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Emmanuel Macron: Anatomy of a Transgression

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Abstract. Among current Western heads of state, Emmanuel Macron is undoubtedly the most unique. Although he was only 39 years old when he was elected for the first time and 44 years old for the second time, he had never previously held an elective office. However, he shares with two of his predecessors, François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac, the fact of having held two mandates. This path is in itself atypical, not to say ‘disruptive’ compared to that of all the presidents who preceded him. This term is also the communication marker not only of his victorious 2017 presidential campaign but above all a key element of his political orientation. However, if he did, at first, ‘disrupt’ the political landscape in France, this momentum very quickly died down to such an extent that the political character he embodies has crystallized hopes, disappointments and then anger and even hatred. Such reactions lead to question the real contribution of this disruption. Until now, these questions have only been partially addressed, leaving room for the implementation of an original approach which consists in postulating that this disruption actually masks a transgression. Through the prism of transgression, this paper aims to decipher this (false) disruption as his journey from 2016 as a candidate until his second term has been illustrated by a variety of behavioral forms and lexical expressions. I approach these aspects in the form of critical narrative writing, which is based on concrete details, spoken words, speeches, interviews, and other texts.

Keywords. Emmanuel Macron, disruption, transgression, lexical expressions, at-the-same-time, macronism, France

INTRODUCTION

In a very short period (only three years passed between his appointment as Minister for Economic Affairs in 2014 and his election to the presidency of the French Republic in 2017), Emmanuel Macron has attracted increasing attention and, above all, superior to that of his predecessors, probably due to the difficulty in discerning this previously meteoric candidate. During his rise to the presidency, he was described as atypical (Endeweld 2015; Bourmaud 2017), ambiguous (Endeweld 2015) or enigmatic (Bourmaud 2016) and, even after a first mandate, he remains elusive (Maison Heinrich Heine 2022).

Without significant political experience, faced with the population’s expectation of political renewal, he has presented himself and was presented as a “disruptor”, a narrative thread that still plays a key role both in the form and in the substance of the policy carried out since 2017. The latter has led many observers to wonder if he is a man of communication before being a politician carrying out a project for France, especially since his personality and his so

disturbing practice of *en-même-temps* (*at-the-same-time*), has given rise to interpretations at the antipodes (see Lasserre 2022).

These matters have only been partly clarified by numerous works and articles published since 2015, both academic and journalistic, leaving room for originality. Therefore, through the prism of transgression, this paper aims to decipher this (false) disruption as his journey from 2016 as a candidate until his second term has been illustrated by a variety of behavioral forms and lexical expressions underlining the multiplicity of meanings and both the concrete and metaphorical scope of a type of transgression (Tantale 2019). I approach these aspects in the form of critical narrative writing, which is based on concrete details, spoken words, speeches, interviews, and other texts according to the methodology suggested by Winter (2005).

WHAT MODELS TO REFLECT ON EMMANUEL MACRON?

The analysis is mainly based on a triple corpus.

Firstly, since 2017, categorizing the political regime in place has proven difficult as the assessments suffer from 'Manichean' shortcuts which do not help in any way to understand the influence of personal and exogenous factors on political choices. Furthermore, the youth of the sitting president is not necessarily favorable to an attitude of detachment and critical distance vis-à-vis his mode of governance. Therefore, it is compulsory to shed light on his career with the contribution of biographies because, as East and Thomas (2003/2014) point out, the biographies of active heads of state and heads of government have always been a convenient means of explaining the type of government and the roles of the head of state, head of government and legislature, date of assumption of office, and source of authority. In this regard, the program book written by Emmanuel Macron and published in 2016 under the title *Révolution* (Macron 2016) offers an insightful working basis but is only rich in lessons if it is put into perspective with the biographies of former presidents with whom he shares the fact of having served two terms. Thus, although we should not expect a 'reference work' in the sense of that written by Eric Roussel on François Mitterrand (Roussel 2015), we can legitimately hypothesize that events of a more intimate before politics, for François Mitterrand the experiences of war and a destructive sentimental disappointment shaped not only the character of the future President of the Republic, but above all his way of approaching the presidential office. Thus, to be able to explain the many aspects of Emmanuel Macron's transgressive attitudes and political decisions, it is mandatory to explore the psychological origins of its political behavior. It is well accepted among scholars that psychological patterns influence individual political behavior and that individuals are induced to act in accordance with their personality traits, values, beliefs, and attachment to groups (Cottam, Mastors and Preston 2022). Post (1980) considers that the life cycle of a leader influences his political behavior and, specifically, that the transition between adolescence and early adulthood plays a crucial role.

From the medieval carnival to the tragedy of September 11, 2001, to the growing uncertainties about the 'existential crisis', and the uncertainties linked to it, into which the Western world and France in particular seem to have entered, the contextual elements can be read as a direct invocation to rid oneself of the prevailing real and material circumstances and to transcend, or more precisely, to transgress the existing order (Jenks 2003). Above all, while for several decades it was the work of exogenous factors, it was once again the prerogative of a president in office because it was deliberate and concerted.

Secondly, it is the journey of Emmanuel Macron himself, from the candidate to the president in office, which determined the postulate from which this paper proceeds: the

interpretation of ‘disruption’ as a transgression. As its Latin etymology indicates, the term transgression refers to non-compliance with rules, encouraging people to go “beyond borders” (Cocton, Favreau and Roch-Veiras 2015, p. 164). Hence, not only does the transgressive act establish the existence of pre-established norms (while leaving open the question of its foundations), but most importantly challenges them. This is to contend that two agendas coexist at Emmanuel Macron. Regarding the first, we cannot elude the link with his youth during which the refusal to follow the rules is apparent, that is to say, a form of disobedience, which has been expressed, for example, by his relationship with his French teacher who later became his wife. The second agenda is less related to the contingencies of the function of the President of the Republic than in the representation he has of it, its relations with French history and identity, Euro-Atlantic integration, and international balance of power.

The synthesis of the two is achieved through resorting to political anthropology (and its sub-field, action theory) and French history to show that there are invariants in history that emerge in the practice of power by political actors depending on the circumstances in which they operate. In a way, the objective of this paper is to “seek explanations through the obvious facts of observable behavior before invoking the weight of the past to account for the actions of the present” (Dyson-Hudson 1972, p. 7 in Vincent 1978, p. 177).

The second assumption is that the (false) disruption that Emmanuel Macron claims fits clearly and almost academically into the range of integration mechanisms, making it possible to mitigate the sources of social conflict and the transformation of political elites in a complex society (Easton, 1959). It is based notably on the confusion between power and coercion vis-à-vis forces contesting the continuity of the established order. Here, the former symbolizes the refusal to recognize the end of the expansionist and positive economic model of globalization and its corollary the reduction of the “multiple to the One” which was intended to stem or even deny social division (Gléonec and Tassin 2011, p.186). Furthermore, from an action theory perspective, it implicitly refers to the manipulation strategies of power holders (see Vincent 1978) which more specifically affect resources, such as economic, social, and/or cultural capital, in the sense of Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1976). It is mainly through, and in, Macronian communication and the use of the French language, the words and phrases that are specific to it, and that they voice themselves best. Both a means and a result of his education and his youth, his lexicon appears, sometimes aged from classical letters, sometimes on the contrary forged in the new paradigm of the “start-up nation” (Mayaffre and Vanni 2023a).

The second body is a look towards the past that tacitly refers to the Grand Siècle (the 17th century), a troubled period that was searching for itself, but also a ‘summit of civilization’ that contains a form of extreme idealization seen from today. But, where the Grand Siècle reflected a vitality in perpetual crisis and, *at-the-same time*, suggested “imperishable values and offered models (honest/dishonest/unseemly) which are still vibrantly relevant today” (Leopizzi 2020, p. 18), the false disruption (transgression) carries within itself the seeds of a betrayal and regression towards a previous state, like the mirror of a past splendor which will never be rediscovered, and not of a qualitative leap in an after-modernity symbol of ‘progress’. Fundamentally, this transgression symbolizes not modernity in crisis, but that it is itself a crisis: “the adolescent crisis of humanity” (Guillaud 2005, p. 77). Parallel to what we can understand about Emmanuel Macron’s personality and youth is almost disturbing. In this regard, he has been described as an ‘adolescent’ for whom the social and political scene allows him to endlessly replay “biographical conflicts” that have never been resolved, whether intimate, precocious, or collective (Mauvais 2020). Depending on sensibilities, the spectacle offered by the President, changing clothes (for example, first borrowing from Napoleon Bonaparte during

the idealization phase in 2017, then in a fighter pilot suit in an imitation of Tom Cruise in the Top Gun films) depending on the circumstances and the audience, has charmed then annoyed, even going so far as to generate a feeling of hatred towards him, thus characterizing an “unprecedented unpopularity” (Radio France 2023).

Third, from education to (trans and) post-humanism via feminist and queer theories, as well as organizational sociology, the phenomenon of transgression is at the heart of research and reflections of a large variety of disciplines whose lessons lie along both a vertical and horizontal continuum. Faced with such “intellectual profusion”, this paper borrows from the deconstructionist movement, which is expressed in the educational sciences. It is easy to see a parallel with what some researchers describe as current “systemic global dysfunction”, thus strongly supporting the plea for an overhaul of educational approaches. The latter must no longer be constrained by concepts that are henceforth considered limited; the underlying objective is to strengthen the disruptive capacities and transgressive pedagogies necessary to build a more sustainable world (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015). In such a context of ‘reconceptualization,’ theoretical benchmarks (and by extension, moral values) lose their role as a beacon, with practice and experimentation then becoming the driving forces of learning until the (re)construction of new theoretical bases. Emmanuel Macron goes even further by ‘merging’ communication and political praxis (in the sense of a modification of social relations). Here, we would more readily speak of the Nietzschean concepts of revaluation (of values) or even transvaluation of all values (Nietzsche 1886/2022), one of the materializations of which will consist of opposing the ideal world and the real world.

Finally, to the central question, ‘what are the models for thinking about Emmanuel Macron?’, the contribution of two fields, organizational sociology and innovation management, is substantial given the frequent reference to managerial language by Emmanuel Macron during his 2017 presidential campaign. For example, in terms of the conquest of power, this paper endeavors to show that the goal was to transgress, through central positioning, the traditional right-left ordering, but not the dominant and normative ways of thinking and acting in governance situations. In other words, deconstructing the traditional right-left divide to reconstruct it in a duel between a central, progressive force and two “outmoded” extremes. Here, transgression has been a way of resolving the equation of contradictory forces (Babeau and Chanlat 2008) which develop in politics, traditional rules consequently being considered as obstacles.

THE ROOTS

In a way, Emmanuel Macron's private and public career as a politician is atypical. “Nothing predestined me for the positions I held as Minister of Economic Affairs, nor for the political commitment that I have today. I really cannot explain this journey”, he admits in *Révolution*, his “fight for France” book (Macron, 2016, p. 9/11). Furthermore, when he tells his story, it is a forced exercise to which he submits but without doing too much in a way that is almost too rational and not very spontaneous. Moreover, unlike his two elders, Emmanuel Macron's youth do not share the adventurous passion or spontaneity of Jacques Chirac (see Chirac and Barré 2009) or the romantic freshness of François Mitterrand (see Adler 2017).

From the few pages in which he opens up, we feel he is reluctant to seek friendships and develop a social life in a period of confusion where the young person oscillates between his desire for autonomy and that of still being dependent on his parents (Singly 2006; Gallant 2008). Actually, Emmanuel Macron found his fulfillment in book-reading. Thus, no peer group appears with an identity almost exclusively constructed within the family circle within which

he creates its bubble of independence with the almost exclusive support of its grandmother, who has weighed heavily in his education. The main risk is that this form of socialization ultimately leads to the development of an inverted double face for the young person and then the adult, in which family socialization comes to compete with or even supplant socialization by the peer group (see Singly 2006), thus limiting awareness of the existence of a difference in thought.

Under these conditions, the ‘unresolved adolescent duality’ mentioned by Singly (2006) might explain Emmanuel Macron’s inability to face the difficulty of reality and to take refuge in a more personal ‘universe’ which contains an ideal of authenticity, that which he shares with his wife for example, less linked to their age difference than the fact that they have known each other intimately since the latter was 15 years old. This relationship, built very early, in a personality still under construction, testifies as much to a need to be appreciated for what he is as to refuse to adhere to certain social norms, and the period of adolescence is representative of this form of transgression (Duteil Deyries 2020). Beyond unjustified criticism, this form of disobedience is likely to have an emancipatory aspect capable of carrying a dynamic of change, which is, after all, the foundation of his approach to politics within the limits that this entails. On the other hand, this transition (youth has often been seen as a period of significant transition or many transitions), if it becomes incomplete, may illustrate a deeper developmental movement that concerns the lack of acquisition of symbolic responsibility, thus prolonging the immersion of the young person and then the individual in imaginary worlds (Zittoun 2007).

Two publications belatedly compensated for the weakness of official information on Emmanuel Macron’s youth. In May 2021, when for 61% of French people he “is not a good president’ (Gautier 2024), he interviewed the magazine *Zadig*, probably feeling the need to reconstitute (himself) a character closer to the French if not to France. In a Mitterrandian posture, he exposes his “intimate geography” located between Amiens and the Pyrénées to which were added the Seine-Denis and Marseille, the places which are supposed to bear witness to his “carnal relationship with France” (Zadig 2021). In addition, he recognizes a generational gap in his youth: “I grew up in the memories of my grandmother. So, I have a vision of France that is not at all that of my generation; I must admit. I feel out of sync.” (Zadig 2021).

As meritorious as it may be, this approach ‘constructed’ from an aggregation of places is relatively cold and opposes the feelings of François Mitterrand: “Of France, I do not have an idea but a sensation, the one that gives a living being, its shapes, its look.” (Terral 2021, back cover). Above all, it denotes a weak attachment and/or understanding of the values that founded France and have led him, as current president, to an ever-increasing distance from the latter, particularly in terms of foreign policy. The second, more or less surprisingly, is the tabloids which have best synthesized the scattered information concerning the youth of Emmanuel Macron describing it as “complicated”, that of an ambiguous personality because it is stuck between two ages (Romano 2021). A more psychological reading of this relationship with older people would tend to show not only a need for listening and stability but also the impossibility of reaching a certain level of maturity.

BUILDING A “PRESIDENT PROFILE”

Strictly speaking, it was about building a “winning” profile.

In 1994, when François Mitterrand, who knew he was weakened but was nevertheless determined to see his mandate through to the end, Jacques Chirac adopted the posture of the president and published *La France pour tous* [France for all] (Chirac 1994): “These pages would have not been useless if I convince the reader that France is a great country with a future,

capable of finding the path to real growth, without leaving anyone behind. As long as you want it.” (Chirac 1994). Parallel with Emmanuel Macron is striking. Published in November 2016, he is not yet president and François Hollande will not run again, *Révolution* (Macron 2016) uses the same elements of language 20 years later in a plea to “confront the reality of the world will make us find the ‘hope’” (p. 7), “bringing France into the 21st century” (p. 43). First and foremost, he borrowed from Jacques Chirac the theme of social fracture. During a campaign meeting in Arras, Emmanuel Macron paraphrased the former President who popularized this formula in public debate in 1995: “We have been talking about the social divide for 20 years. This is essential, and it remains. Yes, we cannot make the country succeed if it is only the success of a few” (Public Sénat 2017). Like his predecessor in 1995, Emmanuel Macron made it a major axis of his (victorious) campaign in speeches with populist overtones aimed at the “abandoned/forgotten territories” of the Republic, exploiting the resentment of a large part of the population there towards the (Parisian) elites (see Epstein and Kirszbaum 2016), while exploiting its spatial variation, which concerned working-class suburban neighborhoods to capture this part of the electorate. It is surprising that the English version of *Révolution* is about the *Memoirs* of Emmanuel Macron, even though he was only 39 years old. Literally, the goal was to grant the candidate-Macron a sense of composure by creating a heritage, a field of skills, and its commons, as well as the nature and extent of a horizon (which will remain unfulfilled), which is Europe. This is one of the pillars of Macronian communication: intertextuality, which consists of borrowing their lexical particularities from the political figures who forged the Fifth Republic according to the adage “borrowing their watch from some to sell the time to others.” As Mayaffre and Vanni showed (2020), Emmanuel Macron's speeches are crossed, most often implicitly, by the speeches of his predecessors, General de Gaulle, François Mitterrand, Nicolas Sarkozy, and François Hollande.

Throughout Jacques Chirac's political rise, a reflection was developed, marked by the joint values of radicalism and Gaullism (Chirac and Barré 2009), from which he would eventually move away. On the one hand, we should not expect to find an identical pattern to that of Emmanuel Macron, given his experience and political positioning. “The culture that I inherited is, on the contrary, that of our great joyful passions, for freedom, Europe, knowledge, the universal,” he writes (Macron 2016, p. 34). His values, what ‘he believes in’, are on the contrary the fruit of a philosophical heritage resulting from his university training, but also of ideas and moral values transmitted by previous generations. There we would almost find the imprint (or a current interpretation to the letter) of the work of constructing a historical anthropology of France undertaken by the historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie based on the study of the inheritance rules relating to the devolution of heritage which, in particular, has led to the definition of “transformation techniques which make it possible to move logically from one area to another and from one era to another.” (Le Roy Ladurie 1972, p. 825).

By amalgamating, a constitutive element of Marconian communication, a lexicon that is sometimes old-fashioned and sometimes ‘modern,’ Emmanuel Macron draws inspiration in particular from Baruch Spinoza to create an ‘affection-image’ (see Deleuze 1981) by calling on French people, in particular those who vote for the National Front/Gathering “not out of conviction, but precisely to protest against the established order which has forgotten them or out of spite. We need to talk to them about their lives again. Give meaning and vision. Fight this party which manipulates their anger” (Macron 2016, p. 42), to rise towards a form of perfection by embracing the dynamic that it intends to create, thus increasing its power to act. On the other hand, as a liberal minister (economic affairs) in the socialist government of François Hollande, he has already symbolized the ambiguity and the “great misunderstanding

between François Hollande and the French” (Endeweld 2015). In reality, he has very quickly crossed a border between the socialist and Gaullist legacies to conquer power. Between anachronism and temporal compression, Emmanuel Macron’s journey has been transgressive because, where François Mitterrand appeared “master of time”, Emmanuel Macron embodies a form of emergency, pressed by the ‘globalist and Parisian elites’ who fear that social relations too quickly free themselves from commercial alienation and do develop emancipatory democratic aspirations [?] (Amin 1999).

First, since Jacques Chirac already had more than solid political experience having held several mandates, whether as deputy for Corrèze, mayor of Paris, or Prime Minister, in *Révolution* (Macron 2016), we cannot see neither the birth nor the formation of a statesman. In fairness, Emmanuel Macron is honest about this: he did not see himself embracing a political career either and recognized that the positions he held did not allow him to establish himself in the political environment, which supports the thesis that it was his supporters who imposed him. He then built his victory by embodying himself, according to the process of the performative statement, as a non-conformist by not joining the game of traditional parties that he finds, *at-the-same-time*, disconnected from reality, but useful to the construction (ex-nihilo) of a new ideology that is macronism. So, on the one hand, he takes as a reference “General de Gaulle, like Pierre Mendès France, expressed better than anyone that politics had to confront reality.” “I fit into this kinship” (Macron 2016, p. 37). On the other hand, his action is part of a personal interpretation of the “permanent coup d’état” (see Mitterrand 1964) in which, all in contradictions, instead of denouncing the possession of power by a single man (Jouary and Spire 1985), Emmanuel Macron has personified the providential man by incriminating the obsolescence of political parties and their inability to propose a vision of the future which does not nourish the development of the extreme right which he has used both times to be elected. Thus, first, a candidate against the parties in place then, at the dawn of the second round of the 2017 presidential election, an avatar of a poorly or even undefined option (the opposition to Marine le Pen), Emmanuel Macron symbolizes neither the unity of the left nor that of the right, but an amalgamation of contradictory interests facing the extreme right.

Finally, he imposed himself in less than a year, whereas his predecessors took 20–28 years. While François Mitterrand had demonstrated his tenacity and determination in politics (several times minister under the Fourth Republic, he failed in three presidential elections - 1965, 1969, 1974), Emmanuel Macron resolutely departs from tradition, if only because he has neither been confronted nor subjected to an elder “already entered into History” as was the case for François Mitterrand and General de Gaulle and, in a certain way, Jacques Chirac who cohabited with François Mitterrand from 1986 to 1988.

THE (FALSE) DISRUPTION MASKS A (REAL) TRANSGRESSION

Emmanuel Macron immediately sought a political-historical frame of reference in the absence of a political culture shaped by experience. On July 8, 2015, an interview appeared in the newspaper *Le 1*, while he was the Minister of Economic Affairs, entitled “Macron, a philosopher in politics” (*Le 1* 2015), in which he explained that philosophical analyses and constructions serve to illuminate reality and give meaning to action. Its ‘philosophical roots’, from Nicolas Machiavelli who was one of the rare philosophers to have been a statesman and his ‘proximity’ with Paul Ricoeur, are used here to “represent the world, to give it meaning to through a different prism” (Macron 2022, p. 10). Faced with the ideological void of right and left parties, they supported the development of an ex-nihilo ideology: macronism.

Inspired by François Mitterrand's "socialism of the possible" (Mitterrand 1971), he argues that "a new France" is possible during the 2016/2017 presidential campaign. The central argument of this paper is that this 'false' act of rupture (disruption) aims to reappropriate part of the intellectual effervescence of the moment linked to the sea serpent of the "civilizational crisis" into which France has entered and traces the path of a (apparently) union of antagonisms. Given that this problem does not contain any singularity¹, he sought to break the horizon of expectation with the help of new sources and the contributions of political philosophy and, in particular, the Florentine thinker with the aim of "liberating us from the reading grids known to shed different light" (de Lapparent 2017; see also, Aron 1984). This conciliation was deemed necessary for him to come to power.

The "ideological void" in the face of France's existential crisis

On August 26, 2014, when he succeeded Arnaud Montebourg, a non-enarque and socialist activist since 1985 who had an image as a renovator, as Minister of Economic Affairs, he was only 36 years old and remained an aspiring politician, outside the political apparatus, and who had never held any elective public office. Under these conditions, in 2016/2017, the problem was how to install Emmanuel Macron on the cognitive market of political offerings. In other words, how do you sell "emptiness"? When the question of the incarnation of Emmanuel Macron ("What is Emmanuel Macron's name?") was asked to his mentor, Jacques Attali, the latter replied: "The void. [He is the name of] the emptiness of French politics." (Challenges 2016). The latter reflects the incapacity of so-called traditional political parties to produce an ideology and its corollary a social project, making it possible to cope with a completed globalization which and with an archipelized France: "It is for this reason that I wanted to create a new political force called "[*La République*] *En Marche!*". Because the real divide today is between backward-looking conservatives, who propose that the French return to an old order, and progressive reformers, who believe that the French destiny is to embrace modernity. Not to wipe the slate clean, or to slavishly adapt to the world, but to conquer it by looking it in the face" (Macron 2016, p. 42).

By investing in this vacancy with a political party created from scratch, *La République En Marche* (LREM), Emmanuel Macron triggered an explosion of the French political class. Being done, in form, through the demonstration of consummate art of the stage and the use of a Macronian vocabulary considered essential material for the making of meaning and its discursive strategies, it has gradually saturated the public space through speech, proving his daily investment in the presidential role with a posture of both "presidential monarch" and another more directly linked to the French (Leroux and Riutort 2022). Its multiple signatures consist of dialogues or monologues, debates, or controversies, press conferences or commemorations, "Citizens' Conventions" or "Major meetings with the nation", "Letters to the French" or tribunes, tweets or videos chanting the presidency of Emmanuel Macron as shown by Mayaffre in his analysis of President's speeches (Mayaffre 2021). While since the end of the 18th century, political philosophies were classified on the right-left axis, he ultimately won the presidential elections with a central positioning, one which makes the linear "right-left" schema obsolete and, above all, establishes the extreme right as the sole rival on the political scene. The 'new ideological field of action' from which he claims is a quasi-scholastic construction (in the sense of knowledge), in short, "a blend of several philosophical and political currents that have

¹ Indeed, the (winning) slogans of Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 and François Hollande in 2012 were respectively "the rupture" and "the change is now" (Alduy 2017, p. 41).

shaped the history of Western political thought”: from the thought-action articulation of Robespierre to the positivism of Auguste Comte, through the political reading of French society inspired by Tocqueville, until to the demands of authentic liberalism of François Guizot (Tournois and Đerić 2019, p. 250). However, intrinsically, this ideological blend conceals a large number of registers in tension or even opposition, and of which the centrality and its avatar of communication, the *at-the-same-time*, are the pillars. This expression, which reflects the thoughts of Emmanuel Macron, has become his political trademark since July 2017, and even gave birth to a Wikipedia page². When tested by the facts, it was proven that it was neither tenable in terms of ideas nor terms of concrete action, but above all, it testified to a poverty of strategic vision, a bit as if an innovation product tried, when it was launched, to be both avant-garde and accessible to everyone.

The triple transgression masks a stalemate

The ambition, as reflected in his book *Révolution* placed Emmanuel Macron at the “bedside of modernity” (Wacquant 1992). “Our political parties are dead from no longer confronting reality, but they would like to seize the main election to survive. It is this democratic fatigue, the disappointments that this new system generates, which fuel its very weakening and the inexorable progression of the extremes” he analyzed (Macron 2016, p. 40). To differentiate himself from the political elites who preceded him, he has claimed and then multiplied, depending on the themes (history of France, management of the pandemic, global warming, etc.), the reference to a “discourse of truth”. At this stage, one may have expected Emmanuel Macron to draw less from Martin Heidegger’s “illuminated insomnia” (Heidegger 2018) the necessary material to deduce lessons from the “crisis of civilization” into which France seemed to have entered than a certain form of intellectual and human honesty. Unfortunately, in an almost caricatured manner, the first steps of its governance were to free itself from its own codes by playing on the differences in linguistic registers. Beyond designating a demeaning rhetorical cliché, it is the ‘wooden language’ that appears in Emmanuel Macron’s communication strategy as a true multi-audience linguistic repertoire. Here, it is not used to find the right words to describe a situation, but rather to allow the politician to escape responsibility (Abecassis 2023). Since then, he ultimately only has embodied this ‘disruptor’ posture verbally, thus concealing a triple transgression. Rather, he has worn “the mask of guardian of science” [understand ‘knowledge’] thus revealing a ‘great unconsciousness’ given the context and its [civilization] issues in the sense of Heidegger (Heidegger 2018).

Cold technocracy vs. reality

From the 2016/2017 electoral campaign, Emmanuel Macron was mainly inspired by Auguste Comte to develop a positive approach to social phenomena. In front of public opinion, he proclaimed himself an anti-system candidate and advocated a disruptive conception of politics, identifying himself in 2017 as “president of the start-up nation”, inspired by managerial practice whose communication objective is to make so that everyone can see the benefits to be gained using rhetoric focused on a transformation that is desired and not undergone. This is the central design of macronism; disruption must be shared to reform society to improve it.

Unless we consider selling one thing and then doing the opposite is a disruption, the first transgressive act concerns the program put in place the day after the election. As historian Vincent Martigny points out, “elected by center-left voters who believed they were voting for

² See Wikipedia : https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/En_m%C3%A0me_temps

a candidate from their political family, and who woke up to Alain Juppé’s program in 1995” (Martigny 2019, p 35). The first part of macronism then has consisted of introducing more liberalism into the economy in the face of liberalism already in crisis, for example by “liberating work” to reduce the protections of employees (occupying unskilled or low-skilled jobs) against layoffs, in a move to euphemize the brutality of the reforms undertaken (Alduy 2017). He has reappropriated the diagnosis established during the socialist government of François Mitterrand regarding unemployment, a “real social scandal,” but without treating it with imagination or by overturning conventions, principles specific to a disruption (see Dru 1997). In contrast, the search for solutions is done within a calculating thought, a reason reduced to an instrumental planning reason, while being consistent with his image of a man in a hurry who will have forgotten the teachings of metaphysics about patience, whose sole objective is the production of rapid and quantifiable results (for example, the unemployment rate). Beyond representing a structural obstacle to any social transformation, the absence of “thinking critically” (p. 10) among Emmanuel Macron not only precludes any negative attitude towards the existing order but instrumentalizes rationality for purposes of domination (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944/1974).

For the equation “more progress in a suffering modernity”, Emmanuel Macron has replaced the “passions of joy” supposed to give new impetus to France with an algorithmic approach (meaning a “set of specific operating rules to a calculation”), literally, by solving the problems that arise systematically and without empathy. The macronian ideal finally appeared in its crudest clothes when he declared that there are jobs in France, “hotels, cafes, restaurants, I cross the street, I will find it for you.” This sentence, pronounced by the President on September 15, 2018, highlights the foundations of Macronian thought, according to which it is a question of freeing oneself from certain burdensome responsibilities (unemployment) by transferring them to others (job seekers). It also illustrates the contradiction with his principles: while in his presidential approach, he addressed the affect of the working classes, it is now no longer possible to remain faithful to his primary professional vocation, “we do not have the right to do horticulture, art history, or other professions’ as sociologist Vincent de Gaulejac then emphasized (de Gaulejac in Le Nouvel Obs 2018). The reality is no longer social (mainly in the sense of the working classes, an electorate that has very few voted for it), but that of the market to which one must believe and, above all, submit³.

The overthrow of democracy

It is by deciphering the political language and rhetoric used by Emmanuel Macron that the objective of domination expressed literally by “taking power and above all retaining it” which he applies primarily to himself, becomes even clearer.

While he claimed to be a social democrat of Scandinavian inspiration during his first mandate, macronism, *at-the-same-time*, capitalized on the authoritarianism of Prime Minister Manuel Valls who believed during the Hollande government in making socialism evolve towards statism to capture the part of the right-wing electorate sensitive to security issues (Tournois and Đerić 2019), and validated a liberal model characterized by the absence of a “global logic based on social equality and investment in human capital, but also economic coherence, which is based on innovation, upgrading, and quality” (Palier in Joignot 2022). From then on, both source and result, Macronism embodies the end of the historical phase of the

³ Recently, the negotiations on unemployment insurance and the life-at-work pact have demonstrated the weakening of social democracy in France (Germain, 2024).

expansion of liberal ideology, which promised French citizens a distribution of wealth built on social advancement, the valorization of work, experience, and ultimately skills that can only be acquired through trials of both individual and professional life. Its completion is now built around the institutionalization of power relations (domination) and their refusal by the instrumentalization of otherness and asymmetry or expressed in politico-economic language in winners-losers: the enrichment of some can now only be conceived to the detriment of others. This is the symbolic foundation of the protest movement of the Yellow Vests, of those who still believed in a form of humanist socialism, one which aimed to put an end to the human condition of 'proletarian' (Lacroix 1945).

As early as 2015, when Manuel Valls was Minister of the Interior, preventive measures were taken, thus contravening Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union concerning freedom of expression. Only a few rare political figures were already worried about a "profound regression that tends to establish a sort of preventive regime, or even moral censorship before freedom of expression" (Authier 2015). From the episode of the Yellow Vests to the health pass put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic until the decree of April 5, 2024, taken in application of article L. 861-2 of the internal security code which provides that police officers will have the right to act under an assumed identity or a false identity⁴, Emmanuel Macron's 'dirigisme' has quickly slid towards a form of totalitarianism, still "soft" for some (Maffesoli 2021), but in reality closer to the implementation of counter-insurgency measures aimed at stifling any desire for revolt.

Paradoxically, it is a reversal of the Western liberal tradition in terms of counter-insurgency doctrine and one of its pillars, which is legitimacy that one can witness in France because 1) only one of the adversaries involved seeks political power (the government in place), and 2) faced with questionable legitimacy, the political establishment can rely less and less on the consent of its administrators and must therefore resort more to constraint (Crane 2008), which ultimately leads to amplified instability and, inevitably, increased acts of disobedience. If one had to retain only one piece of evidence, it would be that Emmanuel Macron's confidence rating is in June 2024 closer to 23%, a figure recorded in December 2018 during the Yellow Vests protests. As scholarly studies have stated, decline of political trust is a potential existential threat to democracy (Cole, Stafford and Heinz 2022). Under such circumstances, we are witnessing the convergence of civil society and the governing elite in terms of the decline of democracy, both being non-accountable to one another which foreshadows a major political crisis like the one that might emerge following results of the legislative elections of June 30, 2024.

The election of Emmanuel Macron ultimately symbolizes an economic-social transgression, not of the divide between the political-economic elites and the people, but the revolt of the former leading the philosopher Michel Onfray to conclude that *La République en Marche*, the political party created by Emmanuel Macron, is indeed the party of the ruling class (Onfray 2022). Thus, implicitly or despite himself, it is first by the repression of the Yellow Vests that his regime incidentally challenged theoretical assumptions about the compatibility between capitalism and democracy (e.g., Ronzoni 2018). It is the advent of 'health capitalism' and its corollary the establishment of the liberticidal health pass during the pandemic episode, which has definitively validated the assertion that capitalism [at the current level of development] and democracy are ultimately incompatible (Streeck 2014).

⁴ See <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000049373347>

French identity

Agreeing that “culture and language form, from their origin, a unity” (Leitchik 2003, p. 114), it is at the level of identity that the transgression is probably the most insidious because it is similar to deconstructionism, put in simple words, the renunciation of political, economic and cultural independence in favor of a ‘global imaginary’. Although it is easy to interpret it as the desire to change the paradigm, to move from the nation-state to centrality, it is difficult to see it as the connection between two worlds. The most critical would rather see it as the desire to “precipitate the end of the old French nation” (Onfray 2022, p. 148) by the absorption of what forges national identity in a Euro-Atlanticist imaginary.

According to deconstructive, co-constructive, and reconstructive principles, inspired by post-structural theories regarding the link between theory and practice (see Taguchi 2007), there is no longer an objective reality, but it must serve transformation. To understand the extent of this transgression, it is useful to remember that Emmanuel Macron had developed a unique relationship with Paul Ricoeur, alongside whom he learned “the previous century” and was taught “to think about history” (Macron 2016, p.20). By confronting political reality, he has forgotten the teachings of the philosopher who expected history “to bring the past of human societies into the dignity of objectivity” (Ricoeur 1955, pp. 23-24). Emmanuel Macron’s relationship to history as well as to language and, more broadly, to French institutions, belongs to an idealized universe in which knowledge does not seek the truth but responds to a necessity of resolving problems of various nature to accelerate the transformation of French society.

First, this third transgression is based on a gap in language or linguistic fields, whose scope far exceeds the sole campaign argument (2016/2017). From his book entitled *Révolution* (Macron 2016) to the massive media relays constantly repeating “Emmanuel Macron is “disruption incarnate”, semantics sheds light on the no longer French but resolutely globalist framework in which the candidate Macron projects himself: the use of an “entrepreneurial newspeak” inspired by Californian Silicon Valley rather than its French equivalent which is “*rupture*”, illustrates not only a desire to completely transform the exercise of power in France but also that of wanting to distance itself from which gives substance to French identity. With this incarnation begins work on the evolution of perceptions of the world, between proclaimed rejection of outdated ideologies and adherence to a model of transformation that claims to be ‘radical’ of liberal Western societies. Given Emmanuel Macron’s fascination with the societies of the *Ancien Régime* (16th-18th centuries) which seem to contain an element of dreams for him, it is legitimate to wonder if the ‘radical’ transformation desired by the candidate Macron does not find its inspiration or ambition in “the increased circulation of printed writing” which has transformed “forms of sociability”, authorized “new thoughts” and modified “power relations” (Chartier 1987, p. 369).

Second, if transgression is defined by the fact of deviating from tradition, it is in terms of reading the world that all the ambiguity of Emmanuel Macron’s central positioning is conveyed. On one hand, media complacency has led to the construction of a diplomatic image articulated around four traditions, notably sovereigntists and universalists (Lefebvre 2019). On the other hand, aligned with the grid defined by the Euro-Atlantic institutions since the mandate of Nicolas Sarkozy, Emmanuel Macron, in a speech delivered at La Sorbonne on April 25, 2023, proposed an alternative construction or vision of universality whose France is no longer the mirror: “The risk for our Europe would be in some way getting used to this depreciation. And that is why what I want to propose to you today, the promise that I would like to seal, is to still try to defend this European humanism that binds us together. If we want to protect our borders, and if we want to remain a strong continent that produces and creates, it is still because

we are not like the others, and we must never forget that. We are not like the others. [...]” (Pluralisme 2024). This declaration was assimilated into a renunciation of French universalism and, in doing so, Emmanuel Macron claimed *at-the-same-time* humanism – theoretically universal – and Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism (Husson 2024) which remain incompatible.

CONCLUSION OR WHAT WILL REMAIN OF EMMANUEL MACRON BEFORE THE END OF EMMANUEL MACRON

Analyzing “at a distance” the personality of political leaders is a difficult exercise. Emmanuel Macron is no exception to this rule. Therefore, I have not tried to find a logical path to the flow of events that marked his rise and then his presidency. Rather, I attempted to shed original light on the personality and career of the politician using a reading grid based on the idea of transgression. Here, it is neither a question of rehabilitating the role of transgression nor of condemning transgressive practices [in politics], but rather to highlight their limits in reconciling the contradictions inherent in this new ideology, namely, Macronism.

At least implicitly, Emmanuel Macron promised to resolve the ‘constitutive contradictions of modernity’ and, more generally, “the disillusionments of progress” (see Aron 2014) by overcoming them through a ‘disruption’ of the political-social field under the seal of a positivist communication method inspired by Auguste Comte. Started in 2014, the “Uberization of French political life” whose objective was to recreate national unity by making the right-left divide obsolete (Tétreau 2015), was only an illusion that lasted until the loss of the majority in the National Assembly in 2022.

It is certain that like the business world in which firms such as Uber, Airbnb, and Spotify have challenged the very existence of dominant firms by changing the rules of the game of an existing market or by creating a new market from scratch, as a ‘new entrant,’ Emmanuel Macron has introduced a discontinuity - a phenomenon widely studied in the literature on industrial innovation and technological development (e.g., Bergek et al. 2013) -, and not a disruption, in the French political landscape.

However, perhaps above all, it has not generated any creative destruction in the sense of Schumpeter (1942/1994). If the political interest of the transgression seemed obvious, to conquer power and keep it, it is in no way “remarkable”, from the Latin “egregious”, or “exgrege” that is to say “outside the herd” (Gueibe 2023). On the contrary, it reveals the limits of a political system now turned in on itself, one of whose intrinsic characteristics is to have desacralized strategic thinking, and its corollary critical thinking, in favor of a conception neither transcendent nor emancipatory of progress, bringing neither economic prosperity (in 2023, France ranks 25th, the same as in 2014 and which is the lowest level ever recorded, in terms of GDP per capita in constant \$ (Péneau, 2023)) nor an increase in France’s influence abroad (we cannot reduce the cultural influence to luxury products, leisure and/or gastronomy), nor having made it possible to “homeopathize” violence by granting it forms of expression or a space of integration within the social system (Seguin 2012).

In reality, for both the individual under construction and the politician, transgression was a means of filling a certain number of gaps. Access to responsibility (no longer symbolic but effective at the head of the state) should have meant the transition to a new state, in a way an exit from adolescence, especially that which establishes the social obligation for individuals to account for their choices (see Zittoun 2007). The obstinacy of Emmanuel Macron has revealed a dogmatic figure, the polar opposite of the “man of dialogue” (between the right and the left, between the different social strata, etc.) that he claimed to be. Thus, the political option which consisted of opposing regression to ‘disruption’/transgression, and which claimed to give

this term an ameliorative meaning (Cocton et al. 2015), has ultimately led to a stalemate. By addressing, *at-the-same-time*, the ‘winners’ of globalization, “those who are not afraid of it, enjoying a certain gentleness of existence which allows them to project themselves without fearing for their future and that of their loved ones”, and to those “left behind by happy globalization” whom he urged to take the train of the “start-up nation” in motion (see Combes 2017), Emmanuel Macron has accelerated the secession of the elites or polarization of French society maintained in an almost caricatured manner by himself and the media. To paraphrase Nietzsche and the criticism he addresses to modernity, while he claimed to break with a past, he has extended it in a disguised manner under the *lemma* ‘disruption’ which, ultimately, materialized through the growing number of fault lines in French society. In this regard, it is rather the notion of “demarcation” which seems to best characterize its heritage, the one which in 1940 symbolized the disunity of France and which, today, is once again “at war with itself” (Werly 2022).

Here, it would be more accurate to speak of ‘ruling caste,’ but, contrary to recent developments on the subject of caste, the false disruption staged by Emmanuel Macron and his successive governments further illustrates a return to the past which echoes some sort of “fossilized tradition”, a comment addressed to the “ritual-obsessed Hindus”, the one that prevents from seeing the true nature of a changing world thus rehabilitating the classical binaries of “traditional” and “modern” as well as “closed” and “open” systems of stratification (Jodhka and Naudet 2023). In 2019, repression of the Yellow Vest protest movement was denounced as the class contempt of a poorly elected president and the monopolization of power by a caste which were the detonators (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 2019). Rather than becoming aware of a certain injustice in the existing state of affairs, the French head of state responded by launching a “Great National Debate”, thus postulating that social conflicts are explained more by problems of communication between power and its opponents than through fundamental antagonisms (Halimi and Rimbart 2019). This narrative underlines Emmanuel Macron’s academic and superficial posture regarding politics, one that notably considers that telling a story makes it possible to establish a bridge between private and public realities (see Jackson 2002). At this stage, Emmanuel Macron’s speeches have ceased to be a mystery because it now seems accepted “that they do not have the truth-conditional obligation to describe a reality which would be external to them” (Mayaffre and Vanni 2023b, p.1).

Patently, beyond this protest movement coming from the streets, the political philosopher that he is, or rather the “philosopher in politics” (Le 1 2015), found himself disarmed, political action gradually becoming a staging backed by selective coercion. Donning ‘the mask of the theater actor’ (remember that there is an intimate relationship between Emmanuel Macron and the theater which dates back to his adolescence), the ‘false disruption’ then became a series of communication operations, and Emmanuel Macron’s adventure continued during his second mandate with a return to an emblematic phenomenon of the 17th century, the ‘salon world’, the place which generates a new equivocal narrative by being both globalist and Europeanist. This salon context sometimes ‘describes’ the real world and sometimes ‘creates’ a universe that is only fictional (see Leopizzi 2020), thus reducing politics to its innumerable masks, and whose relationship to the tangible has become more than ambivalent. Nevertheless, the act of governing, if it carries too much illusion within it, risks turning into buffoonery or drama (Martigny 2019).

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