



**SOUNDING THE
EVENT**

ESCAPADES IN
DIALOGUE AND
MATTERS OF
ART, NATURE
AND TIME

Yve Lomax

E.B. TAURIS

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A little note

For some time now I have been bothered by the question of what constitutes an event. Yes, I have been bothered and the bother has made me prick up my ears to listen out for theories of the event. I have been listening, but I've also been looking, and in listening and looking I have found that the bother has brought wonder to me. Oh yes, the question of what constitutes an event has made me wonder, made me wonder about time, about theory, about sound and many other things besides. There is no denying it, the question of the event has stirred my thinking.

A difficult beginning

From the look on her face I can tell she knows it isn't going to be a good start. I could say it is written all over her face. Or is it? Maybe there is nothing to read, and perhaps it is this that seems so telling. And before I can tell of what is to happen next an old expression of my mother's butts in.

—'She? Who is she — the cat's mother?'

Once again I am being told that it is disrespectful to say she without first having spoken a proper name. To be spoken of as she, as *merely* she, is degrading. *She* is no more than the cat's mother. But wait, doesn't this imply that the feminine pronoun 'she', along with the cat's mother, are to be ranked lower and as such regarded with disdain? Disdain may be too strong a word but, with all due respect, I do not find the same implication with the masculine pronoun 'he' and the dog's father.

Oh cats and dogs and sexual difference.

—'How many times do I have to tell you,' my mother would exclaim.

I knew the words did not ask for a reply; what was asked of me was to sit still and wait to be told again.

And yet again I find myself waiting.

Whatever next, I think as I query my interpretation of the look on her face. Having thought she doesn't need to say a word, I realize that I am waiting for her to say something. As I wait, I think again of my mother's much-used expression. *How many times do I have to tell you?* Repeating the words makes me recall that it wasn't only my mother who used the

expression; whenever the words were said at school I knew I was expected to learn the lesson and grasp it fast.

(How many times? How many times? How many times? There is one thing I can say that I have grasped and this is that time will always exceed my understanding of it.)

And still I am waiting for her to say something, and still not a word is uttered. To an onlooker it may seem that all movement has been suspended in this speechless scene. Not a word. Not a move. Seeing this as suspense could well make an onlooker ask: is an event going to happen?

How long can I wait? It is a stupidly abstract question given that I don't know what I am supposed to be waiting for. Still, I am waiting. *Is an event going to happen?* I have the urge to say that what has happened is a false start.

A false start?

Picturing a false start can make you think of a race that is about to happen. The ambition of those involved is to be the fastest one, the one who wins by covering the measured space in the shortest time possible and comes first. At the starting line the competitors prepare themselves for the effort that will initiate their movement. The event is about to happen, but just before the sign to start is given one strikes out. One has started too soon. Yes, one has already started but the event is not yet to happen. On your marks, get ready, go. But wait, one has gone already.

At the starting line of the racing event expectation buzzes in the air. Yes, an event is going to happen. However, if you start too soon then the event, at least at that time, is not going to happen for you. The event itself will remain beyond your reach; it will, so to speak, slip through your fingers.

So, I ask myself, has there been an unsuccessful attempt to start something — or, has there been a false dawn?

For a false dawn the start is full of promise, affording the expectation of an event to come. Yes, the start is full of promise but the fulfilment of the event never comes. You may wonder what might have been, yet the event itself remains out of reach. A false dawn can leave you wondering as to the promised event; it can also make you ask: what constitutes an event?

And then, with the question hanging in the air, she speaks.

She tells me that she would define a false start as when we can no longer rely upon a notion of starting that a particular conception of movement presupposes in order to get going.

I hear what she is saying, but I am not sure that I grasp what is being said; nevertheless, I say to her that I have a hunch that what she is speaking of has something to do with movement in time. She asks how this movement is to be grasped. I reply:

‘Perhaps by letting it slip through your fingers.’

‘It is only a hunch,’ I say, and she replies:

‘Only?’

I say that as yet something hasn’t been thought through. I say that it remains not yet. She asks if I want to move in the direction of this not yet and I answer by saying that I don’t foresee that this movement will be a race toward a predetermined goal. And she continues by saying that there is the question of movement in time but also the question of how the existence of the not yet is itself to be considered. And I ask if we are to think of the not yet as signifying the existence of something waiting to be discovered, uncovered.

—‘Or, are we to think otherwise than this?’

She says she is wondering about grasping something by letting it slip through your fingers. She says her question is simple.

—‘What does this way of understanding make for?’

I am not sure if I think the question is simple, but I respond by asking if she thinks her question is asking for this approach to understanding to become an object for study and thought. With a little wry smile she replies by asking if this *object* would be one which is easily recognizable. I say that to grasp something by letting it slip through your fingers makes the object of understanding somewhat slippery, and she responds by saying that for some this is no way to know. I say that I can hear the objection: it is far too fluid a way to understand; it is the solid that thinking must strive to possess, indeed must strive to be. She says that she doubts this objection and I say that it is based on that stupid old opposition between the solid and the fluid.

And then, out of the blue, she looks at me and asks if anything is going to happen such that, at some time in future, it will be spoken of in the past tense.

— 0 —

A story is attempting to take place and is making what can only be called a difficult beginning.

Is an event going to happen?

The question stirs something within me. And then, amid the difficulty, an idea comes to me: it is with the event — and the question of its timing — that I want to start.

Is an event going to happen?

Expectation may be buzzing in the air, and perhaps — who knows — fulfilment will come; but the question is also demanding to know what an event may be. Which begs the question: do I have any idea, any vision or concept of the event with which I want to start. Am I not yet thinking?

I wonder.

Is the event with which I want to start beyond my grasp? And if this is so shouldn't I be calling it to account? (But is it there awaiting my call, waiting to be named?) Shouldn't I be making it yield more of a story than so far has happened? To give accounts of events: isn't this what stories do?

I wonder. Yes, I wonder.

The idea comes to me that I want to start with the event and the questioning of its timing; but what of the occurrence of this coming-to-mind?

Well, I wouldn't say that this coming-to-mind has happened in the lightning flash of an all-of-a-sudden. More of a slow burning thought that has flickered here and there. Perhaps, more accurately, this occurrence has been a slow but persistent motion that has gradually warmed my thoughts. Or, perhaps better still: that which has been hanging around and gently swaying. Hanging around and gently persistent but not heavy; no, not heavy with the stillness that comes just before the storm. Hanging around and perhaps abiding but not awaiting a lightning time — an occurrence such as this is perhaps best described by saying: it is in the air, prevalent yet indefinite.

Air resists being grasped as one of those solid things, but isn't air the most solid thing we know — the air that surrounds us, that envelopes us and in which we develop?

I say it is with the event that I want to start; however, making this declaration is not without hesitation. Yes, I hesitate for I am wondering if the event in question may well have already started.

I wonder.

What is making me wonder?

To be sure, any answer will be made with a tentative voice, but let me say that what is making me wonder are starts that happen before you and I

can know of them. Which is to say, what is making me wonder is a start that cannot be known and understood ahead of time. Unlike the racing event — be this of humans, horses or dogs — where time is set — stopped — in order to start and go, what is making me think is a start that can't be set prior to the event. When, for instance, does a photographic image start? And when does it finish? Stupid questions you may well think, but I wonder: when is the event of the photographic image? Indeed, what constitutes an event and how can this be said of the still photographic image?

I wonder.

An idea has come to me, but why should I care to think? Indeed, why should I care to think of and become affected by an event that seems so indefinite? My question is this: what will come about through caring to think? I don't know the answer, but there is a curiosity. And this curiosity is not without a caring for what might come about, what might come to happen. And why should I care for what might come into existence? It only might, and this leaves me on unsafe ground. How can I build upon such ground? Hardly sufficient to build a thesis upon. Hardly enough to construct a theory.

What will come about through caring? This question leads to another, one that began for me elsewhere yet here continues to insist.¹ I would call this the real question: will there be coming abouts that enable me to continue becoming? Which is to ask: will my power to be affected be exercised such that I am enabled to remain open to becoming other than what I am? Indeed, will I be enabled to remain open to 'my' becoming in relation to and without separation from the becoming of others, be they human, animal or otherwise? To care for these questions, which continually ask of us that they be asked, is to care for the existence of the 'not yet'. It is to care for the existence of that which is not in our possession.

The event with which I want to start may be too much up in the air and said to be not a solid enough matter, for as yet 'it' has no particular referent, no particular story or theory to tell. But I'm wondering. Yes, I'm wondering and I do not want to give way on that which can't be seized by and brought under the yoke of a pre-existing category that proudly proclaims its standing permanence and powers of designation. However, to say this is not to say that my ears are shut to theories of the event. Yes, I'm listening and, yes, I'm wondering how the timing of what becomes called an event becomes thought, becomes thought through, understood — let's say, heard. I'm

listening but I'm also looking out for that way of knowing that understands by way of a 'letting slip through the fingers'.

Although the event in question remains 'up in the air', I'm wondering if there is something happening with this poorly grounded indefinite phenomenon that is asking for a re-thinking of what is involved in the attainment of knowledge. Remaining 'up in the air', perhaps this groundless event is silently proposing a reconsideration of knowledge as an acquisition. Without a word said perhaps it is saying: with the attainment of knowledge there doesn't come the grasping of an object and the gaining of an acquisition but rather a different way of existing. I do not gain a possession; on the contrary, something else happens: I come to exist differently.

I may not hear a flow of fine words coming from the event that remains indefinite and poorly grounded, yet I do not want to rush to the conclusion that it has no voice and cannot make a proposition to me. And this begs the question: how can I speak of this event? How can I speak *with* it rather than speak for it or indeed speak at it?

With.

Yes, it is a little word.

I may say to you that last night I was alone with my thoughts. I may say this aloneness brought me calmness and serenity, or I may say it brought me anxiety and trouble; however, in saying either I would not wish to deny that my individual thinking, be it troubled or serene, is made *with* others. The philosopher Isabelle Stengers puts it wonderfully:

'How can you define, in terms of debt, the fact of encountering the words and exigencies that, having come from another, enable you to progress further with your own problem?'²

Quoting these lines, and again listening to them, I find an importance attached to that which 'comes from another', of which the true importance is *because of* having come from another. Having said this I may indeed be putting words into the mouth of another, but something here is beckoning me to think.

I do not produce meaning, or knowledge, or thought, on my own. I do not produce my life alone. It is always *with*. So often, however, this *with* becomes forgotten. Indeed, so often, far too often, this *with* becomes annihilated as the power of hatred pits us against the world. Yet it is *with* that furthers my becoming.

I speak of becoming. I speak of furthering my becoming. But what am I saying here?

To be sure, I am saying that at any given time I am not already complete; however, acknowledging this incompleteness isn't to say that I am not, as yet, being. Becoming is not the journey towards a state of being, be this the state of being a child or an adult, a middle-aged woman or an old man. Being isn't the state that one arrives at after the becoming, rather becoming is the movement of being. As for this movement, let me say that it is the movement that comes with time.

I may be sitting still, very still, but my being is not static. On the contrary, my being is continually moving in time. Indeed, even as I rest in the stillness of the night my being is ceaselessly being made *with* time. And it is this ceaselessness that makes me come to say: I am not already made but always *incomplete*.

To emphasize this incompleteness is equally to emphasize a world that isn't already made and finished but ever in transition and becoming. That is to say, coming about, coming undone.

And speaking of 'coming about' prompts a question to return again.

Is an event going to happen?

A twittering noise

A lot of questions were hanging in the air, enough to fill a book. But there was one question that kept returning like a little refrain ... And once again she found herself asking if an event is going to happen.

—‘Or, has it happened already? Rather than the *too-early* is it now the *too-late*?’

She said that she didn’t know the answer and I said that neither did I. All that could be done was to wait. And wait we did, and as we did we found that questions began to arise.

She asked if thinking always had to be about something, and before I had the time to think about my response I said:

‘Thinking is something.’

Without a hint of sarcasm, swank or cussedness she then said:

‘I’m listening to you.’

And after a short pause she repeated the words yet added:

‘But in what way am I hearing you?’

And the question was answered by her asking another.

‘Upon listening to you will I only hear that which I’ve already heard? Indeed, will I take back what you say to what I presume to already know? However, making this return my ears become plugged with presupposition. And that is not to listen to you. Presupposition seizes what you say before it is said. And this is to take the words from your mouth.’

I looked down, held a breath, and then looked up.

‘Plugged with presupposition my ears do not hear what you say as something as yet unsaid. I hear only the already said and shut out the unspoken, the future that can’t be said ahead of time. No matter what you say I will already know of what you speak. And so I kid myself that the future can be known in advance, but this is not to listen to you. This is to silence you. What is more, it is to assume an already-existing world, one that is complete, already built and no longer becoming. How foolish to presume that I can know the future before its becoming. Yes, how foolish to think that I can control time.’

And, with a twinkle in her eye, she responded by asking more questions.

‘It may be foolish to think that time can be controlled, but isn’t it naive to think that we can hear without presupposition? How can I hear as if for the first time? But wait, why should I fear nativity?’

To her question I responded quickly by saying that to hear as if for the first time perhaps would be like music to my ears. I looked to her and, at the same time, she looked to me. Each waited for the other to speak but the wait wasn’t very long.

‘There is the question of how I am to listen to you; however, this brings another question: how am I to look at you? I see you, but how am I looking at you? I see a twinkle in your eye yet how am I to see this twinkle outside of all prior representations? Indeed, how am I to see *without* presupposition? Yet, this would be to see as if for the first time; it would be to wonder and remain open to, what I can only call, the surprise event. Yes, it would be to see the twinkle in your eye as a glint of an event where something is coming about that hasn’t already been spoken for.’

—‘It would be to listen.’

And then a silence softly fell.

Is she humming to herself? There is a murmurous sound coming from her yet it’s barely audible. It’s a sound I can see more than hear. Yes, it’s a sound I can see as at times I see the sound of cat purring ... My eyes are hearing and there she is purring. This she-cat does have a proper name, one that is called often and to which, although not always, she comes, prancing like a little horse. She will sit beside me. She will sit very close. But she doesn’t want to be touched, at least not by human hand. It is the sound of my voice that she wants to be touched by. Stroke her and she will move away, but speak to her and she will purr and purr. The hairs on her body quiver, yet a sound can hardly be heard. There she is humming to herself,

singing her own little song, and who am I to deny that this little sound is of the world? The humans may think the world was made for them; but who are they to deny that that cat sat singing her song is in the world and of the world? Education may attempt to teach it otherwise, but I'm learning that the she-cat's little song is an expression of the world as it continually makes itself. There is nothing incomprehensible about this, but so often, far too often we fail to listen ...

I cleared my throat and thought to myself: what a noise this action makes. And then I asked her:

'Do you think the world is a Big Thing to speak of?'

She replied without hesitation.

'But is the world something separate from you and I? It is an old story but it is still told to this day: the world is a dangerous enemy that must be fought, restricted and held in place. What makes the world a dangerous place? The power of hatred. It is hatred that separates you and me, from the sky, from the dust and the animals and the bird flying high. It is hatred that makes us strangers to these things. It is hatred that separates. It is hatred that divides.'

After taking a short breath she continued.

'Hatred makes us believe that relations in the world are made by building bridges. How do you see a relation? As a bridge? And what does a bridge do? It makes us presuppose the existence of separate entities, separate sides. I am never separable from my relations with the world, it is these relations that make me, make me come about, come undone, become. But hatred would have me believe that I can separate myself from these relations. Indeed, hatred would have me believe that relations are of the order of bridges, which, at times, are necessary to burn for reasons of defence. Moreover, hatred would have me believe that the words becoming between us are nothing other than bridges being built.'

Suddenly my thinking started buzzing and I said to her that bridges are paradoxical in that they connect the disconnected. Her response was to say that the paradox also could go in the opposite way.

'In making connections do not bridges make the disconnected? It may be assumed that a separation exists before the construction of a bridge, but it is the bridge-building that forges the separation. Indeed, it may be taken for granted that before the building of a bridge there are two sides, and between them, let's say, a void, but it is the erection of the bridge that establishes the two sides and makes the vacancy of the void.'