

Interview with
Christian Salmon

The Era of Clash

[L'ère du clash]

This interview was carried out by AOC
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Christian Salmon, L'ère du clash
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Your book comes at a time when the reappraisal of work is becoming unavoidable. What was your starting point?

2008 was a turning-point that marked the peak of storytelling, with the election of Obama, and the beginning of his fall from grace with the 2008 crisis. With the Trump campaign, it became obvious that political life was no longer following the serial pattern. It is not longer paced by intrigue, but by unpredictable, sudden bursts, a pattern of abrupt changes more akin to seismographic politics than to storytelling. Storytelling has been replaced with clash, intrigue, and serial transgressions, suspense with panic, episodes with a series of abrupt shocks. It has become clear that the mobilising power of stories in management, marketing and political discourse, characteristic of the storytelling era, is more and more frequently jarred by infox, hoaxes and other trolls. Now, virility and rivalry go hand in hand, virulence and violence, clash and warring accounts. The buzz of the clash-tweet has replaced the account that demands a certain continuity to unravel the twists and turns of an intrigue. It is this antagonism, based on one-upmanship, that I call “the era of clash”.

What was your writing process?

I had to avoid a double trap: that of the generalising theory and that of the blow-by-blow news commentary. I chose a double lens. One is historical, and attempts to reconstruct, from 2001 to 2016, the backdrop to the anthropological upheavals that are the product of several overlapping revolutions: a political revolution (from Brexit to Trump), a capitalist revolution (financialisation), a digital revolution (from the rise of social networks in 2005 to Gafam), a symbolic revolution with new ideal types (rapidity, liquidity, volatility). Because this polyhistorical transformation cannot be observed from a distance, I investigated across several fields: the Trump election in the US, the 2005 Greek crisis, Italy of the two Matteos (Renzi and Salvini), Macron's France, etc. Over the course of this research, across several years, a shift or handover between two paradigms began to appear: from that of "storytelling", which I studied in my previous book, to that which led to this new book.

Working in the social sciences also means participating in debates in which your role as a researcher is to challenge prejudice. What is a major misconception that you would like to see challenged?

The expression "fake news" has become so omnipresent that it was officially declared the word of the year by the Collins English Dictionary and the American Dialect Society. Behind this illusion of a diagnosis, the expression functions like a smokescreen, masking the causes of the public discourse's discredit and its history since the 1990s. It's no longer a problem of information malfunction, but of a deterioration of any space for democratic deliberation. Economy of words now follows the laws of financial economics. Volatility. Rumour. Coups de théâtre.

