. Rather, that history is now made in the media, for the media and by the media.

In turbulent times, actors continuously check the news on their mobiles, tablets and computers. The continuous stream of "breaking news", together with comments and reactions to the events, leads to a synchronisation of minds. The news is read almost at the same time as it is made. This synchronicity of "prefigurations" ("mimesis I", the prefiguration of the situation of action in Ricoeur's parlance), "refigurations" ("mimesis II", the fabrication of events by the media and their packaging of facts into breaking news) and "configurations" ("mimesis III", the reception of the news by the actors who interpret the events at the same time as they are making them) articulates time into an ongoing stream of complex experiences that forms the basis of the reconstructions by professional historians ("mimesis IV", as it were, if I may add a fourth moment to Ricoeur's[26] mimetic circle that reconfigures the lived times of the events after the facts in a scientific narrative). All accounts, including historiographic ones, are part of effective history, as it is experienced, produced and narrated by participants and observers who make history at the same time as they are made by it.

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24 Francis Chateauraynaud and Yves Cohen. *Histoires Pragmatiques*. Paris 2016.

25 Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre. *Qu'est-ce que l'actualité politique ? Événements et opinions au xxe siècle.* Paris 2022, 27–87.

26 Ricoeur. *Temps*, 85–129.

3 Cycles and Conjunctures

Analysis of the Conjuncture

Auguste Comte distinguished "organic times" from "critical times". While the former are characterised by continuity and tradition, the latter introduce discontinuities and ruptures in history. In critical times, sequences of occurrences may easily acquire momentum and get out of hand. Contingency increases and it is difficult to forecast what will happen next. The future is open and undecided. Anything can happen, at least that is how actors experience "critical junctures,"[27] those exhilarating moments of accelerated change and institutional flux when path dependencies of the past turn into forks in the road and agents face a broader than typical range of feasible options. Critical junctures may be protracted, but almost by definition, they intervene in between two periods of relative calm and stability of the social order. They thus represent eventful periods in which history suddenly accelerates. Pushing ahead into the future, without clear direction, trajectories may abruptly be interrupted and veer off at any moment, leading to further chaos and indeterminacy.

Pragmatic histories of critical junctures remain close to the actor's experiences. They tend to avoid invoking social processes, structures and mechanisms that operate behind the back of the actors and push them forward along a script of which the actors have no cognisance. Sociologists alternate between internal ("emic") and external ("etic") descriptions. They willingly complement the participants' perspective on the situation with the perspective of the observer who, thanks to the multiplications of viewpoints and the aggregation of data, is able to transcend the description of the situation and bring in processes and structures that escape the immediate horizon of the actors. Without hesitation, they bring in class structures, social mechanisms and long-term social processes to explain and interpret historical situations. With Marx, they assume that social actors "make history, but not under conditions they have freely chosen" (Marx, 1960: 115), to quote a famous line from the *18 Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.*

Up till today, this spectacular text constitutes a model for the class analysis of critical junctures in which the political tensions are so high that a violent overthrow of the government is one of the possibilities. In brilliant prose, Marx analyses the tumultuous sequence of events that led followers of President Louis Na-

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27 Capoccia, Giovanni and Daniel R. Kelemen. The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism. *World Politics* 59:3 (2007): 341–369.

poleon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon, to break up the French parliament on December 2 1851, overthrow the second republic and establish a dictatorship. Marx traces how the conflict between different social interests manifests itself in a continuously changing tangle of political struggles between different fractions of the bourgeoisie who, eventually, in the name of order, would bring a populist figure like Louis Bonaparte to power. Speaking in the name of the people, representing the petty bourgeoisie and the small property holding peasantry, which "cannot represent themselves and therefore must be represented,"[28] Louis Bonaparte will proclaim himself Emperor Napoleon III a year later, betraying the expectations of the big landlords, the industrialists and the financial capitalists that had supported him. The coup d'état also dashed the revolutionary hopes of the working class.

In Brazil, no doubt as a legacy of Marxism, when one wants to talk about the political situation and investigate possible denouements, one proposes an "analysis of the conjuncture."[29] It involves the investigation of how different social, economic, cultural and political factors intersect and interact to create a specific historical moment. In *Como se faz análise de conjuntura?,* Herbert de Souza (1984: 9–18) explains how to do this in simple prose and lists the elements a situational analysis has to take into account.[30]

First element, events: Among the multitude of facts, on has to select those that are significant enough to constitute an event and mark a turning point in the history of a collective. If in a global and geopolitical perspective, we can think of 2001 (9/11), 2007 (the *subprime* crisis), 2016 (the election of Trump), 2020 (the pandemic) and 2022 (the war in Ukraine), in Brazil, the political highlights are 2013 (the June revolt), 2016 (the impeachment of Dilma), 2018 (the election of Bolsonaro), 2020 (the pandemic) and 2022 (the election of Lula). Second element, scenes. Events are not only situated in time, but also in space. Scenes are more or less public arenas where decisions are made that influence struggles and change the story line. It makes a difference whether the events on which everybody is focused take place in the official places of power (congress, the Supreme Court or the presidential palace) or in the streets. It also makes a difference whether the military barracks remain invisible or not. Third element, the actors. They embody ideas, propose proj-

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28 Karl Marx. Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte. In: Marx Engels Werke (MEW), Band 8. Berlin 1960, 111–207, 198.

29 For a brilliant Deleuzo-Marxist interpretation of "Brazil's 18 Brumaire", see Bruno **Cava**. *A terra treme. Leituras do Brasil de 2013 a 2016.* São Paulo 2016.

30 Herbert de Souza. *Como se faz análise de conjuntura?* Petrópolis 1984. For a more detailed, analysis, see Frédéric Vandenberghe. Sociologie de la conjuncture, de la structure et de la démocrature au Brésil. *Problèmes d'Amérique latine* 115:4 (2020): 129–144.

ects and defend their collective interests. They are organized, form class alliances and represent the organic base of power. They act strategically to influence politics and make events happen. In Brazil today, as in the 1960s, it is always the same actors who plot against democratically elected left-wing governments and support coups d'état, whether they are civil-military as in the 20th Century or media-parliamentary as in the 21st Century: the media, the markets, the middle classes, the landowners, the churches, the judges and the military. Finally, the correlation of forces. Relationships between actors can be of coexistence, cooperation or confrontation. They always reveal power relations, i. e. inequality, domination and subordination. In times of economic hardship, tension, conflict and confrontation between social classes intensify. The technical solutions that are proposed by the government are perceived as political and ideological ones. As the tension mounts and crises accumulate, the opposition between the political parties and the groups they represent becomes more marked. It is in such a context of increased polarisation that the correlation of forces can shift decisively, as happened in Brazil between 2015 and 2018. The ruling elites, both the old and the new, were no longer willing to sustain a social-democratic government. The media latched on to corruption scandals and created an anti-political climate. In 2016, President Dilma Rousseff was removed from power and Michel Temer, the candidate of the markets, succeeded her. Two years later, the whole atmosphere had become so tense and toxic that Jair Bolsonaro, an outsider without political party, won the presidential elections, cancelling out the traditional parties of the centre that had governed the country since the return to democracy in 1988. The actors (markets, media, judges) who had removed President Dilma from power had triggered a dramatic series of events they could no longer control. Without knowing it, they had laid the eggs of the serpent.

4 Social and System Disintegration

Crisis as Event and Process

The situation can be analysed in different time frames that are solidary with one another. The transition from a pragmatic analysis of events to a structural analysis of the changing correlation of forces that tips the balance of power is a relatively smooth one. The analysis of the structure takes off where and when the analysis of the conjuncture finishes. The chains of events that transform the balance of power and inaugurate a new conjuncture are themselves related to the social, economic and political relations that have been established over a longer period of time. To

maintain the temporal continuity, the results of the analysis of the conjuncture have to be inserted into the flux of history.

In between the events that change the conjuncture and the changing conjuncture that changes the historical trajectory of a country, a series of crises intervene. It is in times of crises that the conjunction of forces and processes can suddenly shift and make whole societies move from one conjuncture to the next one. In critical times, when the actors are gripped by a sentiment that time simultaneously accelerates and comes to a "frenetic standstill,"[31] the future contracts and the time frame is restricted so as to coincide with the actuality of current affairs. Rupture, instability, unpredictability or the impossibility to foresee the future define the crisis, whether it is economic, political, social, existential or all at once.

A crisis is simultaneously an event and a process.[32] The distinction between event and process is an analytical one. Events are punctual, while processes are continuous. In a dynamic perspective, short sequences of events can be inserted into larger processes. As an event, the crisis is an outcome that is overdetermined by multiple determinations. The event is itself the result of a process that has been going on for a while. The concept of crisis originally referred to a critical or decisive moment in a specific situation, such as a medical emergency or a legal trial. *Krisis*, *Kairos* and *Chronos* are inherently linked.[33] Krisis, from the verb *krinein* (to separate, to cut), refers to the judgment, originally the Last judgment before Christ, while kairos indicates the moment that introduces a rupture in the ordinary continuum of time (chronos). "The crisis is the decisive moment in a the evolution of an uncertain process that makes the diagnosis possible."[34] Over time, the idea of crisis became more abstract and generalised, referring to social, economic and political upheaval. The generalisation of the concept of crisis and its insertion into a philosophy of history that considers the crisis as a transitional state that ruptures the continuity between the past and the future made it an epochal concept of the "new times". Crisis became, thus, according to Koselleck[35] a "structural signature

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31 Hartmut Rosa. *Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne.* Frankfurt 2005, 41 *passim.*

32 Bob Jessop's investigation of crises is exceptionally well informed. My analysis of the crisis as a junction between the system and the lifeworld, event and process, conjuncture and structure, is indebted to his, see Bob Jessop. The Symptomatology of Crises, Reading Crises and Learning from Them: Some Critical Realist Reflections. *Journal of Critical Realism* 14:3 (2015): 238–271.

33 François Hartog. *Chronos. L'Occident aux prises avec le Temps.* Paris 2020, 7–12.

34 Edgar Morin. Pour une crisologie. *Communications* 25:1 (1976): 149–163, 135.

35 Rainhart Koselleck. Krise. In: Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck. *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland.* Stuttgart 1982, 617–650, 627.

of modernity". More particularly, it is the junction between critique and crisis, the idea that criticism of power can cause epochal change, that is specifically modern.

A crisis is not just an objective event or process that disrupts the normal order of things. To be a crisis, it needs to be recognised as such by the actors. It is only when the objective crisis is felt and perceived by the actors, when it affects them in their everyday life, that disturbances become critical. Crisis and critique, the occurrence of a disruption and the evaluation of it, are inherently linked.[36] Critique can trigger a crisis, as Koselleck (1973) argues in the case of the French revolution, or, inversely, a crisis may unleash critique of the system that causes the disruption or of the authorities that fail to stop it and simply "muddle through" in the hope that it will pass. Between the objective situation and the social perception, there may be a disjunction. It is possible that there is an alarming situation (for instance, global warming) that demands urgent action, but is not fully acknowledged or even denied (climate scepticism). It is also possible that that there is alarm (for instance, the migrant crisis), while, in fact, the statistics do not confirm the public perception of the problem. In the first case, the risk is real, but not empirical, while in latter case, the crisis appears to be a manufactured one.

Crises are the result of social tensions and antagonisms.[37] They reveal the fractures of society and bring them into the open. The tensions between social classes, generations and other groupings that were latent have now become manifest. They were virtual, but in the critical juncture, they have been actualised, amplified and transformed into open antagonism between parts of the population who fear that they no longer can live together. The antagonisms now start to disorganise the system from within. The disjuncture affects the structure of the system. Through a series of feedbacks, both positive and negative, small deviations from the norm trigger chain reactions. As red lines are crossed one after the other, disorder spreads from one system to another and, eventually, the whole system becomes unstable and unpredictable.

The crisis is both conjunctural and structural. It is an event, caused by a long sequence of events that have preceded it and led to the present moment. The present moment can be interpreted as the result of a movement that comes from the depths of society and that makes the social conflicts manifest. The event that manifests the crisis is only a symptom of an underlying process that has been going on for a while and that is caused in the last instance by the structure of the society as a whole. The genealogy of the crisis indicates that the disjuncture is the result of

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36 Didier Fassin. Crisis. In: Veena Das and Didier Fassin (eds.). *Words and Worlds. A Lexicon for Dark Times.* Durham 2021, 261–276.

37 Morin, Pour une crisologie.

series of events and processes that find their origin and their cause in the structural contradictions of a class society that remains tainted by colonialism and slavery.

Following critical realism, which can itself be considered a formalisation of a Marxist theory of knowledge, we can distinguish different levels of reality[38] – "the real", referring to deep generative structures (like capitalism and colonialism) endowed with causal powers, "the actual", referring to the processes (like crisis tendencies and social polarisations) that are produced by these mechanisms, and "the empirical", the events that can be observed in concrete situations of action. From this perspective, crises can be analysed as processes that are "objectively overdetermined" by a multitude of causal mechanisms that are acting simultaneously in a complex conjuncture and whose causal powers are triggered by a series of contingent events.[39] As these events are themselves made to happen by the actors who take part in them in continuously changing situations, the effects of the activation of the causal mechanisms remains haphazard and unpredictable. The crises that are "objectively overdetermined" are therefore also "subjectively indeterminate."[40] The decisions that are taken to resolve the crisis are themselves relatively unpredictable. They may resolve the crisis or exacerbate it. Even more, decisions may be taken to intentionally foment instability and fabricate crises. As a matter of fact, in populist regimes, crises are not a problem, but opportunities to attack the system and change it.

Strategic Mobilisations

Without subjective indeterminacy, there's no crisis. For a crisis to occur, structural fault lines are necessary, but not sufficient. The system has to be actively brought into a crisis by political agitation and mobilisation. Mobilisation is the occasional manifestation of the transformative power of social movements and its capacity to organise the members of a community and orchestrate their action in long sequences of events. By articulating events to critical junctures that inaugurate a new cycle of instability, the category of mobilisation opens a passage between the micro- and the macro-levels of society. In critical junctures, when the stability of reproduction is upended and a new equilibrium has not been reached yet, path dependencies are significantly loosened and the indeterminacy is heightened.

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38 Roy Bhaskar. *A Realist Theory of Science*. London 1978, 1–9.
39 Jessop, The Symptomatology of Crises.
40 Jessop, The Symptomatology of Crises.

In his *Sociologie des crises politiques*, the French political scientist Michel Dobry (1992)[41] analyses the indeterminacy that characterises "fluid conjunctures", those exhilarating moments when time is out of joint and actors have the sentiment that anything can happen. He shows how in times of polarisation, the politicisation of issues becomes generalised. Mobilisations and contestations that happen at first in a particular sector of society (culture, education, health, for instance) spread from one sector to the other. When militants introduce criteria that are foreign to the good functioning of a sector, using the same ideological arguments in different contexts, they do not wish to improve the system. They want to put it under pressure and test its resilience to ideological attacks. When the contestation installs itself in time and spreads from one sector to the next one, through orchestration, coordination or imitation, tensioning one subsystem after the other, the logic of functional differentiation of the system comes under duress. Various sectors and subsystems of society lose their relative autonomy. Instead of following their own autonomous logic – Weber's *Eigengesetzlichkeiten* – they are overdetermined by a logic of war that "overcodes" the operations of the subsystems. Decisions are no longer made according to technical criteria, but according to ideological criteria.

The new "culture wars" are unleashed when right-wing intellectuals who read and are familiar with the academic texts of the cultural Left launch an all-out offensive against "cultural Marxism" – by which they mean any critical theory, from the Frankfurt School to gender and post-colonial Studies that aims at actively destroying society by deconstructing the fundamental principles and moral precepts (religion, private property, race, gender) that maintain social hierarchies and contribute to the reproduction of society. Engaged in neo-Gramscian "metapolitics", right-wing agitators recycle the language of the left to empty it from within and turn it against those who criticise capitalism and defend minorities. When extremes inter(re)act by mutual provocation, the whole culture becomes politicised. There is no element of the superstructure that escapes binarism, polarisation and radicalisation. In the end, everything (language, gestures, clothing) becomes a sign of fracture and dissociation. In the name of a metapolitical struggle against the liberal hegemony and the dominance of left-wing ideologies ("communism", "gender ideology", "gayzism") that seeks to consciously reverse the vector of Gramscianism, all fields of action are politicized.

Following the shift in the cultural hegemony, the basic understandings of society, politics, culture, morality and identity have changed. The certainties and stabilities of liberal democracy are up in the air. The discourse of human rights, for

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41 Michel Dobry. *Sociologie des crises politiques.* Paris 1992.

instance, is submitted to a semantic redefinition. Instead of being inherent and un-alienable rights and freedoms to which every individual, by the mere fact of being human is entitled, independently of race, religion, etc., human rights are now seen a politicised discourse of the Left that protects criminals from due prosecution and punishment. The slogan "Human rights for righteous people" shows how discourse is warped. Wave after wave, the corrosion of language, as well as every other aspect of life, sweep up society. People who were indifferent to politics, get caught up and radicalise. The middle disappears. More accurately, it is made to disappear as the extreme Right redefines both centre right and centre left as Left and radical Left. As the people get wound up by campaigns that denounce the corruption of the system and galvanised by violent discourses, a whole society has entered into a different rhythm. The reactivation of the old Schmittian opposition between friends and enemies, the presentation of the leader as the incarnation of the people, and the diffusion of fear and hate by parallel media have transformed a political campaign in a permanent mobilisation of the population.[42] The elections only brought home that the cultural hegemony has been lost and that the social forces have been realigned. Different social groups, belonging to different social classes, now form a social and political force, united by a common ideology that unites them by opposing the elites (the political establishment, the intellectuals of the cultural left, the media) to the common people.

It is necessary to make a distinction between populist mobilisations and populist regimes.[43] Populist governments conceive of their mission as a negative one: To destroy the old society and erect a new one on its ruins. Once they are in power, they take over the apparatus of the state and start to undermine the rule of law from within. The authoritarian tendencies of a populist government are most clearly evidenced in the attack on the division of power between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of the state. Aiming at "direct representation,"[44] populist strongmen tension the constitutional arrangement of liberal democracy and assail the institutional mediations (the parliament, the press, the supreme court) that separate the leader from the people. To "deconstruct the administrative state" (Bannon), the public policies inherited from the past are dismantled. Enemies are designated, allies nominated, administrations purged, state institutions politicised, governmental programmes discontinued, new governmental policies announced, then changed abruptly to create confusion and disorganisation.

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42 Letícia Cesarino. Como vencer uma eleição sem sair de casa : a ascensão do populismo digital no Brasil. *Internet & Sociedade* 1:1 (2020): 91–120.

43 Pierre Rosanvallon. *Le siècle du populisme. Histoire, théorie, critique.* Paris 2020, 16–36.

44 Nadia Urbinati. *Me The People. How Populism Transforms Democracy.* Cambridge 2019, 158–189.

The official report of the incoming cabinet of transition of the new "Lula-government" has presented a detailed "radiography" of the dismantling of the state apparatus under Bolsonaro.[45] While all the attention was focused on the provocations of the president and his ministers, the dismantling of the state advanced overtly or covertly through legal or infra-legal means. Various ministries, notably of labour, culture and family agriculture, were abolished in one stroke. Other ministries were directed by politicians on a kamikaze mission. An anti-environmentalist headed the ministry of the environment, a female evangelical pastor was in charge of the ministry of human rights, family and women, an antiglobalist agitator became minister of foreign affairs, an anti-vaxx general was responsible for health during the Covid-19 pandemic. The state administration was taken over by personnel that was selected on an ideological basis. Almost 6000 military personnel were nominated at strategic positions in the civil administration. The legislation on the right to own and carry weapons was loosened by decree. One million firearms are circulating among the civil population. Environment, health, culture, education and science policies were particularly affected by the dismantling of public policies and public services through budgetary restraints and disruptive measures (e.g. reallocation of secretariats under different ministries, replacement of leadership, constant change of policies). The case of culture is emblematic. The ministry of culture was downgraded to a general secretariat, linked at first to the ministry of citizenship and later to the ministry of tourism. The budget was reduced by 91%. Call for tenders were cancelled, subventions cut, institutions scrapped, policies discontinued, personnel persecuted. Similar stories of institutional dismantling of public policies could be told for other domains (sport, fishing, youth, indigenous populations, etc.). In all spheres of government and at all levels of the administration (federal, state and municipal) where populists were in charge, the programme of the dismantling of the state through planned disruption was executed with verve, if not with talent.

Social and Systemic Disintegration

With neo-Gramscian mobilisations in multiple sectors and within the government, the crisis changes scale and becomes systemic. Following David Lockwood's classic distinction between "social integration" and "systemic integration",[46] we can rad-

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45 Gabinete de transição governmental. *Relatório final.* 2022.
46 Lockwood, David. Social Integration and System Integration. In: George Zollschan and Walter Hirsch (eds). *Explorations in Social Change.* London 1964, 244–256.

icalize the perspective and characterize the situation in terms of a double disintegration: social and systemic. Social integration refers to the relations between "people (individuals and groups) that make up society. When it is weak, social conflicts break out and put society under tension. Polarisation can be exacerbated to the point where society divides and fragments into two irreconcilable fractions that still share the same territory and language, but no longer the same principles of vision and division of reality. When this happens, basic reality starts to diverge and compromise between world views becomes impossible. At the limit, the tension can lead to civil war. Systemic integration refers not to relations between people, but to relations between the parts that make up the system. Systemic integration is low when the "parts" do not sustain each other harmoniously and the system is rife with structural tensions and contradictions. This is the case when various institutions (family, education and labour market) do not work in synch or when a structural contradiction, such as the one between capital and labour, drives the system from one crisis to another without resolution. When society has to cope simultaneously with a high level of social conflict and with structural contradictions that it cannot resolve, processes of social and systemic disintegration may reinforce each other in a downwards spiral, leading to wicked crises and even systemic collapse.

In his classic study of the problems of legitimation in late capitalism, Jürgen Habermas develops a model in which crises ripple down from the economic to the political subsystem, and from there to the lifeworld.[47] He combines a Marxist approach to the structural contradictions of capitalism with a systemic analysis of society that draws on Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann. The main thesis is that of the displacement of the crisis tendencies of capitalism, which are caused by the structural contradictions between capital and labour, from the economic to the political and socio-cultural systems of society. If the structural contradictions of capitalism are not satisfactorily resolved, crises of overproduction and underconsumption are bound to cause mass unemployment, inflation and budgetary deficits. If the government is unable to manage the economic crisis, the economic crisis will be displaced to the political system. Habermas acknowledges that the corporatist welfare state may contribute to the survival of capitalism. To the extent that the political decision to cut social programmes and reduce social spending favours one class over another, however, the policies will necessarily appear as partial and partisan. As the government tries one policy after another, the crisis management

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47 Jürgen Habermas. *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus.* Frankfurt am Main 1973.

will itself enter in crisis.[48] The government will lose it legitimacy, as well as its popular support. When this happens, the systemic crisis becomes a social crisis – the social contradictions are transformed into real antagonisms. To indicate that a crisis only becomes a crisis when it is experienced as such by the citizens, Habermas speaks about identity crisis when the tensions spill over from the system to the lifeworld. The legitimation crisis mutates into a motivation crisis when citizens no longer accept the system as it is and refuse to collaborate. For them, the norms and values of society lack any rational justification. They are unjust and don't make sense. They would not pass the test of discursive justification in public. In the name of democracy, they demand systemic change. And if they don't obtain it, they either withdraw or revolt.

Habermas's model of the displacement of crisis tendencies from the system to the lifeworld can be applied to the situation in Brazil, but the model of legitimation crises of late capitalism needs to be seriously adapted when one deals with "late fascism". After all, the actual situation is radically different from the one around 1968. We are no longer dealing with a moral revolt of the New Left, but of the New Right. A transition to democratic socialism is not in sight. To the contrary, protesters defend private property and there's nothing they fear more than the spectre of communism. They want to unshackle capitalism and liberate markets from the clutches of the state. Their demands are in no way justified by a recourse to reason and discourse. They do not seek a consensus and are wary of any concession or compromise. In the name of God, they espouse traditional values, like the family, and are overall conservative in their outlook. Notwithstanding their invocation of a traditional order, they are revolutionary in their methods and ruthless in their critique of the intelligentsia. In opposition to the mass media, they have set up their own alternative media that diffuse fake news and confirm their alternate vision of reality. Notwithstanding these fundamental differences between the spirit of 68 and the one of 2016, Habermas's analysis of the transformation of a systemic crisis into a social one, can be used to explain the sequence of crises that have destabilised Brazil.[49]

The financial crisis of 2008–2009, which had started in the United States and destabilised the Eurozone in 2010, arrived in Brazil in 2015. Following the collapse of commodity prices, however, the country entered the longest and deepest economic recession in its history. Some of the biggest corporations (Petrobras, Odebrecht and OAS) were implicated in corruption scandals, which contributed to

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48 Claus Offe. Crisis of Crisis Management. Elements of a Political Crisis Theory. *International Journal of Politics* 6:3 (1976): 29–67.

49 Frédéric Vandenberghe. Demokratur in Brasilien. Versuch einer Lehre vom Systemzusammenbruch. *Leviathan* 48:4 (2020): 637–654.

the contraction of the economy. The government of Dilma Rousseff tried to stem the economic tide, making concessions to the market forces, but was eventually brought down by them and impeached in 2016. Given that the impeachment bordered on a parliamentary coup, the political crisis became an institutional one. Michel Temer, the interim president, was widely seen as corrupt politician and a conspirator. Without popular support, his government imposed a radical neo-liberal agenda. With automatic ceilings on spending on education and health, it enshrined austerity in the Constitution for the next 20 years. Meanwhile, poverty and insecurity became rampant. The economic crisis reinforced all kinds of crimes. The number of assaults and armed robberies exploded. The extreme right had a single explanation for the crisis: corruption. By voting the corrupt politicians out of power, the system would be purged from its criminal elements and order would be restored. Not only would the political system be cleansed; all forms of crime would be resolved once and for all by the heavy hand of the state. The legitimation crisis that had led to a complete demoralisation of the political establishment would be solved through decisive action. Once the "communists" would be eradicated, the markets would be able to regain their power and economic growth would immediately return. The election campaign of 2018 was tense and violent. The traditional opposition between social democrats and liberal democrats was overtaken by the surge of the extreme right. Massive protests against corruption filled the streets of the main cities in Brazil. In October 2018, Bolsonaro won the elections.

The Bolsonaro government maintained the pro-market stance of its predecessor, adding a strong anti-state component to it. The "austeritarian" inflexion was personalised by Paulo Guedes, a Chicago Boy who taught in Chile during Pinochet's dictatorship, who became the Minister of Economy. If, according to Wendy Brown (2006), the "American nightmare" combines neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, the Brazilian nightmare combines theo-conservatism and anarcho-capitalism in a conservative revolution that seeks to put an end to social democracy. The anger against social achievements and the contempt for democracy reveal a touch of nihilism that comes straight from anarcho-capitalism.

The pushing through of aggressive labour and pension reforms made clear that the correlation of forces had shifted to the advantage of market forces and to the detriment of workers. Not only did the economic situation not get better, it also exacerbated existing political divisions. As the economic crisis could no longer be blamed on the "corruption of the elites", the government tried to deflect the attention through an orchestration of crises. "Crisification", the continuous production of artificial crises, became itself a form of crisis management. By means of provocations, the polarising tension between the "yellow shirts" (*coxinhas*) and the "red shirts" (*petralhas*) was artificially maintained. Every crisis became an oc-

casion for further provocations, accusations and threats. In this atmosphere of instability, the system was slowly but surely undermined from within. The breakdown of the system was intentional. It was not simply the result of crises; the crises themselves were the levers that allowed the system to breakdown. To Habermas's sequence of crises (crises of accumulation, rationality, legitimation and motivation), one has therefore to add an additional series of crises (ecological, sanitary, military, constitutional, food security, humanitarian) that the German philosopher could not foresee and that transform the lifeworld into a world of death. Two crises have received international attention and transformed Brazil into a pariah state.

The first big crisis was the ecological crisis. On Monday, August 19, 2019, around 4 p.m., the sky over São Paulo darkened. Clouds of smoke from the Amazon descended on the largest metropolis in Latin America and plunged it into darkness. The fires in the Amazon forest are of criminal origin. Bolsonaro blamed NGO's for setting fire and used his opening speech at the UN to attack his internationals critics. His government has prioritised economic development over environmental protection and indigenous rights. He has advocated for opening up protected areas for mining, logging, and agriculture. He has also criticized environmental regulations as burdensome to businesses. As a result, deforestation has surged to its highest level in a decade. Illegal mining in indigenous territories has led to a humanitarian crisis among the Yanomami.

The second big crisis was the Covid-19 crisis. On March 24, 2020 Bolsonaro gave a speech in which he minimised the risks of the pandemic, which he equated with a "little flue". Contrary to all official instructions from the World Health Organization and his own minister of health, whom he sacked, he called for the immediate lifting of the containment measures and warned that a lockdown would cause massive starvation among the population. Alleging that the economic crisis is far more deadly than the health crisis, that the economy cannot and must not be halted, that Covid-19 only affects the elderly, he claimed that God and chloroquine will save the country. The official death toll of over 700.000, 40 per cent of which may directly be attributed to the sabotage of the containment measures, and probably as much that were not registered, show the price of a necropolitics that transforms the lifeworld in a world of death and destruction.

With multiple crises and emergencies occurring at the same time, Brazil is facing a "polycrisis". Economic recession, increasing inequality, political instability, programmed disinformation, a pandemic outbreak, natural disasters, military indiscipline, police violence, constitutional strain, threats of a coup d'état, food insecurity, depressions and panic attacks, all happen at the same time. While each of the crises continues unabated, their entanglements bring society close to collapse.

5 Diagnosis of Our Time

Signs of the Time

In *Krisis und Kritik*, Reinhart Koselleck[50] showed that the changing conceptions of crisis have to be understood against the background of a changed conception of time in modernity. From the eighteenth century onwards, situations of crisis were interpreted in the framework of a linear philosophy of Progress and understood as moments of inflection in the universal history of Mankind. The pangs of history are an inevitable part of the transition to a new age or a new epoch. Through anticipation of the future (*modo futuro exacti*), a particular moment in time is understood as a necessary turning point in the course of History (in the singular). Typical of the Enlightenment, this secular salvationist scheme is found in the work of Turgot, Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists, and also in Kant, Hegel and Marx. Nowadays, we no longer interpret crises in the light of a philosophy of progress. Following the two world wars in the twentieth century, the philosophy of history lost its plausibility. Somewhere in between 1968 and 1989, at least in Europe, the grand narrative of liberation that promised emancipation, but ended up reinforcing domination, lost all credibility. François Lyotard famously defined postmodernity with reference to the loss of historicity and the "incredulity towards grand narratives."[51] If his announcement of the end of modernity struck a nerve, it was because it expressed the spirit of disenchantment of the time. The collapse of the philosophy of history meant that from now onwards the situation would have to be interpreted without the help of secular theologies, without invocation of metahistorical subjects and without the support of metaphysical guarantees.

And yet, to interpret and make sense of what is happening in times of transition between two epochs, one cannot do without "grand narratives" altogether. The narrative about the fragmentation of narratives and identities in post-modernity is itself a master narrative. Ironically, the narrative about the endings of modernity that occupied the minds at the end of millennium was succeeded by a grander narrative about globalisation, which then became embedded into an even grander narrative about the Anthropocene. In any case, since 9/11/2001, which sparked off a global civil war, so many destabilising events have occurred that we may well

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50 Reinhart Koselleck. *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt.* Frankfurt am Main 1973.

51 François Lyotard. La condition postmoderne. Paris 1979.

speak of a change of epoch – a *Zeitenwende*, as the German chancellor phrased it in the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The accumulation of disorder, crises and conflicts may have been particularly acute in Brazil. It is only one case, however, perhaps a more dramatic and pathetic one, among others. Elsewhere, economic insecurity, political instability, the surge of authoritarianism, climate emergency, a pandemic, and now also a return of war have led to a generalised apprehension of the future.

"What is happening to us"? "What is happening with the world? and "What kind of times are we living in?" are questions that spontaneously come up when one opens the newspaper in the morning. In one of his last texts on Kant and the Enlightenment, Michel Foucault takes up these questions in the context of a historical hermeneutics of our selves – "who we have become and what we could have become" – and proposes the "ontology of actuality" as a timely philosophical reflection on the particular epoch in which we are living.[52] Although ontology suggests a metaphysics of permanence, Foucault is in fact concerned with a typification of the present. Like Hegel, he wants to conceptually "grasp his own time in concepts", but without any possible *Aufhebung* of the contradictions and tensions. In the post-structuralist spirit of deconstruction of transhistorical continuities, he wants to understand the epoch as an event in its contingency and its particularity.

To make sense of the present, one needs to insert the events, the crises and the con/disjuncture back into History. This is what "grand narratives" do. They stitch together local occurrences that inaugurate a change of conjuncture and societal transformations of the world at large in a plausible account of epochal change. This operation of totalisation of the events and processes into a "chronosophical" narrative is neither entirely descriptive nor entirely speculative.[53] The projection of historical facts on a conceptual timeline is what allows to gather events and processes into a meaningful temporal order that makes the transition from one period, age, era or epoch explicit. Also here there are multiple hermeneutics at play that can be ordered on a scale of increasing reflexivity – from the "epoch an sich" to the "epoch für sich."[54] From the intimations of ordinary actors that strange times are coming and the performative announcements by politicians that new times have arrived to the explicit elaborations of historians, the scansion of time becomes more objective, public and definitive. Although historians are par-

52 Michel Foucault. Qu'est-ce que les Lumières? In: *Dits et Ecrits*, Tome IV (texte n°339). Paris 1984, 562 – 578.

53 Krzysztof Pomian. *L'ordre du temps.* Paris 1984, 101 – 163.

54 Thomas Angeletti, Quentin Deleurmoz and Juliette Galonnier. Qu'est-ce qu'une époque? *Tracés* 36:1 (2019): 7 – 25.

ticularly concerned with the partition of time in epochs (Antiquity, Middle Age, Renaissance, Modernity), the question of the periodization of history is not limited to them. It is also brought up in philosophy, sociology and political sciences where the diagnosis of the times (*Zeitdiagnose*) is an established genre of social analysis and critique that offers sweeping interpretations of societal change that hover somewhere between chronology and chronosophy, analysis and critique, science and journalism.

The Zeitgeist

The diagnosis of the time is an attempt to offer a totalising interpretation of the historical facts of a particular time-period. It should be immediately noted, though, that the totality is not a dialectical, but an idiographic one.[55] In the wake of historicism, historical hermeneutics acknowledges that the philosophy of history is no longer possible as a resource that gives meaning to history, the world and life. By turning the resource into a topic or theme of investigation, it is able to analyse cultural expressions (religion, philosophy, art, but also common sense) in their spatial and historical variety as objectivations of the spirit that are interconnected into an evolving experiential whole. Unlike Hegelian Marxist interpretations of historical events, from Georg Lukács to Jean-Paul Sartre, that adopt the "point of view of the totality", the totality it wants to capture is not History as seen from the vantage point of an identical subject-object (*casu quo* the Proletariat) that makes History with will and consciousness. The totality it wants to understand and disclose hermeneutically is the human being as it expresses itself throughout history in religions, metaphysics and the arts. Wilhelm Dilthey says as much in the "Overview of my System": "The human being in its unity works itself out following its structure in the various spheres of life: In the knowledge of reality, the determination of values and the setting of ends a unity being expresses itself."[56] Historical hermeneutics has relinquished the metaphysics of the absolute spirit, while retaining the idea that there's something like a spirit of time or, as the French say, an *air du temps*, that traverses all the spheres of life and imprints its mark on the significant practices of a given epoch. There is nothing mystical about the *Zeitgeist*. Its expressions can be analysed through application of the "documentary method"[57]

55 Aurélien Berlan. *La fabrique des derniers hommes. Retour sur le présent avec Tönnies, Simmel et Weber.* Paris 2012.

56 Dilthey, Wilhelm. Weltanschauungslehre. Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Philosophie, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band II. Leipzig 1931, 180.

57 Karl Mannheim. *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge.* London 1952, 33–83.

of historical hermeneutics that discloses the collective meanings of a given time. When we apply the documentary method to analyse political conjunctures, we come up with worldviews, ideologies and utopia that are particular to a particular time-period and link different realms of social life and social groups across geographical contexts.

The fact that one can find similar cultural patterns among different groups in different places (Trumpism in the US and Bolsonarism in Brazil, for instance) is not only the result of the same imprint, but also of the coordination of actions between social movements at the international level. As a set of cultural patterns that are shared by people of a same generation who have witnessed the same experiences and participated in similar events, the Zeitgeist is not unified and homogeneous, however. Within a generation, there are different groups that define themselves antinomically by their opposition to each other.[58] In highly polarised societies, the spectrum of worldviews tends to get simplified to just two. The mediation does not pass through the middle, but increasingly through the extremes that define the positions from which the situation is defined. By bringing together various features that are typical of the worldview of an epoch, the diagnosis of the times tries to capture the *Gestalt* of an age and define its "signature" through a reading of the signs of the time. The point is not to find universal laws that play out in a given situation, but to assemble the different "family resemblances" among the various cultural features in a recognisable physiognomy of a society at a particular moment in time.

In sociology, the cultural approach to signifying practices is complemented with a more structural approach of social processes, trends and tendencies that come together in a given conjuncture.[59] From its very emergence in the 19 th. Century, sociology has been conceived as a *Krisiswissenschaft*, i. e. a science of the societal crises that accompany the epochal transition to modernity. In classical sociology, the diagnosis of society is invariably linked to the general sociology that informs the analysis of the present challenges. Commodification (Marx), rationalisation (Weber), functional differentiation (Durkheim) and individualisation (Simmel) or, at a slightly lower level of abstraction, colonisation, bureaucratisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation and democratisation, are brought in as master processes in a grand narrative of societal, cultural and personal change that spans at least five gen-

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58 Mannheim, *Essays*, 276 – 322.

59 Klaus Lichtblau. Sociology and the Diagnosis of the Times. *Theory, Culture & Society* 12 (1995): 25 – 52. In Germany, the sociological diagnosis of the times is a rather popular genre. Textbooks that map the contours of the genre are regularly published. The most recent ones are Oliver Dimbath. *Soziologische Zeitdiagnostik.* Paderborn 2016 and Manfred Prisching. *Zeitdiagnose. Methoden, Modelle, Motive.* Basel 2018.

erations. In a kind of generalised dialectics of the Enlightenment, each of the social processes comes with a shadow side that compromises the integration of society and the well-being of its members: alienation, disenchantment, anomie, neurasthenia. To the extent that the diagnosis of the times is itself inevitably an expression of the times that it seeks to bring to a higher level of reflexivity, its validity is necessarily limited. Not only does the object of analysis continuously change, the perspectives on society are also in flux. The diagnosis therefore bears the signs of the times and has to be updated when the structural features of societies change. By tracking the changes on the axis of industrialism and capitalism, sociological periodisations typically distinguish three sequential types of modernisation, each characterised by a different spirit: Liberal modernity (1850–1914), organised modernity (1914–1973) and late modernity (1973 till today).[60] The concept of late modernity, popularised in the work of Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman and Hartmut Rosa, tries to delink the discussions about postmodernism from post-structuralism and transfer them to macro-sociological investigations of the transformations in the economy, technology, politics, identity, etc. The analysis is often constructed around a label that is supposed to condense the main trends into an epochal concept of society, such as post-modern, post-industrial, information, risk and high speed society, or a concept of modernity, as in advanced, reflexive, flexible liquid, global past, post or transmodernity.[61]

In times of acute crises, the diagnosis fuses the analysis of the longue durée with an intervention in the public sphere that investigates the possibilities and limitations of systemic change in the short time. The double orientation – inwards, towards the discipline and outwards, towards the public sphere – is typical of the diagnostic self-observations of society. The momentous events and succession of crises of the last decade have led to a multiplicity of punctual researches on the "most urgent issues of today" (global warming, rising inequality, populism, structural racism, immigration, etc) and a surge of probing interpretations of the epoch.[62] If the fin-de-siècle debates about post-modernism and post-modernity were largely about the crisis of culture, today's discussions are about the structural crunch of contemporary societies. The debates are not limited to academia, but thematise societal issues with a radicalism that is reminiscent of the 1970's. Feminism, post-colonialism and ecological concerns are displacing the Marxist orthodoxies of yesteryear and giving voice to the newest social movements. Sociology

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60 Peter Wagner. *A Sociology of Modernity. Liberty and Discipline. London* 1994.

61 For a critique of "epochalism" in sociology, see Savage, Milke. Against Epochalism: An Analysis of Conceptions of Change in British Sociology. *Cultural Sociology* 3:2 (2009): 217–238.

62 With 64 state of the art articles on the contemporary challenges of the "critical moment" we're in, Didier Fassin. *La société qui vient.* Paris 2022 offers an encyclopaedia of our times.

does no longer have the monopoly of interpretation. It is flanked out on its Left by Critical Theory and the Studies. Less concerned with disciplinary boundaries, they have more freedom to bring cultural critique, social analysis and philosophical reflection together in an overarching tableau of the "spiritual situation" of our time. While some have a tendency to explain whatever happens with reference to single factors (techno-industrialism, capitalism, colonialism), they all have to factor in the technological, ecological, economic, political, military and psychological dimensions. One way or another, they invoke the great scarecrows of "neo-liberalism", "populism", "necropolitics" and the "Anthopocene" to sketch out their "visions" of the future. Of late, the diagnoses have taken on a more sinister tone with dystopian visions of a future in which various crises coalesce into a "global polycrisis – a single, macro-crisis of interconnected runaway failures of natural and social systems that irreversibly degrades human's prospects.[63]

Historical Anthropology

Sociological diagnoses paint with a big brush large-scale frescoes of society. In their attempt to answer the questions "What is happening to us?" and "In what society do we live?", they interconnect changes in the various spheres of life (economy, politics, culture, family, education, work, identity) in a totalising picture of the epoch, capped if possible by a snappy concept (e. g. the "risk society" or the "society of singularities"). By reconnecting the analysis of the disjuncture to an overall change of the culture and structure of contemporary societies, diagnoses of society reinscribe the societal dynamics in a grand narrative of civilisational change. Through stylistic exaggeration and overinterpretation of the trends and the crises, often with recourse to casuistic reasoning and use of strong metaphors (the "iron cage", the "colonisation of the lifeworld", the "treadmill of acceleration"), they intimate that societies are on the cusp of major transformations that will change the face of the earth and life as we know it. A certain degree of alarmism is indeed inherent to the "pop-sociological genre" of the *Zeitdiagnose.* By holding up a mirror in which society can see itself changing, it functions as a reflexive instance with an important warning function. Alternating between the registers of prophecy, prevision, prospection, anticipation and promise in the short, middle, long and very long term, it projects visions of a future that is already here, just around the corner

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63 Thomas Homer-Dixon et al. A Call for an International Research Program on the Risk of a Global Polycrisis. Cascade Institute. 2021. See also the chart of the global risks landscape in the *Global Risks Report 2023* (World Economic Forum 2023).

or will become inevitable and irreversible if nothing is done to stem the tide (Chateauraynaud, 2103)[64].

Even when the vivisections of society are directed to the mass media, they remain embedded in a theory of society that conceptually frames the analysis, the diagnosis and the critique. It does indeed make a difference if these are framed in the terms set by modernisation theory (Parsons), systems theory (Luhmann), critical theory (Habermas), actor-network theory (Latour), post-structuralism (Butler) or post-colonial studies (Mbembe). Diagnoses are anything but axiologically neutral. They are critical. Whether they are intellectual interventions in the public sphere or restrict themselves to the academic sphere, whether they are primarily addressed to colleagues, well informed citizens, activists or decision makers, they presuppose and project a normative vision of the good life in a decent society, which they do not fully spell out, however. The diagnoses of the loss of freedom (from Weber to Foucault), community (from Tönnies to Charles Taylor) or solidarity (from Durkheim to Habermas) are to be replaced in a long tradition of iterated cultural critiques and social criticisms of modernity that find their motives in the romantic and post-romantic philosophies of Rousseau, Nietzsche and the young Marx.[65] Although they know that a return to the communal life of the past is neither possible nor desirable, they denounce the moral decadence and inauthenticity of modern times. In the name of an ideal of authenticity, they deplore that self-realisation is no longer possible in a bourgeois society that is dominated by commerce and industry, competition and greed. Under modern conditions, the congruence of the actual self with its real self is precluded. Henceforth, one has to lead a life that is not one's own.

In contemporary social philosophy, the concept of social pathologies has been reactivated as the last one in whole series of medical concepts (crisis, diagnosis, therapeusis) to suggest that whole forms of life may have gone astray – they are not healthy, they are pathological and do not provide the conditions of human flourishing.[66] The "clinical critique" of the modern condition incorporates systemic-functionalist and liberal-normative critiques of industrial-capitalism, but goes beyond them with an existential-ethical critique that pinpoints the anthropological

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64 Francis Chateauraynaud. Des prises sur le futur. Regard analytique sur l'activité visionnaire. In: Dominique Bourg, Pierre-Benoît Joly and Alain Kaufmann (eds.). *Du risque à la menace. Penser la catastrophe.* Paris 2013, 287–309.

65 Axel Honneth. Pathologien des Sozialen. Tradition und Aktualitât der Sozialphilosophie. In: *Das Andere der Gerechtigkeit. Aufsätze zur praktischen Philosophie.* Frankfurt am Main 2000, 11–69, 13–32.

66 Honneth, Pathologien.

consequences of the modern way of life.[67] From this point of view, capitalist-industrial societies of late modernity are seen as animated by an underlying logic of accumulation, acceleration and control that is prone to systemic crises: the structural contradictions between capital and labour or production and destruction are bound to create "crises of management" for the political system. A systemic crisis only becomes a real crisis when it is perceived as such by the citizens. When a small percentage of the population is getting richer, while the majority is getting poorer (to the point of facing food insecurity) or when the exploitation of nature benefits huge transnational corporations, while destroying the local lifeworlds, the system that exploits people and destroys nature for the sake of profit is condemned from a moral point of view for being unfair and unjust. To this moral critique of exploitation, the ethical critique will add that forms of life that have lost the connection to nature, the community or other lifelines that support them also make the members of society ill, unhappy and burned out. With its psychiatric overtones, the Hegelian-Marxist concept of alienation is often used as a generic concept to refer to any existential condition of malaise that is socially induced by modern and post-modern ways of life. The disintegration of social structures, cultural patterns and normative institutions that social change has brought about explains why individuals are themselves disintegrating and fragmenting. The difficulties they experience in their life, the powerlessness (domination), meaninglessness (disenchantment), disorientation (anomie) and loneliness (isolation) they suffer are, of course, personal. Taken together, they can be read, however, as symptoms of collective forms of life that do not provide the social conditions of possibility of an authentic self-realisation.

The articulation between the social and individual pathologies, between objective crises and subjective crises is not always tight. The connections between an objective analysis of the societal transformations of communication technologies (the digital world), the economy (neo-liberalism), politics (populism), ecology (climate change) and the phenomenology of everyday life is often impressionistic and casuistic. No wonder serious scholars (like Jürgen Habermas or Axel Honneth) distance themselves from wholesale interpretations of the times and even when they propose their own interpretations, they are careful to set them off from essayists and cultural critics (like Peter Sloterdijk). Moreover, the transposition of concepts from the medical sphere to the social sphere is problematic. It presupposes that the analyst is like a doctor and that society itself is like a social body. Thanks to Canguilhem and Foucault we know that the distinction between the normal and

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67 Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi. *Capitalism. A Conversation in Critical Theory.* Cambridge 2018, 115 – 130.

the pathological is itself normalising and normatising. Under the guise of normality, it represses creativity and imposes as normality a form that is itself pathological. If the medical concepts are to be more than metaphors, they have to be worked out more systematically in a social symptomatology, aetiology, epidemiology, prognosis and propose as well, if possible, some therapeutics.[68]

Diagnoses and critiques of the present bring together the critical and the clinical in a sombre assessment of the human condition in late modernity. Although they can no longer fall back on philosophical anthropologies that presuppose a normative vision of the human being or on philosophies of history that project humanity into to the future, they nevertheless suggest there is something seriously amiss with a society that systematically produces certain types of behaviours that even the individuals regard as unsatisfying. A critical historical anthropology has to analyse what "type of humanity" (Weber) corresponds to the new age. What kind of society we live in will appear in how it produces its subjects, as well as in the kind of subjects it produces. As the civilisational change implies an anthropic change – a change of the human being, her habits, her way of being in and relating to the world – one can expect that the type of subjectivity with its character structures will reveal what civilisation does to being human. And also how it threatens non-humans. Because a form of life that is alienated from life is also a form that dominates other lifeforms. By doing so it undermines in the long run its own survival. The ecological catastrophe is a symptom of the unsustainability of modern ways of being.

If one wants to understand the "signature of the epoch", one needs to update the classical analyses of the founders of sociology, but also of Freud, Adorno, Heidegger and Arendt among many others. In his analyses the *Kapitallogik*, Marx had already shown that the dynamic capitalism destroys traditional lifeworlds and throws the worker in the satanic mills of Manchester. Two centuries later, deindustrialisation has set in, but exploitation has only increased with rising inequality as a result. The capitalist mode of production that is based on expropriation, exploitation and extraction of human and non-human energy is not productive, but destructive. The destruction of nature has brought back eschatological conceptions of an ending world that the philosophy of progress had supplanted at the onset of modernity. The end of the world is not an event, but a process and a product of a techno-capitalist civilisation that is destroying the material bases of its own continuation. Neoliberalism does not only produce goods, it also produces subjects and subjectivities. Max Weber had analysed how formal rationalisation was introduc-

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68 Christopher Zurn. Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders. In: Axel Honneth (ed.). *Critical Essays.* Leiden 2011, 345 – 370.

ing calculation in all the spheres of life. The process of bureaucratisation was only one aspect of an impersonal form of domination that one finds in the state, the economy, law, science and education. With the new digital platforms, the "conduct of conduct" has taken on a completely new dimension. Surveillance capitalism takes governmentality to the molecular level. The spread of fake news, the propaganda that feeds on insecurity and inflames the minds is both an expression and a driver of a broken system and broken promises. Only psychanalysts can tell if its ressentiment or melancholy and mourning that biases the perception of reality and leads common people to the rabbit holes of conspiracy theories. The pent up anger and the fear of the future only reinforce the degenerative tendencies of the present. The intellectual diagnosis of critical times converges in part with the diagnoses ordinary people make in everyday life. They also criticise the system, they also diagnose the times, they also explain the crises, invoke causes and demand action. If "the principal propositions of the social sciences are, as Mannheim suggests,[69] situational diagnoses in which we use, by and large, the same concrete concepts and thought-models which were created for activistic purposes in real life", then the Zeitdiagnosis "in which we use words like conflict, breakdown, alienation, insurrection, resentment,"[70] is only a systematisation of the ordinary situational analysis of the informed citizen. In the same way as critical sociology has to be complemented with a "sociology of critique,"[71] a diagnostic social science has to reflexively incorporate a sociology of ordinary diagnoses and critiques of society. After all, they are the interpretations that constitute the situation in all its complexity that we need to explain and understand to make sense of our own time.

Retrospection

In this essay, I have presented a theoretical sketch for the analysis of the political situation in Brazil of the last decade. It is only a sketch. A more detailed analysis should follow at a later stage. The turmoil started with the revolts of 2013 and ended with the failed *coup d'état* of January 2023. I assume that the events mark a cycle in Brazilian history that is now closed. Undoing what has been done does not mean that the country can just revert to the point of departure. Meanwhile, the "spirit" has moved on to other pastures (like Israel). Drawing freely on Braudel's distinction between three *durées*, I have analysed the situation

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69 Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 45.

70 Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 45.

71 Luc Boltanski. Sociologie critique et sociologie de la critique. *Politix* 2 – 3:10 – 11 (1990): 124 – 134.

along three temporal cuts, which constitute as many variations of scale. The temporal cuts bring into view different temporal objects: "events", "conjunctures" and "civilisations" in Braudel's language or "events", "structures" and "epochs" in ours. Analytically, the objects may be different; in reality, they refer to a single substrate: human beings who live and act together and whose practices form a long stream of interconnected processes that make history. The articulation between the temporal objects therefore had to be real. It had to show how practices generated sequences of events, how these events led to bifurcations and crises that changed the conjuncture, and how this particular disjuncture that happened in a certain place and time was the expression of forces and tendencies that also happened in other places. Reversing the sequence, the local practices that constitute the situation can therefore also be interpreted as a particular manifestation of the change of a whole epoch that swept up world history. At the end, the analysis of the situation from different perspectives has articulated history, sociology and philosophy in an encompassing analysis of the situation. It has given us a better understanding of the ontology of the present.

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