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## Foreword. Europe at war: almost eighty years later

FABRIZIO DESIDERI<sup>1</sup>, ANDREA MECACCI<sup>1</sup>, FRANCESCO VALAGUSSA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Università degli Studi di Firenze

<sup>2</sup> Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele, Milano

[fabrizio.desideri@unifi.it](mailto:fabrizio.desideri@unifi.it); [andrea.mecacci@unifi.it](mailto:andrea.mecacci@unifi.it); [valagussa.francesco@hsr.it](mailto:valagussa.francesco@hsr.it)

After almost eighty years, exception made for the conflicts in former Yugoslavia (which, however, nominally did not involve European Union member states between 1990 and 2001), war has come knocking at Europe's doors again. Certainly, it can be said that during this long period, the European continent has lost that "familiarity" with the experience and the very idea of being able to participate in a war. To this extent, the absence of an actual European army, resulting from entrusting every military defense entirely to NATO, may have nurtured this peculiar illusion of the European Union. Europeans have believed that the various levels into which the notion of conflict has historically been articulated – e.g. the military level, the cultural level, the political level, but also the religious, ethical, values, and so on – have all collapsed onto the economic level.

The general idea of replacing conflict with competition certainly exercised not only great fascination, but also great influence: politics itself was conceived as an ancillary dimension, inexorably reduced to "ordinary administration". One might just think to what the limit on government deficit (3% of GDP) has represented in recent decades in terms of economic value, becoming almost a kind of symbol; with absolute value even from a political point of view.

The war that broke out two years ago now, in February 2022, and in some respects also the one that broke out a few months ago, in the first days of October 2023, reminded us how war expresses itself at different levels and on a multiplicity of layers.

In this unfolding of new war scenarios, that could even prelude a third world war no longer just "in pieces", to cite Pope Francis' recurring thesis, one cannot limit oneself to merely returning to the claim of the autonomy of the political or to emphasizing the

non-negotiability of certain basic values, however still crucial in the age of global trade. On the other hand, the fallacious identification between war and competition, which re-proposes itself in the form of a sinister parody in the war between gangs that plagues stadiums all over the world, already invites us to step back from a psychological-naturalistic interpretation of war, deriving each of its cyclical reoccurrences from uncontrollable impulses of human nature. It becomes necessary, instead, to think about today's wars without surrendering to the temptation to unify them in a single figure. To ponder them in the specificity of their internal reasons, not only related to the geopolitical order. Being aware that in both cases it is worth neither resurrecting an improbable classic form of war (already catastrophically disproved by the First World War) nor lazily relying on the incapable categories of post-modernism. It is with this awareness that the critical tradition, albeit fragmentary, of European thought can rediscover its vocation. First and foremost, by distinguishing between the different origins and forms of ongoing conflicts. It is only to the extent of our ability to discern and understand the conflicting reasons that we will also be able to nourish with political rationality the possibilities of a fair peace not involving the annihilation or humiliation of one side. It is precisely in this regard that the good European philosophical tradition can do its share. Thus, recognizing the seriousness of Putin's aggression against Ukraine may not preclude one from conceiving its premises and imagining scenarios that would prevent the recurrence of such events. Similarly, standing firm in condemning the terrible pogrom suffered by Israel on 7 October 2023 cannot impede condemning the massacres of civilians (mainly women and children) ordered by the government headed by Netanyahu, without thereby endorsing those forms of old and new anti-Semitism resurfacing both in Europe and overseas, often also in completely unrelated places.

On the basis of these more general premises, the very notion of an "aesthetics of war" needs to be rethought in new forms. Above all, by relating this notion to the thesis put forward by Novalis

according to which "the real war is war of religion; it even goes as far as extermination and the insanity of men is revealed therein in its utmost complete aspect". This requires the abandonment of the Romantic perspective that assimilates war to the chivalrous spirit of the duel, at least to underline that no bare economism would ever explain not just the origin of war but its very persistence. Always, even today, the ultimate motivations of a war must be thought of in their asymmetrical relationship with every soberly rational calculation: what is believed in it and through it, or – if preferred – that quid of "bacchic melancholy" of which Novalis, once again, speaks.

While talking about new forms of "aesthetics of war", we do not mean to refer to an anesthetization of war, which according to Benjamin characterizes fascism, as opposed to the communist project of politicizing the masses. Instead, by "aesthetics of war" we mean the necessity, in the face of the solicitation deriving from the events of war, to thoroughly rethink a whole series of themes: the notion of borders, that of propaganda and of the mild boundaries between this latter and information, the need for paradigms through which to "read" and interpret the emergence and articulation of war events, and so on.

In her article, Maria Filomena Molder reminds us of the importance and role of art as an activity literally capable of tearing the mask off violence, but without ever hiding it. In this sense, the link with Franson's article, dedicated precisely to the connection between war and image, between judgement and propaganda, is profound. Western culture has always claimed the autonomy of judgement, but also the need for judgement to be rooted in the context in which it operates, hence Déborah Brosteaux seeks to investigate those mechanisms of exoneration and detachment that allow us not to feel involved in the phenomenon of war. On the other hand, it is also a question of identifying the paradigms through which to grasp the phenomenology of war: in this sense, Antonio Dall'Igna's article dwells on the paradigm of domination proposed by Ernst Jünger and on that of waiting suggested by Simone Weil. Another read-

ing paradigm revolving around the motif of war in Roger Caillois is proposed by Azzariti-Fumaroli. More directly focused on the relationship between art and war in an actualizing perspective is the article by Alice Iacobone dedicated to the work of Maria Kulikovka.

Inevitably the presence of war has the effect of stimulating new overall conceptions, new *Weltanschauungen*, understood not so much as the claim of “global visions”, but of more modest “world intuitions” that allow us to find new ways through the increasingly complex plots of contemporaneity. Perhaps it is precisely in this sense that Heraclitus’ saying “war is father of all things” still retains the capacity to resonate meaningfully in our world.

The contributions composing the *Focus* section dedicated to the theme of a new “aesthetics of war” are followed by two papers dedicated to the crucial topic of the relationship between “Christian images and ancient culture” at the core of an important work by Daniele Guastini published by Morcelliana in 2021. These are the essay by Graziano Lingua, dedicated to *The secularizing nature of Christian choice for images* and a contribution by Guastini himself, *From allegory to figure and back again*, which delves into some of the motifs of his book (primarily the issue of the figure with reference to Benjamin and Auerbach). To this focus, inaugurating a new direction of Aisthesis intervention – that of the discussion of relevant contemporary works – follow the contributions of a multifaceted and highly interesting *Varia* section, with contributions by Quentin Gailhac, Davide Mogetta, Deborah De Rosa, Miranda Guerra.