Strategies of Disappointment
Paul Virilio

"At sea, the war very soon became an all-out war because those who dominate the sea know nothing about the contingencies, the obstacles … the sea is indestructible and does not require maintenance and it is a natural link between all spaces."[1] This is where the New World received its emergency baptism; this is where it was baptised once more through a mysticism carrying it from the waves of the sea to the current of mechanical waves and on to the flood of electromagnetic waves which now propagate freely and unconstrained in the void. ALL-OUT WAR as seen by the Naval Air Force; waves of bombers over Europe and Asia supported by the frequencies of the first conflict raging between acoustic and radio-electric waves. ALL-OUT PEACE — an undeclared state of war of nuclear deterrence — an arsenal of nuclear arms keeping the balance of terror, increasingly leaving the field to that of information. Binary deterrence (East/West) gives way to (global) multi-polar deterrence in which computer science will have to replace physics, even astrophysics, as the ultimate profile of reality by the end of the century.

Technical purification of the world, the last stage on the way of old, sectarian Puritanism represented by the descendants of those who arrived on the East coast aboard the Mayflower, blazing a trail across the continent as far as the Californian fold; they were sure that they were "leaving the old notion of man" behind the farther they moved away from rural Old Europe and the closer they came to the future eternity in which a "new man" was to he born from a close union of bodies and technologies, even though many were called, but few were chosen, as the Bible says.[2]

"Are you a transhuman?", ask the West coast prophets, high priests of exocentration, cyberpunks, paradoxical preachers or disciples of Nietzsche or Heidegger.

"Too modern for words!" The effects of ads, which are at the same time special effects in the service of marketing world-wide connections, will not be able to keep the illusion alive for very much longer — the technoculture of our surrealist century is entering its final stage.[3]

"In our days characterized by a surfeit of information, meaning, context is the ultimate luxury." You can find something along these lines in the magazine Wired. This luxury will be out of reach in the future, and all the virtual transplantations, psychedelic substitutes and New Age multimedia will seem like a panicky game, the last one applicable at the margin of a Cyber which has no other reference than the state of pure power developed 200 years earlier in the natural nihilism of the sea. "Fleet in being" by Admiral Herbert is a strategy of disappointment marking the transition from being as an entity to being as a state while exercising pressure on the adversary. By setting up a secret fleet in the sea of virtual presence, one can strike the enemy continuously, leaving it perplexed and beaten; however, this requires the abandonment of the bad principle that you have to attack the enemy as soon as you

perceive it. From now on, one can wage war a whole life through without ever having to face a battle.

After the Flying Dutchmen*) of Admiral Herbert, after the end of the Age of Deterrence, 1991 was to show how the new military-informational complex with its cyberarsenal and secret aircraft won the Gulf War without itself having to fight.[4]

"Those who know everything are afraid of nothing." In 1949 Nazi Rosenberg's mad dictum was followed by the formula of the American, Shannon, who said something along the lines of. "Anything that reduces uncertainty is part of the information sector."

The deus ex machina comes into being, a world of absolute destiny where nothing has a literal meaning any longer, neither the good nor the bad, nor time nor space in which what people still call success cannot serve as a criterion on an earth merrily enjoying the Lust am Untergang**): "All the signs of social, political and civilian decline must be interpreted in positive terms. as the signs of the advent of the cyber (…). While it is true that we risk leaving part of the population to their fate when entering the Cyber, technoculture is our ultimate destiny," says Michael Heim.[5]

According to Epictetus, a man's master is he who can procure or take away the object of man's desire or fear at random. However, a man's master may also appear to be his servant from time to time. This special relation of power has since been at work in the technologies of virtuality, not only in the virtual economy which caused damage that can already be appraised; it is present in the societies which expose themselves to the incomprehensible meteorology of the networks, the ultrarapid clouds of this planetary revolution where everyone becomes the potential target of an unheard-of quantity of information and data provided by a great variety of systems.

Do territories exposed to the experimental attacks of information-age arms have to be shielded the way Saddam hid in the sands of the Iraqi desert with his obsolete communication arsenal?

The earth itself is withdrawing. In 1993 the San Francisco quake caused a migratory movement to the East; people left everything behind and moved their homes from Bel Air and Malibu to New York and Florida.

The old myth of the bunker, which had never been completely abandoned after the balance of terror ceased to exist, has been reborn not far from Silicon Valley. Bill Gates, one of the presumed masters of the nets, is now building his palace near Lake Washington. The building also incorporates five invisible bunkers linked by subterranean passageways. On an area of 4,500 square meters the bunkers house three nurseries for the children he might have, three kitchens and dining-rooms, two elevators, a meeting-room for a hundred people, a twenty-meter swimming-pool, a garage for 20 cars etc. … The most special space is a room of virtual sensations, a library containing 15,000 works, with walls full of high-definition monitors to retrieve the hundreds of thousands of works to which Gates bought the rights to electronic reproduction.

Animated pictures are ubiquitous, all in all, they are those living in or rather surviving a world without matter where nothing is invented, nothing is created anymore.

References

1 From Seemacht und Sicherheit, by Vice Admiral Friedrich Ruge.

2 L'art du moteur, chapter 6 (Du surhomme à l'homme exché), Paris: Edition Galilée. 1993) and Munich: Hanser Verlag.

3 Advertising in the shape of videos, films, music, games and sophisticated drugs — magazines such as Mondo 2000, Research or Wired send their cyberpunk contributors to all critical places on the planet when they run out of ideas so that they can draw on these sources.

4 The osmosis of computer science originated in World War 11 crypto-analyses and the war between the ENIGMA decoding machine and its British counterpart ULTRA. The Soviet "Judgment Day" machine, the American "Star Wars" concept and the development of the Internet, which the Pentagon started in 1969 as a global information backup system in case of a major nuclear or other catastrophe, are cases in point. The Internet was then transformed from a military to a civilian service and saw significant gains in importance, as e.g. in November 1994, when it had the US election results before CNN could broadcast them.

5 Quoted by Bilwet. Michael Heim, a disciple of Martin Heidegger, said that there were no biopolitics, no power and no conspiracy on the part of the military or the industry, and no interests behind the development of Virtual Reality.

*) Translator's note: "les vaisseaux-fantômes" in the original. "Le Vaisseau fantome" is the French title of Wagner's opera.

**) Translator's note; "the pleasure of destruction", German in the French original.