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# Mass Education from the War of 1870 to the War of 2001

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**Abstract:** This work traces the involvement of the social practice termed education, especially in its lifelong form, to the production of war from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 to the War on Terrorism 2001-\_\_\_\_\_.

## The War Machine

*Always historicize*  
Jameson

In December 1851, about forty years after the first Napoleonic empire collapsed (Battle of Waterloo, 1815), the Emperor Napoleon's nephew Louis (1808-1873) staged a *coup d'état* in Paris, and following in his uncle's footsteps, installed a second "post-revolutionary" empire in France<sup>1</sup>. This second empire ended in battle too, though much more ignominiously than the first (the Franco-Prussian War of 1870). Goaded into the war by the Prussian Prime Minister Bismarck, Louis' supposedly invincible armies engaged a recently recapitalized, retrained and reorganized enemy much before they were prepared to do so. The resulting military *débâcle* (France was effectively defeated in six weeks) shook the imperial industrial world and resonates eerily in postmodern postindustrial war.

While the "second empire" of post-revolutionary France has been read since as the precursor of twentieth century fascism, it is the rise and fall of that empire that presaged/prestaged not only the mass wars of the twentieth century, but also the militarized peace. The mobilization, deployment and destructive capabilities of the French and Prussian armies bespoke the "total war" that defined the twentieth century, just as the civil and military preparation for war in Prussia and France bespoke the postWWII era of "total peace"<sup>2</sup>.

Total war, made possible by the martial application of modern science, technology, philosophy, industry and education, was based on the coordination, mobilization and deployment of all the resources, civil or military, available to nationalized, imperial states. Previewed early in 19th century by the Napoleonic reconstitution of civil and military France, "total war" was developed conceptually by the Prussian theorist von Clausewitz (*On War*, Berlin, 1832). By 1917, Clausewitzian total war and its accompanying war economy had been generalized in the previously discrete (Hegelian) social spaces between war and peace. By the end of WWII, "totally blended civil/military economies" marked industrialism. Industrialism itself had become a function of war/militarism, an *inversion* of the first industrial war (1870) when industry and civil society were only partially militarized.

The apprehension of total war and fascism anticipated by the War of 1870 was not only based in increased martial rigor (war lethality), but in nascent industrial (mass) communications systems which lent themselves well (but not inevitably) to the production of military/industrial *subjectivity*. This new subject(ivity) was put to work when, as Bismarck recounted, the "Ems telegram" ...enrage(d) the French "not only on account of its contents"—a national insult—"but also on account of the manner of its distribution"—directly to the populace of France and the German states through mass circulation newspapers, as well as to the French government through conventional diplomatic channels—so that "before midnight" on the same day as it was sent, the telegram would "have the effect of a red rag upon the Gallic bull"<sup>3</sup>.

The effect that telegram—like the highly symbolic but more deadly “telegram” recently sent (9/11)—was contingent upon mass communications technologies and upon statist control of the formation of subjectivity. The high-speed printing press and the electrical telegram matched with the *mentalities* of populations deliberately nationalized since the early 19th century, at least from the time the *ancien régime* was overthrown in France (1789), and with a vengeance in the German states from the time of the Napoleonic wars, to produce a war weapon all its own.

Indeed Bismarck, as well as his contemporary Nietzsche, may have been “postmodern”. His understanding that language was comprised of form that could (depending on context) determine content augured well for its military-industrial (and commercial) deployment. Though guile (lies, deception) had been employed for centuries (if not millennia) to whip up war fever, the means Bismarck used to incite/excite the domesticated citizenry (*les citoyennes*) of France and soon-to-be Germany proved as prescient as the war (and the peace) his mediations precipitated/anticipated.

His deployment of mass media/literacy to disseminate mass hostility (sell a perception) was based on the industrial formation of radical difference [the Other]. It speaks to the opportunistic opening of a “popular perceptual front” just as soon as the technical means to do so presented. As such, the “Ems telegram” marks the launching of mass electromechanical perceptual offences (and defenses) whereby the imperialism of “radical alterity” is technologically/psychologically re-inscribed/re-vested. Like the industrialization of war (and commerce) more generally, industrialized wars of perception (for the minds [and hearts] of the “people”) were developed more fully forty years after Bismarck so decisively won the Franco-Prussian war.

The propaganda offences of the Great War (1914-18), especially the reduction of whole nations to “axis of evil”, evidenced the industrialization (and intense capitalization) not only of war (i.e. total war) but of perception (at the time, the terms advertising and propaganda were synonymous)<sup>4</sup>. Virilio (1994: 13) writes:

The year 1914 not only saw the physical deportation of millions of men to the battlefields. With the apocalypse created by the *deregulation of perception* came a different kind of diaspora, the moment of panic when the mass of Americans and Europeans could no longer believe their eyes, when their *faith* in *perception* became slave to the faith in the *technical sightline*: in other words the *visual field* was reduced to the line of a *sighting device*.

The reduction of the *visual field* to a *technical sightline* opened visual perception to constant (instrumental, commercial, political, military) refocus. In effect, human visual perception had been technologically (militarily) delimited (this follows Socrates in that electromechanical prosthetics, like paper prosthetics [writing on paper or lambskin], involve gain and loss). The scope of already reduced Albertian (Renaissance) seeing—called perspective—was reduced even further as the viewer was forcibly withdrawn from the scene/seen even more<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Learning Machine**

*All of us are already civilian soldiers without knowing it. And some of us know it. The great stroke of luck for the military class's terrorism is that no one recognizes it. People don't recognize the militarized part of their identity, of their consciousness.*

Virilio

Bismarck, by launching the “Ems telegram”, provided the state with an industrial means outside of compelled participation in schooling, religion and the military (conscription) to

control/form “the people”, to engineer, however imperfectly, more or less uniform perception and with that mass *affect* (disposition). The First World War amalgamated/welded this theatre of perceptual operation irrevocably to the theatre of war. In effect, a statist industrialized “perceptual front” was opened that complemented the more general industrialization of war (until the nineteenth century, the perceptual theatre had been more strictly a military-religious than a nation-statist concern). With perception emerging from World War I reduced to a highly mediated “sightline”, the common perceptual field became even more regulated (a technical sightline). The means by which massed, national populations could be governed effectively were available now. Virilio (1994:23) writes:

To admit that for the human eye the essential is invisible and that, since everything is an illusion, it follows that scientific theory, like art, is merely a way of manipulating our illusions, went against the political-philosophical discourses then [1920s] evolving in tandem with the imperative of convincing the greatest number, with its accompanying desire for infallibility, and a strong tendency to ideological charlatanism. Publicly to point out how mental images are formed, including the way their psychophysiological features carry their fragility and limitations, was to violate a state secret of the same order as a military secret, since it masked a mode of mass manipulation that was practically infallible”.

It is still not commonly recognized (apprehended) that what is seen (perceived) is as highly mediated (and arbitrary) as the system of representation it is dependent upon; however, when it is recognized, the recognition usually is functional (not theoretical) and employed to garner some immediate instrumental advantage (e.g. marketing, advertising, politics, support for war). Popular culture (including the spectacles of war, politics, diplomacy and commerce) not only depends on this “blind spot” (cynicism and irony signal awareness), but employs a sophisticated understanding of the limited and contingent nature of perception to attract its audience (e.g. to form “mass affect” and its off-shoots such as “public” opinion, war support and “market” demand).

After Prussia’s stunning defeat of France in 1870, compulsion learning for young and old was expanded throughout the new German Empire (often to incredible Church led resistance) by the new Imperial Chancellor Bismarck and his Minister of Culture (education) Falk. This imperial system of forced schooling was employed in *Kulturkampf* (the culture war futilely fought by the German Empire after the fighting ended). From that time on, “industrialized education” in all industrial jurisdictions, whether higher, elementary or adult, was militarized similarly. The “German model” profoundly influenced France and to some degree Britain, though these nations had developed similar projects. Japan followed the German model; its impact in the U.S. became even greater than before the Franco/Prussian War. Lenin followed a Germanic/United Statesian educational/industrial model as he reformed the Russian Empire (Henry Ford and Fredrick Taylor were his heroes). The process of *educationalization* in all industrial societies was the means for the *military/industrialization* of the *contemporary self*.

However, during the twentieth century, this equation was inverted as well—there was no longer a need in for “real” soldier/civilians in postindustrial jurisdictions which now had the means to wage *virtual* war (any more than there was a need for many “real” workers in a world of “virtual” work). This inversion was recognized first in France by Baudrillard, Foucault, Virilio, Deleuze and Guatarri, all of whom took the Clausewitzian formula whereby “war is the continuation of politics [*Politick*] by other means” and stood it on its head. Politics, and other social practices/discourses of control including education, were now *the continuation of war by*

*other means* (its massive generalization). Foucault (1980:90) states: “power is war, a war constructed by other means”. Deleuze and Guatarri (1986:119):

Total war itself [World Wars I & II] is surpassed, towards a form of peace more terrifying still [“Cold War” and terrorism]. The war machine has taken charge of the aim, worldwide order, and the [nation] states are no longer anything more than objects or means adapted to that machine. This is the point at which Clausewitz’s formula is effectively *reversed*; to be entitled to say that politics is the continuation of war by other means, it is not enough to invert the order of the words as if they could be spoken in either direction; it is necessary to follow the real movement at the conclusion of which the States, having appropriated a war machine, and having it adapted to their aims, reissue a war machine that takes charge of the aim, appropriates the States and *assumes increasingly wider political functions*.

Virilio captured similar thought in his concept of “pure war”, which describes a “civil peace” devoted to constant “preparation for war” (“postindustrial” economies are “blended” for that reason. The “information age” itself is a “spin-off” of U.S. military research and development)<sup>6</sup>. Baudrillard’s provocative *The Gulf War Did Not Happen* caught a *vital* aspect of postindustrial *militarization*—its *virtualization*. He argues that war in the era of hyperreality is a media event. The “war effect” might better describe the way “war” is experienced within “postindustrial jurisdictions” now that low-grade hi-tech war (low intensity conflict) is quotidian practice (e.g. the War of 2001).

However, these *inversions* of the conventional narrative whereby war and peace exist as separate states of social being (i.e. the Hegelian concept of war), and of society as generally peaceful and of education as an ultimately beneficent practice, cannot be accessed easily in a discursive space that maintains a positive (learned) ignorance toward the prevalence, practice and function of war/militarization.

This “willed innocence”, as James Baldwin calls it, is not so willed or innocent as he may assume. It is a product of a century and a half of statist-controlled learning (and education) as this is contemporary perception itself—and what is perceived/conceived through its mediation—with a deliberateness and on a scale hitherto unknown (through electrical/mechanical logistics of perception evident in newspapers, radio, film, TV, the NET, and, most importantly, through education—that vast project of deliberate subjective formation as it is actually practiced on-the-ground).

During the twentieth century the field of education, like war and political life, suffered an inversion as well, this inversion especially manifest in the euphemism and practice of lifelong learning, now long removed from 19th. century British autodidacticism and totally attuned to its 19th. century military/industrial Prussian precursor. Prussia then already conceived of education as a cradle to grave operation (like Sparta and Plato’s *Republic*). Today, like the person it forms (*Umbildung*), education has transformed into a global learning system geared to a postindustrial economy of relational simulation<sup>7</sup>. Rather than “educating” in the liberal sense (*Bildung*), it is designed to do just the opposite—to form destabilized subjectivity open to perceptual reformation *on-demand* and *just-in-time* in postindustrial economic terms.

The learning machine—the restriction of sensorium through the formation of delimited perception—is a function of the power of contemporary science, even philosophy, art and literature, certainly social science, marketing, media theory, advertising, organization theory, and much, much more. Yet, since the 19th. century, these discourses in all but their functional aspects (“how to” left in, “why” taken out) were removed even further from common view. In

effect, the discourses that scientifically and philosophically made the instrumentalization of perceptual production possible were kept out of common sight(lines), leaving most persons, even if they wanted to know, without the conceptual or perceptual resources to con/perceive what was going on.

Common “conceptual technology” simply did not keep up with technological and scientific changes. The perceptual gap, or better, the divide that developed early in the twentieth century between “common” and “select” sensibility frames existence still. This particular “splitting of views” (history is replete with them) between the select and common forms of learning was based on *education* (formal learning) alone, though, of course, access to that learning form remained a function of particular discourses of class, gender, race and so on.

While reading and writing as defined in statist terms (mass literacy outside of the statist form was prevalent in Europe and the US from the 18th century on) became mandatory, and levels of formal education rose precipitously in the Western jurisdictions (and Japan). The gap between contemporary (counter-mechanical) philosophy, science, art, literature and (mechanically modeled) common perception continued to grow. In effect “common sense”—Newtonian cosmology—was taught even while it (dis)abused the learner by undeveloping and maldeveloping the ability to understand his/her environs (that is how wars for/of perception are won).

The social bifurcation (schizophrenia) that resulted has yet to be commonly apprehended and exposed. To even admit to such a “split” would demonstrate once again that even the most supposedly egalitarian and positive discourses (of technological redemption) are highly regulated and selective, and like all higher levels of formal learning relegated to various specific places and groups. Unlike in the nineteenth century when autodidacticism in industrial economies was turning this around, the lived experience of the human is again divorced from the intellectual production that forms it, especially an understanding of the postindustrial technologies that postliberal existence is predicated upon.

When Paul Virilio talks about the War Machine, he says the War Machine is never about making war against an external enemy. The War Machine is really about using an external enemy (e.g. axis of evil) as a sacrificial kind of scapegoat for the endocolonization of your own population, for the creation of a domestic bestiary. So the logic then, the threefold logic of tactics, strategy and logistics as developed by Clausewitz and first employed domestically by Bismarck, is to “invade” your own population by employing the politics of radical alterity (difference) in order to maintain/enhance very interested control.

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1 Full references are available upon request.

2 This is not to suggest that the Franco-Prussian War is comparable to World War I in terms of magnitude. More shells were expended in a single day on the Western Front in WWI than in the entire Franco-Prussian War. However, the speed of German troop movements and the concentration of their violence evidenced the changed nature of war. The U.S. Civil War evidenced these same characteristics though it did not have the same global impact. Mayor Guiliani was wrong when he said that “9/11” was the largest mass death in U.S. history, including D-Day and Pearl Harbor. It was the US Civil War Battle of Antietam (1862).

3 The infamous “Ems telegram” reported the happenings of a meeting between the King of Prussia and the French ambassador to the Prussian chancellor Bismarck. Bismarck made available an edited version of the document that omitted the courtesies exchanged by the two participants. This edited version, which was published in France and the German states, further exacerbated the ill feeling between France and Prussia and led to calls for war in Paris and Berlin. France declared war on Germany on July 19, 1870. With the French as apparent aggressors, Bismarck

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was successful in enlisting the southern German states in the ensuing war. The unification of all the German states (except Austria) into modern Germany ensued shortly thereafter. After 1870, Germany indisputably was Europe's leading military, commercial, cultural, technological, educational and scientific power. Hegel's history appeared to be unfolding.

4 In the ancient era, Sun-Tzu, the other theorist of war comparable to Clausewitz, had already identified war as centrally concerned with control of the "field of perception". He advocated using the "tricks of the trade" (purposive deception) to do so. Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema – The Logics of Perception* introduced the martial "logics of perception" to social theory in 1984.

5 Jay (1993:211) explains that following World War I:

The interrogation of sight hesitantly emerging in certain prewar works of philosophy and art was given an intense, often violent inflection by the war, which also helped disseminate an appreciation of its implications. The ancient scopic régime, which we've called Cartesian perspectivalism, lost what was left of its hegemony, and the very premises of ocularcentrism themselves were soon being called into question in many different contexts.

6 Postindustrialism co-exists alongside preindustrialism and industrialism. For example, one geographic area may be "totally wired" and dedicated to the production of information (for example, the accounting data produced in India "overnight" for transnational accounting firms based in Europe and NA), a preindustrial production platform may be located nearby, while an industrial gas works may be located between. Each of these, in turn, in aspects increasingly resembles the others (blending). The industrial plants adopt digital technologies, while the accounting firms come to resemble the preindustrial "outputting" operations. This mixture was not possible until the 1980s. However, all "advanced" economies at root are a function of "third generation" industrial technologies (e.g. electrical generation, advanced metallurgy, petrochemicals [plastics], hierarchical corporate structures). In this rendering, modes of production are contiguous. Postindustrial refers to an economy of the interior based in the production/consumption of immaterial goods as compared to an economy of the exterior based in the production/consumption of material goods. This differs from the original meaning (Tourraine, 1971, Bell, 1973)

7 Fredric Jameson speaks of Brecht's development, through the character Galy Gay in *Mann ist Mann*, of a prototype of "psychic de and re-construction [*Umbildung*]" (*Brecht and Method*, London & New York:

Verso 1998:77). Winthrop-Young writes:

the old concept of *Bildungsroman*—if it ever was more than an obstinate figment of scholarly imagination—must come to an end; for *Bildung*, programmed by the Goethean algorithm to result in the unfolding of a personality core, was tied to a harmonious mixture of worldly experience with education derived from reading the proper books.

Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. "Media Magic Mountain". *Reading Matters*. (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press), 1997:29-52.

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