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# Editorial: Beyond catastrophism

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We're all running on champagne, I mean on ideals. For free time or for work, ecstasy or soberness, our highest values condition our most intimate feelings. And the information we are bombarded with plays with our passions like the fingers of a pianist on his piano.. [\[1\]](#)

Journalists and their bosses should thus avoid wrong notes and listen to the echoes of their melodies in collective opinions. The Outreau case, in France, or that of the cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, abroad, have reminded us of this. There is a police for information just as there is a police for morals.

The effect of an announcement is always subject to the values of a society. The religious Middle Ages and the capitalist world do not comport the same questions, and are thus not interested by the same things. Their respective ideals reveal different feelings, as it is either the saint or the captain of industry who is revered. These models proposed by different types of society are more or less internal.

The world imagined by news agencies is conceived concerning its impact on collective emotions. An accident in the vicinity of the readers is considered more important than a catastrophe in a faraway land. The President's cold is mentioned, but not the fever of a messenger. In short, the media do not communicate, they are the masters of ceremony managing the feelings of a particular society. The soccer World Cup has more coverage than, for example, the preparatory negotiations for the famous Multilateral Agreement on Investment (AMI).

But declaiming the manipulation of the media is not enough. The individual who wishes to control his own personal destiny must climb over a series of obstacles. First of all, he must recognize the major questions confronted by society, in this way escaping from disinformation, that is to say wrong or manipulated information, in order to discover what is hidden. Once he can escape from this dead-end, he has to evaluate the stakes in the most crucial situations, such as the threat of war, terrorism, natural catastrophes, and economic crises. And then, elaborating an opinion and deciding where one stands is not enough, as this does not lead to any action. But how can one's own decisions be put into action? How much can one person do? How to act so as not to be recuperated by the adversaries? What about all the intelligent articles we have read that leave us unequipped?

Any serious political newspaper must help to ask these questions. It is not enough to be a tribune for various points of view. It must suggest a line of thought capable of helping its readers to escape from the labyrinth of each of these enigmatic crossroads.

### **The choice of good information**

It is notorious that people who live under a dictatorship are not well informed. Strict censorship and very serious sanctions that threaten dissident journalists hide the news for long periods of time. But this large amount of news, this « noise », that modern democracies are so proud of, does not always come from expansive and spontaneous sources, particularly when leaders fear repercussions that can be negative to them. For a long time, the French believed that the Maginot Line was impassable, that the radiations from Chernobyl stopped at the border, that the asbestos in the building material which students were exposed to at the University at Jussieu was not dangerous for the health, or even that France was still home to the rights of man. Hardly mentioned, and then only in gossip columns, are the dictators who have asylum in the country, or the dubious arms dealers with a son close to a former inheritor of the throne. And this only concerns people, but what about when we realize that we know more about Stalin or the report on Krouschew than about the assassination of Kennedy? What are we to think when we learn that the two of the most recent American wars, Vietnam and the invasion of Iraq, were launched based on false information given to Congress and the nation by the highest state authorities?

### Discovering the real stakes

When a country is going through a crisis, it is a frequent occurrence that leaders direct information towards a principal enemy found everywhere, for instance God or the devil. The French doctrine of « the exterior enemy », invented by French officers during the war in Indochina, was then used in Algeria where it served as a spring-board for urban control and then for torture, and then spread to South America, particularly to Argentina and Chili. In fact, the notion of the exterior enemy masked the degradation of the hopes of a country to which the French government did not wish to respond.

The false ideas and the supposed dangers thus transmitted most often reveal the desire to divert attention from the preoccupying questions. The imperialism of others is denounced, exterior threats are discovered, evil plots are described, and religious crusades are mobilized.

Presidents with decreasing popularity have sometimes been accused of leading the country into dangerous adventures. However, this diverting of the debate is not reserved to the leaders alone. For example, in August 2002 in Belgium, the story of the sale of lethal arms to Nepal broke out, and the Flemish minister Magda Aelvoet was obliged to resign, having refused to export arms to this feudal government which was using the arms against its own population. Even though she had followed an ethical principle, the debate took another turn. Because she is Flemish, she was reproached with wanting to put the Walloon workers on unemployment, as the weapons factory is in Wallonia.

Emotions reach their height with an over-abundance of information. The whole world was able to see the extensive funerals of Kennedy and Lady Di, and the first steps taken on the moon. These events, fortunately, were short. On the other hand, September 11th gave a pretext for the universal terrorism denounced by President Bush, establishing conditions for an indefinite and perpetual war.

However, when the adversary does not take part in the verbal game, as in the case of Saddam Hussein, the accusation is hammered in up to the level of intoxication. Everyone ends up believing that we are living on the edge of a catastrophe, and that we are dancing on volcanoes.

If the movements that are called revolutionary are not lacking in fiery speeches, the political leaders do not give an inch. There has been much progress since the war of nerves, when the American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, in charge of foreign affairs from 1951 to 1953 during Eisenhower's presidency, invented the word « brinkmanship » (for « being on the brink »). In this way the strategy of risk was born, which consists of pushing a dangerous situation up to the point of disaster. This policy was used during the cold war, with a culminating point with the Cuban missile crisis. Today we can see the same fever between the American State Department and Al Qaida, North Korea, and the new candidate for war, Iran. The new apprentices in tension, in their warlike speeches, are trying to destabilize the adversary while calling for internal dissidence.

The propaganda for going to war is completed by Panegyrics of democracy, this vacuum-packed bubble, and also by the market, this so unquestionable dogma that well confirms that we are not in the postmodern era, as some believe, but very well in the era of Neo-Manicheism, as we are experiencing the epic of the titanic combat between good and evil, where neither escape, nor neutrality, and particularly no third position is tolerated.

Fortunately, we have a Sea of Serenity, the universe of the market and goods. The end of an official enemy, the Soviet Empire, and the market constraints of globalization lead us to our last dream, that of a consumer society, which, without a doubt, is reaching its end. Even more than in politics, information is dedicated to establishing the standards for taste and fashion, because they concern all of the consumers. What is the attraction of a project of

international agreement compared to a new vaccine or a famous brand of perfume? Pages which gave sewing patterns and knitting ideas to the readers of yesterday are replaced today by photos of top models destined to entice potential clients.

Today it is no longer films or music interrupted by commercials, but advertising that is interrupted by films or music. If this concerns GMO or multi-national businesses, economic propaganda invades the pages that used to be dedicated to more serene pastimes. The stakes are not so much to know if nuclear Iran represents a danger, as the impact of a war on the price of oil on the stock market.

### Putting personal decisions into action

Free of all these escape possibilities and these dire phantoms, that must however be exorcised, we are trying to look for appropriate concepts, such as those begun and sometimes elaborated in one or another of the anarchist traditions: federalism, internationalism, pacifism, non-violence, but also direct action or publicity by deeds.

The cooptation of some of these ideas by negative and oppressive forces is nonetheless a false problem, even if it can fool some. In fact, the most beautiful ideas are only empty dreams as long as they are not articulated in concrete actions. It is at this level that we discover the real differences, a level which always remains local, at the level of a human being, out of individual human decisions. We deconstruct pseudo events and binary codes, the firebrand speeches of so-called victims, and we try to find oases of New Resistance in this world on fire, the combats for preserving collective well-being against capitalist appropriation, and creative ideas. Far from being satisfied with only reacting as passive receptors, we bring to light forces of emancipation, which, in all times, have enabled humanity to survive in the tragic course of history. And we are not alone if can count on you. So that, using the famous word from Arthur Rimbaud, « I » will also be another.

Ronald Creagh and Pierre Sommermeyer

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[1] Translated by [Norma Hecker](#)