The Future and Its Enemies
In Defense of Political Hope

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To my brother Pablo,
who hopes no longer,
who now simply awaits our arrival

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Whatever our preferred definition of globalization, there is always a reference to the compression of the space we live in and the implications this intensification has on the awareness of belonging to a single world, be it the global marketplace for economic actors, the universal order for philosophers, or the global order for policymakers (Robertson 1992). This compression of space leads to a unified global time that, rather than creating an automatic, welcome sense of synchronicity, is instead the scene of a new battle of the ages. The global era of the marketplace has come into conflict with the political era of democratic governments, the strategic era of businesses, and the psychological era of the individual.

The global scope of abstract time has situated time at the center of political interests since time explains a good number of the conflicts that exist in a desynchronized world. The speed of social processes is a threat to democratic societies. That is why politics must be understood as a government of time, as "chronopolitics." Politics no longer merely controls spaces, natural resources, or work, but must also manage time. It influences the temporal conditions of human existence, achieves as much balance as possible between the velocities of diverse social systems, and configures democratic rhythms. A critical theory of collective time can also help redefine the democratic ideal of self-government, which has been encroached upon by depoliticizing forces.

Time Wars

In 1752, the British government decided to adopt the continent's Gregorian calendar and declared that after September 2nd, it would be September 14th. When workers heard the news, large protests broke out because they were afraid they would lose their salary from the intervening days. At a gathering before Parliament, they shouted "give us our eleven days" (Whitrow 1988, 3). This demand may not have made sense, but it reflected the feeling that the control of time is power. Nowadays, we would not know exactly where to protest against the injustices that are committed in the name of time control, but determining who makes decisions about time continues to be the central critical question. In an attempt to clarify who has power, control, decision-making ability, or influence, we can reformulate the question in this way: who regulates time frames and rhythms? Who determines the speed of social processes? How is that achieved? These questions also allow an analysis not only of the power relationship between traditional actors and institutions, but of the tensions between distinct social spheres, like the economy or politics. A critical theory of society should ask itself: who can place other people, societies, or social subsystems under time constraints?

The relevance of these questions can be understood if we recall the different ways traditional and modern societies configure time. Although it is clearly not accurate to say that power was not wielded in traditional societies, the structure of those societies was based on the temporalities of nature and religion. In a modern society, on the other hand, there is no longer a natural, spontaneous, and objective coordination of time. At the beginning of modernity, new "time generators" (Rinderspacher 1988, 14)—like the economy, communications, technology, or work—were created, imposing a rhythm on

society, signifying a standardization and homogenization of time inside each of these systems. In modern societies, time is more closely linked to power; the influence is more specific, since it is not controlled by natural cycles or divine intervention. At the same time, differentiated industrial societies were not only characterized by their great organizational capacity, but by a strong demand for synchronization. That is why time has become the quintessential topic of modernity. It also reveals why the organization of time reflects a society's power structures.

Nowadays, our conflicts are, fundamentally, time wars (Rifkin 1987; Virilio 2001). One could advance the hypothesis that since territory has lost meaning, the center of human conflicts has shifted from space to time. Sexual discrimination, conflicts of interest, social exclusions, subtle forms of power are articulated through a dominion over time rather than a possession of space. At present, the emphasis is no longer on conquering exotic countries, but on controlling other people's temporal resources. Regulations concerning space are replaced by the control of time; chronopolitics ends up being more important than geostrategy. Today, the mechanisms of exclusion are less occupations of territory than appropriations of other people's time, in the form of acceleration, impatience, or delays. This is the new axis of social conflict: the imposition of time. Although we may not be very conscious of it, we no longer have as many battles to appropriate certain spaces, mark borders, and secure locations. Instead, our conflicts focus on taking time away from other people, controlling the temporal hegemony of time. Borders are created with speed, not with settlements; they are transgressed through acceleration, not displacement.

Foucault showed that modern social discipline owes its strength to the establishment and interiorization of certain temporal structures (1977). Modern civilization produces a particular confrontation between a unified, coercive public time and the free plurality of individual times. There is nothing strange about the fact that political revolutions have always been fought to determine the calendar. Social relationships exercise multiple temporal coercions; social time itself seems to be an instrument of power and control, a creator of dependencies and aristocratic speeds. Inequalities take on a temporal form: whatever is most advanced, the vanguard, is the best. Evil is defined as an obstacle, historical backwardness, or slowness. Power is equivalent to the capacity for movement. In general in our accelerated culture, where an authentic tyranny of the swift is in force, whoever is fastest is most powerful. The asymmetry that characterizes all forms of power is also found in the concept of time: the imposition and pursuit of deadlines and rhythms is an expression of the diverse possibilities of the use of one's own and other people's time. In this way, we predetermine what is important or urgent, as well as our priorities and the distribution of scarce temporal resources.

Time's diverse configurations or activities provoke specific conflicts. Daily activities such as waiting, delaying, changing pace, advancing, accelerating, etc., often constitute the nucleus of social confrontation. The regulation of rhythms, duration, speed, sequencing, and the synchronization of events and activities is related to power, a series of decisions with conflicting interests at stake. Time affects economic competitiveness and plays a fundamental role in military tactics; global conflicts can be interpreted as a consequence of the imposition of unified time frames. "The compression of time that takes place in the new global simultaneity also carries within it a compression of cultures, ethnic groups, and

social identities, with all the corresponding possibilities of conflict" (Nowotny 1996, 96). From the domestic to the global, temporal asymmetries allow us to explain many of the hegemonies and conflicts of the contemporary world.

If this hypothesis is correct, we would have to reformulate our idea of exclusion, which we tend to express with metaphors that are more spatial than temporal. The new outsiders are not those who live far away, but those who live in another time period. The margins are not a territorial space but a temporal category. When time management is an important requirement, when one lives in a society in which one must arrive on time, synchronize with other people, predict, make decisions at the appropriate moment, etc., time becomes a locus of social opportunities. Being excluded means not being allowed to coordinate one's time with a public time in which vital opportunities, such as power, employment, or recognition, are negotiated. A marginalized person is not on the spatial periphery, but is literally living in another time.

So the mechanisms of exclusion are, fundamentally, procedures of discriminatory acceleration, among which the processes that create social rhythms are worth emphasizing. Edward P. Thompson, in his noteworthy study on industrial capitalism, showed how the implementation of new forms of capitalist exploitation at the beginning of the eighteenth century progressed through a reorganization of people's corporal and social rhythms (1996). This perspective now seems even more relevant as we attempt to explain the presence of domination in a fluid world where power does not seem to be anywhere but where it is, in fact, exercised more and more upon rhythmical concerns (Young and Schuller 1988; Michon 2005 and 2007). Among these imperious rhythms, the acceleration of the financial economy and the temporality of the means of communication stand out.

These rhythms determine richness and poorness, celebrity and ruin. They confer opportunities on the people who move in their particular synchronicity and establish what is urgent and worthwhile. Their memory determines what should be heeded and what ignored.

Heterochrony: A Desynchronized World

Time, in modern societies, has been profoundly pluralized. Given the cultural shifts that have taken place, some traditions that were connected to persistent life circumstances have lost validity in their dealings with time. Our way of managing time is now more liberated than ever from the burden of tradition. That is why the heterogeneity of observable times has increased. The plurality of our temporal architecture has never been greater than it is now, in our particular "polychrony" (Delmas-Marty 2009, 133). Never have so many heterogeneities coexisted in such a thick spatial and temporal network. Koselleck's idea of a "contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous" (1985) can be verified in the reality of scattered times that characterize our society.

People's subjective experiences can be profoundly diverse. Simmel described modern freedom as freedom in the face of life's collective rhythm; individualization would consist of the specific possibility of rhythmic irregularities. This pluralization of subjective time implies a different valuation, a loss of the unity of measure. A structurally or institutionally imposed velocity could be excessive for certain people, while others might consider it excessively slow (1992, 228). One has only to contrast the time experienced by young people and by the elderly; the difference is perceived, for example, in their

contrasting experience of work time, the different assessment each makes about the length of contracts, and the way in which stability and precariousness are experienced.

The pluralism of the times that characterize social groups, distinct cultures, or diverse activities is also profound. Halbwachs (1947) addresses this when he suggests that societies have as many collective times as separate groups, and there is no unified time that is imposed on all of them. Every group and every activity moves within its own time frame. No society renounces a certain harmonization of these times, but as Gurvitch noted, that unification is controversial precisely because the criteria of harmonization are also diverse. "The effort of arriving at that social cohesion and at a relative interconnectedness between social times leads to a new type of disparity: the disparity between social forms from which a new hierarchy is constructed in order to unify social times [. . .]. There is, for example, not only discord between family time, school time, factory time, labor union time, office time, etc., but also dissonance between the ways in which different times are harmonized, regardless of whether it is a patriarchal or a feudal society, the ancient city-state, collectivist or capitalist societies. This creates even more examples of social time" (Gurvitch 1969, 325).

The coexistence of different times is not always peaceful and rewarding. We have more and more examples of temporal desynchronizations that result in a not insignificant number of conflicts. In temporal conflicts, there is a clash between different criteria for structuring time. The world advances at different speeds, resulting in continual fissures between different dynamics. These disparities or fault lines receive diverse names: discrepancies, gaps, divergences, breach, shock, fragmentation . . . . They all emphasize that

temporal realities are distinct, incompatible, even antagonistic and that some of them have a strong inclination to try to impose themselves on others.

Some *heterochronies* are revealed through the conflicts between individuals and groups (young and old people's time, the lack of balance between generations, inequality in general) or a lack of synchronicity between diverse social systems (technological advances vs. the slowness of the law, the time of consumption vs. the time of resources, media time vs. scientific time). Social subsystems have also developed their own logic from the temporal point of view, and their dynamics, acceleration, rhythm, and speed are largely independent: the time of fashion does not coincide with the time of religion, nor does technological time coincide with legal time, nor economic with political time, nor the time of the ecosystem with the time of consumption. One significant problem we need to confront is how to mark a rhythm for these times, avoiding both the risks of desynchronization and the imposition of a standardized time.

Political desynchronization stands out among these systemic desynchronizations, contrasting with other social systems that, like economics or the means of communication, seem to drag politics toward a way of thinking that is foreign to it. In politics, the contradiction between efficient time and the time of debate and legal action is especially intense. The economy, science, and technology are too fast to be well regulated politically and legally. This desynchronization frequently makes the political system adopt anachronistic decisions. That is why the leisurely speed of politics is sometimes corrected by adjudication, which tends to be able to resolve certain cases faster, although resorting to that resource erodes the space belonging to politics (Rosanvallon 2008).

These desynchronizations are proof that progress is not achieved in a united front. In other words, progress in science and technology, for example, does not correspond to social progress. The rather deterministic assumption that economic and political development necessarily go hand in hand has been dispelled. The unification of Europe, which was entrusted to the unifying force of the economy, is a good example: its limits are more obvious today than at the time the Common Market was founded. We can also observe the apparent inconsistency of countries like China that simultaneously maintain a capitalist economy and a non-democratic political system. We have abundant evidence that advanced technology does not imply cultural and political modernity. For example, the internet does not always afford us positive political results, and international terrorists utilize modern technological capabilities.

But time conflicts stemming from the lack of synchronization of different systems are not the only discrepancies that exist. There are also temporal contrasts and malfunctions within each system. One example can be found in the way financial economics tends to prevail over other areas of the economy. What became clear with the peak and crisis of the *new economy* was precisely the divergence between the rapidity of the financial markets and real investments.

The severe dysfunctionality of our lives is caused by a lack of temporal synchronicity. Social disintegration is a result of growing temporal desynchronization, the destruction of the environment is due to the overburdening of natural cycles of regeneration, and the loss of personal autonomy stems from a social acceleration that impedes people's ability to form coherent opinions (Rosa 2005, 110).

The large-scale lack of synchronicity that characterizes the world today materializes in the contrast between global time and local time, between global synchronizations (related to finance, communications, the internet) and global desynchronizations (inequalities, tensions and disputes, Third World peoples, fundamentalisms . . .). The freedom of movement that some people enjoy is contemporaneous with the physical constraints to which other people are condemned. The world today is better described by an image of cyberspace coinciding with the Stone Age than by speaking of "glocality" as if that were a universally achieved synthesis. This imbalance is readily apparent and explains the background forces operating in global spheres: migratory movements, a lack of legal unity, distinct responsibilities regarding the environment, the hegemonic power that resists involvement in the realities of post-autonomous synchronization . . . . The weakness of the institutions of world governance makes synchronizing a world that is increasingly out of control enormously difficult.

Desynchronization is also related to uneven global unification (which makes us all present, but does not unify completely) and to the multiculturalism of our societies, in which different groups with distinct identities appear. In both cases, there is either a unification of time without a unity of place (the instantaneousness of communications and of financial markets) or a unity of place without a unification of time (multiculturalism). The tension between forces that unify but do not differentiate and forces of difference that lack the capacity or will to unify, between a time without place and a place without time, will continue to be something we must discuss as long as we are unable to formulate modes of thinking to allow synchronizations that are not impositions.

Since this issue extends throughout the world, it is certainly a complex task. The greater the diversity of human activities, the more differentiated the temporal structures and the greater the need for agreement and synchronization. Because of the demands for synchronization and coordination when it comes to making decisions, there is a "temporalization of complexity" (Luhmann 1991, 124). The course of modern civilization has not halted the increase of the presence of other people's time in our own time; it appears in diverse forms of communication and the coordination of different people. This leads to a series of temporal imbalances that demand coordination by institutional mechanisms that can determine priorities or feasible compromises. There is no guarantee that we can achieve temporal harmony, but a deliberate social and political effort at configuration must be made. These efforts may not always be peaceful; power relationships will be on the line.

The humanization of social conflicts and the construction of human coexistence are dependent on the regulation of time. Those who govern should ask themselves if things are organized in such a way that temporal discriminations are eliminated. The new vigilance is, more than anything, an observation about the flow of materials and the measurement of the time differences that must be harmonized in some way. The act of governance means allowing temporal coordination between many people, systems, societies, and cultures that inhabit multiple times. From the civilizing point of view, it would be an attempt, as Mireille Delmas-Marty (2006) has suggested, to give order to that which is plural without reducing it to that which is identical, recognizing pluralism without renouncing the law of the land, unifying without imposing fusion, not believing our history represents the only path to

modernization, promoting unification without believing it to be synonymous with

Westernism.

Democratic Time

The collective nature of the time in which we live demands special synchronizations

in order to regulate compatibility, cooperation, and competition. The specific role of

politics is to assure the cultural unity of time in the face of tendencies toward social

disintegration, while simultaneously respecting the profound social pluralism that is also

expressed as temporal pluralism. The objectives of a "politics of time" would be

"identifying how different institutional orders work to different clockspeeds and imply

different rhythms of social interaction" (Pels 2003, 209). Or to say it with Barthes (2002),

it would mean finding a rhythm balanced between *idiorrhythm* and totalitarian

synchronization, promoting democratic *eurhythmics*. Modern democracy is a complex

game of balances within the realm of speed and leisureliness. Political pluralism is also

reflected as temporal pluralism: the slow time of the constitution, the medium time of

legislatures, the fleeting time of public opinion . . . . Politics moves among extremes of

maximum slowness and frenetic speed; it straddles the risk of anachronism to which rigid

political systems expose themselves and, at the other extreme, instability when changes are

carried out without an intelligible framework clarifying procedures and how long the

process will last.

That being said, how can politics organize the power over time? Is it possible to

balance economic, techno-scientific, and media accelerations politically and socially? Is it

possible to carry out these tasks when the efficiency of the government as the regulator of

time in a delineated space is weakened? Democratic politics are greatly exposed to the

dangers of desynchronization in the face of accelerated social and economic developments.

The principal desynchronization between social systems is due to the disconnect between

levels of economic, scientific, and technical innovation and our capacity for sorting them

politically by integrating them into a logical social totality. In heterogeneous and pluralist

societies, the assessment of processes, the determination of priorities, and the task of

synchronization can only be carried out through discursive negotiation. The decision-

making process has to be democratically organized to correct the radically disparate levels

of influence wielded by the various interests at play.

The modern political project that attempted a democratic organization of society

was supported by temporal assumptions that originally seemed obvious but now appear

questionable (Rosa 2005, 392). The first set of assumptions included the unity of historic

time, the difference between past and future, and the idea of progress, which articulated

the political battle between the two poles represented by conservatives and progressives.

Secondly, the temporal structure of representation presumed the compatibility of political

time (in other words, the time of deliberation and decision) and the rhythm, speed, and

sequence of social evolution. The assumption was that the political system would have

time to organize the process of shaping the political will, which is prepared to react quickly

in the face of the necessities that arise from every social sphere, articulating collective

interests in programs, laws, and executive decisions.

Those two assumptions appear anachronistic nowadays. Current "reactionaries" do

not correspond to the temporal axis that links past and future through the idea of progress;

they do not attempt to conserve anything valuable from the past or to balance social

dynamics. Instead, they destroy the future with an acceleration that desynchronizes and excludes . . . specifically in the name of the future. Their goal, for reasons we will address in the following chapter, is to depoliticize. If the distinction between left and right still makes any sense, we now find ourselves with "progressives," in an inverse of the classical-modern pattern, who support deceleration because they are in favor of controlling the economy politically, democratic deliberation, and the protection of the environment and special local areas. "Conservatives," on the other hand, push for acceleration at the expense of the truly political since they are, for example, in favor of the rapid introduction of new technologies, the elimination of barriers for the circulation of global flows, the power of the market, and accelerated decision making (Rosa 2005, 416).

The democratic self-determination of society requires cultural, structural, and institutional assumptions that social acceleration seems to erode. The processes of acceleration, which sprang from utopian desire, were made autonomous at the expense of the hopes of political progress. It has now become clear that the acceleration of the processes of social, economic, and technological change depoliticizes to the extent that the synchronization of processes and systems is made more difficult, overburdening the political system's deliberative capacity, social integration, and generational balance.

One of our greatest problems derives precisely from the contrast between the speed of social changes and the slowness of politics. Governments are simply too slow in the face of the speed of global transactions. Neither education, politics, nor the law can withstand the pace of the globalized world. Their institutions progressively lose the capacity to organize the processes of technical and social acceleration. Governance becomes problematic. Confronting the complexity of decision making and the media pressure for

instantaneousness, political institutions find their sphere of influence reduced, in the best case scenario, to the reparation of the damages generated by the economic and technological system.

The political system is faced with a serious dilemma. On the one hand, it has to adapt to the accelerated developments of science and technology in order to integrate their innovations into the social system, but on the other hand, it is in no condition to keep pace with the velocity of the knowledge produced. While technology follows an enormously accelerated course, the speed of political processes is limited by their procedures. This is why the state, which arose as a revitalizing force in modern society, seems to be a force for social deceleration today. Administrations and bureaucracy present themselves as paradigms of slowness, inefficiency, and inflexibility. All the processes of debureaucratization or decentralization are motivated by this pressure to accelerate the decisions of public administrations. This desperate search for efficiency also explains the displacement of decision-making procedures from the area of democratic politics to other more agile, but less representative and democratic scenarios. Examples would include the rise in expert commissions, which are better equipped for the imperatives of speed than parliaments are; the difficulties the legislative branch has in effectively controlling the executive branch because of their differing levels of agility; the fact that civil society is self-regulated (economic deregulation) and politically controversial topics are displaced toward organisms with greater decision-making capabilities (the judicialization of politics). At the international level, decisions are shifted toward groups of experts or to interest groups that lack democratic legitimacy, but are much more agile than governmental summits.

Even if there is good justification for correcting the political system's slowness, this raises the question of whether the end result is a strengthening or distortion of the political system's capacity for intervention. Political action always presupposes a degree of "idleness," a time of free discussion and deliberation, which conflicts with the demands of decision making. But free time cannot be eliminated without putting the legitimacy and rationality of political decisions at risk.

The dynamics of acceleration constitute a threat against politics to the extent that acceleration represents a loss of a society's capacity for political self-regulation. There is a contradiction in the fact that democratic life presupposes self-government and yet we are aware that dominant time frames do not allow for self-regulation. There is real pressure to convert politics into a true anachronism, to remove political structure from the world: the most powerful conditions related to the determination of time are not democratically controlled or controllable. Because of this, some people announce "the end of politics"; others, as a response to the "ungovernability" of complex societies, recommend a "deregulation" that actually represents capitulation in the face of the imperatives of the economic movement. For this reason, our great challenge consists of defending temporal attributes—as well as the corresponding procedures for deliberation, reflection, and negotiation—in the democratic formation of a political will to counteract the imperialism of techno-economic demands and the agitation of media time.

How then do we gain the capacity for political intervention on social processes? It is not a question of insisting on formulas that have shown themselves to be inefficient nor of renouncing the ideal of democratic self-government, abandoning the configuration of the future to "societal drift" (Lauer 1981, 31). One possible solution consists of compensating

the slowness of politics with future predictions. In order to configure collective life, one needs a certain degree of stability that makes social processes comprehensible and, to some extent, controllable. Achieving stability would allow us to formulate preferences and goals beyond the present moment. Planning must entail a system of thoughtful learning that modifies the conditions and methods of its anticipatory behavior.

As individuals, we do not have complete temporal dominion since our time is made up of horizons, structures, and rhythms that are, to a large extent, socially configured, but because of its chaotic and accelerated nature, society does not govern its own time either. A good deal of our dissatisfaction related to globalization is experienced as discomfort regarding the times that are imposed on us, both as individuals and societies, as destinations over which we have no recourse. It is a question of knowing whether, in spite of the complexity of the contemporary world, a society can, through political action, configure its collective time in some way, making sense of it, and resolving the problems arising from uneven accelerations.