

Chronicle of a summer: cinema as a sociological experience¹

Crônica de um verão: cinema como experiência sociológica

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes to discuss the topicality of the method developed by the French thinker Edgar Morin (1921-) in the 1960s, coined as *sociology of the present*. Our hypothesis is that the sociology of the present allows for a multidimensional approach to reality, which is suitable to analyze increasingly complex social phenomena. As reference, we take two specific scenarios developed by the author in the works *Commune en France: la métamorphose de Plozévet* (1967) and *Chronicle of a summer* (1961). We thus conclude that the central notions of *crisis* and *event*, as highlighted by the author, become increasingly more operative and reflexive, just as the method of phenomenological observation, interview and intervention.

Keywords: Sociology of the present, cinema, Edgar Morin

RESUMO

Este artigo propõe discutir a atualidade do método desenvolvido pelo pensador francês Edgar Morin (1921-) na década de 1960, denominado por ele de *sociologia do presente*. Nossa hipótese é que a sociologia do presente é uma via de abordagem multidimensional da realidade, adequada para analisar fenômenos sociais cada vez mais complexos. Tomamos como referências dois cenários específicos trabalhados pelo autor nas obras *Commune en France: la métamorphose de Plozévet* (1967) e *Crônica de um verão* (1961). A partir daí concluímos que as noções centrais de *crise* e *acontecimento*, destacadas pelo autor, tornam-se cada dia mais operativas e reflexivas, assim como o método de observação fenomenográfica, entrevista e intervenção.

Palavras-chave: Sociologia do presente, cinema, Edgar Morin

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PLOZÉVET: THE SUMMIT OF AN EXPERIENCE

THE YEAR WAS 1965, when a multidisciplinary team led by Edgar Morin, the *Délégation Générale à la Recherche Scientifique et Technique* (General Delegation for Scientific and Technical Research – DGRST) from France, comprised of geographers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, physicians and hematologists, sets off to the commune of Plozévet, in the Finistère department located in the region of Brittany. The objective was to investigate how the modernization process through which French society was going took place in this unique fishing community, which was relatively isolated from the rest of the country but that was also undergoing such transformation in its own way.

According to Morin (1967), there was almost nothing in Plozévet that fit the statistical image of a national average or of an average French person. Dominant sociological methods were capable of producing abundant data on such average ideas; however, this case was singular, eccentric in relation to the rest of France. Due to this original diversity and its ambivalences and contradictions, the commune's internal characteristics are revealing of a specific case of generational transformation, although connected to a more universal economic and technological development.

The research developed in the region is meticulous, comprehensive and multidimensional, moving from the whole to its parts and back to the whole, going back and forth in a pendular movement. Cohabitation between what is archaic and a novelty, the modern and the traditional, transformations of customs and values and of economic and family relations – all these factors indicate that a particular metamorphosis scenario is occurring. Everything changes, from lifestyles to psychology and even social structures. The bourgeoisie, proletariat, and intermediate sectors are more consistently delineated. Ideological cleavages are redistributed. Collective morality reorganizes itself. Shop windows decorated in neon lights are side by side with homes without any electricity. Older ladies wear traditional hair buns while young women discover jeans clothing.

Edgar Morin claims and develops what he calls “sociology of the present” in *Commune en France: la métamorphose de Plozévet* (A commune in France: the metamorphosis of Plozévet) (1967), a fundamental book when considering the elaboration and application of this multidisciplinary research method. Instead of the classical sociological treatment of a phenomena, Morin seeks to discover the subterranean movement of the tectonic plates that operate silently in a given human group, making such movement emerge during its observation, articulating diverse fields of knowledge and approaches, revealing its tendencies. The dynamics and rhythm of the changing commune join a national and

international process, although not representing its total acculturation or radical loss of identity. In the author's words,

A commune is a complex unit. But it is also a cell within a larger social body. These are two inseparable traits. While the biological individual refers to the generic species, the sociological individual refers to society in general. Thus, our research had to delve into the unique characteristics of the communal micro-society and expand it towards the intelligence of macrosociety.² (1994: 215, emphasis added)

The study on Plozévet is the most polished result of one of Morin's ancient restlessness, he condemns the fragmentation of knowledge and the limiting of academic disciplines, preferring open investigations capable of considering a phenomenon in its most varied aspects by smuggling concepts, blurring borders, breaking barriers, and facing epistemological patrols. In other works, prior to *La métamorphose*, Morin was already intuitively using elements of what he would later call the *sociology of the present*. We shall see how this theme was gradually taking shape for the author.

Shortly after World War II (1939-1945), between 1945 and 1946, Morin went to Germany to visit the war's ruins, which inevitably led to a few questions: how does a country of such rich tradition could foster Nazism? And on what bases and social forces would it be possible to rebuild the country? Such questions are answered in his first book, *L'an zero de l'Allemagne* (Germany Year Zero) (2009), 1946. In another work, *L'Homme et la mort* (The Man and death) (1988), published in 1951, the author uses several fields of knowledge, such as anthropology, biology, psychology and history, in an attempt to reconnect and articulate the knowledge dispersed in human sciences about the theme of death and the ritual universe surrounding it.

In his following work, *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire* (The Cinema, or the imaginary man) (1970), from 1956, Morin develops a reflection on what he called "the semi-imaginary reality of man": "how do we assign life, personality and soul to animated images, how do we identify with and project ourselves on the characters on the screen, how are we happy and suffer with them, yet knowing that we are still ourselves?" (Ibid.: 195-196). One year later, in 1957, in *Les Stars* (The Stars) (1989), he sought to reconnect the diverse aspects of the star system among themselves: historical, economic, mythological, anthropological. Idols like Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe and James Dean are all both divine and mortal beings with whom we relate through a double *projection-identification* process.

In 1962, Edgar Morin publishes another book still fundamental nowadays when considering different aspects of modern society, the first volume of *L'Esprit*

²In the original: "Une commune est une unité complexe. Mais c'est en même temps une cellule dans un grand corps social. Ces deux caractères sont indissociables. De même que l'individu biologique renvoie à l'espèce générique, l'individu sociologique renvoie à la Société en générale. Notre investigation doit donc s'enfoncer dans les caractères singuliers de la micro-société communale et s'élargir à l'intelligence de la macro-société".



du temps I (The Spirit of Times I) (2011). The cited publications aided Morin in laying the groundwork for what will be known as *sociology of the present*, whose theoretical-practical structure became evident in the works *Commune en France: La Métamorphose de Plozévet* (1967), *Sociologie* (1994) and *L'Esprit du temps II* (2006).

Such a pluralistic and versatile thought is driven by the idea that a social phenomenon – be it the modernization process in a fishermen community, the rise of mass culture, the emergence of neo-mythologies in a mediatized environment or a simple rumor capable of reaching dangerous dimensions – is at the same time geographical, historical, economic, sociological, psychological etc. Thus, the *sociology of the present* intends to bring back to life the theory and the concrete, which have been impoverished, mutilated, fragmented and compartmentalized.

AN ANSWER TO A CRISIS IN SOCIOLOGY

Edgar Morin's *sociology of the present* arises in a moment when the author observes a crisis in sociology itself (1998), which would have to undergo a reform and regeneration to not degenerate. Among other aspects, the institution of Sociology as a science enabled the recognition of society as a specific object of study. However, its closure and subsequent rupture with other areas of knowledge isolated society as if it were a closed system, largely emptying society of its anthropo-social complexity, disregarding the interactions between society and individuals, between sociological and non-sociological aspects and making it impossible to place it in a broader context, as Morin had done with Plozévet.

Over the history of sociology, the specializations within the field (sociology of work, rural sociology, sociology of religion, sociology of communication) formed ghettos of professionals who can know infinitely about something infinitely small, but who are incapable of stepping beyond their area's epistemological boundaries. Such a state of affairs led to an internal compartmentalization that destroys the multidimensionality and complexity of social realities. On the one hand, there are abstract macrosociological theories that dissolve the social system; on the other hand, there is a mutilating microsociology incapable of unifying society as a system.

The question posed by Edgar Morin, Pablo Casanova (2006) and other authors is pertinent. of the discussion does not intend to deny the importance of sociology and specialization, but of “reaching, at the same time, the virtues of discipline specializations and their well-defined themes and problems, and the strength of an integrative perspective as a unified set” (Ibid.: 13), considering

the possibilities and limitations of knowledge articulations and the possibility of seeking new forms of specialization.

Casanova (Ibid.) uses Aristotle's *Organon* as an example, one of his most known works that articulates philosophy and both natural and human sciences. Nevertheless, "the varied knowledge of organized fields of knowledge achieved by Aristotle did not keep him from being rigorous in each of the disciplines he articulated" (Ibid.: 14).

According to Casanova (Ibid.), fewer efforts to connect knowledge were made in the Modern Age. Humanists like Leonardo da Vinci and Goethe practiced writing, the arts and the sciences, but one of the serious problems of specialization is the non-communication among different specialists. However, such excessive compartmentalization of fields of study led to an inverse movement, which can be observed at least since the 1930s, pointing to the importance of discipline intertwining or even more radically "the demolishing of discipline boundaries" (Ibid.: 19).

In the early 1900s, while the social sciences approached the mechanistic and deterministic model of the so-called hard sciences, physics itself sought to reach other levels: the field opened bifurcations, singularities, indeterminacy, uncertainty, incompleteness, unpredictability and multiple causality. In the opposite direction, the "four blood-flowing channels of classical science" (Almeida, 2012: 54) would be the order, the principle of separability, of reduction and of an inductive-deductive-identitary logic.

These pillars that underpinned the paradigm of classical science began to collapse from the 20th century on, showing signs of weaknesses and necrosis as the notions of disorder, non-separability, non-reducibility and logical uncertainty started to emerge. In this process,

In addition to the wear suffered by the notions of order, separability, reduction, and identity logic, what else is undergoing necrosis within science? The concepts of a unitary and absolute truth, of objectivity and of certainty. In the early 20th century, Danish physicist Niels Bohr claimed that the description of a phenomenon is not its copy; that some phenomena present themselves in a dualized, paradoxical, ambiguous, ambivalent form. Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana argued that it is only possible to speak about objectivity in between parentheses and in 1927, Werner Heisenberg built the uncertainty principle. (Ibid.: 56)

Gulbenkian Commission participants (Wallerstein, 1996) are aligned with the cited thinkers. In 1993, ten researchers from different fields, including social sciences and natural sciences – among whom were the American sociologist

Immanuel Wallerstein and Belgian naturalized Russian chemist Ilya Prigogine –, were invited by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation of Portugal to discuss the restructuring of the social sciences. The result was published in 1996 with the title *Para abrir as ciências sociais* (Open the Social Sciences) (Ibid.). One of the conclusions drawn is that in such an unstable and increasingly complex world where disturbances play a major role, the social sciences had to be renewed. Social and historical systems should be treated as open, complex and dynamic systems, with non-linear and turmoil-like characteristics.

Edgar Morin calls for a reform of sociological thinking within this context, one that simultaneously encompasses the use of a non-mutilating scientificity and the recognition of the possibility of knowledge that is not strictly scientific. This implies an advance in six fronts: 1) to accede to an epistemological knowledge that corresponds to the contemporary development derived from scientific discoveries; 2) to operate a systemic reassembling of partial knowledge; 3) to reestablish communication with other human sciences; 4) to consider an explanation as something that allows a subject to comprehend an object as an object, and an understanding that, either by projection or identification, allows a subject to comprehend a subject as a subject; 5) to open sociological discussions to literature, given that it provides a knowledge of social life that cannot be found in scientific research nor in sociological works (sociologists as scientists and essayists); and 6) to question the immediate present, including events themselves (Morin, 1998).

The mechanistic, deterministic, compartmentalized, reductionist and excessively quantitative sociology caused a disenchantment of the social world. To Morin (Ibid.), the reform of sociology needs to rediscover the complexity, the wealth, the beauty, the poetry, the mystery, the cruelty and the horror – in other words, sociology needs to rediscover life and humanity. The *sociology of the present* is one of the possible answers to such crisis.

THE TOPICALITY OF A SOCIOLOGY OF THE PRESENT

The method is one of the parts of the social sciences that requires regeneration. As Morin is researching varied topics such as post-war Germany, cinema, the *star system*, mass culture, a fishing community in France, May 1968 events (Morin; Lefort; Castoriadis, 1968) or a mere anti-Semitic rumor spread in the city of Orleans which caused fear among women (Morin, 1969), he is effectively looking for his own method, which began to be carefully systematized from 1977 on. He started writing his masterpiece, *La Méthode*³ (Method) (2011a; 2011b; 2012a, 2012b; 2013; 2015a), a work published in six volumes and whose

³ In Brazil, the first editions of *Method* were published in full by the publisher Sulina between 1998 and 2005, with successive reprintings.

last volume was only published in 2004 – a laborious effort that took 27 years to be completed, resulting in what we now know as complex method, complex thinking or simply complexity.

Throughout this path, it is interesting to note how the elaboration of the six volumes of *Method*, considering 1977 as its starting point, seems to have been in incubation since Morin's research that occurred twelve years earlier, in 1965, in the Plozévet commune. As we have said previously, we can argue that complex thinking is contained in the sociology of the present *in nuce* (Almeida & Carvalho, 2012).

Both *complexity* and *sociology of the present* are not anodyne words, and nothing is gained by simply announcing them disassociated from practice itself, as if it would ensure their effectiveness. These are not ready-made research models and do not correspond to a previous research scheme. These are strategies for approaching reality, a meticulous, multidimensional and transdisciplinary investigation that strives to account for a phenomenon and to make it emerge through all possible means. The method only reveals itself at the end: it is an adventure in knowledge and ignorance from which, finally, it emerges, as explained by Morin (2015b) in *L'aventure de la méthode* (The Adventure of the method).

The sociology of the present makes two imperatives emerge. First, it questions an unpredictable event to see what it reveals, modifies, and innovates. Secondly, it is dedicated to the knowledge of a concrete reality (Morin, 2010). As he did in his many books, Edgar Morin also practiced these two movements in several articles he wrote for the French newspaper *Le Monde* for over 50 years, which were compiled in a publication entitled *Au rythme du Monde: a demi-siècle d'articles dans Le Monde* (2014b). In his sociologic-journalistic texts, Morin analyzes, in the heat of the moment, some key events in the history of France and of the world, like that of May, 1968.

Thus, the concept of *event* is one of the fundamental categories of the sociology of the present, as well as that of *crisis*. Morin further theoretically developed these concepts in three works: *Sociologie* (1994), *L'Esprit du temps II* (2006) and *Science avec conscience* (2014a).

The concept of *crisis*, which is inflated by media, spread itself throughout all horizons of contemporary consciousness, and as a consequence of such generalization, the very concept was emptied. There are daily crises and of all different kinds: economic, humanitarian, social, environmental, marital etc. Therefore, the very notion of crisis must be problematized to make it “scientifically usable and epistemologically controllable” (Id., 1998: 140). This is what Morin calls *crisiology*, associating the concept of crisis with a constellation of interrelated

ideas such as disturbance, disorder and uncertainty. Every crisis can thus be understood by its multidimensional and “event-like” character.

For Morin (Ibid.), there is an opposition between the dominant sociology – that of discipline specialization and statistical regularities –, and the sociology of the present – which focuses primarily on the phenomenon and not on the discipline, more on the event than on the variables. For Morin, the eventual, in the sense of an event or minor phenomenon, is crucial for the approach of the social change process, constituting an active test “about the system on which it operates, concurrently intervening in human history decisively and in multiple ways”, as Almeida explains (2012: 112).

When scientific rationality was being developed, the event was initially persecuted and made illegal both in the physico-chemical sciences and in sociology. Nowadays, its reintegration into the social sciences must be considered as a form of re-enabling something that was excluded as considered insignificant, imponderable or statistically minor, something that disrupts the structure or system; however, this very thing can be significant for being revealing, triggering, enzyme, leaven, virus, accelerator, and a modifier of what is considered standard, normal, and ruling (Morin, 1998).

In *Letters to future generations*, Ilya Prigogine (2009) discusses the concept of event in relation to an open and complex system, such as society: an event (understood here as a happening) “implies the unveiling of a new social structure after a bifurcation; fluctuations are the result of individual actions” (Ibid.: 13). The Belgian chemist uses the Russian Revolution of 1917 as an example to clarify these ideas:

Every event has a “microstructure”. Let’s take the 1917 Russian Revolution as a historical example. The end of the Tsarist regime could have taken different forms, and the ramification that followed it was the outcome of several factors, such as the tsar’s lack of foresight, his wife’s unpopularity, Kerensky’s weakness, Lenin’s violence. This microstructure, this fluctuation, these were the aspects that determined the outcome of both the crisis and the events that followed it. (Ibid.: 14)

To Morin, the *sociology of the present* must privilege what is minor, but capable of revealing tendencies; likewise, to Prigogine (Ibid.), history is a succession of bifurcations. The discovery of oil, for example, is both an event and a bifurcation.

The debate about the nature and role of sociology grew vigorously in France between 1967 and 1968. The events of May 1968 served to further deepen the

cleavage, questioning the dominant sociology. In this moment of social efferescence, Morin (2006: 25) claims that

In fact, one can only attempt to understand May 1968 if they [sociologists] take into account other research techniques, other than the sample questionnaires that rule (ruled?) sociology and which, unable to dig under the superficial crust of opinions, was unable to predict what was latent or bursting, or to identify and devise dynamism and ruptures. One can only try to understand May 1968 if one tries to stay above and beyond the fragmented discipline driven knowledge, to try and gather a theoretical body of hypotheses capable of encompassing and structuring the phenomenon.

In summary, we can argue that the *sociology of the present* proposes a theoretical-practical and epistemological re-elaboration of sociology. The key notions of *crisis* and *event* do not refer to what is purely incidental or to contingencies. What drives the *sociology of the present* is the need to represent the role of the marginal element, both negatively (polemical) and positively (reconstructing) (France, 2017). Hence the importance of the central concept of *event*, used to denote things that are improbable, accidental, random, singular, concrete, historical; but also a concept that makes room for other notions and constructs comprehensive narratives, from where its complexity, its unpredictability and its transdisciplinary character are derived (Morin, 2006).

To clarify his proposal, in *L'Esprit du temps II*, Morin (Ibid.) lists six principles of a sociology of the present, emphasizing the notion of event. Such principles are presented below:

1. To pay attention to *crisis* and to *events*, the *sociology of the present* must be phenomenological; i.e., to know how to observe the phenomenon as an empirical emergence endowed with multiple aspects, adequately combining theory and practice.
2. An event means a simultaneous irruption of what is lived, if the accident and of the concrete singular in the fabric of social life. Therefore, the diagnosis must be done exhaustively. Elaborating theories that derive from extreme phenomena is possible, and not only from statistical regularities.
3. From the sociological point of view, an event is all that is not inscribed in statistical regularities. The information-event is, in principle, de-structuring: "Indeed, it is usually under the impact of historical

events, large or small, that we question our explanatory systems” (Ibid. 28).

4. Events have a disturbing and modifying character. Their unpredictability can lead to processes of progression or regression.
5. To the *sociology of the present*, crises are sources of extreme richness. They bring together the accidental character, the character of necessity (unveiling parts that had been previously boiling underneath) and the conflictual character.
6. The *sociology of the present* requires actually living the research, the observation, and the participation-intervention.

Therefore, we must observe the connections that are established between the notions proposed by the author. To Morin, the 1960s were full of *bursting events* that challenged the categories of classical sociology. The unexpected event triggers surprise, making us re-examine previously ruling conceptions, recognizing the invisible crisis that is unfolding and facing the novelties that can be introduced. One of these events was particularly important.

On June 22, 1963, a musical event at Place de la Nation, organized by Europe’s #1 radio station and by the *Salut les copains* magazine gathered about 200 thousand people – mostly adolescents. Shortly after its beginning, to the surprise of the organizers, journalists and political groups, violence started to occur: a wave of depredation, flipped cars and confrontation with the police. In an article requested by *Le Monde*, Morin (2014b) identifies in the public scenario, among other things, the emergence of a new “age class”, the adolescents (called adepts of the *yé-yé*), with their questioning of authorities and a need for self-affirmation. In Bernard Paillard’s explanation (2008: 21-22),

This event will, above all, cause a methodological impact: the event itself plays the role of a social analyst and its “immediate” study enables “diagnoses” of the evolutionary processes occurring in society. Thus, the analysis of the contingent event becomes part of Edgar Morin’s methodological panoply.

In fact, the notion of event in Edgar Morin is quite broad. Here, it suffices to say that “the study of an event’s virulence cannot be separated from the communication processes of events nor from the symbolic, or even mythological traits they acquire as soon as they are within the scope of social communication” (Morin, 1998: 166). Thus, our approach to the idea of communicational event. Morin himself highlights this relationship by stating that an event must

be conceived first and foremost as an information event, which erupts both in the social system and in the sociologist's mental system.

Morin's course of building a *sociology of the present* reveals, at one and the same time, echoes and harbingers that can be found in *L'an zero de l'Allemagne* (2009), *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire* (1970), *Les Stars* (1989), *L'Esprit du temps I* (2011c) and a foreshadowing of *Commune en France: la Métamorphose de Plozévet* (1967) and *Mai 68: la brèche* (May 1968: the Breach) (Morin and Lefort, Castoriadis, 1968). In all these cases the author is searching for a method, something he has been maturing over his whole work, capable of better approaching a social phenomenon and considering its complexity and multidimensionality. As in the case of Plozévet, the objective of the *sociology of the present* is to recognize the power of the dual nature, both particular and universal, of the studied phenomena, which is supposedly insular and insignificant.

Morin called these approaches to reality the *in vivo method*, or simply living method, which favors phenomenological observations, interviews and participation in collective research activities. A living method, far from being a rigid program or a recipe for field research, is rather a strategy designed throughout the research process and only appears at the end. The method is in permanent reconstruction, and its general principles require connections between subjectivity and objectivity, creativity, sensitivity and inventiveness of the researcher, as Almeida (2012) explains.

The observation should be simultaneously panoramic and analytical, capturing the whole perceptual field and distinguishing each specific element. Using literature to clarify his point of view, Morin believes that a researcher must to be both like Balzac, capable of having an encyclopedic view of society, and like Stendhal, trained to detect significant details that go from being ancillary to becoming revealing.

In this panorama, the opposition between micro and macro-research loses meaning, as pointed by Almeida (2012). The phenomenological attitude gets closer to a science of what is sensitive, combining theory and practice, basic research and applied research, empiricism and reflection, and the awareness of the hybridization between the private and the universal.

One of the most striking experiences of this type of investigative attitude was made by Edgar Morin not out of a book, but out of cinema.

CHRONICLE OF A SUMMER, A SOCIOLOGY OF THE PRESENT

In 1960 Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch (1917-2004), a French filmmaker and ethnographer, were jurors in the first ethnographic and sociological film

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Chronicle of a summer

festival, the *Festival dei Popoli*, in Florence, Italy. Rouch had already stood out in the cinematographic world with his ethnofiction works in African communities, such as *Les maîtres fous* (The Mad Masters) (1955), *Moi, un noir* (Me, a Black) (1958) and *La pyramide humaine* (The Human Pyramid) (1959). Morin proposes to develop a similar ethnographic experiment, having the city of Paris as the scenario.

From this proposal, *Chronicle of a summer* (2008), from 1961, is born. Initially, the film would be called *How do you live?*. Morin believed that from questions that were at the same time simple, disconcerting and challenging (for instance, “are you happy?”) it would be possible to access something in the recently awakened consciousness. It would be a kind of thought-event capable of revealing crises, combined with questions about the way of life in a large city that is undergoing a fast-paced process of development and modernization in the aftermath of the so-called golden years of postwar liberal economy, between 1948 and 1973. The film is primarily based on seven non-actor characters: Angelo, a specialized Renault worker; Landry, an immigrant from Congo; Marilu, an Italian secretary; Marceline, a Jewish woman who was deported to Auschwitz when she was young; Gabillon, an employee of the *Société Nationale de Chemins de Fer Français* (SNCF)⁴, and his wife; and Jean-Pierre, a 20-year-old student. The idea was to shoot the feature film in a way that brought it closer to life than to cinema, so a kind of *sociological truth* was extracted from the interactions. These aspects led the authors to christen the genre as *cinéma vérité* (truthful cinema).

⁴French rail public transport company.

Morin always believed that each person has a poet, a philosopher or a child hidden within themselves. Thus, the need to make them speak, to ensure they have some visibility in their problems, desires and daily worries. More than that, the questions were an attempt to access a denser social substratum. The question was not to figure out whether the respondents were rare or exceptional cases, but to find out whether or not the particular problems presented were profound and general: “alienated work, difficulty of living, solitude and the search for faith – fundamental questions that concern each one’s life” (Morin, 2010: 161).

The themes of the large city, the city of light, attractive, but also a tentacular city, sometimes suffocating and ambivalent are implicit. Within the city one finds, blended, the issues of coexistence with foreigners, underemployment, isolation, lack of perspective and the hopes that the characters have for a better life. Deep within, Paris was a unique clustering of all civilization, both singular and universal, where one could find all the contradictions of one’s life, relationships and feelings. The endeavor took 26 hours of filming, which were later reduced to six hours and finally, to a one hour and thirty-minute film. *Chronicle of a summer* (2008) is aligned with what Morin classifies as the challenges of the reformed

sociology, which are basically three. First, to develop both a scientific (scientific culture) and essayistic (humanistic culture) vocation so the two cultures can communicate and interbreed. Second, to confront the anthropo-social complexity of life, articulating the separate dimensions of the fragmented disciplines of the human sciences (for example, opening sociology to the field of arts, considering literature and cinema). Third, to recreate both the sociological thinking and doing, more specifically in the context of a transformation of paradigms of the human sciences (Morin, 1998).

Vera França's formulations (2012) are in line with this type of thinking, working the media/event interface. Vera França defines events as facts that occur to someone, provoking rupture and disorganization, introducing difference, arousing new meanings, making the subject think and act. Linear time suffers a short-circuit, due to events happening in the present, the subject calls on the past and problematizes the future. Media can thus be both the place from where events arise and occur and the space of their repercussion. Considering this idea, França emphasizes the central role of mass media in the creation and proliferation of events.

This proposition is fundamental for approaching *Chronicle of a summer* (2008). The film's first scene depicts the dawn in Paris to the sound of a siren. The soundtrack is also a highlight of the film. Marceline and Nadine go out on the busy streets holding microphones and shooting the initial question at passersby: "Are you happy?". In the beginning there is resistance. Most refuse to answer. A philosophy student, reader of René Descartes, replies to the question by asking them what they mean by happiness. A sad man remembers the family he lost, while another respondent says yes, she is happy "because I'm young and it's sunny".

This is one of the fundamental principles of the *sociology of the present*: the interview. The choice of the interviewees occurs as follows: first, at random, what Morin classifies as pseudo conversation, i.e., pre-chosen questions and quick answers; secondly, by sampling from different areas of the city; and third, by a systematic selection of characters, with whom an in-depth interview will be conducted. This is the same method used in the commune of Plozévet. The objective is not to reach a representation of the average French person, but a maximum meaning, looking for cases that allow for the constitution of typological opposition poles (young-old, modern-traditional, local-immigrant residents).

After selecting the central characters the interviews become denser as the film progresses. The function of this type of procedure is to allow the personality, essential desires and the conception of life of the interviewee to surface through

erratic and oblique conversations. The event-like character of the interview is also implicit in this process, because although the direction it will take is unknown, is the interview is fundamental for the crisis that it can reveal. At this level, an interview is considered successful from the moment the interviewee's words are set free from inhibitions and the interview becomes a "communicational event" (Marcondes Filho, 2013).

Ciro Marcondes Filho (Ibid.) uses the idea of communication as an event. For the author, reality is the product of a clash between "things" (people, objects, feelings, states of mind etc.). Something is produced when "things" meet. Communication as an event takes place in the space *in between*, in the "during" (which the author calls the *principle of during-reason*). Likewise, meaning occurs only once, encompassed by a fabric of "sensitive elements" (Ibid. 41-42) composed of time, place, atmosphere and mood, which leads to an unrepeatable situation – unique and of event-like character. Certain meanings will never be produced again the same way, for it is no longer the same. *Chronicle of a summer* (2008) is still today a paradigmatic film of truthful cinema.

The "metaphoric" research method developed by Ciro Marcondes Filho (2013) resembles Edgar Morin's method since it proposes that communication, as production of meaning, is linked to a specific occurrence, i.e., to an event. In the author's words, the "forces or energies that enabled it to occur did so in a random and unrepeatable way: meaning itself only occurs once. Facts have their *timely timing* by the accidental meeting of all favorable causes" (Ibid.: 44, emphasis added). Communication takes place in the space in between, he says. However, Marcondes Filho distances himself from Morin as the latter aims at something that "reveals the mystery of things", without considering that "the mystery of the other is as unfathomable as the mystery of a dream" (Ibid.: 73).

In fact, in *Sociologie*, Morin (1994) believes that the in-depth interview can lead to a glimpse of the hidden dimension of existences: "the interview leads us to the last uncharted continent of the modern world: the other"⁵ (Ibid.: 220, our translation). But his method is clear when stating that the dimension of social reality, which is also the dimension of the other, is always open, incomplete, unpredictable, unstable, non-linear and marked by incompleteness. No research can exhaust its theme, especially when it deals with the human condition. Nevertheless, after a period of immersion, communication – the "unfathomable mystery" to which Marcondes Filho refers to (2013) – brings to light, based on a Morinian point of view, changes of perspective, the surfacing of obsessive themes, of aspirations and dissatisfaction, allowing for the elaboration of *one* possible explanation, which is, at the same time, singular and universal of a

⁵ In the original: "L'interview nous porta vers le dernier continent inexploré du monde moderne: l'autre".

given social reality (for example, the effects of the modernization process in Plouzévet or Paris).

One of the most striking sequences of *Chronicle of a summer* (2008) is a conversation between Ângelo, the Renault worker, and Landry, the Congolese immigrant, while sitting on the steps of a building. A scheduled, though unpredictable meeting; an objective chance, surrealists would say. Morin says he sees the emergence of a sincere friendship in front of the cameras. Ângelo complains about a consumerist society that favors looks over a truly better life. He says that the laborer sacrifices his/her entire earnings to buy a brand new car and designer clothes, while having no food at home. These are symptoms of a modernization process that Morin discussed extensively in some works, such as *L'Esprit du temps I* (2011c), *L'Esprit du temps II* (2006) and *Sociologie* (1994): the question of welfare, the civilization of the automobile, advertising, the cultural industry, the crisis of happiness, the spectacularization of politics, the ecological problem.

From the second half of *Chronicle of a summer* (2008) on, the film, which until then had been limited to personal interviews, opens to collective discussions mediated by the filmmakers, who are always ready to raise further questions. This is the principle of the intervention put forward by the sociology of the present, which stands out in some key moments: when the researcher identifies a situation that bears change and innovation, or when he leads the interviewees to question their own thinking.

In one of the discussions, Marceline says, in front of a group of people that includes two Africans that “she would never marry a black person” but that she “admires the way they dance”. Landry rebuts by accusing her of reproducing stereotypes. Morin then asks the Congolese: “Do you know what these numbers tattooed on Marceline’s arm mean?”. “A phone number?”, he replies. “It’s my registration number in the concentration camp”, explains Marceline. The film cuts to a scene of rare poetry: Marceline wanders alone in the Place de la Concorde remembering the last image she had her father, who gave her an onion right before they were separated at Auschwitz, from where he would never leave.

Nonetheless, interventions should raise questions, not set standards. In the penultimate scene of the film, Morin gathers the actors in a room for the projection of what had been filmed up to that point. The idea was to have the characters analyze each other’s performances. There were accusations of impudence and exhibitionism, falsehoods and authenticity. Each one reconstituted the film through one’s own projections and identifications. When recalling that same moment almost 50 years later, Morin (2010: 161) comments: “I hoped that a final gathering with the various protagonists of the film would lead to

mutual understanding. But at the same time there were understandings and misunderstandings”.

Chronicle of a summer (2008) can thus be considered an investigation on the multidimensional reality of French society. Furthermore, the film is also a look at the lifestyle of the urban man of that time, moving from a reading of the particular to the universal and installing itself, in this movement, in the *in between*. Between the infinitely small (microsociology) and the infinitely large (macrosociology), desire, memory, imaginary, aspirations, hopes and frustrations arise.

One can notice that the elements developed during the 1960s about the *sociology of the present* already appear in an embryonic state. *Chronicle of a summer* (Ibid.) approaches the problematics of the sociological film with the intention of developing a cinematographic project on urban anthropology, anthropology in contemporary societies or a transdisciplinary project in sociology, anthropology and cinema (as well as other complementary areas).

The question is not to reduce the social sciences to a miscellany of individual perspectives, but to consider that the possibility of an opening in the social sciences – whether through cinema or through the receptivity to multiple cultural experiences and narratives of the subjects involved in the research – is equivalent to increasing the possibility of a more objective knowledge, since it is also a permanent questioning of the very theoretical research models. Universalism is always historically contingent. Thus, the possibility of truth here is always a becoming, not an essence; it is always an action, not a revelation (Ribeiro, 2015).

Cinéma vérité also tends to question the film-making process and its conceptions; thus, turning it into a central research event. In *Chronicle of a summer* (2008) there is an impossibility of representing life (since the representations of the actors are always questioned by the other actors in the film) and an impossibility of reaching an essential truth (Satt, 2008). The principles being discussed are uncertainty, emergence, unpredictability and event. The film's own participants question themselves at the end: “are our representations truthful or not?”. The perception they have of the film and their representations collide during the final discussion. The truth found is impure, but as Morin says in the last scene of the film: “We participated in the entire film-making process, we knew all the people involved in it and we saw that it was not a lie. And if it was a lie, then it was a very true part of it” (*Chronicle of a summer*, 2008).

Chronicle of a summer (Ibid.) ends with a dialogue between Morin and Rouch where they critically assess (a fundamental part of the *sociology of the present*) the project, the paths taken, the affective participation of the authors

and actors, and comment on a relative failure of the film by confirming the unpredictable and unfinished character of the sociological experience; be it cinematic, experimental and investigative or more strictly technical and conceptual. The tendency of the film is also to question the processes of production and conception of the work, making it a central research event, placing the actor's own role in perspective and problematizing the image issue (France, 2017).

In conclusion, in Edgar Morin's perspective, the *sociology of the present* is not solely a technique for the observation and research of reality. Regardless of being cinematographic or an investigative strategy of interventionist nature, or even a more strictly theoretical and conceptual epistemological horizon, such sociological experience requires the refusal of panoramic macro investigations (statistics of the invariant pattern) and an opening to what is singular and the minority, which may contain seeds and tendencies of sociocultural changes. ■

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Article received on March 2, 2018 and approved on August 20, 2018.