

## On War by Mark Stafford

For Erwin Schrodinger, Austrian physicist and inventor of the formula for particle motion, author of "What is Life", who said the closest description of the real is provided in the book of The Upanishads in which an endless war between the Gods keeps the universe in motion.

In W.G. Sebald's study of post-War German literature "Luftkrieg and Literatur" he analyses and identifies how poets and writers of this period felt incapable of describing what they and their fellow citizens had experienced (let alone inflicted on others). He notes warily the way in which many of them drifted into altering the records of their own lives and tacitly embraced social ideologies of "recovery", rebuilding, and even, this time around, building more strongly.

In the aftermath of the U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan journalistic commentary was awash with the political use of the term "forever war". A wide range of political and ideological handwringing appeared, ranging from outrage to attempts at justification. One of these seemingly reassuring assessments to salve the consciousness of a shocked and embarrassed collective was the renowned neuro-scientists and linguists Steven Pinker, author of "Our Brighter Angels", who argued that from an evolutionary point of view war was in decline. Regardless of the absurd calculations of the cost of this war, the decline in international credibility we were in fact seeing fewer and fewer, and far more contained wars. This seems in fact to be an important example of the kind of "camouflage" that the ideology of scientific "knowledge" can provide the global- economic domination that we all live under, but unequally. A system in which war production, which of course includes biological weapons, plays a central role

The architect and urbanist Paul Virillio identified, during the implosion of the former Yugoslavia, and subsequently during the West's attempt to redraw the political and territorial map of the Middle East that the main aim of the industrial and scientific conglomerates upon whom our economic privilege is dependent requires "events" and "conflicts" in order to test their new products.

He didn't live long enough to observe the economic uses of a pandemic which to say the least were unevenly distributed, but distributed they certainly have been. I do not doubt that he would have been stunned at the way the political responses to the pandemic confirmed his thesis that what warfare increasingly requires to sustain its waste and destruction is camouflage. Given that he had devoted such

a sustained analysis to this phenomenon he may also have been stunned by politicians and philosophers who both from very different (seemingly) positions claimed it was a hoax.

In my opinion Sam Moyne, the Harvard based historian of "human rights", is a worthy successor of Paul Virillio, although their style of analysis and speculation is markedly different. In an article the day after the "official" departure from Afghanistan he had the courage to argue that the U.S will invent a new form of warfare which will operate under the banner of "human rights". Wars will occur but they will not be exposed under such anachronisms as "territorial and economic interests" but will be "hidden" from consideration as "wars" in the name of human rights

I can only justify the breath of this discussion by appealing to the obvious confusion caused by the use of war as a metaphor. The signifier is both the support and the semblant that camouflages the monstrosity that we name war. Our discourses when they encounter limitations, resistances and obscurities support the errances that the appeal to the metaphor of war engenders

Erik Porge has provided us with a scansion of the traces of war and metaphors of war in Freud and Lacan. Freud's writing, the unfolding of his thought, is marked by conflicts, struggles, that are implicitly useable in metaphors of war. Whether he was finding in the dreams of combatants the silent activity of the death drive, dreaming of his sons' imminent death or sharing in the disillusionment that marked the early signs of a cultural collapse in the society around him, Freud was marked by war.

As Erik Porge highlights this emerges in his dialog with Einstein. What some people have interpreted as pessimism in his acceptance of the inevitability of war is perhaps in light of Lacan's thinking the vestiges of an optimism, an optimism that some meaning can be found in destruction. A belief that some traces will remain of the desire to leave a trace, a vestige of binding, life-enhancing forces. It is a moving testimony and one that we all we continue honoring.

Beginning in his public work with the psychiatrist Werner Jaureg, we can hear his loud denunciation of those voices that claimed that the sacrifices of war should remain a necessary value in a "civil" society. Those who rejected the sacrifice, who collapsed in helplessness were not in his view, laggards or deserters. Pacifism was and is a mark of human culture, an advancement based upon a renunciation of the drive to destroy.

But Freud never wavers from his distrust of idealistic projects. Despite the obscurity of his contribution there is no doubt that his biography of Woodrow Wilson is suffused with a hatred for optimistic solutions.

The indications that Erik Porge provides of the traces of war in Lacan allow glimpses of a difference in their thinking. Notably is the silence, as an act of resistance, that Lacan made during the occupation by the Nazis. Despite his knowledge that there were others for whom such an occupation called for a sacrifice, whether to protect those who were being sent to their extermination or those who could only engage in the disruption of an obscene reality.

Perhaps we can add that his own work on logical time owes a debt to the work on groups that he recognized in his report on British Psychiatry During the War, where he found a sense of duty cultivated in a manner that had been abandoned during the fall of France.

Should we not also add that thanks largely with his theory of paranoia and psychosis that Françoise Dolto was able to make such brilliant contributions in child analysis, specifically working with the ravaging effect of war on children.

I imagine few people remember the name of Lazare Ponticelli, who was at 110 (he died in 2008) the last surviving combatant in France of the war of 1914-18. Much was made of his survival; a state funeral was planned in his honor (which he refused demanding only that those who never got to live a full life be commemorated). Asked to comment on the war and his views on its effect on him he responded "War is stupid". Perhaps Lacan's identification of the passion for ignorance should be remembered in when the metaphor of war is used. Ponticelli added poignantly "in war you point at and shoot fathers." Now we can add that we no longer point at anyone - we aim to render women infertile, to destroy and make uninhabitable territory. Lacan recognized that the trajectory of conflict in our times was a system of segregation that make a mockery of the existence of the heterogeneous dimension of the real. If the future of war lies in protecting "human rights" we can add that the only agents will be those with a passionate attraction to destruction.

## References

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Virillio "War and Cinema"