

Brazil and the democracy of protest*

Renato Janine Ribeiro

The winter of 2013 has been hard in Brazil. Almost every month of July there is some snow in one or two towns in the South of the country, when some people from the capital cities of Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, or

* Unfortunately I will present this paper in the absence of two dear members of the Academy of Latinity, Edgar Morin and Alain Touraine, who have extensively written about May 1968 in the very heat of the moment. I think it is difficult to think about 1968 and its avatars without being indebted to these two scholars who were among the first to grasp the novelty of the phenomenon. Even though my subject lies in the Brazilian winter of 2013, rather than in Parisian spring of 1968, I would like to quote Morin's "Mai 68: complexité et ambiguïté" ("toute explication qui élimine la surprise et l'incongruité de l'événement est une interprétation qui élimine l'information que voudrait nous apporter l'événement," my italics, you will later see why; publ. in *Pouvoirs*, n. 39 [1986], p. 71-9) and Touraine ("May 68 has been neither a social nor a political movement. It was a cultural movement ruled by

even Paraná will travel in the first hours of the morning to those places in order to touch some snow with their bare hands before it melts. By noon we will see on TV the precious signs of snow in a tropical country, and again in the evening. That is all. But on July 27 snow fell on at least 128 Brazilian towns. This was a historical record, and to my knowledge nobody ventured to compare them to preceding scores, infinitely more modest; in our living memory nothing comparable had ever happened. Snow fell on other days too (on forty towns on September 5, as I write this paper); I insist: extreme cold (for our patterns) came as a surprise. If we lived in the Middle Ages we would surely consider these phenomena as portents or omens, as messages of God or maybe from the devil, I do not know, and we might link them to the great surprise we felt some weeks before, when Brazilian streets were taken for some weeks by every sort of protest—including, on one same evening and place, groups of Bolivian immigrants angry after the murder of a young compatriot of theirs, deaf people asking for better access to communication, and even a

the issue of the liberalization of the youth, not only in their sexuality, but in all aspects of their life. At the time this had no precedent, and thus it faced a strong resistance. Only today, in my opinion, one recognizes some historic significance in the sense that 68 was a sort of premonition of what would happen later"; publ. as an interview in *Informe Humanitas Unisinos*, 250 [2008]). Texts retrieved at <http://www.revue-pouvoirs.fr/Mai-68-complexite-et-ambiguite.html> and <http://www.revue-pouvoirs.fr/Mai-68-complexite-et-ambiguite.html>, on September 4, 2013.

small group of masked people demanding the restoration of a military dictatorship that fell almost thirty years ago. Nature and history seemed to have joined their forces in order to surprise us.

But in the beginning of 2013 it seemed there would be no major surprises in Brazilian politics or, for that matter, in our social life in the next few years. Even if president Dilma Rousseff does not share the charisma or popularity of her predecessor Lula da Silva, it was almost certain she would easily win next year elections for a new 4-year term. Inflation was and is under control, economy was and is performing fairly if not brilliantly, and the social inclusion programs that have been the main feature of the two successive Partido dos Trabalhadores governments, since 2003, were and continue to be successful. They are praised abroad as exemplary. Even if Brazilian press, quite conservative as it is, does not appreciate them, they have delivered what they were intended for. They have been able to change the social landscape of a country that “is not poor, but unfair,” as once or more than once said former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso.¹ The graphic presentation of social inequality as a pyramid has been replaced by a lozenge, as we can see below:

355

1. Cardoso was president of Brazil from 1995 to 2002, just before Lula. He is the most important leader of Partido da Social-Democracia Brasileira, or PSDB, the main adversary of Lula's PT.

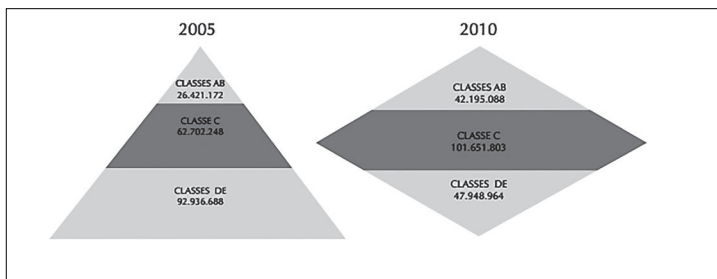


FIGURE 1—Comparison between the social pyramid of classes' distribution (according to the revenue) in 2005 and 2010.

Source: “Nova classe C transforma pirâmide social em ‘losango,’” in *IstoÉ Dinheiro*, March 22, 2011.²

356

As is shown in Fig. 1, the poorest were almost 93 million in 2005 and in only five years their number had fallen to 48 million, as the lower middle class rose from 62 million to 101 million, and the prosperous in the country went from 26 million to 42 million. The bottom of our former social pyramid lost 48.4% of its members, while the middle of the graphic grew 62.1% and the top 59.7%. It is almost certain that Brazil has never known social mobility in such a scale in so short a period of time. This is of course the key to Lula’s enormous popularity—touch-

As far as I could find it, Cardoso has said “Brazil is not poor but unfair (injusto)” in the first year of his presidency, in 1995.

In 1999 he employed a new formula, “Brazil is not an underdeveloped, but an unfair, country”; in “País injusto,” by André Lahoz, in *Exame*, Oct 10, 1999, retrieved on September 4, 2013, at <http://exame.abril.com.br/revista-exame/edicoes/0698/noticias/pais-injusto-m0053588>.

2. http://www.istoedinheiro.com.br/noticias/52423_NOVA+CLASSE+C+TRANSFORMA+PIRAMIDE+SOCIAL+EM+LOSANGO, retrieved on September 4, 2013.

ing 87% as his government ended³—and also a fair explanation for Dilma Rousseff’s good evaluation at opinion polls until the middle of 2013.

However, in a few weeks, everything changed in Brazil. Enormous protests took the streets. Since Brazil is a federation and independent elections are held for the three levels of government—Union, States, and towns⁴—the executive power is in the hands of politicians from different and even antagonistic parties according to the level we are considering. The bad quality and high prices of public transportation were the target of the first protests. As a rule urban buses and traffic are controlled by the towns and surface trains by the States, so the original protests were not aimed at the federal government. Movimento Passe Livre (Movement for a Free Transportation Tariff) had protested in the preceding years, but they always failed to stop the continuous rise of tariffs or to improve the quality of a system that makes many poor people in the big cities spend around 4 hours—and sometimes close to 8 hours—per day

357

3. See “Popularidade de Lula bate recorde e chega a 87%, diz Ibope,” *O Globo*, Dec. 12, 2010, retrieved from <http://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2010/12/popularidade-de-lula-bate-recorde-e-chega-87-diz-ibope.html> on Sep. 4, 2013, and “Popularidade de Lula é recorde mundial, diz CNT/Sensus,” *UOL Notícias*, Dec. 29, 2010, retrieved on the same day from <http://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2010/12/29/popularidade-de-lula-e-recorde-mundial-diz-cntsensus.htm>.

4. Federal and State elections are held every four years, some three months after the World Cup—as some Brazilians use to joke. Municipal elections take place in the year of the Olympic Games.

going to work and coming back home. In 2013, however, the movements have acquired a better organization and were able to block important avenues in the main cities, as Avenida Paulista in São Paulo, for several days. Some protesters resorted to violence and the press asked the State governments to put an end to the protests. On June 13 the State police of São Paulo repressed the protesters, most of all them young and many of them university students, in a violent action such as Brazil had not seen in many years. This led to an immediate shift in public opinion. The newspaper itself⁵ that had been more vocal in the call for an end to the manifestations had a photographer shot in her eyes with a rubber bullet that same evening. Three days later a huge, peaceful protest against police violence took the streets. Other protests were staged all across the country. Many middle-size towns had never before seen so many people gathered in their streets for a political protest. They lost their political virginity, we can say—I mean their “people in the streets” political virginity.

Even in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro nothing similar had happened since at least the 1984 movement calling for the end of the military dictatorship and the 1992 protests for the impeachment of then president Fernando Collor de Mello.

5. See “Retomar a [avenida] Paulista,” in *Folha de S. Paulo*, June 13, 2013, available at <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/opiniao/113690-retomar-a-paulista.shtml>.

Violence made a difference. Before the police charges, some militants and even intellectuals had posted on Facebook and elsewhere texts justifying violence when a conformist majority blocks changes. I even discussed with some of them, criticizing the words attributed to Lenin about the omelet that could not be made without breaking the eggs—the far-left version of the neoliberal phrase about someone not being able to eat his pudding and having it.⁶ The facts gave them the lie. It was after repression, i.e., police violence, that protests gained momentum. Public opinion switched its sympathies in order to condemn violence. Protesters who had been destroying buses and other properties were on the verge of making their cause lose support; it was saved because repressive violence was stronger and more conspicuous than so-called revolutionary violence. And there also was a lot of criminal violence, too.

359

A good measure of the success of Brazilian democracy can be attested by the way public opinion reacted against violence. In the refusal of violent action against political protesters, at least,⁷ Brazilian society has come of age. It

6. These two quite similar phrases, coming as they do from opposite sides of the political specter, are also noteworthy as they testify to the colonization of cuisine by political parties.

Lenin's words have also been attributed to Robespierre, a fact which hints at a possible continuity of a justification of violence in the far-left world of politics.

Finally, if Lenin's words may be apocryphal, it is very likely that the veracity of the usual story about them—a Bolshevik being told by the leader that omelet required the breaking of eggs, as a metaphor to justify thousands of deaths, and answering Lenin that he could see eggs had been broken, but no omelet was visible—will be even more doubtful.

7. However, violence against the poor, most of all in the favelas or slums, does not raise a comparable degree of reaction.

seems not to accept anymore that political conflicts, even if troublesome, be solved by repression. Insofar as democracy has as one of these features the acceptance of conflicts as normal and the refusal to employ violence to put an end to them, Brazil has performed well, or rather: Brazilian society seems to have performed better than the few State governors whose police has distinguished itself by a degree of non-necessary violence.

360 In a few weeks the movements changed their scope, or maybe the press was able to interpret them in a new way. Maybe they kept the same esse, but their percipi changed, if we can refer to the principle which is in the core of Bishop Berkeley's philosophical thought. They began as movements without a strong social basis, with no links to traditional parties but some connections with far-left parties, and with an agenda that prioritized a social cause such as urban mobility for the poor (one feature that distinguishes classes A and B from the other ones is that the more prosperous almost never take public buses, with the sole exception of the subway systems in the two towns that have them, once more São Paulo and Rio⁸; and one of the first demands that someone makes as soon he or she rises from poverty to class C is to buy a car, even if it is second-hand, to employ it daily in the

8. Other cities, such as Recife, also have a metrô but it does not conform to the usual Brazilian conception of a subway system as going mainly underground: they are surface trains.

routes to and from work.⁹ In other words good and cheap public transportation is a cause for the poor, not for the middle or richer classes. This helps to explain why left-wing students were so active during the first weeks of protests. However, as protests grew wider they were presented by the media—and also invested by new protesters—with a new meaning. Their focus would be corruption in federal government. Corruption happens in all levels of government in Brazil. But opposition to it neither was the first aim of the original movement, nor has ever become, even later, its sole or even main subject. But the feeling that federal government was responsible for the many real or imaginary shortcomings of Brazil was instrumental in reducing the popularity of president Dilma from safe 57% to dangerous 30% in the course of no more than a few weeks.

361

Some features of movements inspired in May 1968

As the movement grew the first and most common reaction in the press was of pure amazement. Some journalists even said it was impossible to understand them. This is not correct, of course. Almost half a century after the *événements de mai*, the 1968 events in France that appear today

9. In the time of slavery in Brazil the first thing a former slave would acquire as soon as he got his freedom would be a pair of shoes. Slaves would always walk barefooted. Some freedmen would wear shoes even before buying good clothes, since the physical separation between the feet and the ground was their most visible mark of freedom.

as the paradigm of movements without an apparent cause, it is possible to list some of their most important features. What is true is that they are not foreseen, and even more, they cannot be foreseen. They always come as a surprise. And this is the first point to distinguish these movements.

On March 15, 1968, veteran journalist Pierre Viansson-Ponté published in his column at *Le Monde* a piece that would become famous, “Quand la France s’ennuie,” When France is bored.¹⁰ He complained that no political emotion touched his compatriots. Content and discontent were quite limited. Just one week later, however, the repression of a protest against the American war in Vietnam ignited rebellion. In a few weeks the country would stop. This sort of movement had almost no previous model. At least part of it dreamed of a Marxist, democratic revolution. Its leaders would quote Marx, and some of them would mention Mao or Trotsky as their source of inspiration. But, if we are to quote Marx, it would be good to remember what he said about English and French Revolutions’ reference to biblical or classical past as a way not to understand precisely what is happening; as their predecessors of 1640 and 1789, we could say the 1968 leaders were trying to understand their political action in the terms of the language they knew, in the terms of the same models they were unconsciously de-

362

10. I read it. I was a subscriber to *Le Monde—Sélection hebdomadaire* and read it maybe a fortnight after it was originally published. I never forgot it.

stroying, such was the richness of what they witnessed¹¹ without being aware of its novelty:

“[A]t another stage of development a century earlier, Cromwell and the English people had borrowed from the Old Testament the speech, emotions, and illusions for their bourgeois revolution.¹²”

This requires two comments. First of all, Marx signals that all novelty in political history begins by being understood in the mold of the past. It is quite difficult to seize the present in its terms. But, and this is the second point, sometimes the present goes beyond the past models. If bourgeoisie is incapable of heroism, as says the complete quote (see the footnote), and thus needs rhetoric in order to present its historical task as more noble than it is, on the other side what Marx calls in the next paragraph “the social revolution of the 19th century” will not

363

11. They witnessed rather than they led. Maybe this is what happens when you are the apparent protagonist of something that distinguishes itself for its sheer novelty, its radical difference.

12. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, p. 5, retrieved on Sep. 4, 2013, at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf>. The whole passage reads “[U]nheroic though bourgeois society is, it nevertheless needed heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war, and national wars to bring it into being. And in the austere classical traditions of the Roman Republic the bourgeois gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions, that they needed to conceal from themselves the bourgeois-limited content of their struggles and to keep their passion on the high plane of great historic tragedy. Similarly, at another stage of development a century earlier, Cromwell and the English people had borrowed from the Old Testament the speech, emotions, and illusions for their bourgeois revolution. When the real goal had been achieved and the bourgeois transformation of English society had been accomplished, Locke supplanted Habakkuk.”

take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin (...) before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content—here the content goes beyond the phrase.¹³

The content goes beyond the phrase, and it is quite ironic to see that here the phrase was Marxist, but the content was something new, maybe post-Marxist. Political actors as Alain Krivine and Alain Geismar, for instance, dressed themselves as revolutionary Marxists, albeit democratic and opposed to Soviet-style dictatorship, but the movement they led ended by developing contents different from what they had expected.

364

We have at least two main different accounts of the events. The first one seems to be closer to what really happened. Following police repression in late March, a *Mouvement du 22-Mars* was rapidly created and student action ensued. Students, teachers, young people faced police on behalf of a revolution that would expropriate capitalists. The second account is a story we are reading more and more, and seems to be especially popular among US authors. They will evoke the December 1967 confrontation at the *Université de Nanterre* between the minister of Sports, who was there to open a new pool for the students, and a then unknown Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who told him emphasis on sports and gym were a Nazi fea-

13. Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

ture, aimed at repressing the sexual desires of the youth. They will also emphasize the moment in late March when some male students of Nanterre invade the dormitories of the girls—until that moment, women were allowed to spend the night at their boyfriends' dorms, but the men could not sleep at their girlfriends'. This second account of course emphasizes the non-immediately political aspects of the *événements*, but at the same time it allows us to politicize these features that at first seemed to belong only to private, intimate life, such as sex and love.

What is really interesting is that, at least from an intuitive point of view, there is a difference between what “really” happened and the myth that in a couple of years would grow from the body of the failed Revolution. Because in Marxist terms it was a failure; the Communists did not follow the youth in their bid for socialist revolution. This was seen by many as a betrayal that brought them to break with the Marxist organizations, especially the Communist Party. But the failed or betrayed revolution, to employ two formulae that draw a long tradition inside the Marxist and also the not-so-Marxist-left-wing world, was soon to become a *sui generis* revolution, anarchical, libertarian, different from any other—even different of everything else in the field of politics. A new paradigm was born. It will complete half a century in only five years from now.

365

Its first feature is that it comes as a surprise, and is impossible to foresee. Most political processes are exactly that: processes. This means that as they develop or unfold

we can perceive them. Sometimes we do not see their arrival but then it is our fault, not a feature of theirs. For instance a political change such as the victory of an opposition party in general elections can have its causes identified and explained, if not before the event, at least after it. A political cause must gather support, something that usually takes time. Social movements, if they succeed in their causes, can also be seen as they get strong. Economic changes also need time. The main words we have been employing here mean that processes can be perceived as time unfolds them. But events that happen according to the 1968 model do not gather strength in the course of time, they happen all of a sudden. Here time is the instant, the moment, the momentum.¹⁴ It is not a process. Things might not have happened that way. It is very difficult to tell how they would have developed in a different way, but the scandalous fact is that they happen, they never develop. This makes them contrast with almost all other changes that we witness in our contemporary experience of human life. I say “contemporary” because we have acquired from the social and human sciences this capability of seeing what is happening and then foreseeing its possibilities; or maybe the world has changed in order to expel surprise from the normal course of events. Either we have gotten a

14. Jorge Luis Borges quotes Hobbes in the epigraph of his famous *El aleph*: “But they will teach us that Eternity is the Standing still of the Present Time, a Nunc-stans (as the schools call it); which neither they, nor any else understand, no more than they would a Hic-stans for an Infinite greatness of Place” (*Leviathan*, IV, p. 46).

new knowledge of social and human sciences, or societies themselves have changed so what happens to them has become more foreseeable. Today almost everything in political, social, and economical life can be foreseen, at least as a possibility. But the 1968 model means it had no existence beforehand, not even as a possibility. It was completely out of the world.¹⁵

They happen. To write about them in English now poses a problem. What is called “happening” in English has acquired a new meaning in the last half century. The English word can be employed in French, as in Portuguese and many other language, as it is, between inverted commas. The non-translation creates a new meaning that differs from “*événement*,” “*acontecimento*,” and so on. “Happening” in other languages than English means not simply the generic fact that something happens, but rather the fact that something very special happens. The first time I read the word in French was in 1967, in the weekly selection of *Le Monde*, as it reported the victory of São Paulo-based Teatro da Universidade Católica, or Tuca, at the Festival du Théâtre Universitaire of Nancy, France, with *Morte e vida severina*, a play written by poet João Cabral de Melo Neto, put into music by Chico Buarque de Holanda. After

367

For an urgent revolutionary such as the May 68 militant or, for that matter, his or her heirs time is not eternity, time is present time, the instant, the moment. There is no such thing as eternity.

15. Of course events like this do not conform to a Hegelian-Marxist paradigm of necessity in History, but they do not conform either to the main streams in the social sciences, even those inspired by authors quite far from the left.

their success, told the review, the actors made “un happening *brésilien*” in the streets of that city in Lorraine. “Happening” does not mean here what really happens, as Ludwig von Ranke might want us to understand from his famous formula *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, what actually happened. It means something unique, with no rehearsal and no remake or reprise—*sans répétition*, we could say, in the two senses the French word has, as a preparation to a full spectacle and its repetition later. It also means a party, a festive moment. It is often conducted by people from the performing arts, sometimes from the visual ones. It has at its core the main feature we ascribe to artists: they are creative in all senses of the world and this is not confined to their art, it takes hold of their own lives. Even ordinary experiences during these moments become sort of hallowed by such an extraordinary condition.

John Cage’s 4’33” is quite paradoxically a good example of what can happen in this sense, of what a “happening” can be.¹⁶ As is well known, in this piece the artist will simply not perform the instrument or the set of instruments at his or her disposal during three consecutive movements, one of thirty seconds, then one of two minutes and twenty-three seconds, and one final that will last one minute and forty seconds. Sometimes this piece is described as consisting of silence, or of hearing silence, but it is not only that. It implies we will pay attention not only to silence but to all sounds that can emerge during the

16. The paradox is that in this piece, at first sight, nothing happens...

4'33" it will last.¹⁷ The sounds and even events we would usually perceive as ordinary, or rather not even perceive, will become a work of art. It will be unique, since there will never be two performances of 4'33" that would be identical or even comparable. Rehearsals would make no sense, except as a mockery of the idea of rehearsal itself. The experience of listening to this piece may be different according to the public—they can even laugh or protest—but one of the senses it can have is that it will put 4 minutes and 33 seconds apart from the routine of their lives. It will consecrate this short time, and I employ this verb in one of the meanings of "sacred," which is to separate something to constitute it as extraordinary. The arbitrary definition of the piece by its length in time performs this separation, this consecration of something. Such is the experience people can have when they go out of their ordinary lives in a 1968-type manifestation. People will occupy the Sorbonne, take the pavés from the streets to build barricades, make strikes, invade dorms,

369

17. "In 1951, Cage visited the anechoic chamber at Harvard University. An anechoic chamber is a room designed in such a way that the walls, ceiling and floor absorb all sounds made in the room, rather than reflecting them as echoes. Such a chamber is also externally sound-proofed. Cage entered the chamber expecting to hear silence, but he wrote later, 'I heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation.' Cage had gone to a place where he expected total silence, and yet heard sound. 'Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music.' The realisation as he saw it of the impossibility of silence led to the composition of 4'33" (*Wikipedia*, article 4'33," retrieved on Sep. 4, 2013).

occupy public places all across Spain or in some cities of the United States, dance in the streets of Istanbul as they fight the demolition of a square, or keep cars out of the streets and the avenues as they protest the bad quality of public transport; in all such cases they will be making small transgressions to municipal law—quite seldom they will be committing crimes against national law—but most of all they will be happy in so doing.

370



FIGURE 2—Protesters dance in Istanbul, 2013.

If we can return to an almost religious vocabulary to continue describing this immanent experience, we would say many then experiment an epiphany. They feel another world is possible.¹⁸ For some hours but more usually for some weeks they will share an experience that is seldom available to us. If I have defined it in quasi-religious

18. The motto of Porto Alegre Forum against neoliberalism.

terms it was deliberate. Each one has then an experience of a different, intuitive, instantaneous knowledge; that is epiphany or revelation. They transgress minor municipal laws; that is a matter of action. Each one knows; they act. And they have an experience of new forms of sociability; this is communion. But, even if two among the three words (epiphany, action, communion) I employed to describe these experiences come from a religious lexicon, they must be understood as experiences from immanence rather than from transcendence. It is not the revelation of a transcendent God, like the one who gave Moses the Ten Commandments. It is not the revelation some great mystics had. It is a revelation of possibilities that lie inside everyone, inside yourself. They are quite democratic and often very cheap, since they break with consumerism. Many a thing, not to say everything, seems close at hand. Millennium is imminent, it is portable, but please never forget it has a lay, an immanent character. It breaks with monotheism, with the Religions of the Book, with the traditions of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims.

371

Do people really change in the course of these events that, even if they last for some weeks, as they usually do, can never be characterized as a process? Because they will never stop being moments. People can stay a long time together: they will still have the feeling something very special is happening. This explains why the generations born after, say, 1955 are sometimes envious of those who lived the *événements de mai*—which, by the by, did not happen only in May 1968 and in France, but in several countries of

the world, in the various continents, during the whole year of 1968. There were *événements* in Germany, in the United States, in Brazil, in Czechoslovakia, in Japan, as in many other countries. These experiences are felt most of all by the youth, those who in our society are very free, both from the parental constraints that held them during their infancy and from the pressures of the market that will gain control on them once they are fully grown. Such experiences may be understood as a coming of age, but not one that implies a maturity—rather one that brings a change. Youth is a key word here. Young men and women are not yet deemed to be fully responsible. Their actions do not necessarily imply the consequences they would bring to full grown-ups.

372 In academic life they often are the ones who can protest and contest rules that are accepted by many professors. This implies that all these movements share a sense of intense freedom that in our society is especially allocated to youngsters. So, when at the time of our meeting in Barcelona I was able to see the *indignados* gathering both at Plaça de Catalunya a few blocks from our auditorium and two days later at Plaza del Sol in Madrid, I expected to meet young people, and was quite surprised, and I must say also delighted, to see there were people from all ages. It was the anthropologist Clara Más who draw my attention to this phenomenon. But this is considered to be an exception. A slogan quite frequent in Chile in the meetings of the Unidad Popular that elected Allende, in the years preceding the infamous 1973 coup d'état, was *quien no salta es momio*, literally, those who do not jump are mummies, meaning

conservative, reactionary people with no imagination, no utopia, no ability to go beyond their routine. Young people of course can jump easier than their elders... But of course adrenaline is high in all these experiences, and it makes people feel they are living their lives intensely. This is why these short periods of time when something wholly unexpected happens can lead people who had not the chance of being there to feel sort of envious. I even think one new human right should be, for every generation, to have its own May 1968; the United Nations should think about it.

One of the key factors in what I call this epiphany is that politics encompasses much more than professional, partisan politics, and that it can be joyful. It will address the world of life, as something that can always go beyond theories and institutions and will never be completely subsumed or understood by them.¹⁹ Take the Brazilian protests once more. Brazil is quite deficient in the domain of public services; we usually list them as being education, health, transportation, and public security. Uncomfortable buses, traveling along badly designed routes, charging their customers high tariffs for a bad service: this implies many working people will be at least 4 hours per day in public

373

19. The classic example of subsumption is De Gaulle's speech to French colons in Alger, on June 4, 1958: "Je vous ai compris." There is a first, denotative meaning: I have understood you, so you can expect me to satisfy your demands, i.e., Algeria will stay French. But there also is a second, underlying meaning that will be revealed only *a posteriori*, after some years of several wars—the French-Algerian war, as well as the internecine Algerian and French quasi-civil wars: I have subsumed you, you are under my spell, I have annexed you, so I will do to you what I feel I need to do instead of what you may want and you believed I would do.

transportation. It is a half of their working journey, meaning they spend at least 20 hours per week in a boring, tiresome, and unpaid effort related to their work.

But there are other more symbolical meanings involved. I emphasize the issue of movement. In our times speed is a very much desired commodity. It appears as something very good, most of all in the publicity for private cars and fast access to Internet. Poor people do not own cars and often access the Web in a speed less than satisfactory. They are deprived of speed. They are speedless. Their mobility, both physical and virtual, is severely reduced. Not to have something that is a collective object of desire accrues

374

Common to both meanings is the fact that an external subject knows what other people want and need, and therefore this exteriority—general de Gaulle—acquires a sort of power over them.

But a glissement occurs. The first and obvious meaning suggests the speaker is completely sincere, while the not-so-obvious one constitutes him as an astute manipulator of men. The sincerity and potential equality of the first meaning makes room for the political maneuvering and strong hierarchy present in the second one. Indeed: when De Gaulle speaks in Alger he has just been constituted as the strong man of France by the actions of the colons. He owes them his power. And they called him because they did not want anything more from politicians, men they despised. De Gaulle was a national hero. For them he is—and he will always consider himself as being—above the political parties. This atmosphere of non-politics creates what they consider to be a sincere, horizontal communication between them. In a few years, however, they will feel betrayed. De Gaulle, whom they thought to be their creature, will leave them to their fate. And the second, deep meaning of *comprendre* will imply that politics is back with a vengeance, and with all the bad connotations it often carries.

Of course, even if we do not agree at all with the 1958 Algerian *piéds-noirs*, we can see that their experience of intense hope and desperate betrayal, both expressed in the different and successive understandings of the word *comprendre*, is an insight into a quasi-universal feature of the relationship between those who are represented and those who represent them in the field of politics.

the frustration one feels. It is not only “not to have,” it is to be deprived. It is as though present-day society had made them several promises it will not fulfill. They are reduced to a second-tier rank in society; please notice I am trying to employ metaphors that take into account the issue of movement. The philosopher I have studied the most, Thomas Hobbes, wrote in 1651: “Life itself is but motion.”²⁰ Immobility is thus a sort of death. Not to move is to be almost dead. Bad public transportation means not only an inferior quality of life, but also a small massacre of people who are continuously dying, not in the metaphysical sense of the verse of Brazilian modernist poet Cassiano Ricardo,

Each minute in life
Never is more, always is less²¹

375

but in the non-metaphysical meaning of a loss of life, of its possibilities to no avail; if life is motion, bad buses prosaically mean death. We should add that in philosophical tradition movement is not only the physical transportation of an object from one place to another, undergoing just small, imperceptible changes, as happens to cars or coffee cans when we displace them—it is also, and maybe more nobly, change. Hegel was especially clear about this. To move is not only to displace, it is also to change. To move him- or herself is to be able to change. Thus people with

20. *Leviathan*, chap. VI.

21. “O Relógio.” In full: “Diante de coisa tão doida / Conservemo-nos serenos // Cada minuto da vida / Nunca é mais, é sempre menos // Ser é apenas uma face / Do não ser, e não do ser // Desde o instante em que se nasce / Já se começa a morrer.”

mobility are those who have a future. If our present day societies are so keen about ensuring people with reduced mobility ways to displace themselves without the help from other ones it is a sign that they are getting a right to live on their own they previously lacked. To have a future might be understood as an epitome to all human rights.

376 Can politics be joyful? Michelangelo Antonioni's somewhat forgotten documentary *Chung Kuo, or China*, shows us some workers in their factory; the sequence—maybe a minute long—closes when the narrator tells us something about politics. The word politics appears at the same time as they laugh. This is the conclusion of the scene: working men and women laughing with joy as they talk, so it seems, about politics. Is it possible to be happy in politics?²² Since Maoist experience is so condemned in our present days it has become hard for us to believe this could happen in China in the aftermath of its Cultural Revolution, but anyway the question makes sense independently of its context. Is it possible to be happy, or at least to share joy with other people, when we are doing politics? This is a human experience that arises at these moments we have been describing. It is of course exceptional in the course of human events. Most of the time politics seems to be quite boring; the thesis, so dear to left-wing militants, that it only bores people when it is bad, not true politics, may be no more than wishful think-

22. See my "As tribulações dos chineses n'A China," in *Discurso* n. 6 (1975), available at http://filosofia.fflch.usp.br/sites/filosofia.fflch.usp.br/files/publicacoes/Discurso/Artigos/D6/D06_As_tribulacoes_dos_chineses_na_China.pdf.

ing. But we are dealing here with an exception that is meaningful. Movements as French 1968 have been and still are a sort of model for many among those who lived, or heard about, them. Their influence goes beyond their actual presence. They give people an important tool to conceive of their lives as more original and, why not, funnier than usual.

1968, second wave

And we are presently witnessing what could be called a second wave of these movements. It is possible that we see now a second wave of the movements that had their first wave in 1968. We referred to the many protests that then took the streets in the Americas, in Europe, and Asia. But the same is happening again. In 2010 began the Arab spring in Tunisia, quickly followed by the Egyptian protests of Place Tahrir and the Spanish indignados; later in the year, there was Occupy Wall Street; in 2013, there were the Bulgarian protests, then the Turkish and Brazilian ones. It looks as though these movements, that never disappeared completely but have been most of them reduced to mere memories, are now recovering their momentum.

If we emphasize some essential traits they share, not only did they come as a surprise, not only were they unforeseen, but they always were much larger than their causes. A protest against the Vietnam War or a pool, the self-immolation of a Tunisian worker or meetings against bus tariffs would not normally account for all the results they came to provoke. These immediate causes seem to be the spark that

ignites a fire, but the problem still remains, where was the straw, where was the fuel needed to kindle so big a fire? These movements seem to come out of nowhere. They are not “normal” social movements, gathered around class or religious or political patterns. They also lack formal leadership and, quite often, a precise focus. Other people, most of all those in charge of politics, economy, or the media, often complain about these “lacks.” If they only had leaders we could talk to and who could speak on their behalf, if they only had concrete proposals that could be brought to the table so we could negotiate... But if these movements had identified leaders and a list of proposals, they would not be what they are. They would belong to the world of representative, partisan, professional, realistic democracy. They would never have appealed to the sectors they are able to attract, i.e., many people disappointed by politics and its realistic component. Leaders and focus belong to the realistic factor in politics. If we had them, we would never have this utopian component that, at least from time to time, is absolutely necessary to give politics itself a new life.

378

Let us seize the matter from another point of view. The system of pensions established in many countries of the world around the 1930s has been coming to an end. People are taught they will have to work longer than their parents did, and that very likely they will not live lives such as their parents were able to afford. In Brazil, as abroad, there is a ceiling for the pensions that will be paid to the retired. But since public health in our country is not good, it means that older people, if they can afford it, will buy a private health

insurance that will be quite expensive. A pension is often not enough to pay a health insurance and the medicines an old person will need as a protection against inevitable illnesses. Young people are being made aware of that. They need to spare. They enter the market in their twenties already knowing they must make provisions for their future. To add to their bad prospects, they will never know for sure if the private pension they will contract right now for their old age will be a success or a failure. They might not have anything to receive when they will need to, as crowds of widows discovered in the last months of 2008. This puts a grey shadow on their lives. They are forced to be intensely rational in the worst sense of rationality, I mean: not rationality as an expectation of a better world, in the tradition of the Enlightenment, but rationality as fear for their lives and health. Not hope; sheer fear.

379

It is against this background that doses of utopia constitute a powerful medicine. Which means that these movements are “-less” (leaderless, focusless) only if they are seen from a rather timid point of view, which ignores they bring one of the most important challenges that are needed in order to give politics its life. For one of the great paradoxes of our present times is that politics is rapidly losing its glamour, its power to attract the best and the brightest, exactly at the same time that democracy becomes, for the first time in History, the way of life for more than a half of global population. At some time in the 1990s, with the demise of the Soviet Union and of its satellite regimes, plus the fall of dictatorships in Latin America and US satellites

elsewhere, democracy in its manifold forms became the way of life—the regime, if we give this word all of its several connotations, including those pertaining to health and dietetics—of billions of people. To take the case of Brazil, our country has had until now a little more than forty years of democratic life. I could never call democratic the colonial period, or the imperial period of arbitrary rule plus slavery, or the first years of a Republican regime infamous for the dimension of the electoral fraud then practiced, or the fifteen years of Getúlio Vargas dictatorship, or the two decades of military rule. We can only consider as democratic the 19 years between the fall of the Vargas regime in 1945 and the 1964 coup d'état, as well as the 28 years that
380 went since the end of the military dictatorship. So we have a fragile democratic interlude of less than twenty years between distinct authoritarian models of power, and then almost three decades of a rule that becomes more and more democratic. Nothing threatens at the present moment this democratic vocation.

But will the epiphany I described have long term consequences, or are the protests to be lived only as a carnival? This is linked to another major trait of such manifestations. They almost always fail to deliver what was desired, at least in the short term. Another paradox here: people go to the streets because they do not want the long bureaucratic delays, the burden of the institutions. They want to change, to fully live their moments. They feel the intense democracy they long for as an urgent need. To translate their desire in the language of politics is to give it a sense of urgency,

perhaps even of emergency. But they do not get the results they wanted, at least not before some years. In the short term practically all the 1968-paradigm movements have failed. French elections in June 1968 brought a *Chambre introuvable* to Palais Bourbon, giving president De Gaulle the most comfortable parliamentary majority he ever had in all his years in power. Presidential elections held in Egypt after and as a consequence of the Arab spring resulted in a second ballot between the Muslim Brotherhood and representatives of the old regime: Place Tahrir was absent from the final decision about who would be the first democratically elected ruler of the oldest country in the world. Since Tunisia has a parliamentary system and not a presidential one, events did not unfold as badly as in Egypt, but anyway the main party in the country does not share the ideals of those who fought for democracy. Prague spring had an unfortunate end when Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia, a country that would itself dissolve two decades after as a postponed result of this act of aggression. Spanish indignados were given a right-wing government, Occupy Wall Street was succeeded by the risky foreign policy of president Obama. In all cases disappointment is the follow-up to the experience of a millennium. This can of course be quite dramatic. For many it will mean there will be no day after, other than a remembrance of things truly and irreversibly past. To eject the cars from the streets, to play the piano at the Sorbonne will be no more than happy memories, unable to affect lives that will continue, as it is said of business, "as usual." Thus it is as though people have lived no more than a carnival. This can be an

extraordinary experience, as everybody knows who has already been to Rio de Janeiro or Salvador or other places famous for this festival where things are turned upside down and, as said Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade in his Anthropophagical manifesto (1928), “joy is the acid test.”²³ But carnival soon ends; it is no more than a pause in a life that undergoes no change. It can work as a catharsis allowing people to live one more year as they have been living until now.²⁴

Today I am a civil servant.
Itabira is no more than a photo on the wall.
But how it hurts!²⁵

382

Either you undergo a metamorphosis and live your epiphany in its entirety, or you are doomed to a bureau-

23. Trans. Maria do Carmo Zanini; retrieved on September 4, 2013, at <http://www.emanuelpimenta.net/ebooks/archives/koellreutter/chapters/us/KOELL%20Emanuel%20Pimenta%20US%20Oswald%20de%20Andrade.pdf>. The original is quite difficult to translate. Andrade says joy is “a prova dos nove,” that is, the method of casting-out nines to ensure that hand computations are correct. In Portuguese as in several Latin languages as well as in German, this means “proof by nine.” The word “proof” conveying meanings stronger than casting-out nines, this must be the reason why the translator chose another way of rendering the writer’s idea.

24. In my article “A utopia lírica de Chico Buarque de Holanda,” in *Decantando a República*, 2004, v. 1, p. 149-168, I suggest the words “carnival” and “samba” that appear in many of Chico Buarque’s songs could be read as metaphors for a great and joyful social change, such as a revolution. The Brazilian popular composer certainly does not appreciate the idea that carnival would be no more than a catharsis.

25. A poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade (no relation to Oswald de Andrade), “Confidência do Itabirano,” or “Confession by a citizen from Itabira” (a small town in Minas Gerais state, where he was born): “Hoje sou funcionário público. Itabira é apenas uma fotografia na parede. Mas como dói!”

cratic present identity, which will downgrade the richness of your life to a photo on the wall—and it will hurt. It may be unavoidable that great expectations turn into lost delusions. But at least we should not accept this too easily. Some resistance to this *Gleichschaltung* of memory should be waged.

And yet changes happen. If 1968 is now remembered most of all as the beginning of a series of transformations in individual customs, it is because its success was clear in that field. It was unable to deliver the democratic socialist regime protesters were so vocal about—but in some years they succeeded in changing the ways people live hierarchy, love, sexuality. If the Gaullist won the parliamentary elections held one month after the événements de mai, the names of those deputies have been forgotten, while the conquests of the students and their allies are celebrated as one of the most important moments of the 20th century.

383

Prospects for Brazil

Now I will try and understand the enjeu, the main focus, of Brazilian protests. For those Brazilians who feel shame or frustration at what seems to be a quite slow pace in the advancement of their democracy,²⁶ it is good to remember that in the past three decades Brazilian society has been

26. As I was finishing this paper a young man told me at a panel on the Brazilian recent movements: “You have lived military dictatorship and may be glad you enjoy more freedom today than at that time; but I did not

able to change the country for the better three times, never departing from democratic methods. The military dictators that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985 left the country in a very bad shape, concerning politics, inflation, social inequality, and administrative efficiency.

384 The first major democratic action was in 1984, with the movement *Diretas Já*, which led to the demise of the military dictatorship. In 1994 inflation was finally beaten by *Plano Real*,²⁷ a plan supported by the PSDB which would give Cardoso his two successive presidential terms. In 2002 the presidential election of Lula paved the way so that social inclusion and fight against poverty could become State politics. The preceding governments have had their social inclusion programs, but very often these were the first to be cast aside, every time a major economic crisis put a strain on public finances. Since Lula's first government social inclusion policies have become a must for everyone who wants to get elected as president, governor, or mayor. For the oppositional PSDB it has meant that its better chances to return to federal power will have as their best condition a successful achievement of the PT project. Cardoso himself noticed it when he wrote, in 2011, some months after his party was defeated for the third consecutive time in its presidential bid, that PSDB could not beat PT in terms of

see the military ruling our country; what I feel and hate is the dictatorship of corporations." September 5, 2013, Instituto Ethos panel on "O que dizem as ruas e o que as empresas têm a ver com isso?"

27. Real has been the name of Brazilian currency since 1994.

projects to offer to the poor.²⁸ It could not rival PT in this field. PSDB would have good proposals, however, to deliver to the middle classes. This brought the probable PSDB presidential candidate for 2014, former Minas Gerais state governor Aécio Neves, a political leader more congenial than the twice-candidate, twice-defeated São Paulo-based José Serra, to bet on the success of PT social inclusion programs at the same time he criticized them as being emergency projects, not lasting or sustainable ones. He hinted that Bolsa Família, the main official program for inclusion, is good but we must think about the day after it. In some years it will have done all the good it can, and it will be spent. In his opinion a lasting social inclusion would need a more liberal economy, which would create jobs rather than, say, feed people directly.

385

Actually, the three main possible candidates against PT present themselves as its successors rather than its foes. They do not want to contest a policy and a politician that are very popular in the country. They prefer to say that it now belongs to history. The problem is that, if it was difficult to fight and then defeat inflation, after some twenty or thirty years of a national addiction to it, it is even harder to beat social exclusion, which is five hundred years old. And if it was possible to save almost 50 million from exclusion in only five years, the remainder will surely take

28. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, "O papel da oposição," revista *Interesse Nacional*, n. 13 (2011), retrieved on September 4 at <http://blogs.estadao.com.br/radar-politico/2011/04/14/leia-a-integra-do-artigo-de-fhc-o-papel-da-oposicao/>.

more time, and so on; a fact that can be read in two different ways: either we will consider that PT medicine against misery has had its time, and then another party will have good proposals to deal with it (but Cardoso's caveat is still valid, it seems to me), or we will need to accept that a PT moment is not yet over, and they will continue the favorites in the bid for power until the country puts an end to the national indignity that consists in having so big a proportion of very poor.

386 But, to return to the three democratic victories of the last decades, the first meant a political change, the second an economic one, the third a social one. Three major fields of social or public life were thus addressed. In all cases change has been obtained by democratic means. The results were democratic because they raised the quality of life in Brazil, but also because of the methods employed: everything was gotten through pacific and respectful means, plus a mass mobilization, either in the streets or in the vote. To make it clear we should remember there were at least three failed attempts to beat inflation in the nine years after the end of the military regime. Plano Cruzado (1986) and Plano Verão (1988) were full of measures that would be understood—today—as almost unconstitutional, since they changed contracts, for instance. Most of all they resorted to surprise, trying to catch off their guard the elements that induced the rise of prices. Plano Collor (1990) was the most flawed one, unashamedly disobeying the Constitution that had been adopted only 17 months before its inception. However, discontent was so high with

inflation that many Brazilians accepted its infringement in the hope this could bring them some monetary stability. It failed ignominiously, however. The last and best plan was Plano Real (1994), which ensured the subsequent election of president Fernando H. Cardoso, which as minister of the Finances had supervised the last version of this intelligent and elegant project of monetary stability. It also was the most democratic one of all four plans. I dare say that it still had a small flavor of potential unconstitutionality, insofar as it has been implemented only three months before the presidential elections, and this obviously favored Cardoso against his rival, until that time the clear favorite for the polls, Lula da Silva. I very much doubt the Supreme Court of Brazil would still allow a president in the few months before his succession to adopt measures with so huge a political impact as that one.²⁹ But Brazil then lived a sort of national emergency. There was some tolerance vis-à-vis heterodox political measures. Today we do not live these conditions anymore. So there is no more need, nor room, for policies that could be constructed as incorrect interventions in the electoral domain.

387

29. To give an example: in the last month before the presidential election, 2010, the opposition candidate José Serra proposed to raise Bolsa Família and include more people among its beneficiaries. Let us suppose for a moment that the incumbent government decided to adopt these measures before the elections, in an attempt to demobilize the popular support that the other candidate could expect to gather. A step like this would likely be considered as an anti-ethical and even illegal move to affect the elections, and the Supreme Court would take measures against it. However, it would not be very different in its nature from the adoption of Plano Real only three months before the elections, in 1994.

As far as I can risk a prognosis the next move will be to achieve a crucial improvement in the quality of public services, i.e., in the quality of the State. Curiously this would keep the pace at which each important reform has been adopted—one every ten years, more or less. But we could say that Brazil was able to give the above mentioned steps when the following features were present:

388

1. The current situation (dictatorship, inflation, poverty) had begun to be perceived as taking a huge toll on every aspect of social and personal life. Society as a whole paid a huge price for each one of these three major problems. Under the military it was an ordeal not to be free; in the last years of their rule and the first ones of the civilian government inflation eroded trust in others and faith in the future; for centuries misery has made a mockery of the qualities of Brazilian society as a whole. To exemplify this last point we can compare poverty to slavery—both did corrupt the whole of our social fabric. When labor and workers are despised people are stimulated to gain money without working.
2. The society came to the consensus that the situation (political, economic, or social) was unbearable. Brazil has lived twenty years under the dictatorship, around the same time under inflation, and coexisted with misery for five centuries, but a final straw came. There was a strong belief across the borders of dif-

The difference lies in the opportunity. Today we live no more a national emergency.

ferent classes or political parties that this should not continue.

3. There were political leaders who could, with much endeavor, provide leadership and propose outcomes to solve the situation.

Finally, the results were very good. Every time what originally seemed to be the proposal of one group—the opposition to the military, the economists, the left-wing parties—was accepted and espoused by Brazilian society and became a national commitment. The first success can be measured by the Human Development Index of the Municipalities. The military returned to the barracks in 1985 leaving 85.8% of Brazilian municipalities with a “very low” standard of life, but the years of democracy were so positive that the last available data show that now we have only 0.57% of municipalities under this threshold.³⁰ The second success can be gauged when we compare inflation, which in 1994 was on the brink of attaining a four-digit figure and today is around 5% (in both cases, per year). The third success was seen in Figure 1: a very high, Guinness records-level, social mobility upwards.

389

Each one of the three democratic successful steps had a diagnosis and a prescription. In 1984, the diagnosis said that authoritarian rule paralyzed the whole life of the coun-

30. See “ONU: Atlas Brasil 2013 mostra redução de disparidades entre norte e sul nas últimas duas décadas,” at United Nations Brazilian site, July 29, 2013, available at <http://www.onu.org.br/onu-atlas-brasil-2013-mostra-reducao-de-disparidades-entre-norte-e-sul-nas-ultimas-duas-decadas/>

try, from justice and social justice to personal liberty; the medicine prescribed was democracy. Ten years later, the diagnosis was that inflation was eroding both economic and moral values, and the prescription was for a transparent monetary stability plan, allowing economic actors and citizens to resume faith in themselves and in the others. In 2002 the diagnosis held that misery spoils our social relationships, showing the unethical character of a society that did not actually abolish slavery,³¹ and the prescribed medicine were social inclusion programs.

390 In all three cases the perception that the situation had become unbearable was the cause or maybe the consequence of the definition of an ethical cause.³² The interesting point to be made is that in the last thirty years Brazil lived practical lessons from the best political philosophy. (However, neither our thinkers nor our politicians seemed to be aware of this phenomenon.) First of all, we had practical classes on the issue of freedom, due to and against the repression imposed by the military. Under inflation we had to learn about the importance of trusting each other and the relevance of being able to have proposals for the future, as a basis for social bonds. In the last and probably more dif-

31. There is a widespread legend that in the aftermath of Vargas' coup d'état in 1937 dissolving Congress and replacing the democratic Constitution with a quasi-fascist one, someone sent him a telegram suggesting a law simpler than the new Chart but with the same spirit: "Article I. The law liberating the slaves is hereby revoked. Article II. White people will also be slaves." I could not find the origin of the quotation.

32. I may be tempted, as a professor of Ethics and Political Philosophy, to give too much weight to these factors but I do my best to refrain myself from any such exaggeration.

difficult step, we currently take part at a drama where selfishness, social oppression, and misery face social commitment, equality, and better opportunities as the road to some sort of prosperity. The new issue is whether and how the State—at all levels, federal, State, and municipal—will be able to ensure decent public services. In my opinion it is possible or at least desirable to finally establish the Welfare state we never had.

Among the three features that have been present at each major democratic change the first two are repeated today. We have a strong belief that the situation is untenable, and the price we pay for it is too high. Take the examples of public health, public education, public transportation, public security, and consider them now from the point of view of the middle classes. As taxpayers they pay for them. But they avoid using them. Middle and upper classes citizens will put their children in private schools, buy a car, hire with their neighbors from the same street a *segurança*, meaning a man usually unarmed whose presence is deemed to dissuade robbers from doing their nefarious job, and pay for a health insurance; and if an illness is a little more complex they will still pay the fee of a good private doctor not covered by their insurance. Thus many people pay for State services they never turn to. This can explain and justify the revolt of the middle classes against what they decrypt as the result of corruption, when this is rather, as I see it, the effect of bad governance in the social areas of government. Anyway we can look at it this situation has become very hard to bear. On one side, the middle

classes feel they pay for a government that gives them very few things in return for their taxes. On the other side, the poor can resort only to public education, which means they will seldom get to a good university if any, public health, which makes them wait for half a year before getting an appointment with a doctor that may well be absent from the hospital when they arrive, public security, which does not protect them from crime, and public transportation, which takes from them twenty hours a week and even more, in crowded buses. It is to wonder, not why protests happened, but why it took so long for them to happen.³³

392 The federal government and some of its supporters feel uncomfortable at the protests, particularly since the press has stamped PT as a corrupt party, and the public opinion, i.e. the media and the middle classes especially from São Paulo, attributes most of Brazilian problems to it, which is unfair. But my account of the situation is that, after facing and solving three great problems that kept Brazil from being a true democracy, we have now a fourth agenda. It is not a new set of problems. For some twenty years at least some of our best politicians from the center (I mean PSDB) have been talking about a *choque de gestão*, an administrative shock that would subordinate the State to popular needs. But this never happened. São Paulo, even if it is the richest State of the country, has enormous social deficiencies that have not been solved in twenty years of PSDB

33. The great philosophical, political, ethical question: why are there so few revolts against injustice?

management of its autonomous government. I understand this as follows. Bad governance of social affairs is the diagnostic, and the prescription would be to have good, honest administrators, instead of politically appointed and/or corrupt ones. According to this account politics is the problem, efficiency is the medicine. To solve the question we should have less politics and more technical capability, which would be released once we discard corruption and populism. But I disagree.

If my account of the three successes in our recent democratic history is correct, then we need more politics, not less. Heidegger is right when he asserts that “the essence of technology is by no means anything technological.”³⁴ We can give this essence different names, one of them will be political. But of course we need a politics different from the usual one. Changes have happened because people have been persuaded that dictatorship, inflation, and misery were bad, and that there were leaderships and projects able to fight them. But this did not happen in what concerns the bad performance of government in the social areas. Almost twenty years ago I wrote an op-ed piece for a Brazilian newspaper about how our press and government employed the words “social” and “society.” They gave them opposite meanings. “Society” meant people who have at least a certain income, belonging to the middle and upper classes. “Social” was employed to talk about social poli-

393

34. An accurate translation, but far from elegant. Sorry. This is the only one I found.

cies, i.e., those who intend to benefit the poor. “Society” is composed by those who are the subject (= he who decides) of political decisions, while “social” refers to those who are the subject (= the theme, the object) of social policies. Thus I concluded that “social” was not the adjective correspondent to the noun “society.” It was its antonym. My piece then developed into a book, *A sociedade contra o social: o alto custo da vida pública no Brasil* (2000),³⁵ where I discussed if and how North Atlantic political theory can cope with Western dissident societies as the ones from Latin America, that are quite different from European ones and this not only because they have not yet been able to develop in the same direction, but because they have developed as societies on their own. Specifically, in what concerns the title, the social inclusion programs have changed the situation I described in the 1990s. Empowerment of the poor has included many of them in what was called “society.” “Social” policies are no more the first ones to be discarded. I appreciate the fact that PT governments have succeeded in putting them in the budget as something that will not be sacrificed to financial crises. But this works when public money is transferred to the pockets of the poor, not when the State operates hospitals, schools, and other services that are essential for their welfare. In other and may-

394

35. Jabuti Prize as the best essay in social sciences, 2001. The subtitle refers to what I consider the Brazilian difficulty to deal with the public life, since for us the Mandevillean principle that “private vices” develop into “public benefits” has not succeeded in displacing the traditional idea that we should be virtuous in our private lives at the same time we might be vicious in our public dimension.

be ironic³⁶ words, social policies work insofar as they privatize money—putting them into the pockets of the poor—not when they are operated as a public system.

So we need better administrators but we will not have them if we only require them. In order to get them we must demand for more than fair, just administrators. For the moment being there is no project that can implement such a change. There is an intense desire, there is the belief everything bad stems from this fourth evil, the bad quality of the social areas of the government—of all governments, federal, States, and towns—but this is all. The liberal or right-wing parties will say it is a matter of honesty and technical qualification, the federal government will answer it is doing its best, but this is all. We do not know what may happen in the next years. History is open. Political discussions give much room to the names of parties and candidates, but if historical experience can help us I would say that we were able to have two successive good presidents as Cardoso and Lula because each one of them had a good diagnosis and a proper agenda to fight first one, then another, of the evils I have mentioned. We do not have this for the moment being. But the three major problems Brazil has fought were not defeated in the first battle. Dictatorship had many opponents, many of whom have been murdered; it took a long time to win the war against the illegitimate power of the military. Inflation has been the target of several plans

395

36. The irony lies in the fact that PT is considered to advocate for strong government.

before being reduced to a manageable low rate. It is a matter of trial and error, maybe.

It is also a matter of hegemony. It is interesting to study the political aspect of the fight against inflation because of the three evils this was the one that has needed a mostly technical approach. Democracy and social inclusion are clearly social causes that need political mobilization of the masses. But meetings and manifestations do not help to win the battle against inflation. However an almost universal consensus was created that inflation was so bad and corrosive that it needed to be defeated. Cardoso was instrumental in creating this ideological atmosphere. It is true that his party has been ungrateful to president Itamar Franco who, besides being the head of State that gave political support to Plano Real, invited Cardoso to be his minister of Finances and then his successor at the Planalto Palace. Only after Itamar Franco's death in 2011 has PSDB recognized his essential role; until then the Plan was widely attributed to Cardoso and his party.³⁷ Cardoso is no economist, which means that the Plan was technically devised by a team of experts and institutionally supported by Itamar.

But Cardoso played an essential role to help it create a new hegemony. He gave the speeches persuading the economic actors and Brazilian population as a whole. He was

37. After the presidential elections of 1994, held three months after the beginning of Plano Real and easily won by Cardoso, they even spread the joke that he had been “the first successor [in the history of Brazil] to have made his president” (instead of “the first president to make his successor”).

the great persuader. His rhetoric is very different from Lula's. I asked him once about this; Cardoso answered me Lula would employ more metaphors than him, while he would be more rational but he immediately added that he employed reason at a level not superior to common sense.³⁸ For a person accused by some of his foes of being a snob (which he is surely not) he was remarkably modest. When he ran for his first executive post in 1985 he was considered to be unable to address a crowd because of his academic background and training. But he was a success as a president. This was chiefly due to his ability as a great communicator. Common people would admire him and understand he had points to be taken into account. They probably feel more things in common with Lula. But in spite of their personal qualities they were both able to win ideological hegemony in the country for two agendas that had been built along the years. When Cardoso was elected Brazilian society had elected inflation as its main enemy. When Lula finally got elected PT had conquered ideological hegemony for a political platform that consisted in two points, an ethical agenda and a social one. Resistance to PT was mostly concerned with its economic proposals. In both cases hegemony has preceded election. PSDB lost the presidential election of 2002 to PT in part because of its own success in managing inflation, in part because it was not deemed capable of fighting poverty. It is possible that PT lose a future

397

38. See my interview with him, "Em nome da sociologia," in *Sociologia Ciência e Vida*, number 30 (2009), available at <http://sociologiacienciaevida.uol.com.br/ESSO/Edicoes/30/artigo181631-1.asp>.

presidential election, maybe next year, or in 2018, because of its own success in including social policies into the common agenda of the nation.

But we still need to know if and when a new agenda will be available. The best thing would be for it to be devised neither by a party, nor by or for a leader, but by a more comprehensive network of multiple social and political actors. But this is still no more than a hope. At least we seem to know which is the next challenge for our democracy. And I think Brazilian history in the last thirty years has been, and it may still be for the next decade or two, either representative of or exemplary for several other countries that are emerging from poverty, authoritarianism, corruption, and State inefficiency in the handling of their social areas.