

## AESTHETICS OF GLOBAL EVENT

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It: *Estetica dell'evento globale*. Fr: *Esthétique de l'événement global*; Germ. *Ästhetik der globalen Ereignisse*; Sp. *Estética del acontecimiento global*. The notion of "Aesthetics of Global Event" offers a framework to question both the way in which contemporary events appear and the ways in which we participate in them. It is a useful tool in the field of contemporary reflections on ecological, political, and social issues, as it invites us to deeply question the modalities of our vision when we are immersed in a "globalized" world. The idea of the "event" is to be understood from a historical and historiographical point of view, not according to a superficial event-based view of history once condemned by the *Annales'* historians, but in light of the long-term configurations in which change occurs, even when history appears to flow slowly. The COVID-19 pandemic, 9/11, and the Anthropocene are examples of contemporary events that involve a particular status of visibility, the revelation of a common fragility, a spatial and temporal ambiguity, and an indecision about their localization and the possibility of participating in them. They imply a need for a long-term thinking about complexity in times of emergency. This thinking is rooted in problems of perception and visibility in which the adjective "global" should be understood in a critical sense. On the one hand, globality acquires a central role due to the media, economic and diasporic flows in which contemporary events take shape, and which seem to affect everyone, everywhere on the globe. On the other, the term "global" also indicates a "metaphysics of the globe" (Latour 2017; Sloterdijk 2014), the ideology of a totalizing spherical vision, closed in on itself. Both conceptions of the "global" can be critically interrogated when considered in conjunction with the problem of the visibility of contemporary events. Events like the ecological crisis or pandemics raise questions about other modes of vision that, behind their "global" component, seek "terrestrial and planetary" aspects, implicit in our ways of inhabiting the world. The aesthetics of global events raises the question of how we see contemporary events. The ethical and political questions "How should we act?" and "What decisions should we make?" are thus linked to other unavoidable ones, such as "What do I see? What events do I perceive?" and "How can I take part in them?"

Although the notion of “event” appears in 20th-century French philosophy (Deleuze, Foucault, Balibar, Althusser, Badiou), it is commonly considered that, in the field of the human sciences, it lost prominence with the rise of the influence of the *Annales*, and the relegation of the event-based history to a secondary position relative to the long history of geographical, socio-economic, and cultural changes. Outside the historical field, phenomenological reflections have addressed the question of the event through the reading of Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis*, and through its critique (Romano 2009). However, it is difficult to understand contemporary events through this Heideggerian notion, as the German philosopher explicitly refused to relate it to lived experience, historiography, or politics, and intended to speak only of the original event of truth. Instead, in order to understand events of our time, we must return precisely to the *Annales*. Fernand Braudel used the metaphor of fireflies seen one night in the state of Bahia to talk about events: their brightness, although great, was too fleeting to really illuminate the surrounding landscape (Braudel 1958). This question of visibility must be taken seriously, especially considering that Braudel’s notions of long duration and plurality of historical times are today central to rethinking the methods of historiography in the face of global transformations (Chakrabarty 2021).

The study of global events must therefore begin as an *aesthetic of global events*, enquiring into the traits of their visibility:

1) *the global event is based on a media and visual component, which tends to exploit contemporary technologies that allow a shared and live broadcast vision of the event, or even its spectacularization.* An example is the event of September 11, 2001, characterised by extreme visibility due to its transmission by the media around the world. Mauro Carbone wrote about the event status of images: “Clearly, if it had not been for its images, 9/11 would have been no more and no less than another event. But all this, rather than encouraging us to downplay its seriousness, should help us to consider the full extent of the intrinsic political significance of our aesthetic-sensitive relationship with the world” (Carbone 2021: 114.) This aesthetic-sensitive relationship cannot be dismissed in a serious study of historical events and is, on the contrary, essential to understanding the historical and political domain. The “mediation” by television broadcast is itself part of the event, broadening the sense of participation in it and producing plural forms of engagement. If we consider the global pandemic event, we discover a visibility guided and shaped by the curves and graphs broadcast on television through daily bulletins or on the internet through dashboards (Borradori 2024). These graphs provided a paradigm of vision based on several parameters and their organization: deaths, contagions, hospitalizations. Yet, the way these parameters “show” the event refers to different temporalities, if we think of the latency between infection, diagnosis and death, and this representation evolved throughout the pandemic alongside testing capacities. The media component of contemporary events needs to be studied in depth, and we must beware of the illusion of transparency inherent in media spectacularization (Alloa & Citton 2018; Carbone & Lingua 2023): we are not in the presence of the event itself, but always of sensible mediations of the event. These mediations are studied by an aesthetics of global events.

2) All these considerations lead us to the ambiguity linked to the extreme visibility of global events. This ambiguity has an impact on our vision, understanding and participation in them. Let's again take the pandemic as an example: where does it really take place? In the bodies infected by the virus, in behaviors, in lockdowns, in the data showed on television or on the internet, in the photographs of lorries carrying coffins in Bergamo or the mass burials in New York? It seems we should find traces of events, plural signs and manifestations of it, and that the event lies at the intersection of different perspectives. The symptoms we see commonly appear as manifestations, but they are also, following the ancient Greek *συνπίπτω* from which *σύμπτωμα* is derived, the fact of "falling together", as soldiers fall in battle, to *meet*, but also to *occur*, to *coincide*, to *happen*. *σύμπτωμα* then means "anything that happens, a chance, occurrence" but also a mischance and the symptom of diseases. In the global pandemic, the symptoms are a part of the event: they are symptoms of the general event, just like the deaths, the transformation of social behaviors, etc. The coexistence of all these "symptoms" creates a difficulty in localizing the event in space and in time. These difficulties also have an impact on our practical conduct. Who is participating in the pandemic? The infected bodies? The people confined to their homes? The workers in all sectors who continued to go out and take action? Sentences like "Flatten the curve" or "Stay at home" invite us to actively participate in an event whose time and location are uncertain. The aesthetics of global events studies this entanglement between visibility, fragility and uncertain participation.

3) So far, we haven't used global warming as an example, but this is precisely what we refer to when we speak of the extreme fragility revealed by events. Like other global events, global warming has ambiguous manifestations and locations: where is it? Can we really make it visible and share it through media flows? When forest fires provide shocking images on television news around the world, we are surely witnessing something of the long event that is global warming. But isn't this just a small part of a larger event? Using graphs, scientists have identified a "Great Acceleration", after the Second World War, in the evolution of several parameters that impact the physical and chemical structure of Earth (Steffen *et al.* 2008). This leaves open the ambiguity of visibility, as well as that of participation: anyone who suffers from a flood or a natural disaster is just as much a participant in the global warming event as anyone who drives a car or, more simply, consumes goods. All this ambiguity, in vision and location, reveals something else: the immense fragility of human and non-human beings confronted with a long-term event such as global warming. In the terms of Anthropocene studies, humans are confronted with a geological time, and, given their impact on the geological strata, they must learn their profound connection with the non-humans who inhabit this same world (Bonneuil & Fressoz 2016). This shared fragility is also expressed in the event of 9/11 – for example, in what Carbone calls the fact of "being dead together", of witnessing, through the shared visibility of the event, the same shipwreck (Carbone 2021), which could also enable political courses of action not based on the rhetoric of war and violence (Butler 2004). But this fragility is also what leads to the "pre-mediation" of the event, as Richard Grusin rightly notes: after 9/11, television channels began preparing viewers for the trauma of an event still to come, by showing and anticipating the worst (Grusin 2010), thus attempting to neutralize this fragility. This fragility is, of course, also the fragility of the pandemic, of human

bodies pierced by biological virality, but also of the social body and the relationships that run through it.

In light of the three traits outlined here, an aesthetics of global events must therefore consider the extreme spectacularization of the event through contemporary media devices, but it must also take into account the ambiguities of the vision, its difficulties, the illusion of transparency, as well as the fragilities inherent in inhabiting a globalized common world. An aesthetics of global events also points to a series of issues yet to be addressed. From an ontological point of view, one may ask to what extent these transformations are related to the status of the object, to its crisis (Timothy Morton for example considers global warming as a "hyper-object": see Morton 2013) or how parts of events intertwine, composing complex configurations (Morton 2019). The common fragility we discover raises questions about shared inhabitation in a globalized world and in the face of catastrophic events. Learning to inhabit alongside "chthonian" entities, hybridizing with the non-human, and making theories by recounting unseen co-habitations (Haraway 2016) may all be ways to approach contemporary events. An aesthetics of global events also calls for a shift in historiographical approach, which should set aside the division between natural history and human history and understand these two together (Chakrabarty 2021), and in anthropological thought, which must consider the cultural dimensions of global flows (Appadurai 1995, Tsing 2005). In short, an aesthetics of global events opens up both a critical engagement with the notion of the global and a critical reflection on the planetary implications of our dwelling within the "global condition".

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