

The Event, beyond the Permanent Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a link in the perspective of transition between the concept of permanent crisis belonging to the work of Jean-Marie Guyau and the conception of the event due to Alain Badiou. The hypothesis links the two in the sense that it is not possible to speak of the event as a transformative form of social and political reality without first producing the permanent crisis.

Keywords: Alain Badiou; event; Jean-Marie Guyau; permanent crisis; process; real life; second life; time; transition; true life.

In this paper I will focus on the way in which Alain Badiou conceives the event by virtue of the proximity that his conception has to the idea of permanent crisis with its transitional nature. For this, as far as the permanent crisis is concerned, I will take the reference of Jean-Marie Guyau, a pioneer about the idea of a definitive crisis and who was able to lucidly expose, before others, the fact that philosophy and the action that derives from it had entered into a permanent crisis. This is concretised as a never-ending work and not as an end (Revault d'Allonnes, 2012, p. 73).

One of the first arguments developed by Guyau is that, despite not having written any specifically political text, his writings reveal ways of approaching the political that bring him closer to the discourse of confrontation of the modern as a project with the real. This awareness of modernity in the process of definitive crisis gave rise to a pioneering discourse in our philosopher on the idea of the end of modernity as progress and of democracy without foundation. Intelligences liberated from dogma. He states that they will continue to associate in order to defend themselves

against human adversities, to fight against setbacks. This association has its beginning in the consciousness of fraternity that nestles in consciences, which, despite having freed themselves from disturbing dogmas (Guyau, 1889), remains aware of the vicissitudes in which their integrity finds itself. To this end, he introduces a first transition between the absence of religion as a fundamental element of the world, with the idea of fraternity, which represents not only a stage in human evolution, but the very awareness of a condition which, free from the great dogmas, becomes aware of its state of essential solitude, shared with the rest of humanity. Hence the idea of an orphan fraternity that Guyau raises in his writings (Riba, 2021).

This orphan fraternity, conceptually expressed by Guyau, with the word *anomie* is the creator of new forms of relations, of different solidarities in the face of those who continue to support the constituted norms. In this sense, Jean Duvignaud (1986) sees Guyau's *anomie* as the fact by which humans produce themselves through new forms of sociability and escape the norms of a morality defined by respect for rules or a collective conscience elevated to the rank of reason. Guyau claims that *anomie* is just "the absence of a fixed law" (Guyau, 2012, p. 165). It is at the basis of our freedom; it is one of the foundations of morality with all its risks. Thought walks in front of it, with activity, composing the world and disposing of the future. We believe that we are the masters of infinity, because our power is not equivalent to a given quantity: the more we act, the more we expect.

Anomie also defines the singularity of the conception of theory, which can no longer be conceived as before. This principle therefore goes beyond the idea of discipline, law and rule. The only valid rule is the one that takes into account the facts, namely that we are beings endowed with meaning and thought and that this is the specificity, the reality and the essence of our nature. That is the starting point for understanding and creating politics. The human being, in any case, is driven by his desire for struggle and the risk of thought (Guyau, 2012).

1. THE METAPHOR OF MODERNITY

To make this explicit, Guyau introduces a metaphor at the end of his book *Esquissed'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* which anticipates and clarifies this idea linking irreligion with fraternity. Metaphor is, in Revault's words, the capacity to produce a new meaning, but giving entry to an original, essential situation, both of existence and of language. Metaphorical expression has two characteristics of its own: it is an innovative

and revealing discursive form of something that remains either hidden or outside the proper sense of formal discourse.

The metaphor expresses orientations in the view of the observation of the world of life which cannot be crystallised in pure concepts, but which provide a tacit dimension of intelligibility. This is certainly why Blumenberg recognises it as an essential figure of what he calls aconceptualisation (Blumenberg, 1995). This way of proceeding is not really new, on the contrary, it has a long tradition. The metaphor par excellence that shows the vast problematic of existence is that of the navigation on sea, which Blumenberg explores in his book *Shipwreck with a spectator*.

It is therefore interesting to turn to Guyau showing his perspective on the link between the crisis of modernity and the human condition and the political link that firmly joins them in a space that, despite its permanent uncertainty, bursts forth as an invitation to endless action (Tassin, 2012).

We discover then in Guyau's thought the intuition of an agonistic space in which hypotheses emerge without which the subject could hardly develop in a society that presents so many antinomies. Guyau considers it is necessary to go beyond experience and formulate personal hypotheses, without giving rise to a system that would take the form of a metaphysical doctrine that could be universally imposed on human reason.

Hence, the metaphor mobilised by Guyau at the end of *Esquisse* is not only a good example of what Beck calls "reflexive modernity" (1998), but also reveals the crisis of the normative detected in particular by "the absence of points of reference", as Claude Lefort mentioned in many of his works. In a world dominated by uncertainty and permanent crisis, we are driven to live accepting risk and trying to manage it (Beck, 1998), while seeking "paths" that, lead to precarious certainties for some, incomplete for others.

Guyau writes at the end of his book: "No hand directs us, no eye sees us; the rudder has been broken for a long time, or rather, there has never been one, it must be done: it is a great task, and it is our task" (Guyau, 2012, pp. 343-344). Only individualities in solidarity are capable of this. This is the way in which the two key concepts of Guyautist thought, "anomie" and "solidarity", find their realisation when articulated.

This is Guyau's great intuition: the idea of moral fecundity. Through it, Guyau transforms the spectator into an actor. This is the key political anthropological aspect to understand the transcendence of Guyau's thought. The mission of the individual will not only be technical: to steer the ship to avoid sinking; it will also be political: to escape the drift to which humanity seems condemned in the absence of guiding principles. The moral agent, Guyau points out, plays here the same role as the artist:

he must project himself out of the tendencies he feels in himself, and make “a metaphysical poem with his love” (Guyau, 2012, p. 161).

It is therefore thanks to vital expansion, the intuition that we acknowledge to Guyau, that human beings can and must fight against drifting, a state in which they originally found themselves. And that life is expansion means that it is also sociability, essentially altruism. Guyau used a metaphor to represent his thinking, probably for various reasons: in order to question the order of the modern, to confront it as a project with the order of the real. With the metaphor of the Leviathan, an old ship abandoned to its fate, Guyau was able to express the fragility of the link between the thought and the real (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 275). It is when he states that no hand directs us, that no eye watches over us, and that we have to build it and this is our task.

He clearly states that if political modernity is represented by the idea of progress, this is politics without foundation. This is exemplified by Guyau in his metaphor: there is no storm that threatens navigation, but it is the lack of a rudder that leads the ship adrift. But also, in Guyau's metaphor, with or without a rudder, there is no possibility of finding land or shelter. The Pascalian “we are embarked” becomes a perpetual state. And in doing so, Guyau also dissociates himself from Hegel when he writes:

Here we can affirm that we are at home and that we can, as a sailor would do after a long voyage, cry out: land! Descartes is one of those men who have begun again at the beginning, and it is with him that culture, the thinking of modern times, makes its debut. (Hegel, 1985, p. 1379)

Guyau thus provides a different vision of the metaphor of the shipwreck (Blumenberg, 1995). Guyau's political-irreligious discourse reveals the confusion of modernity in the face of the impossibility of realising the great narratives, of the definitive crisis that plagues modernity as a whole. For this reason, and not so much to get out of it, but to adjust to this new reality, the crisis of reason and the end of the idea of progress are made to coincide with the advent of the philosophy of action. The sea is conceived by our philosopher, in the manner of Arendt¹, as the exterior of the Garden, and the little Socrates who observes it is the image of humanity confronted with the great problem of the absence of referents represented in Guyau's metaphor of the absence of a rudder to steer the ship.

There is indeed no pre-established political discourse, nor can there be, just as there is no rudder to steer the ship. And in the face of this double

¹ See Pascal's “thought” which Hannah Arendt uses repeatedly in her writings to establish the distinction between two particular ways of conceiving philosophical work.

non-existence, Guyau's discourse is fruitful because at the same time as it presents the empty place from which to build the rudder, it is the affirmation that it can only be built from solidarity-based individualities.

Guyau thus introduces action as an expression of vitality, which turns the spectator, as we have already pointed out, into an actor. His mission will no longer be technical to steer the ship away from shipwreck, but political: to avoid the drifting into which humanity is plunged in the absence of guiding principles. There is thus in the metaphor an obligatory invitation to permanent construction. Humans are conceived as energy to be spent. Thanks to this vital expansion, Guyau's own intuition, humans can and must fight against this state of original drift. Vital fertility replaces previous finalist and determinist discourses.

2. THE CRISIS OF FOUNDATIONS

Guyau accepts what was already rejected in his time and is still denied by many: the profoundly nonsensical character of today's world (Mugnier-Pollet, 1966, p. 41). It can therefore be affirmed that in the face of the unique reality of drifting, only the option of tenacity remains. In the course of a few years, these ideas were also ratified and developed by Simmel, who stressed that there is no guarantee of success in this political project (Simmel, 2010). And later Revault d'Allonnes did not fail to consider this fact in his book. He takes it up again on the basis of the writings of Foucault and Lefort, whom, he points out, about having realised in the early 1980s the change in the forms of contestation in the contemporary epoch (despite the differences that separated them). They noted their "dissemination", their transversality, the diversity of their objects (the family, women, children, sexuality, justice, the situation of prisoners, the management of companies, the protection of nature, etc.) (Revault d'Allonnes, 2012, p. 142).

Indeed, a century after Guyau, as Revault points out, Lefort wrote with a similar aim to that proposed by Guyau, that it was necessary to elevate reflection to a practice that is not mute. In this way, the democratic experience is traversed by antagonistic experiences (Lefort, 1981). For this reason, in this current crisis, which is experienced as permanent, the use of metaphor proves to be of great help in explaining it.

Guyau, a precocious clairvoyant, fully describes the essential fact in which humanity finds itself after the end of the great narratives: the irruption of the politics and the conflict with the finalvision of history, hitherto. The critical consequence of this metaphor emerges as the absence of a

foundation, as in the impossible normativity capable of providing principles of action and going beyond the strict reality in which individuals move, united in their common life.

3. THE CRISIS OF NORMATIVITY

And so, while the older systems represented only a tension in internal activity, in the present we are faced with a term situated between uncertainty and categorical affirmation. This is a certainty that is the basis of our freedom. We do not know what the future will bring us, but through action we operate, we work, we undertake (Revault d'Allonnes, 2012, p. 134). And in this regard, Guyau points out that the true commandment is the one we give ourselves not in the name of some higher authority, but of a particular principle superior to any commandment (Agamben, 2013).

This principle, therefore, goes beyond the idea of discipline, law and the State. The only valid rule is that which takes into account the facts, i.e. that beings are endowed with meaning and thought, and that this specificity is the reality and essence of our nature. Therefore, the question: How can we give meaning and form to uncertainty in order to create an open space of possibilities? becomes necessary.

The political model towards which Guyau sees humanity tending, in accordance with his idea of fraternity, is what he calls federated republican (Guyau, 1887, p. XVIII). He does not elaborate much on this form of government, but he states emphatically that it should allow for the coexistence of all kinds of religious individualities and any kind of association that these individualities might wish to form. Religious anomie is, according to Guyau, the one that best represents this state, since it has crucial effects on modern individuality, that is, the one that occurs in the process of secularisation of the democratic becoming.

Christ could have affirmed: I have not come to bring peace to thought, but the incessant struggle of ideas; nor repose, but the movement and progress of the spirit; nor the universality of dogmas, but the freedom of belief, which is the first condition of its final expansion. (Guyau, 1887, p. XIX)

Expressed in another way, the essential truth of a democracy would be that in which political things burst forth with force. Claude Lefort took it upon himself to highlight this empty place of the political, showing once again the conflict between philosophy and politics, in particular in connection with Guyau's ideas. This is precisely his main problem, the impossibility

of simultaneously conforming to the double meaning that the concept of republic possesses, political things and *politeia*, in order to constitute a universal republic.

To arrive at it, nothing better than to recall the words of Feuerbach in his book *Principles of the philosophy of the future* (1843): “the essence of man resides only in the community, in the unity of man with man, a unity which, however, rests only in the reality of the difference between the I and the Thou”.

This irruption of the politics allows the consolidation of the republicanism of political things, making more visible the secular conflict between politics and philosophy that Arendt situates historically in the condemnation of Socrates by Athens. The singularity of this antagonism has allowed authors such as Miguel Abensour, Jacques Rancière and others to develop their thinking. They have done no more than update the conflict under the premise of a singular epochal principle, which, configured under the premise of democracy, contains those elements that the progressive abandonment of theological referents leads it to become a thought without referents; and society to organise itself under this premise.

Democracy should not be seen, under this conception associated with the fraternal principle, as a crystallised form, as an organisation of powers, but as an uninterrupted movement. A political action that opposes the established forms that prevent its realisation. Conflict becomes in this situation the major axis which, instead of impeding, underlines the specificity of living together.

It is true that the limitations of philosophical writing highlight the very impossibility of establishing a permanent link between the factual and the real. Simmel called this gap between the ever-living action and its products a crisis of culture. Democracy can therefore be thought of as having no alternative but itself in its permanent realisation. And there is no historical time beyond the present.

In short, the interpretative contribution of the Guyautist metaphor gives contemporary meaning to a situation which, seen with retrospective eyes, gives permanence to the revolutionary sentence of fraternity or death, undoubtedly intensely current, of the moment humanity is living. Lefortian democratic uncertainty takes on new impulses, not in the face of external dangers, but because of the very circumstances in which democracy is inscribed. And in the face of which, all that remains is the expression of that orphan fraternity that Guyau once brought to light and which, in the words of Hegel, takes the place of destiny, and therefore, it is an unending and persistent modernity that opens up like a breath of what Miguel Abensour has called the utopian impulse (Abensour, 2011).

4. THE ROLE OF EVENT IN THE PERMANENT CRISIS

Hence the importance of the events that Guyau experienced in 1871 for him. In contrast to the predictions of positivism, they escaped these predictions. No law reflected them, because they did not obey causal regularity. At the same time, Guyau experienced the establishment of contradictory and irreconcilable tendencies and motives. Faced with such an oppositional situation, Guyau nevertheless believed himself capable of providing an answer to the minds that were troubled by this uncertainty, by sketching the contours of a common ground, where thoughts could meet again.

Anomie, as Guyau conceived it, defines the singularity of the command we give ourselves and which does not limit us in the name of a commandment, but in the name of a particular principle superior to any commandment. The only valid rule is the one that takes into account the facts; that is, that we are beings endowed with meaning and thought and that this is the specificity, the reality and the essence of our nature.

Guyau's deployment of his anomic theory is based on three postulates. Firstly, the affirmation of an individual self, the sole judge of its own life. Guyau (1877) had imagined a society in the process of transformation in which the individual would be the principal agent of transformation. Kropotkin, who saw himself as a disciple of Guyau for this purpose, had thought that he found in Guyau's idea the reason for a society without obligation or sanction.

Guyau, secondly, conceives the idea according to which the social part present in each individual binds him indissolubly to the human species: the solidarity which, no doubt, he had lived in his personal experience during the days of the Commune. Thirdly, Guyau felt that history is a series of acts that sometimes allow us to overcome adversity, but also force us, at other times, to accept the inevitable. This is undoubtedly what happened to the Commune and to Guyau himself.

In short, Guyau's writings implicitly reject a whole way of conceiving political thought that Hobbesian thought of fear displays and defends. Against this Guyau reveals how the struggle for emancipation is on the side of risk and courage.

5. THE EVENT, TRANSIT TOWARDS SPACES OF "NON-RESIGNATION"

Thus, Badiou's idea of the event serves to relate post-foundationalism to the overcoming of the philosophical crisis and also of a certain moral

disengagement when it comes to do philosophy. The event is temporary and transformative, but only in the sphere of permanent crisis. In another context, conceived as free of permanent crisis, the event has no transformative capacity.

For Badiou, the philosophical way out of post-foundationality, to which Badiou devotes his work, has elements that bring him closer to the ideas that Jean-Marie Guyau put forward in his time, emerging from them the idea that links the permanent crisis with the event.

Let us take a risk, Badiou points out, with the following formula: the event is that multiple which, presenting itself, exhibits the same inconsistency that underlies situations, and overturns, by its irruption, the conceived classifications. The novelty of an event is that it interrupts the normal regime of description and knowledge, which is always based on the classification of the known, and imposes another kind of approach that admits that something, there, in that place, hitherto unnamed, happens consummately.

6. FIDELITY TO THE EVENT

A truth is such an infinite multiple, always to come and to make a hole in knowledge, the result of a fidelity related to the unlimited consequences of an event. Emancipated society, mathematised science, love subverting sexual difference by the invention of a new link between man and woman, artistic discipline called for the revolution of a form. These are the four types of truths, produced by the four procedures of politics, science, love and art, capable of producing, always unusually, a subject capable of making an exception to the ordinary regime of knowledge, opinion, egoism and boredom.

His philosophy seeks to expose and unfold the potential for innovation, revolution, invention and radical transfiguration of every situation. For, unlike many philosophers today, Badiou believes that we have not reached the end of philosophy, but that it must take one more step forward. To continue on that endless road from which we cannot step off if we do not want to abdicate our condition of humanity. For Badiou, philosophy is closely related to the condition of humanity, so its absence represents a hopeless return to animality.

But it will not be a question of constructing new “narratives”, these, in the sense of representing a metaphysical project, are certainly exhausted. Badiou’s work is, therefore, complex. His thought discusses various forms of knowledge and raises many questions about philosophy itself.

7. THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GUYAU AND BADIOU ON THE PERMANENT CRISIS

But it will not be a question of constructing new “narratives”, for these, in the sense of representing a metaphysical project, are certainly exhausted. Badiou’s work is therefore complex. His thought discusses various forms of knowledge and questions philosophy itself.

His extensive oeuvre can be classified in various ways depending on the criteria we use to do so. The most common is to point out three areas in which his work develops.

For Badiou, philosophy must be armed with the best discursive weapons to confront a discourse that is based on the seductive power of the established. Armed with powerful dialectical instruments, philosophy will have to establish a new regime of seduction. As one of the most seductive arguments of the established is the discourse of inequality, philosophy will have to uphold as the most abstract of its maxims that of absolute equality. To such an extent is this idea part of the essence of Badiou’s thought that everything that goes against it is considered by the author to be contrary to the truth. This has led him to transform the notion of truth in such a way that it obeys this egalitarian maxim, which is why he has given truth three attributes. The first is that it depends more on its emergence than on a structure. All truth is therefore new. It will be what Badiou will call the doctrine of the event. The second of the attributes is that every truth is universal, in a radical sense, an equal and anonymous for-all, this pure for-all constitutes it in its being. This will be its genericity.

And the third of its attributes is that truth constitutes its subject and not the other way round. For Badiou, it is not a question of a reconstruction of metaphysics, which has already made its end clear, with no possible return; rather, it is a question of the unknown that represents the redefinition of philosophy as a possible place of the unconditioned. Badiou does not fail to point out the difficulties involved. There are a number of reasons inscribed in the historical development of philosophy as such. The first is that we know that the human sciences cannot replace philosophy. Today we know that they cannot replace it because the human sciences do not allow us to think or treat singularity as such. Instead, they deal with things from the angle of the general or from a profile determined by statistical or empirical data, but their contribution to the singular is never shown.

Therefore, there is a first form of expression of the necessity of the philosophical from the angle of thinking the singular as such. The second reason is based on the confirmation that large, hypothetical, collective subjects, such as the proletariat, the people, etc., can no longer be

maintained. Hence the emergence of a second necessity which is directed towards the reformulation of the subject formulated in its own name in the face of the inhuman. It is no longer possible to speak from a redemptive collective subject. For the individual decision, without recourse to the figure of a collective subject, without religious, historical or spiritual support, the existence of a reference point is required, which serves as a fulcrum from which to raise the solitary decision.

From the moment when everyone is returned to his or her own singularity in the face of the inhuman, an unconditioned principle is necessary. The re-establishment of a category of truth, of a fixed point of view, of a possible discrimination from the point of view above all of the inhuman as such.

There is a third reason, which Badiou sees from the perspective of the increase in the planetary reactions of the religious, the racial or the irrational, which have come to occupy the space of the periclitated collective subjects. We will not know how to deal with this rise of the reactive, of that which makes return its condition of permanence, if we do not have the perspective of a philosophical vision of these elements.

There is a fourth and final reason, which Badiou arrives to, from the perspective that the world we inhabit is vulnerable. It is a world that functions well as long as it functions well, but which has serious problems in dealing with complicated situations, which easily falls apart and has great difficulty in grasping events positively.

8. THE TRANSITION TO THE POLITICAL, BETWEEN PERMANENT CRISIS AND EVENT

This is why, Badiou points out, we need a philosophy of the event, which, together with singularity, truth and reason, will produce a solid philosophical proposal for a world in a permanent state of perplexity. According to Badiou, none of the new schools that have emerged from the crisis of philosophy can yet provide this. In fact, it is a question of explaining Badiou's nodal and apparently paradoxical thesis: to know that there is only the history of the eternal, because only the eternal proceeds from the event. In other words, there is no history but truths, since all truth is strictly eternal, impossible to reduce to any relativism.

For Badiou there is undoubtedly a philosophical moment that is finished, but this very end presupposes a beginning. To end is to begin from what is finished, Badiou points out in his book *La philosophie, de nouvelle fois*, composed of texts that originally appeared in periodicals. For

this new beginning, he makes use of the hypothesis, just as Guyau did in his time. At a time when the great certainties have been exhausted, philosophising implies risk. Hypothesis is the risk in thought. In Badiou there is a special allusion to the conditions on the basis of which philosophising takes place. These are four in number: politics, science, love, and art. Each of these four conditions makes possible a perspective on the real and an opening towards the possible. In the field of each of them, philosophical intervention proves necessary in the face of the sudden orphanhood into which contemporary thought has fallen. This leads him to the formulation of an appalling radicality: “Without the Idea, all that remains is an animalised humanity” (Badiou, 2010b, p. 45).

And he points to the direction of philosophising:

If humanity does not work on its own unfolding, on its own invention, it has no choice but to occupy itself with carrying out its destruction. That which is not under the reign of the idea will be under the reign of death. The human species cannot innocently be animal. Man belongs to that species which needs the idea in order to reasonably inhabit its own world. (Badiou, 2010b, p. 45)

CONCLUSION

And why not think of the two metaphors, that of the Leviathan and that of the Platonic cavern, taken up by Badiou, to establish this transition between the permanent crisis exemplified by Guyau and the Platonic cavern by restoring, through the event, the idea, an example of the Guyau an rudder?

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