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TOMASZ FALKOWSKI\*

### The Physics of History Braudel and the concept of event

**Summary:** The problem of the concept of “event” in Braudel’s oeuvre is more complex than it seems to be. The author tries to analyse this question on three different levels. In the first part of the article he shows that in the schema of “traditional history”, reconstructed by Braudel, the historical event loses all its characteristic features. It becomes uniform, abstract, and functions there as a negative element of history. The second part is devoted to the position and meaning of event within a theoretical model of history which is usually called “the global history”. Against the traditional approaches to this question the author of the article claims that there is not a pure or strong opposition between structure and event. The latter starts to be structural and that’s why it becomes more concrete and specific. Moreover, the event allows for revealing long-term historic process and structures. Finally, in the third part of his article, the author presents the history arisen from Braudel’s historical analysis as a kind of evolutionary system. Owing to this fact he can coin a concept of “historic mutation”, a special form of transformation, which could characterize the role of event in the historic development.

**Keywords:** Fernand Braudel, methodology, *Annales*, traditional history, eventual history

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Institute of History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Ulmutowska 89d St., 61–809 Poznań; [tmfalko@amu.edu.pl](mailto:tmfalko@amu.edu.pl); ORCID: 0000–0002–4799–3594.

There are three general contexts within which Braudel places the event. The first of these is ‘traditional history,’ ‘eventful history,’ and therein a certain schematic and at the same time critical view on the main current of historiography, which constitutes – on the principle of opposition – the negative subject of reference for the entire *Annales* community. The second context, the project of global history, is a theoretical proposal for the holistic understanding of history, an attempt to insert social reality into a framed structure that in its assumption should embrace historical phenomena of all types. Finally, the event can be found within the very tissue of Braudel’s historical analysis, where all notions, saturated with something concrete, lead their own independent lives.

## I

For Braudel, traditional history is defined by several preliminary assumptions, a kind of coordinate mesh determining the means by which concrete phenomena are perceived, and first and foremost history as such. The world appears here as the subject of a political game in which exceptional human beings play their part and it is on their decisions that the fates of nations and societies depend. At this level, history happens at an unusually rapid rhythm designated by subsequent events, while its natural element is ‘short time,’ of the size of the moment. All of this is organized by a chronological system, the rigour of a succession characteristic for a chronicle. Politics, the individual, the briefness, the event, chronology – it is these figures that lie at the bases of an image of the past, as imposed by traditional history; an image that finds its confirmation in two planes mutually connected with each other: that of the source and the ‘phenomenal.’ For on the one hand it repeats what has been directly drawn from historical sources, their, so to say, skin layer, as if a faithful reflection of reality awaited within them more just waiting to be summoned, a repetition within the historian’s discourse: “The momentous discovery of the document led historians to believe that documentary authenticity was the repository of the whole truth. ‘All we need to do,’ Louis Halphen wrote only yesterday, ‘is allow ourselves to be born along by the documents, one after another, just as they offer

themselves to us, in order to see the chain of facts and events reconstitute themselves almost automatically before our eyes.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, this image is a continuation of a world vision that arose within the framework of its colloquial, common-sense perception.<sup>2</sup> In this way ‘old history’ may be viewed as a pure description, one directly copying the past, making claims to a single reliable representation of what has passed.

All of these things are well known. If we do recall them then, it is only in order to roughly sketch the first expanse, the first *dynamic* plan where the concept of the event, in covering the possible distance, becomes entangled in internal contradiction and negates its own meaning under the force of the structure in which it has become entwined. In a word, here it results in its collapse. For it is more than likely so that in traditional history, as Braudel was to perceive it – the said ‘dramatic acts’ (already proverbially the battles, the treaties, the meetings ‘at the summit’...) in serving as the ‘building blocks’ of history, being their fundamental axis – lose their eventful character. In trying to reduce the past, or at least its essence, to an array of short-lived events happening subsequently after each other, the ‘traditional historian’ simultaneously homogenizes them, erases their individuality, so that “one might believe in all good faith that history is nothing but a monotonous game, always changing yet always the same, like the thousand combinations of pieces in a game of chess—a game constantly calling forth analogous situations and feelings which are always the same, with everything governed by the eternal, pitiless recurrence of things.”<sup>3</sup> If it were to appear that the whole of the past becomes personified in events, that it is them that are the foundation of history, their mutual similarity or also strictly speaking configured uniformity deprives it of the dimension of ‘eventfulness.’ This ambivalent attitude taken by traditional history in relation to the event finds its expression on at least three levels. That which was to be exceptional, detailed, imprinted with the stamp of difference – *événement* – undergoes a reduction to a certain type with identi-

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<sup>1</sup> F. Braudel, *On History*, trans. S. Matthews, Chicago 1982, pp. 28–29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 11; cf. also F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. S. Reynolds, Berkeley 1995, vol. 1, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> F. Braudel, *On History*, p. 11.

cal structural properties. It becomes a model, a mould within which the same hierarchy of things rules and which is conditioned by a narrow range of causes (usually human motifs and passions). In this way the event ceases to be also specific and concrete. If it imposes its presence on us, if it is something that is the most visible, garish, expressive and yet in some sense the closest, 'real' *par excellence*, if it is a "*nouvelle sonnante* ('matter of moment')" whose "delusive smoke fills the minds of its contemporaries,"<sup>4</sup> then simultaneously it becomes a purely abstract being. Cut off from the deeper layers of history, from its general context, rooted only in human decisions, in their will, it depends therefore on chance, on the whims of those who create history. Here one may make reference to Hegelian thought, which – contrary to intuition – links the concrete with the universal, as only the latter can saturate that which is individual with content, the 'material' of events can only be found in the universal. Therefore in traditional history the events are, as Braudel said "a gleam but no illumination; facts but no humanity."<sup>5</sup> In the end the affirmation of the event by assigning it a superior function in the process of becoming is to a large degree feigned for it is restricted to the 'surface' layer, as then its role will be exclusively negative. Remaining beyond the scope of its interests the reality that stretches between and under events, the 'traditional historian' arranges from these a sequence of partial or complete negations. Each element of the series questions some aspect of the element or earlier elements – not even necessarily those in its immediate surroundings – but itself will in turn sooner or later be questioned by the elements that come after it. This means that "events are bound to each other, one summons the other"<sup>6</sup> on the principle of a permanently recurring negation. Given that this principle designates within traditional history the double referencing of all events, every event draws its entire significance from it: the event confirms itself when it negates and when it is negated.

One may clearly see that the event in the three fundamental modalities of its existence – structural, semantic (in as far as the degree

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> F. Braudel, *Historia i trwanie*, trans. B. Geremek, Warszawa 1999, p. 51.

of abstraction of some being increases along with the disappearance or erasing of its meaning) and the functional – loses everything that it had originally appeared to have gained. And this exactly on the effect of the action of these very factors within the scope of this same complex whole. An eminent individual, its uniqueness, having by assumption to differentiate and dramatise subsequent significant occurrences in history, turns out to be an instance which homogenizes them (eternal feelings and motifs, a similar prime mover...). The surface, the ‘foam’ of history, the flash of its first plane, where nothing can hide, where every fact is absolutely overt, is a light that ultimately blinds us without illuminating any depth. Finally, chronology, the task of which is to separate one event from the other and design for each of them a specific position – a function it realizes after all with the ruthlessness appropriate to it – locks the events within the enchanted sphere of annihilation, making impossible, particularly through its own relentless rigidity, any sort of juxtaposition, regrouping or abstraction of events. Thus if traditional history establishes events or certain type of them (the political event) to be the subject of its enquiry, then the form of this establishment, inseparably connected with the structure of the theoretical conditions that lie at the bases of the cognitive possibilities of this conception, deprives it of all ‘eventfulness.’ This ambiguity or rather movement of contradiction results from the dissimilarity of the perspectives that rule Braudel’s discourse in the context of a critique of traditional historiography. The difference I refer to is the one which characterises the opposing approaches to the question of cognition as such. When one begins by asking about the subject field of a specific area of knowledge, in this case that of traditional history, it is then treated as external (though already initially defined) in relation to cognitive practice – given that there are battles, treaties, groundbreaking meetings, there is no other way out then but to draw them together under a notion, and even a ‘reality’ of the event, meaning that which is shortlived, detailed, visible and concrete. Here the means by which the researched subject is expressed is secondary: whichever way one looks at it the event remains the event. However, at the moment when the relation between the given mode of examination and its subject matter is considered to be an internal game of cognitive form, within the borders of which the said

relation happens,<sup>7</sup> answers to the question: What exactly are we studying here? may only be given after an earlier analysis of the logic governed by this form.<sup>8</sup> From this viewpoint traditional history as its own practice producing a specific type of knowledge, possesses a subject characteristic for itself which has *de facto* little in common with the event, with the ‘eventfulness.’

Here it follows to dismiss a certain accusation that could arise in relation to the main idea of the argument hitherto offered. For it was Braudel, someone shall say, who emphasised at every step of the way that a happening is constitutive and therefore an inalienable part of traditional historiography, harmoniously entwined into it as its fundamental indicator, nay symbol (traditional history = eventful history). How many proofs in the form of unequivocal statements supporting this thesis! Yet in turn in vain would one seek in Braudel the *explicite* of expressed judgements that would introduce into this question some kind of transverse or even opposing line of understanding, a second depth. It is difficult not to agree with all this. One may admittedly maintain that this distinctness on the one hand, and silence on the other was dictated by strategic reasons, that is by the necessity for a clearly defined enemy (of traditional history, one of the predicates of which would be indeed the event), but then we would also have to follow this resolute voice and consent to the said silence. Yet we must hear that where Braudel is silent, his discourse nevertheless speaks on still. Not because the word conceals their multiple meanings, nor because the author wants to make something secret or to muffle something, but simply from the nature of discourse, from the nature of its relational structure, within the framework of which there exist – although they remain unarticulated – definite links between its individual elements. Hence the binding force and even obligation to reveal these relations for they are the property of the

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<sup>7</sup> As enacted by the entire anti-positivist tradition of the history and philosophy of science/knowledge (Bachelard, Canguilhem, Foucault and others).

<sup>8</sup> “It is literally no longer the eye (the mind’s eye) of a subject which *sees* what exists in the field defined by a theoretical problematic: it is this field itself which *sees* itself in the objects or problems it defines – sighting being merely the necessary reflection of the field on its objects.” L. Althusser and É. Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster, London 1970, p. 25.

very utterances, that which decides about their discursive existences, which constitute the condition for the assuming on their part of any meaning that would enable their hierarchization; which, in a word, is not supported on any external criterion (intention, aim, designation...), but is the pure immanence of discursive sets. Hence, equally each and every reading demands its own mobility, constant returns, endless relations amongst the elements of the analysed structure (the ideal would be to research all the tracks and place them on a single map). So the matter did not concern, and now we return to our problem area, the preparing and repeating of what Braudel thinks about the event and its status in the set that he has constructed (and through which he has set its elements into motion) under the name 'traditional history.' However, this does not mean that we intend to underestimate it. Quite the opposite: to define the actual form of the event's presence in the described expanse (a divided form, internally contradictory, mutually exclusive) is, firstly, to remain at the level of overt declarations, perfectly audible words about the event itself, but also about the chronology, the individual, the 'merciless return of things' etc., while secondly, to treat it as utterances, morphologically complex creations of a polypoid or rhizomatous build which intersect (for example, conceptionally), take root one in the other (for example, functionally), mutually weaken (for example, through the neutralisation of one of the relations) or strengthen (for example, creating a common node). And now becomes clear that we may distance ourselves from the charge of disloyalty to Braudel's fairly obvious and unequivocal position in the question of the 'eventfulness' of traditional history. For if the analysis here is internal in relation to his discourse, while at the same time revealing it, then this incompatibility and even opposition does not testify either to the external contents ascribed to that discourse, or about our mistake or misreading. What it does signalise is that something else might result from the claims as such, which means those threatened individually and differently from their discursive existence. Consequently, the question of concurrence or 'divergence' from the author's convictions is of no significance in this case whatsoever.

## II

Global history as a model remains on the same level of generality as the schema for traditional history. The main reason for it is that it constitutes a direct answer to the limitations of the latter, more exactly: an attempt at their theoretical overcoming. Let us recall: history, as Braudel puts it, does not comprise exclusively short-term phenomena, and all the more is not dependent on such. One needs to see that history is created by a whole mass of diverse phenomena that, first and foremost, differ as a result of the longevity and nature of their duration. It is possible to differentiate here three main types. Firstly 1) events, momentary and ephemeral forms that disappear as soon as they appear; employing a graphic metaphor one may bestow on them the form of points. Next 2) conjunctures, or “realities in their own right,”<sup>9</sup> defined through the entirety of the changes occurring within the rhythm of periodic movements; in other words these are seasonal oscillations, cycles, intercycles, trends of all hues; these determine lines that to a greater or lesser extent recall a sine curve,<sup>10</sup> displaying in this fashion its characteristic properties: phases of growth, of fall, turning points, dependent moves. And finally 3) structures that is what is characterised by the greatest durability, what is exceptionally resistant to change, that which rather slowly evolves or even harden into an unchanged form than undergoes visible transformations. Yet, this individual resistance only speaks of their vitality (in the broadest possible meaning of the word) for some transversing vast stretches of time, maintaining themselves despite various shocks over whole ages or even millennia, simultaneously however even those most durable lead their ‘own life,’ which manifests itself in, among other things, the fact that they have their own beginnings and ends, that

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<sup>9</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th–18th Century. Vol. 3: The Perspective of the World*, trans. S. Reynolds, London 1984, p. 610.

<sup>10</sup> “Such movements, harmonious or discordant, bring to mind the vibrating cords or sounding-boards of schoolday physics.” *ibidem*, p. 71.



they do not exist beyond historical reality by virtue of some transcendence.<sup>11</sup> One may consequently compare this to long but finite lines.<sup>12</sup>

Events, conjunctures, structures – according to the concept of global history, these ideal types of historical phenomena are arranged in a vertical order, which is to reflect the differences and connections appearing between them, in at least three aspects. Firstly, in the aspect of ‘visibility’: the shift from events to structure is tantamount to the movement “between clear surface and obscure depths – between noise and silence;”<sup>13</sup> beneath this metaphorical expression lurks the notion of the various degrees of awareness on the part of people in relation to what exists in history (the conjectures here constitute the border for ordinary perception<sup>14</sup>). Secondly, in the aspect of meaning: the more durable a phenomenon the deeper the layers of history, the more hidden the process (and the further it is from the unstable surface) the more strongly it permeates and defines social life, the stronger it hangs over it; and in reverse, fleeting events (that ‘foam’ of history) are the least important dimension of historical reality, it is not they that shape its real form. Thirdly, in the aspect of dependence: the depths are at the same time the base upon which the upper elements of the global system rest so that the ‘heaviest’ structures not only designate the boundaries of what is possible in a given time, not only do they create the liminal conditions for all other phenomena (more conjunctural or eventful), but equally they directly condition and enable their emergence.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This vitality relates equally, as we have already seen, to the sizeable significance of the structures, the fundamental role that they play out in history, deciding each time on its shape.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. F. Braudel, *Historia i trwanie*, p. 346.

<sup>13</sup> F. Braudel, *History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée*, “Review (Fernand Braudel Center)” 2009, vol. 32 (2), p. 188.

<sup>14</sup> “[U]nconscious’ history – which half the time concerns cyclical phases but is *par excellence* about structural time (...).” Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> “In any case, on the basis of these layers of history, one can rethink the totality of history, as through it were located atop an infrastructure. All the stages, all the thousands of stages, all the thousands of explosions of historical time can be understood from these depths, from this semi-immobility. Everything gravitates around it” Ibidem, p. 181. Cf. the remark about the superficial history resting on structural history (F. Braudel, *Historia i trwanie*, p. 110).

This principle of conditioning functions in accordance with the movement occurring in the vertical arrangement, which characterizes the ‘global’ perspective. So, for example, every event grows out of some more durable form (conjunctures, structures), while the reverse situation is in advance excluded: for a phenomenon temporally shorter cannot be the ‘foundation’ for a longer phenomenon. But this proves also a certain temporal unity between all the layers of history. The vertical diversity is held together by the horizontal necessity imposed by the ‘imperious time of the world,’ ‘the time-demiurge,’ ‘mathematical time,’ “‘exogenous” time”<sup>16</sup> – the general measure of all movements. Significant consequences derive from this: “In fact, the temporalities that we differentiate are bound together. It is not so much duration that is the creation of our mind, but the splitting up of this duration. And yet these fragments come together again at the of our work. The *Longue durée*, cyclical phases, and events fit together easily, for they all are measurements on the same scale. Hence, to enter mentally into one of these temporalities is to be part of all of them.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, individual temporalities do not constitute autonomous sectors of history, they do not erect amongst themselves barriers which could be impassable. In reality the given phenomenon may run across various levels of time, leading in this way to their consolidation. There is consequently no point to say that some history or other (e.g., political) is more eventful, while another (e.g., economic) more conjunctural. In every historian’s area of study, it is possible to distinguish all types of movements.

We shall now attempt to search for the notion of event in the discursiveness that is plotted by the concept sketched above. This discursiveness forces one to instantly doubt in the initially arising thought that the discussed notion transferring from one context (‘traditional history’) to another (‘global history’) does not undergo in principle internal transformations, but that in spite of this it completely loses its significance in the sense of its importance and validity. Such an opinion may admittedly emerge as the effect of a certain type of reading, an adherent of which will argue in the following manner: ‘What is Braudel doing? In essence, he is expanding the

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<sup>16</sup> F. Braudel, *History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée*, p. 198.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

subject of historical research, including in this structures and cyclical phases because he considers them to be more important than events and this is the reason why the latter cease to play a decisive role. In other words the cause of this unique depreciation does not lie in some kind of conceptual reworking of the very event – still it allies itself with short time, with consciousness, with ‘superficiality’ etc., as is clearly pointed to by Braudel himself.’ However, we have seen that the discursive status of event in the structure of traditional history was not either that unequivocal nor limited to the attributes clearly ascribed to it. Quite the opposite, a number of ambiguities made up its form. The question as to the degree of the notional continuity of the event, about the scope in which transferring from one context to another it preserves its discursive properties which are summoned by utterances as a result of their varied connections has to, in our case, be adopted as the point of departure of precisely these ambiguities. How far in Braudel’s global project the event oscillates between short time and an ahistorical structure which would constitute the realisation of a certain natural order of things (their dependence, causation etc.), which would be therefore totally ‘anti-eventful’? How far in its pertinacity, in its ostensible transparency does it become incomprehensible, pointing us to an instance governed by chance, and therefore to what is opaque? And how much finally is it manifested only in an act of negation or as the subject of such an act? These three issues can lead to such a question: does the concept of the event in the theoretical concept of global history entangle itself in similar contradictions or does it rather create some other configuration?

If, according to this concept, individual types of phenomena occur at the very same time, in the general time which bonds them, then the event in some way goes beyond its characteristic short-duration. In other words, it does not occur exclusively – to continue our use of the vertical schema – on the mere surface of history, but also within its depths: “A fact hitherto not known is after all never completely not known and new. It co-exists the repeating or the regular. Paul Lacombe spoke on the matter of the Battle of Pavia (24<sup>th</sup> of February 1525), and particularly about the Battle of Rocroi (19<sup>th</sup> of May 1643), that certain occurrences in these battles ‘depended on the system of weaponry, the tactics, the military habits and customs, which one may find in many other battles of these times.’ Pavia

was to a certain extent the beginning of modern war, an event, but one in a whole family of other events.”<sup>18</sup> And in addition: “Resounding events are often only (...) manifestations of these larger movements and explicable only in terms of them.”<sup>19</sup> And this draws numerous consequences along with it. The event is located henceforth on the intersection of many movements, numerous streams of duration penetrate it, it becomes saturated with the social. One may consequently talk about a unique ‘depth’ of the event, about wide space where it exists with conjunctures and structures. It now combines the apparent and visible with the hidden and unconscious. In effect the event falls beyond pure ‘drama’ and takes shape based on more durable phenomena, through which – paradoxically – there occurs the historization of its structuality (one could say even the ‘evenementation’), because, first of all, all of these phenomena, even the longest, are, as we have seen, temporally defined, and secondly they are present within the event in the form of various combinations. So as opposed to traditional history, global history does not standardise events by incorporating them into some kind of single model, but the reverse: thanks to their attachment to the deeper layers of history it differentiates them structurally ad infinitum. Hence, events can be found everywhere, “for all sectors – the political, the economic, the social, the cultural, even the geographical – are filled with the signs of events.”<sup>20</sup> This dual process of individualisation designates simultaneously a measure of the ‘intelligibility’ of every event, for it in a sense illuminates its internal structure, attempting to discern what in it is *historical necessity* or rather more: what phenomena of long duration it repeats or express, and which ones it possibly modifies, overcomes, disseminates or reverses. The event no longer refers to desires, motifs, aspirations or acts enrooted in the free will or the features of character of its main protagonists, that is to a kind of universalism of the human psyche with its mysterious and aleatorical functions and symptoms, from which it was to have been dependent and which was to have explained it. For it is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, pp. 156–157.

<sup>19</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> F. Braudel, *Morze Śródziemne. Region i jego dzieje*, trans. M. Boduszyńska-Borowikowa, Gdańsk 1982, vol. 2, p. 261.

grounded in the historical determination of structures and circumstances, which make it comprehensible. In other words, the movement runs here in the exact opposite direction: traditional history departs from a phenomenal, close, non-problematic event and reaches to the gloom of chance, in turn in global history only the exposure of what was hidden, those long lines of time, casts light on the thick evenemental node and allows it to be untangled.<sup>21</sup>

So, if traditional history attempts to inscribe into the same framework – frames of short time, ‘eventful’ frames – phenomena of varied dynamics in course,<sup>22</sup> then the global schema attempts to do the opposite incorporating – through the multiplication of the levels of durations – the event into movements of various kinds. As a consequence it changes its function. Firstly, it obtains the status of a manifestation, a symptom, a sign of deeper layers of history: ‘(...) each of them [each event – T. F.] – even the shortest – convey evidence, illuminate some point of the landscape, and at times the deep layers of history.’<sup>23</sup> The event would possess a certain heuristic power, would play the role of the revealer. However, more important is that it actualises what temporarily goes beyond it, what within a shorter or longer dimension precedes it. In each

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<sup>21</sup> If – as an example – analyses of the already mentioned Battle of Pavia were undertaken – within the context of the “clarity” of the event that is of concern to us here – by the historian being the ideal representative of ‘traditional history’ (obviously in the guise that is derived from Braudel’s discourse), then the event would appear to our eyes as if the resultant of the dealings, interests, aspirations and strivings of Charles V and Francis I of France: of significance would be, for instance, that the French king had not given up on Italy and continued the policy of Louis XII (so ambitions would have been decisive), that Charles V desired Habsburg dominance of the continent etc.

Meanwhile the ‘global historian’ would rather be interested in to what extent and in what dimensions did, for instance, the system of armaments, the tactics, the customs of war, the types of armies (mercenary), the time of the exchanges, the treatment of the vanquished by the victors etc, in relation to the Battle of Pavia, constitute a continuation or perpetuation of existing structures, or to what extent it transformed them. Here analysis would progress with the aim of determining the territorial scope of the structures disclosed as well as their history, age of existence, durability.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. F. Braudel, *On History*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, *Morze Śródziemne. Region*, vol. 2, p. 261.

single actualization it serves as the subsequent realisation of determined structures and conjunctures that it combines in itself. It creates a place of multiple varied repetitions. So does the function of actualisation not confirm the affirmative ‘stance’ of the event? Does the global conception having combined it with more permanent phenomena, not free it of the said obligation of negation and being negated which traditional history imposes on it? But yet another question arises: does the event as an act of repetition that allows it to appear in its positivity, not become merely a passive response to the claim of what demands to be repeated? Does – to put it differently – it possess still any meaning whatsoever for historicity as such, for the way in which history moves?

Given that the basis of the event is the multiplicity of the prolongations of the phenomena existing beyond its boundaries, given that they constitute the event’s materiality – a materiality that is not uniform, but – quite the opposite – completely heterogeneous, then it would open up in its scope a space for quantitative relations. Strictly speaking, it would be possible within the event to differentiate a certain number of repetitions placed on specific levels of the historical depth (duration) as well as the sphere of that which is in a way different, which breaks with the past, and cannot be reduced to ‘the same.’ If we consider now the structural and objective diversity of events which we have differentiated earlier, and compare them, we would obtain, firstly, an entire panoply of quantitative relations defined by the opposition repeatable-unrepeatable as well as, secondly, varied distribution of both of these opposing ranges in the vertical global system. This last dissimilarity constitutes at the same time the basis for the hierarchical order which would classify events in relation to their importance, their impact on the fates of history, because, as has resulted from earlier observations, the depth of historical layers is the measure of their importance. In this sense the location of the event’s novelty, that breaks with the past, designates the degree of its significance (at least potentially). And that is why Braudel may say: “To those living at the time, incidents unfortunately seem all too often to be all of an equal degree of importance, and the most momentous events, those which will shape the future, make so little noise—arriving with the silent step of a dove, as Nietzsche once said—that one is rarely even aware of their

presence.”<sup>24</sup> Speaking less metaphorically, events that appear as exceptional, unique and full of consequences for the fates of the world, are based on the play of phenomenal, exceptional, ‘superficial’ differences, not disturbing in this the phenomena constitutive (essential) for the given time and repeating (duplicating) some of them. In turn, actually important events may pass unnoticed, beyond the limited perception of consciousness for their intervention in history concerns a reality of a fundamental (in the dual meaning of the word) character.

This interdependence between the significance and the ‘depth’ of events, incorporated into the range of the whole global schema, may lead possibly to the emergence of a new type of event. We shall listen initially to three short fragments which instantly take us to the crux of the matter:

[M]odels are of varying duration: they are valid for as long as the reality with which they are dealing. And for the social observer, that length of time is fundamental, for even more significant than the deep-rooted structures of life are their points of rupture, their swift or slow deterioration under the effect of contradictory pressures.<sup>25</sup>

[S]hould we dare to contemplate those insidious, almost invisible cracks which become deep rifts within a century or two, beyond which the whole life and character of man is changed, should we consider these amazing, internal revolutions, then slowly the whole vista becomes distinguishable, revealing with increasing intensity yet wider views and further complications. There is a young Italian historian who had the feeling after careful prospecting that the idea of death and the depiction of death in art changed utterly around the middle of the fifteenth century. A deep rift came into being (...).<sup>26</sup>

The history of economic conjunctures has been for me myself a passion for a long time now, but I am fully aware that the history of longer

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<sup>24</sup> F. Braudel, *On History*, p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

periods, 'of long duration' requires one to put aside these impressive events that are the rises and falls in the level of prices.<sup>27</sup>

Now that such entities as structures and conjunctures have been discerned and granted the relative autonomy, there also appear new forms of what we might provisionally call 'short-term historicity.' It concerns phenomena like the birth and disappearance of structures, their sudden transformation, conjectural shift, and the beginning as well as the end of cycles.<sup>28</sup> Are not these forms which have been revealed, excavated, or equally 'constructed' by the concept of global history in fact a new form of events? If we wished to answer this question not from outside of Braudel's discourse, but from within *its* outside, taking as the basis of our response the statements relating to the said constellation of hitherto hidden phenomena, or also investigating the subsequent fates of the category of interest to us here, its subsequent 'branching out,' then there would be no doubt whatsoever: the said turning points, the internal transformations, the moments of arising and disappearance are a previously unknown form of events. An example of such a resolution may be served here by Foucault, who saw an inseparable link between the process of the multiplication of duration types and the process of the multiplication of event types – 'dispersed', 'atmospheric' events, such as are, among others, all forms of reversals (e.g., of economic trends), sudden increases (e.g., in the consumption of protein), turning points (e.g., of a demographic curve) etc.<sup>29</sup> Ricœur similarly claims that the discovery of *Longue durée* leads to 'the emergence of a new event-like quality,'<sup>30</sup> one of which is the life and death of structures.

Our answer would have to be the same if we were to believe the words, taking their treacherous duration for a vehicle of identity, granting them a kind of power of transubstantiation. Does Braudel not call directly such

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 337 (cf. on the self same page Braudel's remark where he defines the history of economic conjunctures by the term 'the history of economic events').

<sup>28</sup> Cf. e.g., F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1992, vol. 3: The Perspective of the World, trans. S. Reynolds, p. 77: "A secular cycle, like any other cycle, has a point of departure, a peak and a point of arrival (...)."

<sup>29</sup> Cf. M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Paris 2001, pp. 1144–1146.

<sup>30</sup> P. Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, Paris 1983, vol. 1, p. 396.



phenomena as rise and fall of prices ‘impressive events’? Does he not transpose the term ‘revolution’ which ‘on the surface’ of history describes an event *par excellence*, into a structural transformation? Do not, to put it differently, these words bring with them their own history, the whole baggage of meanings and associations that have grown up around them, in order to enter them, at least some of them, into a new, only just unveiled reality? Furthermore, also the earlier features (besides openness) of the event – such as short duration, autonomy, functions of change, breaking away or modification – also seem to define the fundamental moments of structures and conjunctures (the turning points, shifts, birth etc.).

However, neither the approving voice reaching us from the immediate proximity of Braudel’s discourse, nor the objectifying power of words, nor even still the replication of a set of identical meanings in another place will allow – if we wish to remain inside the discursive context of the global concept – to put on an even footing events (existing here in the form of two elements: repetition and uniqueness) and those specific phenomena of a short duration existing at the structural and conjunctural level. Let us say rather that the global schema exercising the movement of the notion of event in the direction of what is positioned deeper, of what is more durable, opens new spaces up to it – possibly even designates for it new directions – rather than revolutionizing its concrete content, replacing battles with conjunctural shifts. It creates, therefore, a transitional stage. Consequently, one should turn to the form of event which constitutes a functional and ‘syntactic’ element of the image of the becoming world in Braudel’s strictly historical analyses.

### III

In carefully following the narrative of either *The Mediterranean* as equally *Civilisation and Capitalism, 15th–18th century*, it is easy to detect fragments in which the event takes on an analogical form to what occurs within the scope of the schema of global history. Let us take the example of nomadism:

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Diego Suárez, a soldier writing a chronicle of the fortress in Oran (...) sees nomads as they cross the plains surrounding *presidio*, head to the sea, set up camp for a short time and decide to risk some form of crop cultivation. (...) Every year they return, punctually almost to the very day. When in 1270 the French king Louis IX, commonly known as Saint Louis, set up camp on the remains of what had once been Carthage, opposite Tunis, nomads appear and lead to the defeat of the pious king. In August 1574 when the Turks took La Goulette from the Spanish and the fort in Tunis, nomads from the south, being in place at the time, supported the Turks' siege of Christian fortresses. (...) An illustrative arrangement of events does appear from the perspective of centuries to be strangely repetitive. Barely yesterday, for the year was 1940, North Africa in being devoid of means of transport called on the nomads for help.<sup>31</sup>

As one can see, each of the events herein cited reveal two structures: nomadism and the cyclical inflow of nomads to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. One may add here also the repeating act that was the participation of nomads in various forms of conflict. If, however, the defeat of Saint Louis, the taking of Spanish forts by the Turks as well as the North African campaign of 1940 enable the revelation of phenomena which in their duration go well beyond individual isolated facts, then both sets mutually interlock, they encroach on each other, outline their common part. Without these structure-arrangements that are nomadism<sup>32</sup> or the temporary return of nomads to the Mediterranean Sea,<sup>33</sup> the recalled events would have turned out differently, they would have been something else because their materiality would change. And the reverse, the event surrounds with its boundaries a particle of longer stretches of reality, designating the point of their contact: the alloy of nomadism and the means of its functioning create in this way the sphere that links the skirmishes of Louis IX with the

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<sup>31</sup> F. Braudel et al., *Morze Śródziemne. Przestrzeń i historia. Ludzie i dziedzictwo*, Warszawa 1994, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> "Nomadism is a certain defined whole: a herd of animals, men, women and children together changing their place of abode, carrying across huge distances all the articles that serve them in day-to-day life." Ibidem, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> This would implicate a certain relationship between nomadism and geographic expanse.

Muslims, the capture of Christian forts by the Turks in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the operations in North Africa during the Second World War. So are we alongside this repeatability also dealing here with actualisation? For certain nomadism as such, as well as the summer forages of nomads to the north coast of Africa, occur without events and exist independent of them. Still, there are also structures which need them. Let us somewhat broaden the scope of our example on the base of what Braudel himself wrote: the permanent inflow of nomads to the Mediterranean Sea brings about a specific type of statehood, a certain political feature the essence of which results in a small state-ephemera.<sup>34</sup> An example of such a creation was the small state of the nomad Shābbiyya tribe, which came into existence in 1550 with the town of Kairuan as its centre. It was not to last too long for only a year later the Shābbiyya were displaced by the Turks. And here is Braudel's commentary: "[h]istory like this repeats itself a thousand times. For example around Tripoli in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there grew up in similar circumstances other nomadic states and these were equally quick to disappear not having the time to bear fruit."<sup>35</sup> What Braudel calls the 'the infiltration from the steppe',<sup>36</sup> is this very permanent statehood of a fleeting character, realised only and exclusively through the subsequent 'flashes' of small nomad states. A series of events of the same nature sketches the concrete durability, and the latter is only able to survive further thanks to them.<sup>37</sup>

Let us look at another example which embodies a similar dependency between the event and the structure. In discussing the types of transhumance, Braudel distinguishes the so-called 'reverse' transhumance that involved, during periods of the winter half-year, shepherds along with their animals descending down from the now too cold mountains into the plain areas of below, and here particularly to coastal areas. Hence:

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. F. Braudel, *Morze Śródziemne. Region*, vol. 1, p. 178.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, p. 29: "The event is, or is taken to be, unique," but "the everyday happening is repeated, and the more often it is repeated the more likely it is to become a generality or rather a structure."

Topographical relief and season are the two factors that broadly determine what can and should happen in particular cases. In 1498, at carnival time, some *stradiots* carried out a raid near Pisa. Their haul was not surprising in winter near the sea: 300 head of large stock, buffaloes and cattle, 600 sheep, some mares, and some mules. Another raid near Zara, against the Turks, in January, 1526, resulted in 2500 animals being carried off. A final example occurred in December, 1649, when Morlachian raiders, led by a new chief, seized ‘13,000 head of cattle’ near the coast of Dalmatia.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the obvious differences that occurred amongst these three events – a different time and place, a different number with regard to the quantity of animals stolen, a different culprit – they find support in two structures: reverse transhumance and stock rustling. With regard to the former they merely ‘catch’ each other minimally – one of the stages in the reverse transhumance, but at the same time without this common part they would lose their content. In turn, the latter updates itself each time whenever the seizing of a part of a herd occurs. It lasts because the specific acts of theft are repeated.

This same logic governs many intersections of structures and events.<sup>39</sup> There often appear ‘micro-histories’ of various hue which contain what we called above short-term historicity at the conjunctural and structural level.

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<sup>38</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, p. 87.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. e.g. F. Braudel et al., *Morze Śródziemne. Przestrzeń i historia*, pp. 67–68 (structure: the maritime discoveries of Carthage; events: concrete expeditions); F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, p. 38 (s.: the resistance of the mountains to the world of civilisations; e.: failed conquering of mountain societies); *ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 108 (s.: the ability to navigate on the open sea amongst the inhabitants of the Mediterranean world in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; e. examples of specific voyages); *ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 127 (s.: the Venetian policy of control over the Adriatic; e.: the hijacking of Roetz ships, the destruction of the Trieste salt flats etc.); *ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 248 (s.: the winter “victories” of the Mediterranean over sailing ships; e.: subsequent maritime disasters); *ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 332 (s.: plague; e.: demographic disasters); *ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 469 (s.: the maintaining of the flow of gold through the Sahara to Africa and the Mediterranean in the years 1440–1520; e.: examples of supplying precious metals); *ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 735 (s.: permanent social war; e.: concrete revolts, riots, unrest etc.); *ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 770 (s.: the fraternising of hostile civilisations; e.: court decisions in favour of ‘alien civilisations,’ the release of prisoners-of-war etc.); F. Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism*, vol. 1, p. 66

When Braudel, in the subchapter characteristically entitled ‘Long duration does not exclude change,’ ventures the opinions of several historians on the subject of the unchanging form of the European peasantry over entire millennia, he himself opposes such views:

We should not unthinkingly assume however that peasant history is one of total immobility. (...) Houses, fields, animals, people, forms of speech and proverbs may indeed have remained the same. But how many things have been constantly changing over that time! In Mitschdorf, a little village in northern Alsace, spelt, an ancient cereal, was finally abandoned in about 1760–1770, in favour of wheat. (...) The same village between 1705 and 1816 (probably in about 1765) went over from a triennial to a biennial rotation system, and that was not negligible either. These were small changes, the reader might answer, but there were big ones too. [He refers here to the abolition of serfdom, the serfs purchasing their lands for money, etc. (Braudel: “All these developments were important: each one might profoundly alter the situation of thousands of people”) –T.F.] Any long standing situation crumbles sooner or later, though never all at once: cracks will appear gradually.<sup>40</sup>

The replacement of one cereal crop by another or the mentioned transfer to a more efficient system of cultivation – were these not events? And one could ask a similar question about the development of sea-going vessels sailing the Mediterranean,<sup>41</sup> the transformations of the Lombardian plain<sup>42</sup>... However, merely increasing the number of examples gives us nothing here for one needs to search for the answer elsewhere, namely, in the unique historiosophy of the work discussed here.

Braudel’s historical world is made up of *forces*. Everything that exists in history, that appears within it, every historical phenomenon is a certain force. To exist is always to exist as a force. From whence such an identification? Let us note first that Braudel’s vision of history comprises an arena of multiple struggles. Starting from the most general of levels, from the

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(s.: threats from wolves; e.: packs of wolves in Paris 1420, 18 years later they attack people between Montmartre and the Saint-Antoine Gate etc. ).

<sup>40</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 2, pp. 256–257.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. F. Braudel et al., *Morze Śródziemne. Przestrzeń i historia*, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, p. 69.

struggle on the line of man-nature, all sectors of history are transversed by an array of oppositions: civilisations, these ‘powerful beasts,’ inflict on themselves ‘covert, brutal, recurring blows,’<sup>43</sup> the life of the mountains opposes itself to that of the plains, settled societies come into constant conflict with the Bedouin,<sup>44</sup> passes through the Alps – as routes of transportation – ‘compete’ with each other,<sup>45</sup> great cities rival each other for economic primacy over the whole world,<sup>46</sup> fashions mutually are in conflict<sup>47</sup> etc. Therefore these phenomena, in order to survive against the tendencies destroying them, in order to exist further, must wield a particular power. This power is manifested in various acts. Firstly, in the act of expansion. This does not refer merely to the conquest of the lands of one people by another, but also the dissemination of ‘essentially’ non-human forces. Such is the case of the history of cultivation and crop farming which clash with each other and sometimes literally take over new territories, pushing out from these other competing forms of farming.<sup>48</sup> Similar ‘expansionism’ may be observed in the history of sailing – for example in the 16<sup>th</sup> century vessels of moderate tonnage slowly eliminated large ships from the Atlantic in order to ‘grab’ the whole ocean for themselves.<sup>49</sup> Power is also the ability for **resistance**. When the Balkan Peninsula was taken by the Turks, that is when Greek civilisation succumbed to the civilisation of Islam, the former did not disappear, despite four-hundred years of occupation. In an analogical way we have Spain under the Moors. As Braudel says, “in the first and second case what is surprising is that after many centuries of enslavement the native civilisation found itself untouched – as if nothing at all had happened.”<sup>50</sup> The strength of a civilisation, and civilisation as strength itself, is here borne out by the strength of its resistance. Thirdly,

<sup>43</sup> F. Braudel et al., *Morze Śródziemne. Przestrzeń i historia*, p. 101.

<sup>44</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and*, vol. 1, p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 206.

<sup>46</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism*, vol. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 311 ff.

<sup>48</sup> The example of the “omnipotent” sugar cane on Mediterranean islands in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and later in north-eastern Brazil. F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, p. 179.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 295–301.

<sup>50</sup> F. Braudel et al., *Morze Śródziemne. Przestrzeń i historia*, p. 100.

power manifests itself in a kind of *transgression*, in the act of breaking down barriers, obstacles, boundaries. Again we shall make reference to the history of sailing. Thanks to the introduction of pintle-and-gudgeon rudders on boats sailing the Mediterranean in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it became possible to navigate to the wind. In turn, the overlapping planking of the hull, which was employed three centuries later, allowed ships to face high waves head on and thus winter storms stopped being problematic, something that was to revolutionise maritime transport because from then onwards ships started to sail all year round.<sup>51</sup> In this way two geographic obstacles – the wind and stormy seas – which had restricted and limited sea sailing both temporally as well as spatially, were at a certain moment overcome.

It follows here to add several specifications. If history turns out to be the sum of an infinite number of forces, this in no way means that it is at the same time a single enormous clash of everything with everything, to paraphrase Hobbes. All forms of struggle are merely one of the types of connections that occur between particular forces. The latter may remain neutral in relation to each other. First and foremost, they often cooperate with each other, forging symbiotic relationship, mutually strengthening, and forging amongst them various types of alliance; and vice versa – the weakening of one force often brings with it the waning and decline of another. As an example: the growth of economic circumstances in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries favoured the development of empires, of those ‘giant’ states,<sup>52</sup> the Genova-Antwerp axis decays along with weakening gold,<sup>53</sup> the success of sugar cane fueled slavery<sup>54</sup>... What is more, the type of connection that links the given forcers is never established once and for ever. The birth of new strengths, the collapse of the old, the scales turning in the favour of one of the sides in neighbouring confrontations, the collision of two expansive phenomena, in a word – the more or less local disruption of a current distribution of power – results in a change in the character

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<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 41.

<sup>52</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 2, p. 659.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, vol. 1, p. 500.

<sup>54</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 2, p. 159, and *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, p. 155.

of a certain relation. What yesterday was an obstacle today may be already utilised (cf. the above example of sailing and a hostile wind), neutrality turns into rivalry (Portuguese trade vs. Venetian trade – the fight over pepper<sup>55</sup>) etc.

If history never obtains an ultimate balance, if it does not resemble a finite mechanism, it is because history is made up of forces. And what do the specifics of these forces depend on, what is their ontology? In no case do they recall things, they are not locked away in themselves, stuck in immobility and through this existing in isolation, for they only exist in interaction, in influence and effect. To imagine a force independent of its effects is tantamount to negating it. Why this property, and even the necessity for interaction, why is a force not, so to say, isolated? As Nietzsche writes, “the will of every centre of power [is] to become stronger – not self-preservation, but the desire to appropriate, to become master, to become more, to become stronger.”<sup>56</sup> In other words “every body is specifically [we would say: every historical phenomenon – T.F.] striving to control the entire expanse and spread its strength (its will of force) and to displace what is opposing its expansion. But constantly it encounters the self same aspirations of the bodies [phenomena – T.F.] of others and ends up in negotiating (‘joining’) those which are sufficiently related to it: then they plot together to seize power.”<sup>57</sup> If some force was deprived of its will to power, then it would instantly disappear under the pressure of other forces. While if no force possessed it, then history would lose its dynamic.

Forces therefore function only in a system, within a net of varied relations which they themselves designate. Returning to Braudel, this means that history, if it is made up of forces, must always be structural. This general definition (history as a structure of forces) covers, as it appears, the fundamental field of the phenomena establishing the historicity of the world in the analysed work and, what comes with it, it allows one to understand the boundaries and borders of this field. This can be clearly seen in connection with the way geography is here entwined. Strictly speaking, in Braudel’s

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, 543–569.

<sup>56</sup> F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, transl. L. O. Levy, Edinburgh 1909–1913, p. 164.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 214.



work geography *sensu stricto* is absent. Instead, there are geographic phenomena (or forces), which at the same time are historical forces, and hence are linked to some part of other historical forces, and create in conjunction with them smaller or larger systems based on relations of opposition, exploitation, cooperation, submission etc. Seas, mountains, islands, deserts, seasons of the year, winds, river networks, mountain passes, all appear on the stage of history only because here their power works: they stop, block, hinder, but they also support, drive, accelerate, stimulate. In this way, however, they lose their strict geographic character and take on features appropriate for the historical world. By becoming a part of the structure of the forces of history, they enter into the general circulation of power. They succumb to the same relativization, and through this to the same historization as forces of another type.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the Mediterranean winds from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century were ‘geographically’ possibly the same but their historical being (function, action, power) underwent distinct changes.

Under pressure from the multiple tensions that at every moment exist at the junction of particular forces, history develops along a dialectics of duration and change, identity and difference.<sup>59</sup> In many places the forces achieve a temporary stability, mutually counterbalancing and creating in this way relatively closed systems. At the same time, on other levels of reality, in its other dimensions, there occur decisive victories, new phenomena appear, old ones fade away etc. This duality of statics and movement bestows on history the form of a specific *evolution*.

This needs to be understood in a proper manner. For here the question is not whether the historical world in Braudel’s work resembles Herbert Spencer’s vision of society – we have to reject any associations with social evolutionism whatsoever in the adopted meaning of the notion. There exist, however, a partial though fundamental correspondence between the ‘structure’ of evolution in the animate world (with its mechanisms, rhythm, character of changes etc.) and the ‘structure’ of historicity

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<sup>58</sup> “Each [civilization] has its own geography with its own opportunities and constraints, some virtually permanent and quite different from one civilization to another.” F. Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, trans. R. Mayne, New York 2005, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 3, p. 537.

in Braudel's work.<sup>60</sup> The manner in which historical processes pan out (at the most formal 'abstracted' level) reflects to a large degree what occurs within the framework of evolution. Already the very 'substance' of both orders is analogical – in both cases, the substances are forces. The famous evolutionist concept of 'the struggle for existence' means exactly that the "[t]he emergence of organisms represents the consequence of a long struggle between opposing actions, the resultant of contending forces, the outcome of a conflict between the organism and its environment [meaning its surroundings—Auth.]"<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, as is known, the theory of evolution does not encapsulate the relations existing in the animate world exclusively in categories of opposition or clashes. At the level of macro-evolution, that is in the field of interaction between species, a part of the bonds that link them are useful or even essential for their survival (symbiosis). Similar is the case with relations on the organism-environment axis: certain conditions favour the survival of specific populations, others make this impossible. As a result we obtain analogical relations to those that we have distinguished in Braudel's discourse: competition, mutual strengthening, mutual weakening, stimulation, neutrality....

An evolutionist observes the biological phenomena at the very same resolution, so to say, as Braudel does historical phenomena:

[t]he most radical transformation of the biological attitude wrought by Darwin was to focus attention, not on individual organisms, but on large populations. Until then, variations that could occur in a particular organism provided the yardstick for envisaging the types of transformations to which it might eventually be susceptible. With

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<sup>60</sup> There is no, obviously speaking, single theory of evolution. In the discussion of evolutionists over the development of living entities various opinions clash: punctual equilibrium, neo-Darwinism, socio-biology etc. However, the differences between them we may ignore at this point. What concerns us are the fundamental principles, notions and properties of evolution which bestow on it its general shape, and which have been singled out, for example, by François Jacob. We shall attempt to track its reconstruction in a later stage of our disquisition. F. Jacob, *The Logic of Life: A History of Heredity*, trans. B. E. Spilmann, New York 1973 and idem, *The Possible and the Actual*, Seattle 1982.

<sup>61</sup> F. Jacob, *The Logic of Life*, p. 167.

Darwin, the mishaps and misadventures that might happen to this or that individual lose all interest.<sup>62</sup>

Braudel adopts a similar perspective: an individual fact is not significant in history, what counts however are structures and therefore collections or assemblages of facts, their ‘great populations.’ In the way that particular organisms are elements of populations that within the scope of a species constitute certain forces – they fight for survival (but equally they cooperate with other species), individual facts combine into smaller or larger structures which also create forces – given that they survive and at the same time compete or reinforce each other, they must also wield a certain power or ‘the will to power.’ So what is the principle of this specific structure of forces? Obviously reproduction, that is procreation (multiplying) as well as repetitiveness. Hence the subsequent analogy: if “[i]n the end, the only force peculiar to the evolution of the living world is the power of multiplication peculiar to living beings,”<sup>63</sup> this – paraphrasing – one may say that the only exceptional power of historical structures is their ability to reproduce, to multiply.<sup>64</sup>

Despite what is sometimes seen, it does not follow to identify evolution with progress. The mechanism of natural selection works – whether on the individual level or that of a species – only and exclusively within an actual as well as a temporary constellation of forces – this is the automatic selection happening in certain conditions by which it is limited and from which it results. The fact that some population does not survive points merely to the fact that in the given net of interaction in which it was entangled it turned out to be too weak in order to survive; it does not succeed in reproduction. In this sense, evolution does not lead to the creation of forms that are increasingly stronger (according to some universal scale),

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<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 166.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, pp. 168–169.

<sup>64</sup> “The everyday happening is repeated, and the more often it is repeated the more likely it is to become a generality or rather a structure. It pervades society at all levels, and characterises ways of being and behaving which are perpetuated through endless ages.” F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, p. 29.

more perfect, increasingly better adapted to the external world.<sup>65</sup> If it were so, Jacob says, “then each organ, every function or particle of an organism would be adapted to the environment in the best possible way. Yet, evolution “far from perfection”, as was repeatedly stressed by Darwin, who had to fight against the argument from perfect creation. In the *Origin of Species*, Darwin emphasizes over and over again the structural and functional imperfections of the living world. He always points to the oddities, the strange solutions (...).”<sup>66</sup> Natural selection, the fundamental evolutionary mechanism, has consequently a selective character, and not an instructive one. Evolution does not realize some ideal program established *a priori* – subsequent figures of the biosphere are the resultant of changeable forms in the layout of power. As a consequence, the present structure of the animate world is only one of many that could potentially have existed. There is nothing to be said about any evolutionary necessity.

The claim that according to Braudel history does not run along the line of progress, nor does it develop according to some initially devised plan, but rather is open in character, free from any *a priori* necessity, sounds obviously banal. What is important, however, are the implications of this indeterminism. So given the autonomy of history, its – in the final calculation – independence from human intentions, desires, aims, or efforts,<sup>67</sup> and as a result of the fact that it constitutes a dynamic whole, the shape of which is determined by the interaction of varied forces, we may say that there operates within it a kind of ‘historical selection.’ For the only criterion that decides about the ‘lifespan’ of particular phenomena in history is neither their degree of perfection, nor their degree of functionality, but the ability to persist, the power to reproduce. And no one decides about this – history is, so to say, autopoietic. In the same way that natural selection constitutes an inherent feature of the animate world which results

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<sup>65</sup> “It is not the best who survive – survive do those who manage it.” F. Jacob, *Gra możliwości*, Warszawa 1987, p. 7 (from the introduction by W. J. H. Kunicki-Goldfinger).

<sup>66</sup> F. Jacob, *The Possible*, p. 34.

<sup>67</sup> F. Braudel: “One cannot oppose history. People do not create their own history. Marx was wrong in claiming that people are the creators of history; it seems certain though that history creates people, who are subject to it.”, “Forum” 1986, no. 1 (1068), 2 I 1986, p. 23. Qtd. in: A. F. Grabski, *Dzieje historiografii*, Poznań 2003, p. 766.

from the fundamental incompatibility between the unlimited power of the reproduction of living entities and the limited expanse of their biotopes, then equally what we call 'historical selection' points merely to the fact that in history selection permanently occurs – some phenomena disappear (e.g., silphium as a seasoning in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD,<sup>68</sup> the idea of 'celestial death' or the type of 'medieval town' in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>69</sup> etc.), others last, while still others – those that have only just come into existence – amongst the varied arrangements of forces either immediately succumb to annihilation or find their own 'niche':

So the very first thing the historian sees is the troop of events which have come out on top in the struggle for life. But these place themselves once again, order themselves within the framework of a variety of contradictory possibilities, among which life finally made its choice. For one possibility which was fulfilled, there were tens, hundreds, thousands, which disappeared, and there are even some which, numberless, never even appear to us at all, too lowly and hidden to impose themselves directly on our history. We must nonetheless somehow try to reintroduce them, because these vanishing movements are the multiple material and immaterial forces which have at every moment put the brakes on the great forward impetuses of evolutions, slowed down their development, and sometimes put an early end to their existence.<sup>70</sup>

Evolution and history therefore are connected by a specific type of wastefulness. From the manifold chances which they create for themselves only a few are actually taken advantage of. In Darwin's writings, as Jacob states, "emphasis is put on this prodigious wastefulness of nature," on "the extent of destruction, the ineffectiveness of the mechanisms governing fertilization and reproduction," as a result of which "the most infrequent events end up having the most important consequences."<sup>71</sup> In history, matters take a similar course – let us mention inept civilisational revolutions,<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, p. 220.

<sup>69</sup> F. Braudel, *On History*, p. 16, and idem, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, p. 341.

<sup>70</sup> F. Braudel, *On History*, p. 84.

<sup>71</sup> F. Jacob, *The Logic of Life*, p. 167.

<sup>72</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 3, p. 542.

the wasted chances of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Turkey,<sup>73</sup> the inventions that have never been applied<sup>74</sup>...

And the problem of variability is connected with this particular wastefulness. The transformations that occur in the animate world result fundamentally from two factors: accidental mutations and natural selection. All deviations appearing within the genetic program of subsequent individuals constitute a potential source for changes in the scope of the given species. However, the “struggle for existence” amongst individual organisms in each generation implies that only part of them are able to reproduce, and in effect, the majority of mutations turn out to be ‘blind,’ not playing any role in the process of differentiating forms of life. To put it differently, “it is natural selection that gives direction to changes, orients chance, and slowly, progressively produces more complex structures.”<sup>75</sup> The cooperation of chance mutations and rivalries in reproduction – this is why the development of living beings is the sum of tiny changes.

Braudel has emphasised many times that in history there are no radical cuts which would momentarily and deeply modify the structure of the social world.<sup>76</sup> Transformations are local, while their significance is decided on by the dimension of ‘longue durée’: “no innovation has any value except in relation to the social pressure which maintains and imposes it.”<sup>77</sup> The invention of printing was extremely important but only because the very act turned out to be the beginning of a permanent structure of exceptional weight. Another example: “Artillery made its appearance in some form in the West at the battle of Crécy; more reliably at Calais in 1347. But it was not a major element in European warfare until Charles VIII’s expedition to Italy in September 1494, after a century and a half of gestation, experiment and discussion.”<sup>78</sup> At the same time artillery ‘is born’ equally

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<sup>73</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, p. 188.

<sup>74</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 335.

<sup>75</sup> F. Jacob, *The Possible*, p. 15.

<sup>76</sup> “No society is likely to be able (...) to transform at a stroke ‘its attitudes, institutions and techniques,’ (...) There will always have been some earlier experiences, stages of progress and adaptations.” F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 3, p. 538.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 431.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 385.

in China but there, as opposed to Europe, it quickly disappears. Hence the fundamental difference in the significance of both – to a certain extent the very same – innovations.

Thus we would have, on the one hand, historical mutations of a type – for example, inventions, but also ideological transformations (atheism<sup>79</sup>), agrarian (the two-field system), “social” (transhumance<sup>80</sup>), religious (reformation) etc.; and on the other hand – “historical selection,” a changing order of mutually influential forces that are organised within certain systems which decide on the development or disappearance of new phenomena. As an effect of the combining of these two variabilities history evolves – it is not unchangeable, it does not also depend merely on the simple reconfiguration of these same elements but at the same time it does not involve radical, sudden turns.

There remains to be resolved the question of the event. If we accurately reconstruct the structure of the world’s historicity, the image of which is proposed by Braudel’s discourse, and if it adopts a form comparable with the evolutionary schema, then one would have to take into consideration three general levels on which potentially ‘something happens.’ The first of them is the domain of all these factors which Braudel perceived as short-lived flashes, ephemeral phenomena so rich for traditional historiography: battles, treaties, meetings at the top... What would their role be? They are merely the result of contemporary force relations, and have no effect on them. They arise as the results of the varied interactions that occur between the individual forces. This is almost literally the ‘foam’ of history. From the perspective of historical development nothing ‘happens’ here. Being, so to say, beyond the realm of play between ‘mutations’ and ‘historical selection’ (although sometimes they may be the place of the former), these facts become a kind of history’s *surplus* which does not participate in its formation. In this sense they are on the outside of historicity. Therefore, if events are constituent parts of history, it is not at this level.

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. F. Braudel, *On History*, p. 85 (atheism as a certain “intellectual speculation” arose in the Modern Era, and which had “a great future ahead of it”).

<sup>80</sup> Transhumance as a mutated form of the nomadic way of life. Cf. F. Braudel et al., *Morze Śródziemne. Przestrzeń i historia*, pp. 21–25.

The second level is defined by the mutual interaction of forces. As we already know, it is by its very nature a dialectic structure – both the space of constantly recurring clashes, changed allies, periodic expansions, joint declines, as well as the area for the formation of stable systems, local isles of inertia, local slumps; it could appear therefore that one of the forms of its dynamic is the event. The sudden victory of one force over another, the reversal of a particular relation, the breaking up of the triumphant parade of some phenomenon – would these not be events? But what should we acknowledge it for: the diametrical fall in the indigenous peoples of America that occurred immediately after the Colombian incursions (which in the viewpoint of forces represents the triumph of ‘European’ diseases over Indian societies),<sup>81</sup> or the significantly slower conquest of city-states by larger state bodies?<sup>82</sup> Would it be the collapse of booming Aleppo, which would “be thriving one day, and the next suffering from extraordinary price increases,”<sup>83</sup> or the more stretched in time change in the struggle for economic primacy in France (the transfer of the financial centre from Lyon to Paris)?<sup>84</sup> In other words: would the tempo of a given change be the only decisive criterion by which one can determine its nature in the system of forces? But how, in that case, should one establish the boundaries between eventful and processual? By way of arbitrary intuition? If in the historical field of power we are dealing with a unique dynamic continuum, if the changes take place at all possible tempos, then we may admit that all of them are faster or slower processes, but equally well they constitute faster or slower events. For here the difference is purely quantitative.

The evolutionary character of history requires one to identify the event with historical mutation. On this third level, at the very sources of historicity, there emerges what had been hitherto unknown, completely new (*événement*), what – in its very essence – is completely governed by chance (*eventus*), which comes from somewhere (*e-venire*) – a new idea (e.g., the idea of a crusade), technical modification (e.g., an invention),

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<sup>81</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, p. 36.

<sup>82</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, pp. 345–347.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 549.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 218–219.



a new practice (e.g., transhumance) etc. Next, almost instantly, history starts to play out its role, the specific physics of history, 'historical selection,' sifting through the events-mutations – one *novum* quickly disappears, a second constitutes the transformation of a structure that already existed, while one more becomes the germ of a constant force. Event-mutation does not arise in a vacuum – it is only (or rather no less than) the least or the greatest deviation from what is encountered. But between the one and other limitation, between the burden of the past which defines the rules of the game and designates the boundaries of 'the possible,' and the necessity of the future which decides about the immediate breakdown or ensures lasting success, in this barely discernible fissure of historicity, there occurs something that is located beyond all processuality and determination: something that has not yet been subjected to the pressure of history, something that is literally monstrous. This scant space in which the event-mutation appears is at the same time the place of the greatest risk and chance, where the rule is a lack of any rules whatsoever. Only here does the element of pure 'eventfulness' reign.

