

8 Public Emotion

According to Clausewitz, 'war first surfaces in the art of holding a siege.' This military art is thus opposed to the tumults of the origins of the history of conflicts.

Today, as everyone can see for themselves, 'hyperwar' resurfaces in the art of provoking panic, thanks to the tools of mass communication.

A purely media phenomenon, this situation in turn entails reinterpretation of the classic notion of deterrence. 'Military' deterrence in the recent past, 'civil' deterrence in the near future or shortly after: the threats to democracy are numerous.

In fact, it is definitely the fortification that, in history, has best embodied the desire for deterrence of the different powers. Isolated, linear or strung out in a network of strongholds, the rampart signals a desire for deterrence in relation to some massive aggression, but as Thierry Wideman rightly points out, 'From the point of view of strategic thinking, a global theory of conventional deterrence seems unworkable, unless it is based on Clausewitz's theory of the superiority of the defensive raised to the status of an axiom, the multiplicity of variables effectively making any generalization impossible.'¹

As an operational strategic concept, deterrence only made sense with the advent of nuclear power.

Military deterrence in the recent past, still useful, apparently, in the face of certain 'rogue states'. Civil deterrence in the near future in the face of the threats of a latent, if not patent, hypertextterrorism . . . In writing this, it is vital to specify

that at its inception war was already part and parcel of that collective mass psychosis that afflicts the besieged, buried alive as they are behind their protective enclosures.

Siege warfare was at the political origins of the history of cities and of nations. Mobile warfare came later on. We should also note that territorial conflicts have never stopped accelerating, finally turning into this 'Time War' that will soon overrule the war of the geostrategic space of empires, and in which sea power will be taken over by the power of air-naval and, finally, air-orbital forces.

Today, though, globalization and its poliorcetic foreclosure are spreading on a planetary scale. But by the same token, what is surfacing with this global state of siege are no longer the enclosure and its colossal fortifications, despite the illusory anti-missile system of the United States. First and foremost what it produces is the inordinate spread of panic, a panic that is still mute, certainly, but that never ceases to grow at the rate of all the accidents and disasters and 'mass terrorist attacks' that point to the emergence, not so much of some hypertextualism as of this post-Clausewitzian 'hyperwar' that outpaces all political givens regarding conflicts, national or international.

Damaging strategy, in other words, the geostrategy that so long rejected its new chronostrategic dimension, this sudden internationalization of real time imposes *ex abrupto*, a different tyranny – that of instantaneity and ubiquity – not only on military commanders and planners but on the democratically elected politicians who are supposed to be running the show.

In fact, after mass and energy (atomic or otherwise), war now opens into its third dimension: information that is instantaneous, or as good as.

Whence the untimely emergence of information astrology that each and every one of us benefits from, whether military or civilian, soldier-citizen or terrorist, not to mention simple common-law criminal.

At this point in time, as the third millennium kicks off, what is dawning in people's mentalities is what some like to describe, euphemistically, as a feeling of insecurity. And this is nothing but the symptom of mass panic of the besieged targeting, in the first instance, the metropolitan concentrations, veritable 'resonance chambers' that they are, of a type of population movement no one really regulates.

Actually, the more the contemporary city-dweller is subject to diffuse and uncertain threats, the more he or she tends to make political demands for someone at the helm to be punished, for want of an avowed guilty party. This is what the clandestine terrorist takes advantage of, thereby directly threatening the representative democracy of assemblies and even, lately, the democracy of opinion created by the major media outlets, thereby boosting a democracy of public emotion that is nothing less than the poisoned fruit of the panic phenomenon referred to above.

In fact, what emerges alongside the necessary formation of public opinion by the sundry media outlets is the unheard of possibility of a public emotion whose unanimity would be merely the symptom of the decline of any true 'democracy'. And this would in turn pave the way for a conditioned reflex, no longer 'psychological' but 'sociological', a fruit of the panic-ridden terror of populations faced with the outrageousness of the broadcasting of real or simulated threats.

And so, after the launch, almost a century ago, of ecstatic consumption, we would look on powerless, or very nearly, at the booming of a form of communication no longer 'ecstatic' but openly hysterical. Audiovisual interactivity has already mastered the secret of this, thanks to the possibilities of an instantaneous commutation in collective emotions, and this, on a worldwide scale, the synchronization of mindsets cleverly rounding off the old standardization of opinions of the industrial era.

With mass terrorism, this hyperwar in which mass no longer bears reference to armies and armoured divisions but to civilian victims, the unarmed populations have become the exclusive parade ground, the ground that takes over from the battleground of the military campaigns of yore.

In this war on civilians that borrows a number of features from age-old civil wars, it is still the war of movement that carries on, speeded up, with its tactics and its tricks. But the 'movement' now means, above all, the panic-stricken flows of terrorized populations.

And so the serial killer of 'organized crime' is outclassed by the mass killer of 'organized terrorism' in the age of the imbalance of domestic terrors.

Lumped together in the metropolises, urban populations suddenly become the breadth and depth, but especially the height, of the action engaged, resulting in the now emblematic dimension to the VHB, or very high building, since the collapse of the Twin Towers.

But what subsists of the concrete and down-to-earth in this strategy of hypertension is demo-topographic concentration, not as once upon a time within the fortified market town, nor even the enclosure of independent cities, but now within the megapolitan nebula harbouring tens of millions of inhabitants.

At the end of the day, this is the metropolitics of terror that is gearing up to resurrect the geopolitics of size, national or imperial. Everywhere you look now, the scale of terror dominates the scope of space, the real space of nations and their old common borders.

Communicable at a distance and in real time, panic flows have once and for all replaced the old tactical movements of military units of days gone by. It is all too easy, in fact, to imagine the day when an 'accident' (telluric or otherwise) or pollution incident (maritime or other) will set off regime change in the targeted nation, along the lines of what happened in Spain after the Madrid terrorist attack.

Once, not so long ago, the French monarchy dared not imagine the worst and so it endured the terror of the Revolution, followed swiftly by the Empire. Shortly, if we are not careful, the same could happen to democracy in Europe. At any moment, a transpolitical disaster could cause us to relive the death pangs of bygone political revolutions, to the very great detriment of public freedoms.²

But let's get back to this tele-objective panic produced by the telephoto lens and the various mass movements it gives rise to. Note, for instance, the blitzkrieg waged by the German armoured divisions that, in 1940, propelled onto the roads of France some 12 million civilians terrorized by the Fifth Column. Strangely, this figure is exactly the same as the number of Spanish citizens who marched in the streets of Iberian towns after the terrorist attack on Atocha railway station on 11 March 2004. These same citizens were, the very next day, to overthrow the Aznar government, against all the forecasters' predictions.

In this other brand of blitzkrieg, panic is the main force of organized terrorism and it is no longer so much the discipline of the troops as the lack of discipline of the hordes that becomes decisive.

This is the impetus behind the strategic programming of terrorist attacks, either for the nightly newscasts, as in Paris, fifteen years ago, or for the day before elections, as in Madrid in 2004, thereby provoking a public emotion that was to shatter the indispensable serenity of the democratic vote, along with the opinion of future electors.

Faced with this psycho-sociological condition of the horrified masses, the old 'science of the defence and attack of strongholds', or poliorcetics, is transformed.

The very last bastion of public freedoms is merely the mass of potential victims!

By way of example, we might recall Mao Zedong's China where the United States was only ever seen as a 'paper tiger' since, with over a billion inhabitants behind it, Communist

China was not afraid of a nuclear war that would involve hundreds of millions of dead.

Public opinion or public emotion? This domain finds itself in the same situation as so many others where the community of interests conducive to political action gives way to a 'community of emotion' open to all kinds of manipulation.

And so, a new Anglo-Saxon practice known as storytelling now sees professional storytellers intervening in corporate life. Their job is to tell stories to wage-earners in order to foster certain behaviours and certain emotions in them, within the framework of job restructuring or relocation, an intervention that clearly flags the new importance of emotion management in business administration.³

But we must not confuse the feelings we might experience and the emotions we might feel, for feelings can be submitted to the test of reason, thereby avoiding any untoward reaction, whereas, emotion, on the contrary, easily escapes all control in mob phenomena.

Since the age of revolutions, this type of mob rule has constantly overturned the very form of the 'republic' and, consequently, of our democracies. You only have to look at the 'rape of the crowds' by the different totalitarian regimes in the course of the twentieth century.

Public opinion is supposed to be built up through shared reflection, thanks to the freedom of the press but, equally, to the publishing of critical works. Public emotion, on the contrary, is triggered by reflex with impunity wherever the image holds sway over the word. Easy to trigger through any over-the-top *mise en scène*, the herd effect of whipping up collective emotion meshes perfectly with televised cinematics, as well as with the interactivity of cybernetic technics, madly stoking every kind of frenzy.

Whereas republican opinion rested, from the very beginning, on the art of oratory and reading, post-republican

emotion rests, for its part, on sound and light. In other words, on the audio-visibility of a spectacle or, rather, of an incantatory liturgy that is only apparently secular ... witness the characteristic abuse of rebroadcasting not only of commercials but equally of terrorizing events.

In its grandiloquent fashion, this media phenomenon overrides the state itself in a sort of accident in political substance that has particularly far-reaching consequences for the future of republican freedoms.

'The electorate no longer knows the party!' wailed a German journalist after the stinging swing in the French elections of March 2004. He went on to specify that 'the actions of those who govern the countries of Europe today are undermined by fear (of economic stagnation, of unemployment, etc); in other words, fear of the future.' Strangely, this list does not even mention terrorism and its devastating effects on the Spanish government, kicked out only a fortnight earlier.

Here again, the electoral accident argument wins out over the argument of the terrorist attack, as in the explosion in the Toulouse fertilizer factory in September 2001, just a few days after the attacks on New York and Washington.

On the subject of the Toulouse ammonium nitrate explosion, we might hazard a gratuitous hypothesis: supposing that the reverse happened and that the Toulouse investigators had opted for the terrorist attack line of inquiry. Not only would French diplomacy have been quite different, but the Franco-German 'peace camp' would have gone up in smoke under the pressure of a public opinion traumatized by the scale of the disaster – as happened later in Madrid.

Suppose now that the new investigations under way in Toulouse ended, shortly, in flagrant proof that the Toulouse tragedy, in which over 30 people died and over 2000 were injured, was indeed the result of a twin attack: 11 September in the United States and 21 September in France, at Toulouse, the city of the European aerospace industry, host to *Aérospatiale*.

In that case, what would be the consequences of this situation with its staggered front on European geopolitics, as well as on the fate of a French president suspected of having covered up a mass terrorist attack, while the president of the United States only lied about the existence of weapons of mass destruction? But this is, of course, just a simple hypothesis of politics-fiction.

'Fear has been the ruling passion of my life,' Roland Barthes confessed, before being wiped out in a road accident. I very much fear that, tomorrow, this individual passion will be the collective passion of societies crippled by the untimely nature of catastrophic events whose repetition winds up fostering fatalism, at least, if not despair.

When the unexpected is repeated at more or less constant intervals, you come to expect it, and this 'expectation horizon' then becomes an obsession, a collective psychosis open to every kind of manipulation, every kind of destabilization of public order.

Of course, with mass terrorism and its instant impact, fear can't stay private and restricted to the minority for long. It tends inevitably to become public and available to the majority, with the consequence that any kind of true courage is not possible, unlike with individual fear, but only the indifference that precludes the silence of the lambs.

From that moment, we can guess where the administration of public fear finally leads: to this civil deterrence that not only succeeds the military deterrence of the Cold War era, but especially the 'fear of the policeman' of the policed societies of days gone by. There is one difference, though, since such an administration will no longer be 'republican' but will be entirely bound up with the mass media.

In the face of the hyperwar, Clausewitz's theory of the superiority of the defensive over the offensive is outmoded by the very nature of information – this third dimension of

conflict after mass and energy. So it is urgent that we study the question, at once psycho-political and socio-strategic, of domestic terror.

The first indication of such anticipation in public emotion is provided to us by the American concept of a 'war of zero deaths', with its surgical strikes and its preventive wars that spare the soldiers fighting, at least, if not civilians.

We know what flows on from such fibs. A paramilitary concept, the preemptive war as a matter of fact signals a strategic grand illusion: the one where the offensive is no longer anything more than a disguised defensive against an asymmetrical adversary who is disqualified as a fully-fledged 'partner' in some wargame where the classic alternation between attack and counterattack is blocked, on the one hand, by an enemy who refuses to do battle, and, on the other, by development of an electronic arsenal of lures and techniques for avoiding any real engagement.

As an age-old proverb has it: 'Fear is the worst of killers; it doesn't kill you, it stops you from living.' It even stops soldiers from making war, according to the rules of political propriety!

This has nothing to do with the threat along a state's borders or the assault of some invader or other. The phenomenal migration flows of dire poverty or of mass tourism have long replaced these. And that is to say nothing of the pending shift, also massive, of well-off populations, newly dissatisfied with the lack of comfort and security offered by the great metropolises of affluent countries.

No, the administration of domestic terror imposed by the various major hazards has absolutely nothing to do with the threats of a recent past. The equation is radically different and 'armchair strategists' would do well to think twice before engaging in military responses to terrorism, responses that are, in the end, nothing but tragic 'distractions'.

After the Cold War and its apocalyptic threats of annihilation comes the time of this cold panic of an organized terrorism likely to inflict analogous disasters.

Imperceptibly, with the decline of the nation-state, we are seeing the end of the monopoly on public violence enjoyed by the state, triggering the ascendancy of a privatization of domestic terror that not only threatens democracy but the legally constituted state.

Europe, today inordinately enlarged, can't go on for long turning a blind eye to these issues that are not so much political any more as 'metropolitan', since the demographic concentration of its populations in megalopolises has gradually shifted the old theatre of operations from the country to the city, with the 'carpet bombing' of the mid-twentieth century prefiguring the 'mass suicide bombing' against densely-populated urban agglomerations at the very beginning of the twenty-first century.

And so, the very notion of defence is radically transformed. After the military defence of nations and the civil defence of urban populations it seems that there is an urgent need for a new line of inquiry.

On top of national security, based on the armed forces, and social security, underdeveloped as it is in a number of democratic states, we must now add the crucial issue of human security, which would extend the old public interest of the state.

As the former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, recently declared: 'September 11, 2001, demonstrated that no state, not even the strongest militarily, is capable of protecting its citizens any more, not even within its own borders.'⁴

Faced with this alarming assessment, which introduces the temptation of a sort of nihilism, not only in defence (as happened in certain Nordic countries before the Second World War), but in the public arena, with the city as epicentre, it

might perhaps be useful to take a closer look at the historic shift in the armed forces. This shift has taken us, as we have seen, from siege warfare, with the domination of weapons of obstruction (ramparts, fortifications of all kinds), to the war of movement and, finally, to this *blitzkrieg*, or lightning war, in which weapons of destruction supplanted urban and other entrenchments until the days of the deterrence strategy. With the latter, which introduced the 'non-battle,' the relative inertia of the balance of terror greatly favoured not only the arms race and eccentric proliferation of weapons, but, more especially, the development of those 'weapons of mass communications' that are today throwing the old geopolitics of nations into turmoil every bit as much as the stability of a military culture in disarray for over a decade – in other words, since the fall of the rampart of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the keep of the World Trade Center in New York.

The current latent conflict simmering away in the United States between the State Department and the Pentagon is a fatal sign of this panic. But so is the US Army's split personality project, that will pit the historic army against a second army now on the drawing board, an 'anti-panic' army, designed to mop up the damage done to the legitimate state and to do so in a public arena undergoing accelerated privatization.

Whether we like it or not, public space and public authority are indissociable and any attempt to split them is equivalent, sooner or later, not only to undermining national security but especially to undermining human security, with the obvious risks of genocide that this entails.

The much-touted 'precautionary principle' of the ecologists thus applies above all to this necessary stability of public law and its real space, as the setting of any democracy.

We should point out once again that this new notion of 'human security' that was recently adopted in Canada and Japan – a probable result in Japan of the major earthquake at

Kobe and the sarin gas terrorist attack in the Tokyo underground – could well contribute to the outlawing of this *uncivil* war that threatens to wreak havoc, in the near future, not only on the legitimate state but indeed on the whole panoply of civilizations.

After the privatization of energy, the privatization of the public arena will inevitably lead, not to the professionalization of the public (police) force now, but to military anarchy. This veritable 'defence nihilism' will no longer involve an openly declared enemy – much as the Swedish movement Forvarsnihilism hoped, when it asked, in the 1920s, 'Is the invasion of our territory by another civilized people such a serious thing?'¹³ It will impact on the military institution itself, as the basis of that 'right to defence' that subtends all political rights.

What can you say today, in fact, of the territorial invasion by a 'civilized people' when it is precisely a matter of mass terrorism using the complete array of the democratic amenities of transport and telecommunications provided by societies open to the most incredibly diverse exchanges of the age of planetary globalization.

CLAUSTROPOLIS or COSMOPOLIS? A society of enforced seclusion, as once upon a time, or a society of forcible control? Actually, the dilemma itself seems illusory, with the temporal compression of instantaneity and the ubiquity of the age of the information revolution. This interactive society is one in which real time overrules the real space of geostrategy, promoting a 'metrostrategy' in which the city is less the centre of a territory, a 'national' space, than the centre of time, of this global and astronomical time that makes every city the resonating chamber of the most incredibly diverse events (breakdowns, major accidents, terrorist outrages, etc). Break up of a social order will be triggered by the extreme emotional fragility of an aberrant demographic polarization, with megalopolises that will shortly bring

together, not millions but tens of millions of inhabitants in very high towers where they will be interconnected in a network, and where the standardization of the industrial age will make way for this synchronization of collective emotion likely to do away with all democratic representation, all institutions, promoting instead a hysteria, a chaos of which certain continents are already the bloody theatre.

We should point out further that if interactivity is to inform what radioactivity is to energy, deterrence is transformed: military deterrence or civil deterrence? That is the question!

And so it is no longer a matter here of going beyond the geopolitics of nations, nor of going back to the ancient poliorcetics of city-states. It is a matter of truly taking it to the limit: the mounting extremism of a hyperviolence that Clausewitz could never have imagined.