

The Eventualization of Political Thinking: From the Arab Revolutions to the Trump Era

Oscar Barroso
University of Granada, Spain

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Continental Philosophy Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

Recommended Citation

Barroso, Oscar. "The Eventualization of Political Thinking: From the Arab Revolutions to the Trump Era." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 20.4 (2018): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3361>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3361)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 20 Issue 4 (December 2018) Article 2

Óscar Barroso

"The Eventualization of Political Thinking: From the Arab Revolutions to the Trump Era"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol20/iss4/2>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 20.4 (2018)**

Special Issue **Processes of Subjectivation: Biopolitics and Politics of Literature**. Ed. Azucena G. Blanco
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol20/iss4/>>

Abstract: In his article, "The Eventualization of Political Thinking: From the Arab Revolutions to the Trump Era", Óscar Barroso maps out some of the most important contemporary philosophies of the Event: those of Rancière, Badiou, Hardt and Negri and Žižek. These philosophies of the event are defined as post-humanist political proposals that entrust emancipation not to the realization of anthropological ideas but to the emergence of difference. Examining the pessimistic interpretation that these authors make of what has happened since the events of 2011, the author questions whether too much trust has been placed in the supposed virtue of difference and, as a response, he proposes a reappropriation of humanism.

Óscar BARROSO

The Eventualization of Political Thinking. From the Arab Revolutions to the Trump Era

Introduction

In this study, some of the philosophies of the Event deemed most relevant at present will be analysed, compared and discussed, after locating their origins in the twentieth century, focusing particularly on the anthropological suppositions that they endorse and the criticism they make of humanism.

I define the *philosophy of the event* as that which contemplates the possibility of criticism and emancipation, individual or collective, from an ontology of difference as a normative value; where the promotion of difference, in as much as it implies the possibility of rupture with the existing order and the explosion of new possibilities, is virtuous in itself.

In as far as it is post-humanist, the philosophy of the event rejects those strategies of emancipation constructed from the anthropological perspective; in other words, from the proposal of ideas and ideals of humanity manifested in projects of individual and collective realization.

I will examine the relations that exist between the conceptions of the event in Rancière, Badiou, Hardt and Negri, and Žižek, particularly through the analysis of the ways in which they have considered real events, such as those that took place in 2011, from the Arab Spring to the Spanish anti-austerity movement (15-M), and simulacra of events, such as the rise of nationalist populism.

Underlining the pessimism with which these events and their results are described, I will question whether their failure is not due to an essential errancy inscribed into the very eventualization of a political reality. My hypothesis is, precisely, that in the basis of this errancy there is an ontological belief that does not have to be adopted: that difference is by itself the instigator of emancipation. My criticism of this belief is based on a vindication of humanism – albeit a humanism that recognizes the criticisms of the thinking on difference against traditional humanism. Indeed, in many cases, traditional humanism has been insensitive to difference, drowning diversity in totalizing authorities.

Post-history and event: from Kojève to Deleuze

In 1947, Kojève, in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, formulated the thesis of the "end of human Time or History" (32); of its consummation in the "Universal and homogeneous state" (90) that was born out of the ideals of the French Revolution and was made reality with the advance of the Napoleonic army, which homogenized constitutional law for all Europe. Moreover, Kojève linked the end of history with the "death of man" (245). After this death, only living bodies in human form remain, but deprived of Spirit, that is, of Time or creative power.

A few years later, in 1954, Carl Schmitt, in *The Unity of the World*, saw accurately that, even with the dramatism with which in the second half of the twentieth century the ideological confrontation between the "free" world and the communist world revealed itself, for the view of the techno-industrial unity of the world, this duality was only a moment of transition: whoever managed to survive that ideological struggle would be the sole master of the morrow, being able to plan and organize it in accordance with its political, economic and moral ideas.

That same year, Hannah Arendt, anticipating some of the central ideas of Foucauldian biopolitics, saw, in *The Human Condition*, a progressive mix between the space of social necessity and political freedom because of which politics ends up becoming a process of functionalization and normalization of the members of society. The final fulfilment of this normalization is mass society, "where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength" (Arendt 41). With this, a mutation of the concept of equality is produced: while in the *polis* it referred to the possibility of living among equals in the public sphere, where everyone manifested their individuality, now it pointed to the statistical normalization of behaviour. From here, Arendt shows, in a highly important turn for this study, the tendential powerlessness of the event: "The justification of statistics is that deeds and events are rare occurrences in everyday life and in history" (42). And she goes on to say: "events will more and more lose their significance, that is, their capacity to illuminate historical time. Statistical uniformity is by no means a harmless scientific ideal; it is the no longer secret political ideal of a society which, entirely submerged in the routine of everyday living, is at peace with the scientific outlook inherent in its very existence" (Arendt 43).

This situation, for Arendt, also constitutes the heart of the end of history: "What we traditionally call state and government gives place here to pure administration – a state of affairs which Marx rightly predicted as the 'withering away of the state,' though he was wrong in assuming that only a revolution could bring it about, and even more wrong when he believed that this complete victory of society would mean the eventual emergence of the 'realm of freedom'" (Arendt 45).

But as Kojève, Schmitt and Arendt denounce the powerlessness of the event in a post-historical world, others like Heidegger, Foucault and Deleuze believed that they had discovered in it new potentialities for emancipation, highlighting its aspect of breaking with the past: the becoming of history, the radical changes in it, would not be due to the observance of laws or the realization of plans, but rather the unpredictable opening of radical new possibilities. This idea is pinned on the Heideggerian distinction between technical reason and meditative thinking, and the reference to *Gelassenheit* as aptitude from which to attend to a new unveiling of being that makes it possible to overcome *Gestell* (Heidegger 46-57). But of more interest at the moment are above all the cases of Foucault and Deleuze.

In Foucault's last period, and thanks to the nexus between biopolitics and criticism of humanism, it is possible to see a transition from an anti-humanist (scientific) to a post-humanist (ethical) criticism, in which the subject gains ground with respect to knowledge and power.

In this context, Foucault does not hesitate to place himself in the ranks of the *Aufklärung*, provided that it is clearly separated from humanist aims, which would actually go against it. As long as the *Aufklärung* aims at a critical and transgressive relationship with the present, humanism seems like a kind of justifying technique of specific ideas: "Humanism serves to colour and to justify the conceptions of man to which it is, after all, obliged to take recourse" (Foucault, *What is* 44). Neither a specific idea of human nature nor the value judgement that justifies it are humanist. Faced with this technique of justification, the *Aufklärung* represents a type of "limit-attitude": "in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression" (Foucault, *What is* 45).

In "The Subject and Power," this justifying character of humanism takes the form of the effective exercise of power, which consists "in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (Foucault 221). Through the establishment of an idea of human nature, power can direct the behaviour of individuals and of groups. Humanism is, therefore, a technique of governance, of subjugation. And for Foucault, behind every idea of humanity this search for subjugation can be found.

But subjectivity is not only subjugation. If power acts by directing human possibilities, freedom is constituted as its very condition of possibility. It can only exercise power over free subjects, in other words, "individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized" (Foucault, *The Subject* 221). Power acts by adjusting this system of possibilities. But insofar as we are talking about free subjects, these subjects react against such adjustment. Every form of power involves a potential for struggle against its subjugating mechanisms. And in this potential for struggle, in this resistance, new types of subjectivity are created.

However, these new types of subjectivity are not constituted as new ideas of humanity. Obviously, Foucault is not interested in recovering a humanist notion of subject: here, subjectivity is constituted rather as a reflective practice of freedom. But how can one be a free subject without knowing what one is? For Foucault, it is a question of priorities: "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are" (*Subject* 2016). In reality, Foucault feared that a new propositional consideration would end in a new subjugation.

Deleuze, for his part, calls attention to a transition from disciplinary societies to "control societies" (*Negotiations* 178). Disciplinary centres disappear as the subjects begin to interiorize the practices of inclusion and exclusion. In Foucault's terms, it is a question of the transition from discipline to biopower – a power constituted as effective dominion over all life.

What is interesting for the purposes of this essay is that at the same time that a new power unifies and incorporates all the elements of social life, it reveals a milieu of maximum plurality and uncontainable singularization: the milieu of the *event*. Our era, through the very configuration of power, entails an explosion of events. The forms of singularization that arise in the milieus of resistance to biopower take the form of an event.

Yet Deleuze, thanks to his rich conceptualization of life, goes further than Foucault in his ontological insight of the event, shedding new light on considering the possible not from the *telos*, from finality, but from a conception of life as virtual development. What is virtually possible rejects transcendence; it moves always on a plane of immanence, without betraying the immanent development of life (Deleuze,

Pure 25-34). Life, one could say, is eventual. The virtual constitutes a real possibility, but which only exists as a form of expression. The virtual is performative possibility. Here the possibles are not given beforehand, rather they must be created in the 'eventing' itself. What is more, preconceived answers annul the event.

The event reveals something intolerable in those possibilities established beforehand and opens up spaces of experimentation and creation that signal new possibilities. An event is more an opening up of possibilities than a solution for problems. It is not so much a question of developing a system of possibilities as of showing that "another world is possible".

And this was precisely the slogan of the now distant event of the "Battle in Seattle", which was symbolized as the first response to globalization. According to the conceptual outline of Foucault and Deleuze, what was produced there was a mutation of subjectivity, of the way of feeling: what had until then been endured was no longer. In Seattle, neither was there a historical subject nor was a class struggle at the forefront of expression. Instead there was an attempt to express new possibilities, new forms of life, and to find the way to make them effective and carry them out. In terms of the Marxist maxim, Seattle did not consider the problems it could solve but problems that still had no solution yet were shockingly evident.

Let us note that Deleuze's reading of the event is diametrically opposed to that proposed by Arendt. For the latter, events are tendentially powerless, whereas for Deleuze they constitute the very site of emancipation. The philosophies of the event that I will analyse below shift paradoxically between Deleuze's euphoria for the event and Arendt's despair.

Out of this double view of the event, we can ask ourselves a series of questions: do those phenomena that today are characterized as events by part of the intellectual left really constitute new possibilities for emancipation or are they merely tremors incapable of breaking the crust of the political and economic reality? Are 15-M or the Occupy Wall Street movement anything more than reformist projects of a history already settled? Can the Arab Spring be reduced to a demand to be admitted into post-history? A depressing fact can, nevertheless, be confirmed: the hope of emancipation with which this decade opened, thanks to various world events, is being replaced by a profound despair, the greatest expression of which is the sensation of the advent in the western world of nationalist or neo-fascist populism.

The event in current thought.

Rancière defines the event as the possibility of breaking habits: the *ethos* constructed from the structures of power and that impedes emancipation. The event peters out in this rupture. In other words, it does not involve a propositional, "propositive" moment, something like a new emancipatory habit: "And (...) it is not their ethos, their 'way of being', that disposes individuals to democracy but a break with this ethos" (Rancière, *The Philosopher* 101). All strategy requires expert knowledge, but the defence of democracy by Rancière starts from the unequivocal separation between the milieu of the police (where even this knowledge would be discovered) and the milieu of the political, the specific space of emancipation.

Apart from this, the strategy that Rancière specifically develops in order to allow the event that breaks with the order of the possibilities established by the system is of an aesthetic character. This is what can be seen, for example, in his references to new workers' movements, whose aim is to break the positions of the bodies established by the habits of power (Rancière, *The Philosopher* 57-69).

The part excluded in the distribution (*partage*) breaks the habits that define its exclusion. For Rancière, all the democratic movements that have been observed in recent times, from the Zapatista uprisings to the occupying of squares in the West, obey this logic: they try to create a new idea of people overcoming the exclusion entailed in the established habits and the distribution of the sensible. All those movements shared the same space: that of those excluded by the oligarchic system.

Likewise, Rancière explains the advent of neofascism as failure when it comes to building a people, insofar as it comes to occupy the place of a people that cannot represent itself.

However, and against Rancière, is the failure in the constitution of the people surmountable from its unequivocal separation from the political and the police? If we understand politics merely as the rupture of constituted habits and all knowledge falls on the side of the police, in the hands of an oligarchy that considers that politics can be reduced to management and the community can be founded on inequality, what real possibilities do those excluded from being constituted as a people have of institutionalizing the event?

Badiou, for his part, defines the event through opposition to being. Being is constituted by the ontological order of the real for which everything that there is can be reduced to a determined and ordered situation, in such a way that what escapes the scheme of being, its "excess", is invisible. This means that for this scheme there are no systemic limitations, but only local problems that can be overcome. It is precisely when this excess is visualized that we find ourselves before an event. This implies that all events are anti-system.

The event, given that it refers to something that did not exist for being, arises as though out of nothing; like something inexplicable from the situation of being. Although when it arises, Badiou says, it reveals the Truth of this situation; it sheds light on what the situation wanted to repress.

Badiou speaks of Truth with a capital letter – diametrically opposed to the postmodern idea of a world of conjectures, fragmentation and prudence. But he is also conscious of the dangers of strong truths in politics and, particularly, of the danger that is found behind the paradigmatic form of failure of the event: the Truth-Event does not have an alternative to the existing social order and, aware of the danger of ending up being betrayed, enters into a dynamic of destructive terror in pursuit of a purifying intention.

Badiou means to overcome this terror by demanding that the revolution, sustained by the event, practise subtraction in terms of the power of the State. Emancipation remains as a pure idea, as a prescription. That is, in order to sustain the purity of the Communist Idea, one must forego inscribing the event into a positive social order, aside from local political interventions (such as the abolition of the death penalty in France). This is a strategy similar to that developed by Rancière through the unequivocal distinction between police order and political act.

Protecting the Truth of the event is also at the basis of his moralization. In Badiou there is a Manichaeism tendency to place the event in the purity of the good; in opposition is *l'être*, being – the place of evil. In the processes of subjectivation this Manichaeism is represented by confrontation between the noble citizen that fights for equality and the corrupt bourgeois that only seeks their own benefit.

However, though this is the theory to which Badiou has devoted two monumental works, when one turns to his latest, minor works and to his journalism, the event acquires new powers, with the risk that implies of losing the previous precautions regarding the truth of the event. Particularly meaningful is his 2011 book, *The Rebirth of History*. The event of the Arab Spring is not residual, it does not aim at small interventions: rather, he discerns in it the possibility of an awakening of history.

In general, he understands the events of 2011 as a response to the "retrograde consummation of the essence of capitalism" (Badiou, *The Rebirth* 14). Capitalism had been halted in the attempt to respond to Communism in the 20th century, but when capital is the sole ideology remaining, it can, at last, fulfil its dreams of extreme and violent inequality.

The fall of the Berlin Wall entailed a profound change in the objective situation of the world and also in subjectivity. For two centuries, public opinion had felt that there were two paths for the destiny of mankind: the liberal and the socialist. But since the 1980s, it has seemed that only the path of neoliberalism is practicable. This is why Thatcher said not that it was a good solution but the *only* solution.

To be precise, the events of 2011 can be understood as an awakening of history insofar as they reject this resignation and try to make the idea of communism effective again.

For Badiou, this awakening is still in a latent state in the disturbances in the West, but it is perfectly visible in the Arab countries. In any case, here, too, Badiou's optimism is curtailed: such an awakening encompasses a new ideological context that affects new historical possibilities whose destiny is still uncertain. Nonetheless, our future depends on its result: the revitalization of the idea of communism as an open, shared and universally practicable form of emancipation.

Can we do anything in the West? Can we, for example, show that the Arab struggles are not asking for liberal democracy; in the language of Fukuyama, they are not knocking at the doors of post-history. What they are demanding is a new idea of communism.

The success of the event, otherwise, requires organization and discipline. But how can this be achieved if one must necessarily reject both the "party" and attaining State structures? Nonetheless, for Badiou the structured event has a limiting power on the power of the State and can even utilize it in its favour in specific situations. There are clear proximities with Hardt and Negri's multitude here, but before moving on to them, let us look briefly at how Badiou analyses the "event in a negative sense" of Donald Trump's rise to power.

In some way, Trump's success is the reverse of the failure of the 2011 events, of powerlessness when it came to reviving the idea of communism (Badiou, *Reflections*). The citizen, desperate – feeling compelled to return to the resignation imposed by oligarchical power – searches for the solution in the

darkness, in the promises of vulgar and violent demagogues. The efforts of resistance in 2011 did not succeed in opening other avenues. Badiou's final diagnosis is not very far from Rancière's: the impossibility of finding a big Idea, in which the global unification of all the forms of resistance and invention might take place – an idea that mediates between the individual subject and the collective political and historical task – leaves a void that is filled by popular fascism.

Badiou's answer to this problem is expressed in Hegelian terms: our failure is to have been incapable of expressing the authentic contradiction. We have only grasped the apparent: that between Trump and Clinton; between demagogy and oligarchy. But we have not seen the authentic: that between Trump and Sanders; between darkness and rationality. The lesson of this terrible false event is that we must create, through continued denunciation, the environment so that the true contradiction can become evident.

Although, in contrast to Rancière, Badiou connects the event with the truth, he leaves the debate regarding the idea of communism undetermined; as something which has to be given form in the event itself. The political truth is absolutely eventual. Revealing the true contradiction, we can prepare it, but no more.

For Hardt and Negri, the event's place has, in terms of power, not the form of confrontation but of an active and reconstructive exodus. In the "multitude", they find an alternative space and time to those of power from which to construct emancipating habits.

But how is the event produced in the multitude? Hardt and Negri do not share the aesthetic solution or the Manichaean view of Badiou – which leads him to postulate a moral goodness in every disturbance. The make-up of the multitude requires political organization, strategies that encourage emancipatory habits.

The habits that Hardt and Negri aim to foster are those that make it possible to find a physical and common (neither transcendental nor individualist) formula of subjectivity. Basing their concept on American pragmatism, they maintain that habits constitute a fundamental tool for understanding how subjectivity develops in the milieu of quotidian experience, practices and behaviour. Habits break the unreal dualism between the fixed laws of nature and subjective freedom; they are what we continually produce and what is found at the basis of all our actions; that which finalizes our nature and acts as the basis to life and creative capacity (Hardt & Negri, *Multitude* 196-202).

Knowledge becomes, in this regard, a fundamental tool – not only in the obvious sense that the optimum decision that the strategy entails requires knowledge, but also in that it constitutes a fundamental moment of the appropriate habituation of the multitude: "People have been trained in apathy and ignorance, encouraged to suppress their appetite for democratic participation and to regard social systems as so complex that only experts can understand them" (Hardt & Negri, *Declaration* 63).

Could not this knowledge be used, therefore, to construct out of the multitude suitable ideas of humanity to direct the action? It is precisely here, in humanism, where Hardt and Negri break with American pragmatism. This is a break that even makes them question whether it would not be more accurate to talk of performance – insofar as they consider the absolute immanence of practices – rather than of habits as the core notion of the production of the common.

Although Hardt and Negri have taken a fundamental step with regard to the approach of Rancière or Badiou, they stay within the limits of the paradigm of the event, which while in their case does not hinder the search for new habits that constitute the multitude, does compel them to do so from a perspective absolutely interior to the immanence of the bodies. The strategies are constructed as practices and not as proposals of ideas; they are not planned, rather they happen in an unexpected or unforeseeable way. Power has won the battle of the possible, compelling the multitude to move within the space of waiting for the event. There is not even a glimmer of a world to come, nor of the idea of the governing subjectivity.

Hardt and Negri consider that the events of 2011 support their analysis. When one pays attention to those social movements, one discovers that manifestos are obsolete: "the multitudes, through their logics and practices, their slogans and desires, have declared a new set of principles and truths" (Hardt & Negri, *Declaration* 4).

But it is not simply a question of finishing with the intellectual elites, it is not about whether ideas pass from them to the multitude. The new social movements do not require ideas, insofar as their "visions" are constituted through desires and performative practices. One could say that this is the form in which the multitude happens; the form in which it avoids the blackmail of "common sense" generated by power and its limitations on the possible, at the same time that it enables the development of a new common sense out of which new meanings can be constructed for freedom and the relation with the common.

The events of 2011 were characterized by breaking with what common sense dictated. According to common sense, to exit the crisis one had to trust in the decisions of the dominant powers in order to avoid greater disasters, but the response was a set of events at the global level that were apparently disconnected – singular struggles that were responding to specific problems. But they actually maintained channels of communication through which the local battles and the global battle remained united without contradiction. It is true, however, that, insofar as nobody spoke for those who were in the struggles, these were of low intensity.

Hardt and Negri see common characteristics in these struggles: first, a strategy of camping and occupying. The anti-globalization movements that began in Seattle were nomadic in character. Conversely, now they are strongly rooted in local problems and occupy local spaces. Second, they share internal organization as multitude. Both Tahrir Square and Puerta del Sol lacked leaders, headquarters and central committees. They spread like swarms traversed by horizontal mechanisms of organization and democratic practices in decision-making. Third, all these struggles, although in different forms, were struggles for the common – struggles for social justice and against the rule of property, both private and public (struggles against State control). Žižek, meanwhile, defines the event in the following terms: "something shocking, out of joint that appears to happen all of a sudden and interrupts the usual flow of things; something that emerges seemingly out of nowhere, without discernible causes, an appearance without solid being as its foundation" (Žižek, *Event* 7).

Žižek distinguishes the true event from the mere appearance of one: First, the true event attacks the very foundations of the capitalist order, something that the simulacrum does not (thus, for example, Trump makes the immigrants responsible in order to conceal the true contradiction). Second, the true event emerges from the "vacuum" of the situation, from the symptomatic element that has no proper place in situation, whereas the simulacrum of the event repudiates the symptom. Third, only in the event does the vacuum resound, the impulse of death, the radical negativity that momentarily suspends the order of being.

It is no surprise that, from this conceptualization of the event, Žižek considers the emancipatory powers of the event in an ambiguous way: this implies a level of exigency so high that we continuously run the double risk of falling into the abyss or remaining imprisoned in powerlessness. Even when, upon taking power, it fails, the situation must not be wasted. The tragedy of politics is that there will never be a good moment to take power: the opportunity will always present itself at the worst moment (economic disaster, environmental catastrophe), when the ruling class has lost its legitimacy and fascism threatens. Philosophy cannot continue falling into the trap set by neoliberal ideology in its effort to make us believe that it is impossible to abolish its rules of the game. Žižek reminds us that Lacan replaced the phrase "everything is possible" with "the impossible happens". It is the work of the intellectual, and therefore of the philosopher, to act immediately (to overcome the powerless inertia in which it had become mired), even without knowing very well what must be done (Žižek, *A Permanent* 94), because what is fundamental is not to let up in rejecting an order that is simply unbearable.

This is the posture that Žižek maintained in a more or less uniform manner until 2012, the year in which he wrote: "in order to make the step from reformism to radical change, we must pass through the zero-point of abstaining from acts of resistance which only keep the system alive. In a strange kind of release, we have to cease to worry about other people's worries, and withdraw into the role of a passive observer of the system's circular self-destructive movement" (Žižek, *The Year* 109).

In my opinion, the analysis that he undertook of the 2011 events and their later downfall weighs heavily in this pessimistic turnaround. Broadly speaking, Žižek has serious doubts about whether these "events" can be brought about again in reality as new possibilities with regard to the current global order.

The outlook at the present proves discouraging. The mechanisms that power utilizes to undo, neutralize and convert the event into a possibility within the system are practically insurmountable. The question "But what do you want?" that was insistently asked in 2011 of the people who congregated in public spaces, could be translated as "'Say it in my terms or shut up!'" (Žižek, *The Year* 84).

All this leads Žižek to a paralysing question: "how to fight the system without contributing to its enhanced functioning?" (Žižek, *The Year* 3).

To this must be added that Žižek maintains a rather negative conception of movements of the multitude. These movements either cannot be understood as authentic events or they are but only in some particular sense, that is, in an ambiguous way. Thus, the student struggles can be considered as struggles for the upkeep of the privileges of those who receive a bonus salary in contrast to the minimum salary, or as self-satisfied movements, or those just done for the fun of it. Žižek quotes the statement of an individual in the New York movement: "They are asking us what is our program. We have no program. We are here to have a good time." (Žižek, *The Year* 76).

As regards the disturbances in London, Žižek is simply against cataloguing them as an event, instead, he says that this is really a *rabble*: "referring to those outside the organized social sphere, prevented from participating in social production, who are able to express their discontent only in the form of "irrational" outbursts of destructive violence, or what Hegel called 'abstract negativity'" (Žižek *The Year* 53).

In some cases, the movements of the multitude, far from giving place to forms of life that are alternative to the system, end up becoming a kind of "idealized ideological supplement" (Žižek, *The Year* 15). In others, faced with the awareness of the impossibility of a real alternative to the system, they turn into an angry mob, a "revolt without revolution" (Žižek, *The Year* 84).

Lastly, although Žižek tends particularly to show the eventual traits of the Arab spring, he notes their tendency to Islamofascism.

Žižek seems to find himself at a dead end: on the one hand, he knows that the system does not allow the construction of alternatives other than itself, which compels him to embrace a miraculous notion of the event; but, on the other hand, he believes that without concrete, well-defined alternatives, social movements tend more towards fascist or self-destructive forms than to a productive multitude. For this reason, one can see many disturbances in our global world, but none of them is capable of transforming into event. The transition from one to the other requires the creation of a commitment of the collective subject to a new, universal, emancipatory project – a patient work of societal restructuring. But there are no projects for such a transition. Never have intellectuals felt such impotence when it comes to finding a path that shows a possible direction. The exit that I have been pointing to is clear: abandon all possibility of resistance; cease resisting. If the possibility of an outside to power does not exist and if every resistance strategy, of counter-power, is destined to fail from within, passive contemplation seems to be the only option.

Obviously, the theoretical attitude is not carried out in intellectual contemplation but has a practical meaning in that it is based on the belief that the system cannot expand indefinitely: "A new war in the Middle East or an economic chaos or an extraordinary environmental catastrophe can swiftly change the basic coordinates of our predicament. We should fully accept this openness, guiding ourselves on nothing more than ambiguous signs from the future" (Žižek, *The Year* 135).

In *Trouble in Paradise* (2014), a new way to action is observed, one that is very interesting insofar as it is based on a reduction of requirements regarding the true event. Now what is asked is that, simply, the event activate emancipatory and democratic dynamics, otherwise subscribing to Badiou's hypothesis of the communist idea: an authentic event cannot have as its aim the overthrow of capitalism, but the far more modest task of revealing its inconsistency in specific areas; opening itself to the global through its solidarity with other struggles.

In this book, there are also elements that explain his celebration of the triumph of Trump and which move him closer to Badiou's standpoint.

Obviously, Žižek has no doubts that the success of the populist right implies an ethical regression, but this regression has to be seen as the reverse of the explosive development of capitalism: they are two sides of the same coin that put emancipation, the idea of communism, in danger. And if the reaction against Trump gave rise to the awakening of a more radicalized left that enabled it to rescue its legacy? And if a false event became the condition of possibility of a real event? Pseudofascism can make us wake up from our utilitarian misery and with it open a possibility of emancipation.

Tackling the "Trump problem" in a cold way, we can declare that, broadly speaking, Trump is better than Clinton for a radical project of emancipation.

But what if such a project does not in the end occur? Who is worse? In this case, Žižek concludes, paraphrasing Stalin: "They are both worse!" (Žižek, *On Clinton*). Trump is worse in as much as he ensures a turn to the right and represents the degradation of public morals. Yet at least he promises change. Clinton is worse because she wants to make it be seen that not changing anything is desirable. In this situation, it is better to choose the "worse" that means change.

Once again, with Badiou, at this juncture Žižek bets on Sanders. We cannot forget that Trump feeds off the same anger as Sanders. Popular anger, however, is amorphous and can be redirected. The liberals are highly aware of this, which is why what they really fear is not a swing to the right but social change in itself.

It may be that Trump entails a great danger for humanity, but what is certain is that the left will only mobilise through this type of catastrophic threat. As Mao would say: "Everything under heaven is in utter chaos; the situation is excellent" (Žižek, *On Clinton*).

A defence of humanism against the uncertainty of the event.

By way of conclusion, I would like to make a vindication of humanism, insofar as I consider that the philosophy of the event is based on its negation.

A statement such as this can seem paradoxical if we consider, along with Foucault, the fact that the term "humanism" works as a type of label that aims to endow whoever touches it with dignity. We could ask ourselves, like Foucault, whether humanism is nothing other than a tool that serves to try to justify, dignify and, in the end, to hegemonize the most diverse conceptions of human nature. We could thus understand humanism as the set of rhetorical strategies that aim to make a specific conception of this nature dominant.

Post-humanism could thus be defined as the attempt to consider human affairs from the perspective of the rejection of the conceptualization of human nature. Again, as per Foucault, it would be not so much a question of trying to know what we are as of freeing ourselves from those chains that a certain conception of human nature forces us into: we will only follow that path of emancipation insofar as we disrupt the attempts to define our nature.

But what is the thought horizon out of which destruction can be made the essence of emancipation? In my opinion, the horizon of the event. This is what makes it so difficult to comprehend the paralysis of the event, the terrible problem that implies its institutionalization.

The renunciation of the conceptualization of human nature, the disdain for anthropology, implies the impossibility of considering human problems and of the solutions to these problems in terms of ideas and ideals of humanity. The anthropological focus would try to consider these problems and solutions out of the productive debate around ideas – What is it? – and ideals – What should it be or become? – of the human being. The post-humanist focus sees the problem in the identitarian character of these ideas and sees the solution from its destruction. I write "from" because destruction in itself cannot be the solution. This must be accompanied by a new beginning of generation. Difference, in the philosophy of the event, thus has a critical and normative value: it is virtuous in itself.

The event can therefore be defined as salvation destined by difference. Obviously, this implies that the event cannot be planned; it escapes human intention, it escapes human projection and construction of finality. In fact – and here lies the heart of the matter – the event could be fomented by any incident that destabilized the status quo, however terrifying it may seem.

The task of the intellectual, therefore, is not defined using the parameters of a philosophy of praxis – using the expression beloved of Gramsci – but from sheltered contemplation in the theoretical heights, from which they declare "the worse, the better", as only uncertainty can turn desperation into hope.

But what if post-humanism were the product of theoretical slackness? On the one hand, it opposes humanism by conceiving it as an insubstantial rhetorical strategy used by power to hegemonize certain ideas of the human being; but on the other hand, it rejects philosophical anthropology because it sees a humanist aspiration within it. Having said that, in no way can anthropology be characterized as a rhetorical discipline without justification. Undoubtedly, anthropology, like all forms of knowledge, including ontology itself, is loaded with ideological elements and can be utilized as a way of legitimizing power, but this does not take even a jot of dignity away from its fundamental objective: philosophical reflection around the ideas and ideals of humanity with the aim of acting critically and constructively on the present.

Works Cited

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The U of Chicago P, 1998.

Badiou, Alain. *The Rebirth of History*. Verso, 2012.

---. "Reflections on the Recent Election." <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2940-alain-badiou-reflections-on-the-recent-election>

Deleuze, Gilles. *Negotiations*. Columbia UP, 1995.

---. *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*. Urzone, 2001.

Heidegger, Martin. *Discourse on Thinking*, Harper & Row, 1966.

Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power". *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. By Hulbert L.

Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, The U of Chicago P, 1982, 208-228.

Foucault, Michel. "What is Enlightenment?". *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rabinow, Pantheon Books, 1984, 32-50.

Hardt, Michael & Negri, Antonio. *Declaration*, Argo Navis, 2012.

---. *Multitude*. The Penguin Press, 2004.

Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Cornell UP, 1980.

Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. U of Minnesota P, 1998.

---. *The Philosopher and His Poor*. Duke UP, 2004.

Schmitt, Carl. "Die Einheit der Welt" (The unity of the world). *Staat, Grossraum, Nomos: Arbeiten aus den Jahren*

1916-1969, Duncker & Humblot, 1995, 496-512.

Zižek, Slavoj. "On Clinton, Trump and the Left's Dilemma". *In These Times*, Nov 2016,

http://inthesetimes.com/features/Zižek_clinton_trump_lesser_evil.html.

---. *Event*, Penguin Books, 2014.

---. *Living in the End Times*, Verso, 2010.

---. "A Permanent Economic Emergency". *New Left Review*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2010, pp. 85-95.

---. *Trouble in Paradise*, Verso, 2014

---. *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, 2012.

Author's profile: Óscar Barroso is professor of philosophy at the University of Granada. Over the last few years he has undertaken research whose aim is to show the anthropological presuppositions of contemporary political thought. This is evidenced in his writings: "Immanence: a person. Dialogue with Roberto Esposito" (2014), "Power and Virtue: Humanism after the death of man" (2015), "From action to contemplation: Reflections on the event in Žižek" (2017). Email: obarroso@ugr.es.