

The Inevitable Return of Order

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When fathers get used to letting their children do as they please,
When sons no longer heed their words,
When teachers tremble before their pupils and prefer to flatter
them,
When young people finally despise the law because they no longer
recognize the authority of anything or anyone above them,
Then, in all beauty and youth, tyranny begins.

—Plato. *The Republic*.

Inexorably, over the last twenty years, with a recent peak between 2020 and 2022, a clear worsening of physical violence, particularly homicide (homicides and attempts) has been recorded by public services. All surveys, polls and incident reports confirm these concordant findings from all professional, sporting, medical, social, and educational organizations...

Twenty-five years ago, the author of these lines published: “There’s not a day that goes by that doesn’t see its share of violent acts affecting cities, urban transport networks, schools, housing estates ...” But these events are nothing new. Crime evolves, repeats, shifts, and renews itself. Over the course of four centuries, blood crimes have virtually disappeared (from over 100 per 100,000 inhabitants to less than two). The city has civilized crime. Over the years, however, recurring phenomena have emerged. Bands of juvenile delinquents from the suburbs (“Apaches” at the turn of the century, “Teddy boys” or “young hoodlums” after the Second World War), crime on the first metro line as soon as it opened in 1900, development of drug addiction (100,000 cocaine addicts in Paris in 1921). Nothing would really stop this text from being reprinted. Only worse.

The accelerated breakdown of the family unit, the departure of retirees to a separate universe, the rise of single-parent households that have trouble making a family, are creating spaces without presence, and therefore without surveillance. Add to this a process of family reunification decided on officially humanitarian grounds in 1976. This doesn’t consider its practical effects in terms of housing and density within the same household; you have “4:30 p.m. orphans,” schoolchildren left to their own devices as their parent(s) work later and later. Grandparents no longer take over; they are relegated to nursing homes at best. Schools are no longer providing supervised homework, expelling the most disruptive children, and

experiencing truancy that is rarely dealt with, so much so that the “troublemakers” are outside rather than in the classroom, at both elementary and high school.

The virtual world, not so much that of television as that of video games, and above all the virtual *unreality* of social networks, allows children, ever younger and ever more dependent on their consoles or telephones, to live in a parallel world. It imitates reality as closely as possible, where actions, even the deadliest, never have consequences. Each death is worth points, each game allows the resurrection of previous victims. Master of the game in the metaverse, we believe ourselves invulnerable in real life.

The relative calm that seemed to reign over the territory prior to June 27, 2023, did little to conceal an increasingly regular and widespread succession of a settlement of scores between criminals, including in rural areas, in a process of permanent restructuring of drug trafficking. Micro-events followed one another: refusals to obey orders, assaults, family dramas and brutal adjustments of criminal catchment areas on territories increasingly far from the “projects” whose command center could be treated in the paradise of the “influencer scammer.”

The riots of June 2023, marked by a tragic homicide, are both similar to those of 2005 and profoundly different. Almost twenty years ago, two children fleeing police control were electrocuted in a transformer, triggering three weeks of violence and several weeks of rebellion and violence against institutions, symbols and the forces of law and order. In 2023, everything was faster, more intense, younger, and more violent.

The TikTok-ization of the lives of younger people (but not only) also influences the durability of movements. Consequently, there is the risk of their repetition. This is due to the competition between actors creating their own reality show and who want to score points by happily burning down everything that makes up the city and society: private and public transport, buses, streetcars, libraries, media libraries, gymnasiums, shops.

In the face of these events, the state is bogged down by contradictory injunctions, between recognition of past errors, colonial remorse, and the desire to return to a “just” order.

Each time the relief of having survived the crisis is felt, the administration thinks it has escaped both the feedback of experience and the need to reform what needs to be reformed. The state had to choose between restoring order or contenting itself with an absence of visible disorder. Crime has become a phenomenon of social expression, marked by tendencies to confine oneself to a finite universe. “The neighborhood,” marked by modes of appropriation ranging from tagging to territorial control characterized by “border” crossings, not forgetting the use of modern means of telecommunication to organize trafficking at over 4,000 dealing points across the country (including in small and medium-sized towns), adding the option of home delivery between pizzas and burgers.

However, the underground economy and organized drug trafficking are, paradoxically, factors of internal stability, as is militant Islamism. For reasons linked to the desire not to attract the attention of the police, another order is replacing the republican state. It made its power felt by allowing anger and looting to take place, then insisting on a return to a precarious calm, far more favorable to business.

The state's response has been to pile up a series of measures now unified under the heading of "urban policy." The barbaric acronyms have been added one after the other in a logical shamble. But as François Dubet rightly reminds us, by focusing on buildings and transport, we have often forgotten the inhabitants. The effort has been real, and substantial, but focused on "users" or "constituents," who are often infantilized and regarded as recipients of assistance. Mayors and mothers, fathers, and peers are essential if we are to reverse this trend and give citizens back control of the streets.

It's now up to us to finally assume a strong reorientation to meet the needs expressed by the population. Otherwise, the most simplistic and extreme solutions, with the scapegoat responsible for all our ills at their fingertips, will succeed in convincing ever-growing numbers of voters—until it's too late. This is why it is no longer possible to avoid overhauling public safety policies, in particular the management of the judicial treatment of public disturbances. And, first and foremost, those caused by increasingly young minors.

We need a wide range of feedback to enable us to make the right changes to the way police are deployed in the field. As Fabien Jobard points out: "We need to get away from the idea that we need to bring the police closer to the population. Uniforms are not intended to make up for the disappearance of the adults who used to work with young people in working-class neighborhoods. Putting the social back into the social, and the security back into the security, means allowing everyone to do what they're supposed to do in the field. But with the last pillar of social order and regulation: families.

In any case, order will return. Criminal order at its worst. Extreme authoritarian order. Republican order that also guarantees democracy and freedom.

We will have to choose.

