

A DYNAMIC COUNTRY, A FALTERING WAY OF THINKING

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I belong to a generation that attended university in the 1950s and had high hopes for new projects in Brazil. We saw a broad future on the horizon ahead of us. Two keywords: development and nationalism. Getúlio Vargas' suicide was a watershed, with the indictment of his testamentary letter on one verge and the inauguration of Brasília on the other. Plans, goals, the era of Juscelino Kubitschek. We lived in a country that was beginning to believe in itself. The Catholic University Youth of 1959, drawing on a suggestion from philosopher Jacques Maritain, sought a solid historical ideal. Soon after, in the following decade, we wished to let ourselves be suffused with the aspirations of a new historical consciousness. Like Emmanuel Mounier, we reckoned on a personalist and community-minded socialism. We denounced the inegalitarian capitalist system and underdevelopment – dependent and associated, as we would soon be charging them. Student and labor leaders alike demanded basic reforms. And popular culture was beginning to be discovered: Paulo Freire, political consciousness, the MEB (Grassroots Education Movement), Recife's MCP (Popular Culture Movement), the National Students Union's CPCs (Popular Cultural Centers). Popular wisdom was valued, as well as the people's pedagogic process from magical reasoning to critical awareness. Perhaps, to use Malraux's term with a pinch of irony, we allowed ourselves to be somewhat carried away by a certain lyrical delusion.

Then, in a flash, a fulminant severance: twenty years of authoritarianism – exile, imprisonment, abdication and abandonment, suicidal strategies, volunta-

rism, accommodation. During this period, however, in the undergrounds of society, popular resistance held on, careful and creative, less directly political, more participative, expressing the demands of society. In Brazil and in Latin America, the 1970s saw the growth of social movements in the countryside and in the cities, and of pastoral movements within the churches: squatters in the north, rural day laborers in the middle states, the church initiatives known as pastoral of the land and pastoral of the proletariat, the Indian Council. . . For the Catholic Church in the region, this was the time between the episcopal encounters in Medellin in 1968, and Puebla in 1979, when the church's preferential option for the poor and the new Grassroots Ecclesiastical Communities (the CEBs) was spelled out. We cannot possibly understand the mobilization of the late 1970s and ensuing years if we disregard this seldom visible, but extremely vigorous and substantial work. The military were obsessed with outbreaks of guerilla warfare and insurrections and fiercely repressed them, without ever seeing that a more profound, real and pervasive dynamics pervaded many of these grassroots experiments proliferating all over the country. In this sense, political openness was not merely an act enacted from above, or a cunning survival strategy; it was also a conquest of society's most vital fringes, in which sectors of the Catholic Church and labor opposition leaders played a decisive role. The leftist vanguards strove to catch up and, if possible, accouter these movements, in spite of their various conflicting ideological theses. (Because, contradicting Marx's anti-idealism, they had slipped from the concreteness of reality to the abstractedness of principles and "proper positions".) Democratic opening found a country socially mobilized but not always sufficiently aware of its virtualities.

But then the old, foxy political elites, many of them conniving with the dictatorship until the day before, attempted to deter or co-opt these dynamic efforts. A neoconservative pact, the persists to this day, attempted to sever political society (being re-democratized in the old style) from civil society, which was then in threatening effervescence. The traditional left, seeking "what to do" in texts from the early 20th century, places its wagers on party cadres as the most befitting instrument to act and became suspicious of the new undisciplined movements. What is interesting is that, a bit earlier, on a significant date in 1968, the rebellion of young people all over the world had opened new courses for action and thought, signaling that it was no longer time for classical political revolutions, but for of great social

mutations¹. From now on, the most definitive transformations would not stem from power seizures and from the authoritarian imposition of new socioeconomic regimes, but from complex, profound and relatively slow social processes. However, this forerunning movement seemed to have lost momentum soon afterward, and the political practices in the ensuing years did not take it in due account. Only around 1989, with the crisis of real socialism, did this new historical perspective begin to make itself evident. Alain Touraine, who had nurtured high hopes for social movements from a long way back, stated that although 1968 did not have a day after (*landemain*) it would certainly have a future (*avenir*)².

Meanwhile, without faltering, society continued experimenting with alternative practices and soon other social movements began to emerge: women's, ethnic, ecological... They expanded the horizons of demands and struggles, introducing new social and cultural dimensions, disparaging old structures of domination, and denouncing traditional habits. The political left per se remained conservative in various realms of reality. Accustomed to a one-dimensional, single-purpose economic perspective, its response was to consider these other dimensions as secondary elements that could only serve to avert attention from a main class contradiction. Nevertheless, it was through these other dimensions that new perspectives were being uncovered, making them determining issues.

Modernity was reckoning on the "disenchantment of the world" and on an ineluctable process of secularization. But lo, precisely at the end of a long-lasting period and at the onset of a secular crisis, to use Fernand Braudel's terms, when it seemed on the verge of giving its last squawk, the dimension of sacredness showed all its vitality and relevance. Religious movements and practices would play a leading role in this renewal, and church space would become a vast laboratory for

1. When the Bastille was taken in 1789, the king's minister answered his master's perplexed question saying: "Majesty, this is not a revolt; it is a revolution". The phrase was soon included in French history textbooks. In May 1968, students scribbled a new version on the walls of the Sorbonne: "Majesty, this is not a revolution; it is a mutation".
2. See Touraine, Alain. *Le communisme utopique. Le mouvement de mai 1968*, Paris, Ed. Du Seuil, 1968, p. 53.

experimentation, where traditional and conservative sectors would have to coexist with the new liberating practices³.

It is interesting to note how often backward, traditional theories can block and even blind all kinds of thoughts, analyses and researches that strive to understand a new reality. On one hand, there was Marxism (which, it must be admitted, was attempting to renew itself, either through Althusser's structuralist purview or through Gramsci's rediscovery of historical processes and superstructures); on the other, we had tautological functionalism, with its irrelevant analyses and disquisition, and soon after, a postmodern mode of thought that fractionated and destroyed meanings. Philosophy, having enclosed itself in the formalism of abstract logic, evaded reality and was irremediably entangled in the deconstruction of cryptic discourses. The inglorious dissolution of real, authoritarian socialism in the 1990s orphaned many sectors of the left and led us to the apparent hegemony of a *single mode of thought*, inaccurately called neoliberal, that announced the end of history and all utopias. Although taking other pathways, it would end up in the same impasse of postmodernism, both attempting to freeze social processes, unaware of any and all latent dynamics, and denying the unremitting flow of history.

Curiously, this was all happening in violent contradiction with the actual processes that continued in ebullience throughout the world, generating new movements and practices, engendering vast transformations in the forces of production through information technology, robotics and genetic engineering. New and fertile perspectives for innovation and change were opening up, part of a hugely intense social dynamics at all levels of reality – a climate remindful of the Renaissance and the great inventions of the 15th and 16th century, also a time of transformations in thoughts and mental habits. In contrast, a skeptical theoretical climate pervades many spaces in our own time, immersed in unfruitful pessimism, unable to intuit the remarkable technological revolution going on and denying the evidences of the most significant social processes. As if it were a worn out mode of thought that grows old and fears plunging itself into a new historical adventure, remaining fet-

3. Souza, L. A. Gómez de. "Secularização em Declínio e Potencialidade Transformadora do Sagrado: Religião e Movimentos Sociais na Emergência do Mundo Planetário", *Religião e Sociedade* v. 13, nº 2, Rio de Janeiro, ISER, Jun. 1986.

tered to outdated minuscule fears (*la petite peur des bien pensants*), as Mounier had arraigned decades ago⁴. We thus discovered that an asymmetry existed between vital, concrete social processes and a certain analytic difficulty in studying and understanding them.

Interpretations of reality often become ideological for their misguided awareness, inversion of reality, abstraction, and hasty generalizations. Analyses remain at the level of general categories: classes and movements are presented as univocal totalities with very vague features, and soon definitive adjectives are applied without a proper understanding of specific processes. Sociologists are partly to blame, often constructing, in an ill-digested Weberian tradition, ideal types or models that are no more than simplified categories, veritable caricatures of what happens in the real world. Anthropologists may at times have been more judicious with specific situations, attempting to understand them in their full complexity and inevitable contradictions, a precaution one must have with every living thing. Simplistic generalizations turn everything into things and either mythicize facts or debase them in definitive judgements. Taking a closer look, such generalizations are often conditioned by ill-will, biases or the irascibility of those who never were and never will be “organic intellectuals”, i.e., capable of guiding or patrolling those processes they would like to maintain under their vigilant control.

Furthermore, many analyses suffer from another type of reductionism, that of idealizing the past and eliminating all its rough edges. Thus, in face of a complex and uncertain present, they are incapable of understanding its inevitable contradictions. More often than not, readings of past times are selective, retaining the most significant aspects and forgoing all indecision, failures and tensions. Experiences from those times remain cast in plaster, so to speak, in unchanging and relatively simple formulas. On the other hand, considering the imprecision and hesitations of the present, it is far easier to report growth crises, refluxes or exhaustion. I have criticized the analyses carried out by the Grassroots Ecclesiastical Communities in the 1970s that concluded they were disappearing, when a more attentive reading of reality would point in the opposite direction, counter to the apparent evidence of

4. Mounier, Emmanuel. *La petite peur du XX^e siècle* (1949) in *Oeuvres de Mounier*, vol. 3, Paris, 1962, pp. 341-425.

a deceitful common sense⁵. The same may be said of prognoses concerning social movements – whose apparent reflux, by the way, after the vitality of 1968, was already foreseen in Europe in the 1970s. Decade after decade, this idea of reflux and depletion returns every time someone idealizes an immediately prior moment as more vigorous⁶. It is as if an inexorable process of entropy was linearly corroding historical processes. In this manner, we are soon led to an unappealable conclusion: the movements are shriveling and becoming erratic and rudderless. But I would like here to indicate the opposite direction: in spite of their stumbling way of thinking and their crises, the reality of social processes continues to yield vital and profound novelties – in complex, contradictory, non-linear or univocal fluxes, to be sure, which is perfectly normal. To understand the dynamics of society, we must set aside our a priori interpretative grids, which only serve to fetter us, and – taking to heart a lesson from a shrewd and mindful Marx – raise ourselves from abstraction to concreteness.

I insist on this issue because we urgently need to understand the challenges and dilemmas Brazil faces today. The case of the MST (Movement of Landless Rural Laborers) is a good example to clarify this point. Due to its bold and audacious initiatives, this movement has gained such visibility that it is no longer possible to doubt its importance. The MST has acquired legitimacy in the eyes of public opinion. The movement now deeply influences the country's political agenda and has forced a government that is arrogant, myopic, timorous and vexed by reality to reluctantly review its public policies. No one can forget how, a few years ago, the MST still aroused fears even broad sectors that deemed themselves progressive but distrusted the movement's incisive declarations and feared its unpredictable initiatives. The movement spoke with rather orthodox Marxist overtones and, for this reason, had given rise to drastic negative judgements by those who assess movements mainly through their system of ideas. However, if we try to go beyond its

5. Souza, L. A. Gómez de. "As CEBs Vão Bem, Obrigado", *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*, n° 237, Petrópolis, Vozes, Mar. 2000, pp. 93-110.
6. A chapter in a book by Alain Touraine asks this question and then disclaims it: "reflux of the social movements?", referring to the 1970s. See Touraine, Alain. *Le retour de Pacteur*, Paris, Fayard, 1984.

statements and learn more about its concrete experiences, our conclusions will be much more nuanced and precise. The movement's encampments, for instance, are a setting for an extremely creative day-to-day living, a place of participation, shared responsibilities and innovative ways to produce goods, where a new ethics of conviviality and comradeship is being gestated. We will also discover how leaderships circulate and are renewed, and how significant is the participation of women and young people. To be sure, all this coexists with a relatively stable and centralizing nucleus of historical directors, whose utterances still tend to be somewhat traditional. But I would venture to say that, in this case, lived out practices go way beyond proclaimed theory. The two elements are certainly not dissociated and, for better or worse, one contaminates the other. But in a not-so-long-range, this contradictory situation may bring consequences and changes in the movement's behavior and deliberations. I even believe that practices tend to lead to gradual changes in the ideas themselves, enfranchising and unshackling them, and also to an increasingly participative and democratic environment. This will not happen automatically, but it is highly probable that it *will* happen, as long as the movement avails itself of its virtualities and can be confident of obtaining cooperation and support.

In the case of the MST, the situation is even more interesting when precarious encampments become stable settlements. Two extremely significant experiences then occur. First, an award-winning educational practice has been developed in their schools, notable for its creativity and methodological innovations that restore and reformulate old experiences in popular education. After the heyday Paulo Freire, when popular education ran the risk of falling into rote repetition and platitudes, other pedagogical processes were being tested at the MST settlements. Second, new forms of productive units are arising, cooperative or otherwise, boasting excellent levels of efficiency and competence. In this manner, the landless, now settled, are innovating in the field popular or congenial economics, obtaining high rates of productivity, and creating new circuits for the circulation of goods. Thus comes to naught all the overhasty predictions that were drawn only to the MST's aggressive actions during occupations but considered the movement ineffectual in the ensuing phases. Two films by Tetê Moraes – *Terra para Rose (Land for Rose)* and, ten years later, *O Sonho de Rose (Rose's Dream)* – depict what is certainly non-linear trajectory, full of contradictions, inevitable blunders, but also some very significant advances. The movement has already accrued two decades of experiences. A careful

and solid assessment cannot but show a positive balance, beyond and away from any contradictions – which, in any way, will eventually be overcome.

Therefore, it is currently very difficult to deny the relevance of the MST. Other experiences, however, continue to be ignored, as if only that movement was important. But they are out there, all over Brazil, for everyone to see – in grassroots organizations, associations, cooperatives, women’s and youth’s movements. I dealt at length with impasses in theory and thought because I wanted to try to understand the stream of pessimism found in many analyses of such an ebullient society. We seem to be living in the antipode of that hopeful climate of the 1950s I alluded to above. Nevertheless, everything seems to indicate that real history – history that is lived out but not always perceived – is much more dynamic than certain skeptic or distrustful judgements would lead us to believe.

In fact, interpretations of reality can also be reductionist. Modernity has shown preference for two realms: that of politics/power and that of the economy/market, involving the production of material goods – forsaking other practices that produce symbolic goods in the worlds of arts and culture, of subjectivity, of emotions and pleasure. If we look around us, we will see that cultural vitality is well and thriving in popular artisanship, in the *literatura de cordel**, in music, the theater, cinema... Everywhere at the base of society we see innovative capabilities being manifested, alongside with an enormous production of knowledge, information and data on reality – a salute to the world of information technology from this still undervalued new social capital. Brazil has two apparently distant sectors: popular creativity and the information that seems to gush everywhere. These two extremities may eventually find and nurture each other, as communication makes societal dynamics visible. By the way, this was precisely Herbert José de Souza’s (Betinho) intuition when he created IBASE’s *Alternex* long before the Internet fad: through that server, information technology was placed at the disposal of social movements and popular initiatives⁷. I must once again insist on the tremendous vitality of a

* Or “twine literature”. Small booklets with popular literary works, usually in rhyme, crudely printed and illustrated, that are hung in twines to be sold in street markets.

7. Herbert José de Souza (Betinho) and Carlos Alberto Afonso, returned to Brazil in 1979 after years of exile and, with other colleagues, founded the IBASE, hoping to make all the

living society that experiences successes and failures, insecurities and ambiguities, with the usual contradictions of every living historical process. Those that were enthused by the *Mostra do Redescobrimento** in São Paulo evincing the country's creative capabilities over the last 500 years should know that this dynamism was not exhausted and will very likely go on "for another 500 years". I do not intend to fall prey to a naïve triumphalism: I am all too aware of our enormous difficulties, obstacles and dilemmas. On the other hand, there must be no place for a defeatism that is unable to discover our potentialities that come from far back in time and project themselves into the future.

I would like to point out another type of difficulty in understanding this reality, which is sometimes shut off by undefined analytic categories. Today we see a new player, a player with an imprecise face, or rather, with many faces blurred into a vague profile. This new player are the poor, who have lately been replaced by another protagonist, equally or more ambiguous, the excluded⁸. We must pay attention to a possible misuse of these terms. First of all, both terms are general and vague, concealing the true heterogeneity of situations. The poor comprise everyone – from the destitute, those totally dispossessed and unresponsive, to sectors that have now become organized and active. These poor are not passive and inert beings, awaiting charity and aid. Many of them are extremely dynamic in terms of resistance and initiative. Some years ago, Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian theologian and pioneer of the Liberation Theology, wrote a book titled *The Historical Power of the Poor*. The world of the poor is a socially ebullient realm, if we learn it from *los de abajo, desde ele reverso de la historia*⁹. The excluded, on the other hand, may suf-

wealth of the authentic popular initiatives they had discovered available through modern means of communication, anticipating by many years the current fad of Internet surfers.

8. In this topic I draw close to some observations by José de Souza Martins in "Changes in the relationship between society and the state, and the trend toward anomie in social movements and in popular organizations", but greatly depart from his conclusions.
9. Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres, desde el Reverso de la Historia*, Lima, CEP, 1979. The document by the Latin American bishops who gathered in Puebla in 1979, inspired by Gutiérrez himself, speaks of "the evangelizing potential of the poor" (see n^o 1147).

* Or *Exhibit of the Rediscovery*, celebrating the 500th anniversary of Brazil's discovery in 1500.

fer a similar or even worse fate. The word “excluded” might give the impression that they are totally outside society. Indeed, they are excluded from the benefits of the hegemonic system, but they certainly produce material goods in a parallel economy, they create symbolic goods in the world of culture, and they reproduce themselves and bestow life. The “cry of the excluded”, which is celebrated every year on September 7*, intends precisely to indicate their dynamism and their disquieting presence. In a text written some years ago, I referred to the “transforming potential of the excluded”¹⁰. I certainly do not defend the indiscriminate use of this category, as seems to be in vogue in our social pastoral environment, unless it is very well justified. Something similar happened in the past during a debate in Latin America on marginality, another ambiguous term. The *marginals* were and are a necessary part of a system that exploits them and, to a point, depends on them. One thing are the mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization in a system that perpetuates privileges; another are the resistance and tenacity of those who do not allow themselves to be cast outside society and choose to defy it subversively. The system has always wished to push the stranger – the other, the outsider – beyond its borders, even if, contradictorily, it needed them to exploit them. The barbarians, geographical outsiders or peripheral peoples of the Roman empire, were considered uncivilized non-citizens. Going back in time, during the decadence and dissolution of that world, we can see how the barbarians became the new impelling agents that would supersede those who were vanishing into historical impotence. The sophisticated world of Adrian and Trajan, apparently solid but already undermined in its foundations, would soon be overwhelmed by those who supposedly were the excluded.

Moreover, no one who belongs to the so-called world of the poor acknowledges him or herself as such. They are poor for others, for those who want to exercise their charity and protection. Nevertheless, they establish their own identity from the positive values of their lives and their day-to-day existence. It is evident, more than evi-

* Coincidentally, the date of Brazil’s Independence.

10. “O dinamismo transformador dos excluídos”, *Tempo e Presença*, nº 268, Rio de Janeiro, 1993. See also “Reaprender a Pensar um Mundo Plural e Diferente”, *Tempo e Presença*, nº 276, Rio de Janeiro, Jul.-Aug. 1994.

dent, that what is important is not the semantic discussion and the substitution of terms, but rather the discovery of how complex and variegated is the world of the *los abajo*, the have-nots. This world has the wretched at its fringes, those who are truly dispossessed of everything, even of their identity and ability to react, but it also has many other sectors that are resistant and creative – and certainly threatening to the system, which tries to ignore them, only to fear them once again soon after. We may thus discover the potentialities of the popular sectors, with their organizations and spaces for production, partying, culture, religiousness and celebration.

A comparison with the United States in the 19th century might help. Let us imagine a sociologist or a political scientist from our time arriving in the US in the latter half of the 19th century and hoping to study that society. After talking with the customary academic big shots, he or she would be content with interviewing those players considered decisive in Washington's political arena, in New York's economic scene, in Boston's cultural life. Our sociologist would probably not pay much attention to the disconcerting waves of immigrants arriving on ships, nor would he or she show much interest for what was sprouting in the mid-west or going on in the chaotic and violent far-west. However, in order to understand the dynamics of the ensuing decades, our sociologist would have to take into account these less traditional players, who would become responsible for the vitality of the fledgling American society.

Likewise in Brazil. Those who circulate predominantly in the esplanade of the ministry buildings in Brasília, who stroll around in the banking sectors of Rio and São Paulo or wander through the more notorious university campuses, will probably never envision what is beginning to flourish in the societal dynamics of a more recondite Brazil. In this more unfathomable country, they will find no well-defined rationality, nor players with predictable or punctilious behavior, but only spaces for quests, for resistance and experimentation – often surprising, but not necessarily coherent or precise. Furthermore, one is dumbfounded to see how the media concentrates on describing minor political events, reporting the doings of insignificant characters and reveling in palatial or courtly surroundings while ignoring the great mobilizations, marches and initiatives that will perhaps subvert routines and privileges. Much more disquieting is to see this same attitude overflowing into the academic environment – even if explainable by complicity of some of their own with the ruling political and economic elites.

Nevertheless, the universities may have the essential and irreplaceable task of making the emerging Brazil visible – through their researches, their dissertations, their theses – by detecting the country’s virtualities and impasses. However, to accomplish this, they must first overcome an existing stratification, whereby the major centers of excellence tend to detract and dismiss all the innovative work that is being done outside the more prestigious axis. The pioneering initiatives of numerous institutes of higher learning around the country are simply not taken into account. The potential of the new generations beginning their graduate work is enormous; it would be essential for them to plunge into the disquieting and challenging Brazilian reality.

We also have NGOs (non-governmental organizations) following up, counseling, striving to envision an alternative historic gestation and cooperate for its success. I do not want to idealize their role, which can also be ambiguous, naïve or self-seeking. But the NGOs have tenaciously tried to discover feasible pathways that remain unseen for more conventional eyes. Many experiences sprout from an imprecise milieu and must not be hastily judged according to their statements or intentions, but through careful analysis of their practices and actions – something that is only possible for those who follow them closely, attentively and empathetically.

Perhaps the world of the arts is best equipped to envision certain latent virtualities. Films like *Central do Brasil* (*Central Station*) or *Eu tu eles* (*Me you them*) reveal a suffering but vital country. Mário de Andrade, in 1922, discovered an ambiguous modernity long before the economic and social processes of later decades and analyses. Guimarães Rosa and Graciliano Ramos brought to light the challenging life in the disconcerting hinterlands of Brazil. The itinerary of Euclides da Cunha is worth following, from the prejudice and distrust of his first articles about Canudos to his much more receptive and ingenious diagnosis in *Os Sertões*¹¹.

We also find a prophetic and revealing role among critics. One need only mention two of them, with widely differing viewpoints. Alceu Amoroso Lima – Tristão de Ataíde – in more the 50 years of literary criticism, was always mindful of an emerging new novelist in Brazil’s northeast, or of a new poet in Rio or Porto Alegre.

11. See Galvão, Walnice Nogueira (org). *Diário de uma Expedição*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2000, Coleção Retratos do Brasil, with articles by Euclides da Cunha that show the gradual changes that would eventually lead him to write *Os Sertões*.

And, unlike so many of his peers, he understood the significance of the incipient Ecclesiastical Grassroots Communities and of Liberation Theology, isolating himself from those who could not fathom why he was always seeking a *new era*, for whom he was a victim of his own *naïveté*¹².

In painting there is Mário Pedrosa, whose centennial we recently celebrated, an indefatigable militant concerned with the relationships between the artist and society, who traversed easily from the local to the universal. In the 1930s, he saw from afar the firm strokes of Portinari and, to the scandal of many, would soon discover the meaning of abstract art and eventually help to consolidate the various *pop* and *post-pop* currents, including Oiticica and Lygia Clark. Perpetually restless, Pedrosa was one of the founding fathers of the São Paulo Bienal. During one of his exiles, he created in Chile the fantastic Museum of Solidarity that welcomed artists from around the world and, soon after the political defeat, the Salvador Allende Museum of Resistance. Indefatigably curious and committed to emergent ideas, he had denounced the *nomenklatura* of real socialism since the 1930s. Upon returning to Brazil at the end of his life, Pedrosa keenly felt the proletarian dynamism that was flourishing in the industrial cities around São Paulo and called its leader to prepare a new grassroots party¹³. Both of them, Alceu until he was almost 90 years old, Mário until his eighty-first birthday, retained a youthful, perceptive and enthusiastic gleam in their juvenile eyes. They taught us hope and how to avoid falling into the bitter neurasthenia of those who lose their faith in the future.

12. In a letter I received from him in March 1964, days before the coup, he mentioned the pain of losing friends who did not understand his always renewed and indispensable changes in attitudes and judgements. See Souza, L. A. Gómez de. "Amoroso Lima na Preparação da Idade Nova: Reflexões a partir de uma Carta sua de 1964", *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*, n° 172, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1988, pp. 707-713. Two of his books had this idea, *Idade Nova (New Era)*, so dear to him, in the title.
13. *Mário Pedrosa, Arte, Revolução, Reflexão*, Rio de Janeiro, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 1991; Arantes, Otilia Beatriz Fiori. "Atualidade de Mário Pedrosa", *Folha de S.Paulo*, caderno *Mais!*, Apr. 16, 2000. In Santiago, I was able to closely observe in Mário's interest for the Chilean process and his fine sensitivity in face of what was being created in the plastic arts around the world and in the great global historical process. He combined the two latter dimensions in a remarkable allocution, which unfortunately has been lost, when entrusting Allende with the Museum of Solidarity.

Of course, we have an open future ahead of us, full of possibilities but also great risks. In view of the current Brazilian situation, the obstacles are formidable. Economic disparity is grave and growing, as part of the population struggles merely to survive. At the same time, retrograde elites stubbornly insist on ignoring the country and cocoon themselves in their privileges. An overwhelmingly Lilliputian political class, arrogant and uncommitted with the nation, takes part in its dismantling¹⁴. Heralding the end of the Vargas era and undermining the State in the name of recipes dictated from abroad, it wishes nothing more than to cancel out hope and deny the historical process I alluded to at the beginning.

The situation in Argentina may be a warning sign. Drawing on the enormous vigor of massive immigration waves in the late 19th century, the country reached the mid-20th century with the possibility of becoming the first modern and developed nation in Latin America. But an “infamous decade” after 1930, coupled with a Peronist populism that led the country to submerge in myths and in cyclic convulsions, ruptured a historical rhythm and aged the nation and its project. Argentina, a culturally dense country, seems to have slackened and lost the will to attempt new paths. A warning signal for us not to forget that every historical dynamics runs the risk of being aborted. Nothing is assured beforehand. All the more reason to rely on new, latent dynamics, and to promote their growth and development.

In Brazil, we find a pulsating vitality in the local grassroots bases. It is true that, because of the enormous size of the country, these experiences are frequently isolated from each other. Hence the importance of intercommunication: if networks and horizontal connections are established, they may nurture each other, promoting the exchange of knowledge and providing mutual support. Today, information technology has all the material means to make such an interchange possible. The idea of networking has become essential for the combined efforts of society to bear fruit, making for be instantaneous and intense contact between local realities. The flow of information is unceasing and only grows as popular organizations become increasingly computerized.

This type of joint effort is a major factor in democratization, enabling communications between experiences that do not have to be channeled through central

14. Lesbaupin, Ivo (org). *O Desmonte da Nação*, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1999.

organizations, which always tend to control and direct, while allowing diversity and differences to flourish. Multiple categories of the different and the plural are essential if a society is to respect identities and learn to disseminate diverse and heterogeneous practices. Our mental habits are more accustomed to stereotyped models and similarities, and do not always see the wealth of diversity. New plural networks are often unfavorably compared with the old, uniform and centralized organizations because, at first sight, the latter seem more efficient and disciplined. However, the fact is that, overwhelmingly, the greatest possibilities for creativity and impact lie in the inventiveness and in the capacity for renewal of the former. Having gotten used to routines and repetition, we tend to be wary of what is new and different – which may be much more fecund and challenging.

At the Center of Religious Statistics and Social Investigations (CERIS), where I work, we follow-up and provide counsel to popular projects and various NGOs, and also finance small initiatives. We can literally feel their tremendous latent virtuality¹⁵. More and more experiences in alternative, solidarity-based economics are being developed, for instance, as shown by recent surveys and analyses, and as Paul Singer indicated in “Brazil on the Threshold of the Third Millennium”¹⁶. Theodore Roszak spoke of the “creative disintegration of industrial society”¹⁷. Social structures inevitably face crises but, from within them, alternative practices emerge. Many will fail, others will succeed. Looking at Brazilian society, its dimensions and its momentum, its cultural dynamism, its social and productive creativity, we must wager on – and cooperate with – these grassroots movements.

15. The CERIS currently provides counsel to approximately 60 organizations from all over Brazil and to social pastorals in 24 dioceses of the Catholic Church, and also finances 180 small popular projects each year. Since 1979, it has provided financial contribution and support to almost 2,700 such experiments. Thus, we have the opportunity of knowing first-hand a very large number of social initiatives from the various regions of the country and of closely following their development.
16. Singer, Paul. “Brazil on the Threshold of the Third Millennium”. See, from the vast literature published in Latin America, an essay based on concrete practices in Gaiger, Luiz Inácio *et alii*. “A Economia Solidária no RS: Viabilidade e Perspectivas”, *Cadernos CEDOPE*, nº 15, series Movimentos Sociais e Cultura, São Leopoldo, Unisinos, 1999.
17. Roszak, Theodore. *Person-planet: The Creative Disintegration of Industrial Society*, London, Granada Publishing, 1981.

It seems evident that, at any moment now, this process will find political resonance on a national level. Local experiments are already being carried out in partnerships between city governments and civil society organizations. As yet, the means of social communication do not attach great importance to these processes, traditional politicians continue entangled in their petty schemes for survival, sectors from the academy remain skeptical. One must have a keen eye to sense the virtualities and the profound social movements that are patiently being prepared before irrupting into unquestionable visibility. Pope John XXIII, referring to the council he had convoked, once spoke of the “flower of an unexpected spring”. Actually, the unexpected is being slowly prepared from long ago and will sneak in, unseen, before the light of day. If we learn to understand this process and cooperate to make it successful, it will be possible, in the onset of this new millennium, to redeem the hopes that our generation rightfully anticipated half a century ago.

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