

Volume 40
issue 1 / 2021

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577
Niterói (RJ), 40 (1)
jan/2021-apr/2021

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

Crisis and catastrophe as interpretative categories of human experiences of time¹

CARLOS ALBERTO CARVALHO

Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) – Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. E-mail: carloscarvalho0209@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-8433-8794

VERÔNICA SOARES COSTA

Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais (PUC-MG) – Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. E-mail: veronicacosta@pucminas.br. ORCID: 0000-0002-1324-0535

PHELLIPY PEREIRA JÁCOME

Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) – Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. E-mail: phellipy@ufmg.br. ORCID: 0000-0001-6939-7542

BRUNO SOUZA LEAL

Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) – Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. E-mail: brunosleal@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-6937-6976.

¹ This paper assimilates, to a certain extent, collective discussions held at the Tramas Comunicacionais: Narrativas e Experiência research group regarding the preparations for the X Historicidades dos Processos Comunicacionais, a regular meeting held with other Brazilian research groups. This edition took place from November 4 to 6, 2019 in Belo Horizonte, with the theme "Crisis and Catastrophe in Human Experiences of Time".

TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Carvalho, C. A.; Costa, V. S.; Jácome, P. P.; Leal, B. S. (2021). Crisis and catastrophe as interpretative categories of human experiences of the time. *Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication*, v. 40, n. 1.

Submitted on: 06/16/2020 / Accepted on: 01/19/2021

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v40i1.43112>

Abstract

Crisis and catastrophe are explored in their temporal dimensions, taking the narrative as a reference, and harboring important implications related to human action and imagination. Our aim is to take the terms as heuristic categories that reach specific dimensions of the human temporal experience, including media practices. At first, uses and meanings of the two terms are highlighted, to explore their interconnections and presence in daily life and academic studies. The notions of narrative, intrigue and its interconnections with time help us to identify how crisis and catastrophe can be positively understood in association with action and imagination. Thus, crisis and catastrophe are both related to modern Western structuring of time and to cultural experiences that escape that frame.

Keywords

Crisis; Catastrophe; Temporalities; Modernity.

Introduction

This paper aims to approach the concepts of *crisis* and *catastrofe* in their temporal dimensions and in association with communication phenomena, having as a central reference the concept of narrative as a condition of the human experience of time, as formulated by Ricoeur (2010). The hypothesis, here, is that the regulating principles of the narrative emplotment in each society are organized in a peculiar way both in *crises* and in *catastrofes*, contributing to them and, at the same time, resulting from them. In all cases, considering their interconnection with narratives, *crisis* and *catastrofe* have important implications for human action and imagination.

Before deepening into these relationships, we understand that an initial explanation on uses and meanings regularly associated with the two terms is necessary also to highlight their interconnections and their strong presence in daily life and in academic thought. *Crisis* and *catastrofe*, in these uses, maintain polyvalent relationships, which can be approximated and dissociated in different ways. In the same way that a crisis can result in a catastrophe, a catastrophe can generate a *crisis*, or they can be simultaneous; and they can designate quite different situations as well.

After this initial explanation, in which the relationship between both terms and the concept of event is also briefly addressed, the paper focuses on the dimensions of narrative and time arrangements, seeking to identify how crisis can be understood in a positive perspective, as something inherent to the human gesture of producing concordance to the discordances between cosmic time and lived time. Catastrophe, in turn, can paradoxically be what suspends action and what establishes the need to imagine other ways of being, existing and doing. Therefore, we follow the concepts of emplotment and its interconnections with time as proposed by Paul Ricoeur: "Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience." (Ricoeur, 2012, p. 93).

By articulating the ideas of crisis and catastrophe through the manner of narrative, we are not interested in restricting our thoughts to specific phenomena or subjects. We plan, in fact, to use these concepts to promote a discussion with other ways of thinking, especially the perspectives developed by Rivera Cusicanqui (2018), Quijano (2009) and Mbembe (2018). Our reflection is founded on the understanding that the experience of time occurs as part of extensive cultural processes that allow, as Ricoeur observes, the connection of cosmic time to human time. To contemplate past, present and future as something comprehensible and visible is part of the human organization of time, whether at an individual level, as a group, a collective and/or a society; and this comprehensibility and visibility are made through relations with traditions, memories, prognoses, aspirations, projects and others processes that configure spaces of experience, horizons of expectations and layers of the present in everyday relationships (Agamben, 2009; Antunes, Gomes, 2018; Appadurai, 2013; Certeau, 1998; Heller, 2000; Koselleck, 2006; Leal, Sacramento, 2019; Ribeiro, Gomes, Leal, 2017; Ricoeur, 2010, among others). However, it is always important to remember that the encounter with chance and other temporal dimensions can expose the limit, the smallness or even the uselessness of time made human.

Crises, catastrophes, events, and the occupancy of the world

In the first Brazilian newspapers, at the beginning of the 19th century, the words *crisis* and *catastrofe* were used almost as synonymous to mark the relationship that the new capital of the Portuguese Empire established with other nations. *Crisis*, for example, was the word that defined the rivalry between France and England in the *Correio Braziliense: Ou Armazém Literário*, as well as the constant exchange of accusations between these countries. It was also used to specify, in the same newspaper, the reasons for the annexation of Finland by Russia or to expose the revolutionary threats in Spain. In 1808,

the newspaper would regret the *catastrophe* that happened in Madrid on May 2 of that year, emphasizing the debility of a government that did not defend its people (*Gazeta do Rio de Janeiro* would also do the same). As we can see, these terms were strongly associated with political dynamics, with references to environmental or health disasters being rare in the early years of that century.¹

Two centuries later, a close look to today's newspapers will reveal similarities, but also several differences with these past uses. As a matter of fact, this happens at a time when we are facing the consequences of a global pandemic without precedents in this century, in which these terms assume a major role. *Catastrophe* and *crisis*, in the news section of Google's search engine, in April 2020, lead us to narratives about political impasses created by a President and his Minister of Health when discussing measures to fight COVID-19²; discussions on the urgent need to tackle this same disease and prevent a *catastrophe* in Africa³; sinister prognosis and panoramas for the global economy⁴; and the revealing of the virus's singularities in our country and other local problems⁵. There is also room for natural phenomena, like the eruption of a volcano in Indonesia or a forest fire in the vicinities of Chernobyl.

In many of these narratives, we identify temporal relations such as anticipation, readings about the present and waiting. They talk about *avoiding a catastrophe*, about early warnings of the consequences of global warming that have been delegitimized, about a world that *will return to normality* and about the impossibility of returning to the situations that have caused the *crisis*. In news that describe some events as *catastrophes* (which are the results or the causes of a *crisis*), there is usually an established synonymic web that links them to tragedy⁶, disaster⁷ and disorder⁸, one that is connected to powerful changes in our previous perceptions of acting on and suffering those phenomena.

As it turns out, plenty of these quotidian narratives have crisis and catastrophe often associated with singular events of different magnitudes, whether they are seen as natural or understood as caused by humanity. Initially, these distinctions may seem obvious, even when we try to avoid simplifications in the connections between events and situations. A presidential impeachment, for example, can be seen as the event that ignites a crisis, as well as the one that ends the crisis, becoming its synthesis and referential mark; a phenomenon of nature, such as a harsh drought, can generate a crisis that becomes a major event itself, even though it is experienced in everyday situations (like part of the affected population leaving in search of better conditions).

Catastrophes, on the other hand, are generally considered events of great magnitude, that can be unpredictable like a tsunami, a manifestation of nature that escapes and overlaps the times of humans;

¹ The newspapers were consulted in their digitalized versions at the Brazilian Digital Hemeroteca. Available at: <https://bndigital.bn.gov.br/hemeroteca-digital/>. Accessed on: May 3rd 2020.

² Available at: <https://www.brasil247.com/blog/mandetta-e-a-conta-da-catastrofe>. Accessed on: April 19th 2020.

³ Available at: <https://exame.abril.com.br/mundo/e-preciso-agir-rapido-para-evitar-catastrofe-na-africa-diz-cruz-vermelha/>. Accessed on: April 19th 2020.

⁴ Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/economia/noticia/2020/04/01/coronavirus-a-catastrofe-economica-e-social-em-numeros.ghtml>; <https://www.istoedinheiro.com.br/em-tres-meses-planeta-mergulhou-em-cenario-de-catastrofe/>; https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/economia/2020/04/09internas_economia,843311/catastrofe-no-comercio-global-omc-estima-perdas-na-economia-brasileir.shtml. Accessed on: April 19th 2020.

⁵ Available at: <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/blogs/brasil-debate/a-pandemia-e-uma-doenca-de-classe-a-catastrofe-brasileira-ainda-esta-por-vir/>. Accessed on: April 19th 2020.

⁶ Available at: https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/gerais/2020/03/25/interna_gerais,1132490/novo-coronavirus-prefeitura-de-brumadinho-vai-instalar-barreira-sanit.shtml. Accessed on: April 19th 2020.

⁷ Available at: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/justica/noticia/2020-04/justica-libera-dinheiro-de-desastre-de-mariana-para-combate-COVID-19>. Accessed on: April 19th 2020.

⁸ Available at: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/bbc/2020/03/30/a-arriscada-aposta-da-suecia-de-combater-o-coronavirus-protetendo-economia-e-liberdades.htm>. Accessed on: April 19th 2020.

or they can be linked to the controversies of humanity, such as genocides, bombs and wars. However, this distinction between *natural* and *human* events, and even the relationship between crisis, catastrophe and event, starts to acquire other qualities and nuances at the end of the 20th century, a scenario that becomes more intense in the following two decades. Since then, the perception that the actions of human beings have consequences not only for humanity has been consolidated. Deforestation, different ways of polluting, agricultural technologies, extractivism, populational growth, poor distribution of wealth, the extermination of human groups and of many animal and plant species, occupations, unequal and predatory uses of the planet's spaces and resources are now being seen as an environmental crisis that produces regular catastrophes and that foreshadows a terrifying future.

As Eva Horn (2018) points out, there is no decisive event in the environmental crisis: it is an ongoing process, one that has a *catastrophic* nature, which manifests itself in major and minor events that are interconnected and present distinct temporalities. Thus, the flood in an important Brazilian city in 2020 is part of urbanization processes that have consumed and devastated rivers and hills over several years; a tsunami in Asia is connected with the increase in ice loss in the Arctic and in Antarctica, which are consequences from the excessive pollution in the rivers and in the atmosphere, and from unbridled consumerism as well; the rises in tomato price is related to the economic cycles of production and consumption and also to the impoverishment of soils, monoculture, transgenics and the high use of pesticides. Therefore, it is no longer a question of associating *crisis* and *catastrophe* to a *decisive event* of this or that magnitude. The events, including their own impacts and repercussions, succeed each other as fragments, pieces, interurrences of something bigger, more complex and more challenging, that belongs to a world that is simultaneously in crisis, because it is heading towards catastrophe, and already catastrophic, due to the crisis that it is living through (Stengers, 2015; among others). So, *crisis* and *catastrophe* can be understood as soaring and interconnected ways of relating to these many events and to the multiple temporalities and dimensions of the present, as the studies gathered by Manna, Valle, Bertol and Maia (2020) indicate.

Temporal preoccupations related to crisis and catastrophe are part of a vigorous intellectual production in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), for example, launched a free access library entitled 'Facing the crisis in Latin America', with works that are concerned with the relationship between humans and algorithms, also reflecting upon the challenges faced by progressive governments and the left in the subcontinent, in addition to questioning concepts such as multiculturalism and biopolitics, producing territorially located thinking. *Catastrophe* and *Crisis* is also the way in which Eric Hobsbawm, in his book 'The Age of Extremes', characterized the beginning and end of the 'short' 20th century, with its atomic bombs, World Wars and artistic-cultural production. This vocabulary is repeated in analyses of distinct emphases and disciplines, as we can see with Bruno Latour, who identifies a crisis in modern criticism; Jean-François Lyotard, who postulates a crisis of scientific knowledge and the grand narratives; Isabelle Stengers and her reflections on science, catastrophe and Gaia; and Bauman and Bordon, who seek to comprehend the 'state of crisis' in contemporary governments. We can also find it in Ailton Krenak, who ratifies a crisis in the way in which humanity works; Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who sees the very idea of present in *crisis*; Judith Butler, and her considerations on the violence that causes and is resulted from crises; Rita Laura Segato, and her discussions on gender and coloniality; among many other authors.

In many of these works, both crisis and catastrophe are used in epistemological oriented thoughts that pretend to promote new ways of inhabiting and territorializing the world, or even recognizing an actual arrangement of present and ongoing relations. Whether due to a modernity that never really existed, that is in crisis or that no longer exists, they identify limits, consequences, implications and fractures in our ways of producing knowledge, almost always related to their Eurocentric matrices, often taken as colonial (regarding the coloniality, see Quijano, 2009; Mbembe, 2018; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018, among others).

As Gilberto Guimarães Filho puts, in a text that analyses the relations between justice and utopia in Paul Ricoeur's work,

Establishing a dialogue with temporality and history, it is clear that every narrative is a selection: elements are chosen as important or relevant and narrated from a certain point of view, a certain way. Only the relevant and notable moments of the action are narrated, the ones that make sense to what is at stake in the plot. However, we can always narrate in a different way, and this selection opens up the possibility of manipulation, of cunning strategies, such as forgetting important facts for personal or political interests. For this reason, exists the problem of the always controversial 'official' stories of a people (Guimarães Filho, 2016, p. 201).

Although they are situated around the problem of the always precarious equality, Gilberto Guimarães Filho's considerations coincide with the concerns of several studies focused on the recognition of the dynamics of colonialities. As products made by humans, narratives are subject to contradictions and disputes of meaning and power, so they are also privileged phenomena for scrutinizing ways of proposing intelligibilities about crises and catastrophes. In this scenario, there is a challenge imposed to narratives when identifying temporalities, events, spatialities and characters that can be named or obliterated, valued or neglected, placed under hierarchizations, in a forced or privileged manner, that seek, in a broad sense, to stimulate and give visibility to stories (and pasts, presents, futures) or circumscribe them, and even prevent narrations that are considered subaltern and less significant.

Therefore, the frequent uses of *crisis* and *catastrophe* cannot be dissociated from the Western and modern structuration of time, that begins with the worldwide expansion of Europe. That is, if the past is what must be overcome by the future in an increasingly accelerated present, as proposes Koselleck (2006), the fixation for revolutions and ruptures leads to a permanent feeling of crisis. However, this sensation of rupture and belief in progress has become more and more problematic for (post) *moderns*, to the point of becoming an apparent (and catastrophic?) paralysis of action, recognized in propositions like the *slow present* (Gumbrecht, 2015) or *presentism* (Hartog, 2015). On the other hand, if *presentism* is understood in a negative perspective by some authors who are debating European modernity, other cultural experiences of time help us making the temporal relations of past-present-future more complex. In studies like the ones made by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018), for example, these relationships are not taken as a linearity or a rupture; they are seen in a spiraled, stratified way, reinstating the strength of a present that is dynamic and by no means immovable. It is, after all, a matter of escaping the Eurocentric ways, an act claimed by decolonial studies, who defend that setting certain relations of time and causality *into crisis* is a demanded political gesture.

In this sense, due to the epistemological perspectives provided by the reflections we evoked here to think about crisis and catastrophe, the scrutinization of narratives becomes decisive, including the ones that circulate through multiple communication processes and products, demanding acute observation of temporal tensions, erasure of characters, hierarchies that come from prejudice, among other variables. If narratives have to deal with complex relations of time in their operations of making human time intelligible, in a process described by Paul Ricoeur (2012) as an arrangement of discordant events, temporalities and characters in a concordance only made possible by the arts of emplotment, they are also part of the complex game of narrative identities (Ricoeur, 2012; 2014).

Briefly, narrative identity, for Ricoeur, concerns the dialectic sameness-ipseity, in which we are temporally and permanently confronted with the sameness that remains in us with the passage of time, and with the other *oneselves* that temporal action, among other variables, imposes us. We are, dialectically, one self and the other selves, a process that also includes, in addition to the ipseity before what I was, am and will be, the ethical obligation to extend the recognition of otherness to those that are different from me. In these terms, we are in a permanent crisis, because we act and suffer the (and on the)

relations of time, both when they are taken as pacified and recognizable as when they are taken as capable of destabilization; and it is these relations of time that, epistemologically, insert us in a permanent process of experiencing the catastrophes of human time and its connections with cosmic time.

Narrating, acting, imagining

What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is.
If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know.
Yet I say with confidence that I know that if nothing passed away,
there would be no past time; and if nothing were still coming,
there would be no future time; and if there were nothing at all,
there would be no present time.
(Augustine, 2003, chapter XIV).

What Augustine asserts in his *Confessions* (2003) serves as a strong starting point for Ricoeur to develop his ideas in *Time and Narrative* (2012). After all, it signalizes an ontological deficiency of human time (one that always eludes us as it passes us), in the same way that it defines the aporetic condition of any reflection on temporality. Time is simultaneously thought of in a positive perspective (what has been, what is and what will be) and in a negative one (what no longer is, what is not yet and what will be no more). Faced with this inconsistency of the being-of-time that leads us to a principle of ultimate discordance, Ricoeur perceives in the emplotment a path to resolving it in a poetic approach, while offering some degree of concordance to the chaotic order of time. "To make up a plot is already to make the intelligible spring from the accidental, the universal from the singular, the necessary or the probable from the episodic" (Ricoeur, 2012, p. 74).

We propose, then, that the crisis can be perceived as something seminal to any reflection about time. The aporetic nature of time means that its definitions are always *critical*, provisional and open. In this sense, there is a call to human action that outlines our reflections on the past and our expectations for the future to a present articulated as the time of initiative. For this reason, linking *crisis* to the human effort to produce concordance in discordance postulates the agency of subjects (people, institutions, nations, etc.) in social life's transformations inside specific regimes of historicity. As a first unfolding of this starting point, we can understand that *crisis* is inherent to human actions in time. Each action itself is a response to other actions and to the alteration of a state of things, that has shifting and often interdependent scales. Thus, every human action itself is a *crisis* because it indicates a transformation, minimal as it may be, that contains aspects of proposition in relation to the past, the present and the future. Consequently, the *crisis* constitutes itself as the circumstantial, daily opportunity to review (update, maintain, change, dispose, combine, etc.) imaginaries and to act imaginatively.

If we take Hannah Arendt's (2000) idea of action as a reference, we find that this is "the only activity that is carried out directly among men without the mediation of things or matter, it corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, and not the Man, live on Earth and inhabit the world" (Arendt, 2000, p. 15).

Thus, understanding action as a political principle shows the necessity of preserving human diversity as a foundation for a common life, indicating that any person should be recognized as someone that has the capacity to act. Consequently, *crisis* will always continue due to the need to assign a subject to the/of action. In this perspective, expressions such as *political crisis* do not describe an exceptional moment, but the constant imperative of doing politics, of acting and of having someone or something responsible politically, for example. *Crisis*, therefore, if understood from the narrative perspective, characterizes the continuous human effort, the acting and suffering, of organizing a world (and a self) in constant transformation.

However, the philosophy of action and the Ricoeurian hermeneutics inspires us to defend that

the gesture of narrating does not come from nothing (Ricoeur and Castoriadis, 2018). The narrative is always connected to stories, traditions, traditionalities, canons and the *ethical substratum* of a cultural reality (Ricoeur, 2010; Leal and Sacramento, 2019) that is prefigured in the conditions that permits its establishment. This predefinition makes possible the fact that we are not obliged to attribute unprecedented gestures of signification at every time. For this reason, even though we always act *in crisis*, given the characteristics of time-being and being-in-time, we do so by appeasing the edges of this aporia and being immersed in a culture that enables us to think about certain things and prevents us to think about so many others. That is, we make discordances concordant only considering that prefigured world. At this moment, we can see the relationship between action and imagination more clearly. "There is no action without imagination", says Ricoeur (1989, p. 223). In all dimensions of action, imagination has a role that is decisive and unavoidable. It is considering the anticipatory and organizing qualities of the imagination, figurative qualities we could say, that an action becomes possible and realizable:

It is imagination that provides the means, the luminous glade, where we can compare, measure, such heterogeneous motives, like desires, and ethical requirements; these so diverse requirements, such as professional rules, social habits or highly personal values. Imagination provides the common space for comparison and mediation for terms as heterogeneous as the force that pushes as if it comes from behind, the attraction that seduces as if moving forward, the reasons that legitimize and fundament, as if going downward (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 224).

All action, therefore, implies the mobilization of the human capacity to fable, to figure expectations, possibilities, probabilities, paths, consequences, choices, even when we operate within the scope of reflections that appear to be merely conjectural or reveries or that come in form of counterfactual reasoning (Dulermoz; Singaravelou, 2018). Quotidianly, this interconnection between action and imagination also expresses the articulations between the personal and collective dimensions, placing action in history and in specific social conditions. In Ricoeur's terms, they are the imbrications between the imagination as a human potency, manifested in each individual, and the social imaginary.

Elaborating from the categories developed by Alfred Schutz, Ricoeur observes that the imagination operates from intersubjective schematisms, which compose what is called the social imaginary. In them, decisive passages are produced, from *me* to *us*, from *us* to *them* and vice versa. In other words, it is based on the ethical substrate of some cultural reality that we are able not only to project, to conceive our individual actions, but also to perceive ourselves as part of a broader collective, guided by equality and differences, that also includes those that are already gone and those who are still to come. In Ricoeur's words:

(...) imagination carries the competence to preserve and identify the analogy of the ego, in all relations with our contemporaries, our predecessors and our successors. Therefore, its competence is to preserve and identify the difference between the course of history and the course of things (...). But we will remain affected by the course of history and by the effects of history only insofar as we are able to expand our capacity to be affected by them. Imagination is the secret of this competence (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 227).

Whether in the so-called healthy or sick forms of ideology or utopia, we are constantly strained between movements of preservation and openness of meaning, both at individual and collective level. This is part of the dynamics of human ways of acting, suffering, imagining. However, there are situations capable of calling into question this world that is given to us and the manners in which these dynamics usually become operational. Suddenly, forms of emplotment, of amalgamating concordances and discordances that are naturalized and available in daily life seem to lose their effect, exposing the ontological inconsistency of human time and its historical-social processes. At those moments, *crisis* tends to give way to *catastrophe*. Although, as we have seen, *catastrophe* is a term that can be applied to different phenomena, sometimes

comprehended as a consummated fact, an event of considerable magnitude, in the perspective that we share here this association becomes not so simple. The loss of effect in the *mise-en-intrigue* processes (Manna and Lage, 2019), in articulating concordance-discordance, is not merely a consequence of *natural* or *human* disasters, for example. A tsunami does not necessarily generate this loss of effect, since different social institutions, such as the news media, act exactly with the intent of preventing the occurrence of this rupture, configuring the event out of established cultural matrices, like the melodrama (Ribeiro et al., 2020). In some cases, the catastrophe appears less as something external to the individual, and more as the quality of the relationship that this person may have, in a specific situation, with what is surrounding him/her. As Leal and Gomes (2020) point out, even an ordinary repeated act can, sometimes, *happen as a catastrophe*, when the conditions of action in the prefigured world are destabilized.

In this positive perspective that we intend to endorse, catastrophe acquires the status of being the limit of the action, which demands an intense and radical change or prevalence over some state of things, including one's way of thinking. In this way of understanding it, *catastrophe* would be the interdiction or the momentary suspension of action and, by extension, of the human capacity to imagine. This is what some *relations* with events considered to be *major*, such as the collapse of a mining dam, an earthquake or a pandemic spread of a virus, among other phenomena, can promote. Therefore, in the dimension we engaged in here, *catastrophe* appears as some kind of violent suspension of a certain possible world, in which historical forms of understanding time and the world itself collapse and the efforts to deal with the transformations of action become depleted. However, even if it imposes limits on human action, unless this limit is truly apocalyptic, *catastrophe* is not configured as an end, but, on the contrary, it demands overcoming, imposing the urgency and the need of acting, as part of the work of building new, different possible world, state of things, society, etc. – a possible return to a state of normality or the foundation of a new normal.

As Alphonso Lingis (2018) explains, we live in a world that can be defined by a rigorous determinism and an effort of exhaustive planning as a form of trying to control the aporias of time – and that seems to gain intensity in the face of the dynamics related to living (and surviving) through a pandemic, since the multiplication of texts and tutorials about *what to do* to organize time, to make it productive and busy during periods of social distancing. But even outside these extraordinary experiences, all the time, we set personal and intersubjective goals for work and for our affective relationships, we load ourselves with responsibilities and we often forget that there is an “an element of chance and risk in every relation with another human being. We never really know what someone might think or might do. We can only trust him or her” (Lingis, 2018, p. 30). Thus, our experience is marked by a deep uncertainty about the improbable reasons for our origin and our future. In addition, it does not matter how much we plan, we are always subject to disruptions in our expectations, including those that have a personal dimension that, for each human being, will lead to an unpredictable course: losing a job, the death of a beloved one, receiving the diagnosis of an incurable disease, and even, as many audiovisual narratives explore, a tiny change in the temporal and spatial organization of our daily routines. These situations destroy the rhythmic time of work and reason, opening a gap in our forms of creating narratives, requiring other ways to make the discordances concordant in cosmic time.

That said, when repositioned, *catastrophe* does not mean the absolute failure of action. That would be death (also considered metaphorically). Those who stay alive act. Unless we consider the possibility of an end to everything, *catastrophe* also reinforces the possibility of survival. For those who stay alive, it represents, paradoxically, that some ways of acting in the world will lose their meaning, as will some narratives that gave coherence and significance to that world in which they used to live; and it also represents an imperative of acting to establish a new place, not yet understood, in which the previous imaginary no longer seems to make sense any longer. The turning point indicates that certain actions, situations, routines, and events no longer signify what they signified *before the catastrophe*. In

fact, as noted by Leal, Borges and Tognolo (2019), different contemporary audiovisual productions, such as *Battlestar Galactica*, *The 100*, *The walking dead*, *The expanse*, and *3%*, have repeatedly narrated *post-apocalyptic* realities and the challenges of living in (acting, imagining, building) another world after the fall of the one that existed *before*. Likewise, as perceived by Costa and Jácome (2018), we can also observe a certain flattening of temporal dimensions in series like *Black Mirror*, *Westworld* and *The Refugees*, that "(...) talk about a future to come in which humanity is faced with the disastrous consequences of the dream of modernity, in which the omnipresent technology is a witness to a failed progress" (Costa and Jácome, 2018, p. 283).

In regard to the reflections about time, *crisis* and *catastrophe* appear, then, as interpretative categories that allow us to reach important aspects of the human experience of time, being applicable to different situations and events. As we indicated, a nuclear disaster, the fall of a political regime, death, the eruption of a volcano, the emergence of a new virus and a new pandemic, for example, can be seen in different approaches when considered under the *crisis* or the *catastrophe* lens, acknowledging yet that it is not on every occasion that each term would be exactly pertinent. Anyways, every event, unfolded in time, can be seen as a *crisis*, but not always as a *catastrophe*.

Presentism as a strong present: relational propositions between crisis and catastrophe

In the previous section, we affirmed that *crisis* is an inherent feature of the human condition of experiencing time, and that, as a *catastrophe*, it constitutes ways of understanding and relating to the world. Now, we would like to dwell in a specific regime of historicity. The so-called modern history, as emphasized by Koselleck (2006), can be seen as the emergence of a new temporal configuration, a *new time*, which results in major consequences for all humanity and reposition the idea of *crisis*. This happens because, in the modern (Western, Eurocentric) experience, time becomes not only the way in which all stories unfold, but it also starts to acquire a historical quality by itself. European modernity (and its internal and external colonialisms) does not designate a fixed time, it only qualifies it in contrast to an earlier time (without informing the historical content of that period). For this reason, there is a postulation of a temporal linearity that monopolizes and unifies the other flows of time following one same scale. Different cultural stories and experiences become part of *the same story*, now led by the West. According to Koselleck:

The advances of the sciences, which always promised and announced more discoveries for the future, just like the discovery of the New World (sic) and its peoples, reverberated, at first in a slow pace, by contributing to making us aware of a universal history, which would be entering a new time as a whole (Koselleck, 2006, p. 278).

This *new time* would be defined by a belief in progress, in the acceleration towards a better future and in the idea of an availability of History. In this sense, thinking about the uses of the word 'crisis', it is important to retain Koselleck's understanding, for whom the term designates the chaining of a (in)decision within an idea of progress. The moderns wait for progress to arrive and their acting can imply wait or revolution (an action to *make history*, to *make the future arrive*). Then, we reach other dimensions around the idea of *crisis*, that is characterized by a fragile present, as a time of passage towards the closure of the past and the openness to the novelties and benefits of the future. This new manner of articulating present-past-future started to generate a gap between the previous experience (configured as a space of experience) and the expectation of what is to come (glimpsed as a horizon of expectation), expanding the difference between past and future, by considering that the present, the time in which we live, is now experienced as a time of constant rupture, permeated by new and unexpected events, *in crisis*.

This modern composition proposes a synchrony to different phenomena, placing them on a same comparative basis, allowing, for example, to categorize countries as *developed* (modern) and *archaic* or *developing* (the pre-modern). The simultaneity of the asynchronous forces the idea of a delay, as it authorizes the thought that the technical-industrial level that developed countries already reached could, in the future, be reached by the ones in development. In Brazilian imaginary (Jácome, 2020), for example, our expectation of a *developing* or emerging country is an experience that compulsorily belongs to them: the Modern and developed, the Europeans, the citizens of the global north. An experience that is a space-time that we supposedly want to reach. However, a series of unfulfilled promises and wars, genocides, environmental disasters, among other events that we could generally categorize as catastrophic, harshly shook the belief in an accelerated time that would lead us towards progress. The moderns are no longer (have they ever been?) capable of overcoming the past and making it close towards the future. At the same time, the future is more similar to dystopian reflections than to an innocent idea of universal progress. As Achille Mbembe (2018) points out, the humanism era seems to have ended without ever starting.

So, it is not by chance that there are several narratives that imply the end of history and the challenge of seeing beyond it. “We react more than act”, says Hartog (2015, p. 10) in his examination of an empire of the present, which he names presentism. His book ‘Regimes of Historicity’ proposes a reflection about the *crisis of time*, a crisis of a world in which, reigning absolutely, the present imposes itself as the only horizon. However, considering our previous thoughts in this paper, we are inclined to look at the European presentism, following Hartog’s terms, less as a *crisis* and more as a *catastrophe*. We sustain this because, more than a definitive interruption, an end – a death –, presentism occurs as an inability or refusal to imagine *beyond* and, at its limit, to act in time. There is a temporal immobility in a present that is configured as being omnipresent and omnipotent, imposing a horizon that tends to value immediacy, claiming the past as a stabilized monument. It is, therefore, ‘a disoriented time’, in which the tension between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation (Koselleck, 2006) becomes a schism (Ricoeur, 2012) that is unable to create new relations in the present. In this perspective, presentism can be understood as a sign of weakening, a European *disease* in face of modernity, a paralyzing catastrophe that acts to prevent time from flowing, an insurmountable landmark of our historicity.

For Hartog, presentism is seen as an incapacity or a refusal to act, which we understand here as a *catastrophe* of time. However, presentism can also be seen dynamically, recovering the strengths of its *crisis* potential as an acting opportunity for imagining and animating other possible worlds, especially for those who stand on the margins of European temporality. As María Inés Mudrovcic points out,

When we ask ourselves about a forgotten past or, on the contrary, an extremely present past; when the future appears threatening or sealed; when the present seems to consume itself in the instant or it passes uninterruptedly, it is then that arises the interstice or the crack that makes evident that a proposed, ‘naturalized’ experience of time, in which we lived comfortably, is now being questioned. (Mudrovcic, 2013, p. 13).

In this sense, in a different and more positive approach than what Hartog postulates, *presentism as a catastrophe of time* may represent, for Latin American populations, for example, the possibility of an effective inquest of history as a collective singular.

Mudrovcic (2013; 2015) explains that the monopoly of national histories is mitigated by a plurality of perspectives: feminist movements, black people movements, immigrant movements, indigenous movements, etc. These perspectives demand their place in history and *catastrophically* (we emphasize the term’s positivity here) claim a new possible world: new forms of rearranging past, present and future. Also according to Mudrovcic, in its relations with the temporalities, the past becomes debt, guilt, memory, justice, in short, a past that does not cease passing and in which we act and suffer. It seems to us that the main concern here is to do not accustom transformative actions into *magical concepts*, as Rivera

Cusicanqui (2018) warns us, understanding that these concepts possess the ability to explain everything and to self-explain themselves, leaving no margins for doubts or inquiries about the heuristic validities in them implied.

If discussions based on the concept of presentism can potentially lead to a feeling of paralysis in face of a now that weighs in the form of a present which vigorously imposes itself and of a threatening or decadent future, it is necessary to do not fall into the opposite trap of perspectives insinuated by notions of progress. After all, depending on the adopted focus, progress would be the arrow for a future that is always more auspicious than the past and the present, untwining temporal tensions and erasing hierarchies and other problems that colonialist approaches of the temporalities and historicities carry. It is worth resorting again to María Inés Mudrovic:

Progress was an expected future. As the son of the philosophies of history, progress shows a historical process that marks a final stage, the society without classes or the peoples' federation, for example. It becomes, then, a philosophical historical project, that is, one that has no political anchorage. Human action is irrelevant to its fulfillment. The progress of the philosophies of history is conceived as a historical process that is not a result of the actions of men, but of the development of what Arendt calls 'extra, super or subhuman forces, in which the man who acts is excluded from history'. It is the same thing that leads Koselleck to affirm that the final stage of the historical process delimited by the future conceived as progress 'excludes the inclusion of its participants', that is, 'the role of the empirical agent is reduced, it performs an action whose origin and meaning is attributed to progress' (Mudrovic, 2015, p. 105).

With its colonialist premises, progress would consequently be linked to the negative and incomplete meaning of catastrophe, when it is interpreted as the end of human action, or perhaps more appropriately, when it insinuates the unnecessariness of human action, given the supposedly immanent nature of progress as a precondition of History. Of the many political consequences that come from there, we have the misunderstanding –strategically repeated to forge a regime of truth, it is important to remember that – of a History with a capital H that, under the rule of progress, becomes universal, taking away all the spatial and temporal differences, people, and societies with their unique traits. In these milestones, crises in progress' script towards historic paradise are the ones responsible for the inexplicable or astounding catastrophes; and the scapegoats are limitlessly exposed daily, for example, in different media, embodied in indigenous peoples, in illiterate and impoverished populations, in women, in LGBTQIA+ people, in migrants and in an endless number of *people hindering progress* just because they denounce the fallacies of its presumptions.

Crisis and catastrophe as categories of uncertainty: considerations

We started the second part of this text by referring to newspapers from different times and spaces and their news, in which crisis and catastrophe assume diverse conditions, although they are subordinated to presupposed conditions that define these two categories as being immanent to the nature of the reported event. Epistemologically, narrative gestures like those tend to erase the complex spatial and temporal relations that can permit more comprehensive heuristic dimensions to the ideas of crisis and catastrophe. This means that those narratives potentially erase or turn secondary, with consequent hierarchizations, characters, events, spatialities, temporalities and other variables, rendering the dimensions of concordance and discordance opaque, as in the meanings proposed by Paul Ricoeur (2012). According to the Ricoeur's premises that we articulated with other philosophical and historiographical traditions, there is no linear temporality, in the same way that it is not possible to narrate without ethically recognizing the challenges imposed by respect for the other (in me or in front of me), according to the premises of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 2012; 2014).

Our proposal here assumes that every effort of understanding, every human action, aims to organize lived time. But these movements do not prevent chance, so that the *catastrophe* of human action is exposed and indicates the limits of preventive agency intended to avoid it. The contact with the other, his/her enigmas, ethical and epistemic trials, and also the cosmic or times of nature present themselves as catastrophes when exposing the beyond, the unreachable for the human. They require, as a care, a sense of relativity (not relativism), a gesture of setting in perspective the cultural constructions of time and the ethical acting, the full recognition of the alterities in relation; this can even be a way of avoiding the making of *scapegoats* supposedly responsible for those *crises* and/or *catastrophes*.

We propose, therefore, to take *crisis* and *catastrophe* not as the natural sequence of events, in which one would be the condition of the other's existence, but as terms that allow us to articulate temporal and spatial relations, events, people and institutions involved in what challenges our narrow comprehension of complex phenomena. In this sense, we envision theoretical and analytical paths to go beyond certain procedures that impose us, through the media and on daily basis, successive crises and catastrophes, preventing us from being able to act or situate ourselves in face of them. If, at first sight, *crisis* and *catastrophe* are exclusively on the key of negativity, because they represent ruptures, fractures in expectations, interruption of personal or collective projects, interdiction of acting and other modes of violence, here we mobilize them both under the aegis of some sort of heuristic positivity. In this perspective, crisis and catastrophe present us with the challenge of thinking (acting, imagining) beyond linear relations of time, and call upon examinations to the human diversity available in every researched phenomenon; but, above all, they stimulate the casting of doubts and uncertainties where there seems to be a predominance of regularly unilateral and imposed examinations, that shows claims of universal validity.

Acknowledgements

The research projects that allowed the production of this paper are funded by the Research Support Foundation of Minas Gerais (Fapemig), by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), and by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes).

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Carlos Alberto Carvalho is a permanent professor at the Communication Post-Graduate Program at Universidade Federal of Minas Gerais. In this article, he contributed to the conception of the paper structure; the development of the theoretical discussion; data interpretation; support in the reviewing process; writing of the manuscript and revision of the English version.

Verônica Soares Costa is professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais. In this article, she contributed to the conception of the paper structure; the development of the theoretical discussion; data interpretation; support in the reviewing process; writing of the manuscript and revision of the English version.

Phellipy Pereira Jácome is permanent professor in the the Communication Post-Graduate Program at Universidade Federal of Minas Gerais. In this article, he contributed to the conception of the paper structure; the development of the theoretical discussion; data interpretation; support in the reviewing process; writing of the manuscript and revision of the English version.

Bruno Souza Leal is a permanent professor at the Communication Post-Graduate Program at Universidade Federal of Minas Gerais. In this article, he contributed to the conception of the paper structure; the development of the theoretical discussion; data interpretation; support in the reviewing process; writing of the manuscript and revision of the English version.