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The Gulf War did not take place

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The Gulf War did not take place

Since this war was won in advance, we will never know what it would have been like had it existed. We will never know what an Iraqi taking part with a chance of fighting would have been like. We will never know what an American taking part with a chance of being beaten would have been like. We have seen what an ultra-modern process of electrocution is like, a process of paralysis or lobotomy of an experimental enemy away from the field of battle with no possibility of reaction. But this is not a war, any more than 10,000 tonnes of bombs per day is sufficient to make it a war. Any more than the direct transmission by CNN of real time information is sufficient to authenticate a war. One is reminded of *Capricorn One* in which the flight of a manned rocket to Mars, which only took place in a desert studio, was relayed live to all the television stations in the world.

It has been called a surgical war, and it is true that there is something in common between this *in vitro* destruction and *in vitro* fertilisation — the latter also produces a living being but it

is not sufficient to produce a child. Except in the New Genetic Order, a child issues from sexual copulation. Except in the New World Order, war is born of an antagonistic, destructive but dual relation between two adversaries. This war is an asexual surgical war, a matter of war-processing in which the enemy only appears as a computerised target, just as sexual partners only appear as code-names on the screen of *Minitel Rose*. If we can speak of sex in the latter case then perhaps the Gulf War can pass for a war.

The Iraqis blow up civilian buildings in order to give the impression of a dirty war. The Americans disguise satellite information to give the impression of a clean war. Everything in *trompe l'oeil*! The final Iraqi ploy: to secretly evacuate Kuwait and thereby mock the great offensive. With hindsight, the Presidential Guard itself was perhaps only a mirage; in any case, it was exploited as such until the end. All this is no more than a stratagem and the war ended in general boredom, or worse in the feeling of having been duped. Iraqi boasting, American hypocrisy. It is as though there was a virus infecting this war from the beginning which emptied it of all credibility. It is perhaps because the two adversaries did not even confront each other face to face, the one lost in its virtual war won in advance, the other buried in its traditional war lost in advance. They never saw each other: when the Americans finally appeared behind their curtain of bombs the Iraqis had already disappeared behind their curtain of smoke ...

The general effect is of a farce which we will not even have

had time to applaud. The only escalation will have been in decoys, opening onto the final era of great confrontations which vanish in the mist. The events in Eastern Europe still gave the impression of a divine surprise. No such thing in the Gulf, where it is as though events were devoured in advance by the parasite virus, the retro-virus of history. This is why we could advance the hypothesis that this war would not take place. And now that it is over, we can realise at last that it did not take place.

It was buried for too long, whether in the concrete and sand Iraqi bunkers or in the Americans' electronic sky, or behind that other form of sepulchre, the chattering television screens. Today everything tends to go underground, including information in its informational bunkers. Even war has gone underground in order to survive. In this forum of war which is the Gulf, everything is hidden: the planes are hidden, the tanks are buried, Israel plays dead, the images are censored and all information is blockaded in the desert: only TV functions as a medium without a message, giving at last the image of pure television.

Like an animal, the war goes to ground. It hides in the sand, it hides in the sky. It is like the Iraqi planes: it knows that it has no chance if it surfaces. It awaits its hour ... which will never come.

The Americans themselves are the vectors of this catalepsy. There is no question that the war came from their plan and its programmed unfolding. No question that, in their war, the Iraqis went to war. No question that the Other came from their computers. All reaction, even on their part (as we saw in the episode of the prisoners, which should have produced a violent

reaction), all abreaction against the program, all improvisation is abolished (even the Israelis were muzzled). What is tested here in this foreclosure of the enemy, this experimental reclusion of war, is the future validity for the entire planet of this type of suffocating and machinic performance, virtual and relentless in its unfolding. In this perspective, war could not take place. There is no more room for war than for any form of living impulse.

War stripped of its passions, its phantasms, its finery, its veils, its violence, its images; war stripped bare by its technicians even, and then reclothed by them with all the artifices of electronics, as though with a second skin. But these too are a kind of decoy that technology sets up before itself. Saddam Hussein's decoys still aim to deceive the enemy, whereas the American technological decoy only aims to deceive itself. The first days of the lightning attack, dominated by this technological mystification, will remain one of the finest bluffs, one of the finest collective mirages of contemporary History (along with Timisoara). We are all accomplices in these fantasmagoria, it must be said, as we are in any publicity campaign. In the past, the unemployed constituted the reserve army of Capital; today, in our enslavement to information, we constitute the reserve army of all planetary mystifications.

Saddam constructed his entire war as a decoy (whether deliberately or not), including the decoy of defeat which even more

resembles a hysterical syncope of the type: peek-a-boo, I am no longer there! But the Americans also constructed their affair as a decoy, like a parabolic mirror of their own power, taking no account of what was before them, or hallucinating those opposite to be a threat of comparable size to themselves: otherwise they would not even have been able to believe in their own victory. Their victory itself in the form of a triumphal decoy echoes the Iraqi decoy of defeat. Ultimately, both were accomplices as thick as thieves, and we were collectively abused. This is why the war remains indefinable and ungraspable, all strategy having given way to stratagem.

One of the two adversaries is a rug salesman, the other an arms salesman: they have neither the same logic nor the same strategy, even though they are both crooks. There is not enough communication between them to enable them to make war upon each other. Saddam will never fight, while the Americans will fight against a fictive double on screen. They see Saddam as he should be, a modernist hero, worth defeating (the fourth biggest army in the world!). Saddam remains a rug salesman who takes the Americans for rug salesmen like himself, stronger than he but less gifted for the scam. He hears nothing of deterrence. For there to be deterrence, there must be communication. It is a game of rational strategy which presupposes real time communication between the two adversaries; whereas in this war there was never communication at any moment, but always dislocation in time, Saddam evolving in a long time, that of blackmail, of procrastination, false advance, of retreat: the recurrent time of *The Thousand and One Nights* — exactly the inverse of real time. Deterrence in fact presupposes

a virtual escalation between the two adversaries. By contrast, Saddam's entire strategy rests upon de-escalation (one sets a maximal price then descends from it in stages). And their respective denouements are not at all the same. The failure of the sales pitch is marked by evasive action: the salesman rolls up his rug and leaves. Thus, Saddam disappears without further ado. The failure of deterrence is marked by force: this is the case with the Americans. Once again, there is no relation between the two, each plays in his own space and misses the other. We cannot even say that the Americans defeated Saddam: he defaulted on them, he de-escalated and they were not able to escalate sufficiently to destroy him.

Finally, who could have rendered more service to everyone, in such a short time at such little cost, than Saddam Hussein? He reinforced the security of Israel (reflux of the Intifada, revival of world opinion for Israel), assured the glory of American arms, gave Gorbachev a political chance, opened the door to Iran and Shiism, relaunched the UN, etc., all for free since he alone paid the price of blood. Can we conceive of so admirable a man? And he did not even fall! He remains a hero for the Arab masses. It is as though he were an agent of the CIA disguised as Saladin.

Resist the probability of any image or information whatever. Be more virtual than events themselves, do not seek to re-establish the truth, we do not have the means, but do not be duped, and to that end re-immerses the war and all information in the

virtuality from whence they come. Turn deterrence back against itself. Be meteorologically sensitive to stupidity.

In the case of this war, it is a question of the living illustration of an implacable logic which renders us incapable of envisaging any hypothesis other than that of its real occurrence. The realist logic which lives on the illusion of the final result. The denial of the facts is never one of them. The final resolution of an equation as complex as a war is never immediately apparent in the war. It is a question of seizing the logic of its unfolding, in the absence of any prophetic illusion. To be for or against the war is idiotic if the question of the very probability of this war, its credibility or degree of reality has not been raised even for a moment. All political and ideological speculations fall under mental deterrence (stupidity). By virtue of their immediate consensus on the evidence they feed the unreality of this war, they reinforce its bluff by their unconscious dupery.

The real warmongers are those who live on the ideology of the veracity of this war, while the war itself wreaks its havoc at another level by trickery, hyperreality, simulacra, and by the entire mental strategy of deterrence which is played out in the facts and in the images, in the anticipation of the real by the virtual, of the event by virtual time, and in the inexorable confusion of the two. All those who understand nothing of this involuntarily reinforce this halo of bluff which surrounds us.

It is as though the Iraqis were electrocuted, lobotomised, running towards the television journalists in order to surrender or immobilised beside their tanks, not even demoralised: de-cere-

bralised, stupefied rather than defeated — can this be called a war? Today we see the shreds of this war rot in the desert just like the shreds of the map in Borges' fable rotting at the four corners of the territory (moreover, strangely, he situates his fable in the same oriental regions of the Empire).

Fake war, deceptive war, not even the illusion but the disillusion of war, linked not only to defensive calculation, which translates into the monstrous prophylaxis of this military machine, but also to the mental disillusion of the combatants themselves, and to the global disillusion of everyone else by means of information. For deterrence is a total machine (it is the true war machine), and it not only operates at the heart of the event — where electronic coverage of the war devoured time and space, where virtuality (the decoy, programming, the anticipation of the end) devoured all the oxygen of war like a fuel-air explosive bomb — it also operates in our heads. Information has a profound function of deception. It matters little what it "informs" us about, its "coverage" of events matters little since it is precisely no more than a cover: its purpose is to produce consensus by flat encephalogram. The complement of the unconditional simulacrum in the field is to train everyone in the unconditional reception of broadcast simulacra. Abolish any intelligence of the event. The result is a suffocating atmosphere of deception and stupidity. And if people are vaguely aware of being caught up in this appeasement and this disillusion by images, they swallow the deception and remain fascinated by the evidence of the montage of this war with which we are inoculated everywhere: through the eyes, the senses and in discourse.

There are ironic balance sheets which help to temper the shock or the bluff of this war. A simple calculation shows that, of the 500,000 American soldiers involved during the seven months of operations in the Gulf, three times as many would have died from road accidents alone had they stayed in civilian life. Should we consider multiplying clean wars in order to reduce the murderous death toll of peacetime?

On this basis, we could develop a philosophy of perverse effects, which we tend to regard as always maleficent whereas in fact maleficent causes (war, illness, viruses) often produce beneficial perverse effects. They are no less perverse as a result, but more interesting than the others, in particular because it has been a matter of principle never to study them. Except for Mandeville, of course, in *The Fable of the Bees*, where he shows that every society prospers on the basis of its vices. But the course of events has drawn us further and further away from an intelligence of this order.

An example: deterrence itself. It only functions well between equal forces. Ideally, each party should possess the same weapons before agreeing to renounce their use. It is therefore the dissemination of (atomic) weapons alone which can ensure effective global deterrence and the indefinite suspension of war. The present politics of non-dissemination plays with fire: there will always be enough madmen to launch an archaic challenge below the level of an atomic riposte — witness Saddam. Things being as they are, we should place our hopes in the spread of weapons rather than in their (never respected) limitation. Here too, the beneficial perverse effect of dissemination should be taken into account. We should esca-

late in the virtual (of destruction) under penalty of de-escalating in the real. This is the paradox of deterrence. It is like information, culture or other material and spiritual goods: only their profusion renders them indifferent and neutralises their negative perverse effects. Multiply vices in order to ensure the collective good.

That said, the consequences of what did not take place may be as substantial as those of an historical event. The hypothesis would be that, in the case of the Gulf War as in the case of the events in Eastern Europe, we are no longer dealing with "historical events" but with places of collapse. Eastern Europe saw the collapse of communism, the construction of which had indeed been an historic event, borne by a vision of the world and a utopia. By contrast, its collapse is borne by nothing and bears nothing, but only opens onto a confused desert left vacant by the retreat of history and immediately invaded by its refuse.

The Gulf War is also a place of collapse, a virtual and meticulous operation which leaves the same impression of a non-event where the military confrontation fell short and where no political power proved itself. The collapse of Iraq and stupefaction of the Arab world are the consequences of a confrontation which did not take place and which undoubtedly never could take place. But this non-war in the form of a victory also consecrates the Western political collapse throughout the Middle East, incapable even of eliminating Saddam and of imagining or imposing anything apart from this new desert and police

order called world order.

As a consequence of this non-event and living proof of Western political weakness, Saddam is indeed still there, once again what he always was, the mercenary of the West, deserving punishment for not remaining in his place, but also worthy of continuing to gas the Kurds and the Shiites since he had the tact not to employ these weapons against those Western dogs, and worthy of keeping his Presidential Guard since he had the heart to not sacrifice them in combat. Miraculously (they were thought to have been destroyed), the Presidential Guard recovers all its valour against the insurgents. Moreover, it is typical of Saddam to prove his combativity and ferocity only against his internal enemies: as with every true dictator, the ultimate end of politics, carefully masked elsewhere by the effects of democracy, is to maintain control of one's own people by any means, including terror. This function embodied by dictatorships — that of being politically revealing and at the same time an alibi for democracies — no doubt explains the inexplicable weakness of the large powers towards them. Saddam liquidates the communists, Moscow flirts even more with him; he gasses the Kurds, it is not held against him; he eliminates the religious cadres, the whole of Islam makes peace with him. Whence this impunity? Why are we content to inflict a perfect semblance of military defeat upon him in exchange for a perfect semblance of victory for the Americans? This ignominious remounting of Saddam, replacing him in the saddle after his clown act at the head of the holy war, clearly shows that on all sides the war is considered not to have taken place. Even the last phase of this armed mystification will have changed nothing, for the

100,000 Iraqi dead will only have been the final decoy that Saddam will have sacrificed, the blood money paid in forfeit according to a calculated equivalence, in order to conserve his power. What is worse is that these dead still serve as an alibi for those who do not want to have been excited for nothing, nor to have been had for nothing: at least the dead would prove that this war was indeed a war and not a shameful and pointless hoax, a programmed and melodramatic version of what was the drama of war (Marx once spoke of this second, melodramatic version of a primary event). But we can rest assured that the next soap opera in this genre will enjoy an even fresher and more joyful credulity.

What a job Saddam has done for the Americans, from his combat with Iran up to this full scale debacle! Nevertheless, everything is ambiguous since this collapse removes any demonstrative value from American power, along with any belief in the Western ideologies of modernity, democracy, or secularity, of which Saddam had been made the incarnation in the Arab world.

We can see that the Western powers dreamt of an Islamic perestroika, on the newly formed model of Eastern Europe: democracy irresistibly establishing itself in those countries conquered by the forces of Good. The Arab countries will be liberated (the peoples cannot but want to be liberated), and the women of Saudi Arabia will have the right to drive. Alas! this is not to be.

The conquered have not been convinced and have withdrawn, leaving the victors only the bitter taste of an unreal made-to-order victory. Defeat can also be a rival bid and a new beginning, the chain of implication never stops. The eventual outcome is unpredictable and certainly will not be reckoned in terms of freedom.

No accidents occurred in this war, everything unfolded according to programmatic order, in the absence of passional disorder. Nothing occurred which would have metamorphosed events into a duel.

Even the status of the deaths may be questioned, on both sides. The minimal losses of the coalition pose a serious problem, which never arose in any earlier war. The paltry number of deaths may be cause for self-congratulation, but nothing will prevent this figure being paltry. Strangely, a war without victims does not seem like a real war but rather the prefiguration of an experimental, blank war, or a war even more inhuman because it is without human losses. No heroes on the other side either, where death was most often that of sacrificed extras, left as cover in the trenches of Kuwait, or civilians serving as bait and martyrs for the dirty war. Disappeared, abandoned to their lot, in the thick fog of war, held in utter contempt by their chief, without even the collective glory of a number (we do not know how many they are).

Along with the hostage or the repentant, the figure of the

"disappeared" has become emblematic in our political universe. Before, there were the dead and traitors, now there are the disappeared and the repentant: both blanks. Even the dead are blanks: "We have already buried them, they can no longer be counted," *dixit* Schwarzkopf. At Timisoara, there were too many of them, here there are not enough, but the effect is the same. The non-will to know is part of the non-war. Lies and shame appeared throughout this war like a sexually transmitted disease.

Blank out the war. Just as Kuwait and Iraq were rebuilt before they were destroyed, so at every phase of this war things unfolded as though they were virtually completed. It is not for lack of brandishing the threat of a chemical war, a bloody war, a world war — everyone had their say — as though it were necessary to give ourselves a fright, to maintain everyone in a state of erection for fear of seeing the flaccid member of war fall down. This futile masturbation was the delight of all the TVs. Ordinarily we denounce this kind of behaviour as emphatic or as empty and theatrical affectation: why not denounce an entire event when it is affected by the same hysteria?

In many respects, this war was a scandal of the same type as Timisoara. Not so much the war itself but the manipulation of minds and blackmail by the scenario. The worst scandal being the collective demand for intoxication, the complicity of all in the effects of war, the effects of reality and false transparency in this war. We could almost speak of media harassment along the lines of sexual harassment. Alas! the problem

always remains the same and it is insoluble: where does real violence begin, where does consenting violence end? Bluff and information serve as aphrodisiacs for war, just as the corpses at Timisoara and their global diffusion served as aphrodisiacs for the Romanian revolution.

But, ultimately, what have you got against aphrodisiacs? Nothing so long as orgasm is attained. The media mix has become the prerequisite to any orgasmic event. We need it precisely because the event escapes us, because conviction escapes us. We have a pressing need of simulation, even that of war, much more than we have of milk, jam or liberty, and we have an immediate intuition of the means necessary to obtain it. This is indeed the fundamental advance of our democracy: the image-function, the blackmail-function, the information-function, the speculation-function. The obscene aphrodisiac function fulfilled by the decoy of the event, by the decoy of war. Drug-function.

We have neither need of nor the taste for real drama or real war. What we require is the aphrodisiac spice of the multiplication of fakes and the hallucination of violence, for we have a hallucinogenic pleasure in all things, which, as in the case of drugs, is also the pleasure in our indifference and our irresponsibility and thus in our true liberty. Here is the supreme form of democracy. Through it our definitive retreat from the world takes shape: the pleasure of mental speculation in images equalling that of capital in a stock market run, or that of the corpses in the charnel house of Timisoara. But, ultimately, what have you got against drugs?

Nothing. Apart from fact that the collective disillusion is

terrible once the spell is broken; for example, when the corpses at Timisoara were uncovered, or when awareness of the subterfuge of the war takes hold. The scandal today is no longer in the assault on moral values but in the assault on the reality principle. The profound scandal which hereafter infects the whole sphere of information with a Timisoara-complex lay in the compulsory participation of the corpses, the transformation of the corpses into extras which in the same moment transforms all those who saw and believed in it into compulsory extras, so that they themselves become corpses in the charnel house of news signs. The odium lies in the malversation of the real, the faking of the event and the malversation of the war. The charnel houses of Timisoara are such a parody, so paltry by contrast with the real slaughter-houses of history! This Gulf War is such a sham, so paltry: the point is not to rehabilitate other wars, but rather that the recourse to the same pathos is all the more odious when there is no longer even the alibi of a war.

The presumption of information and the media here doubles the political arrogance of the Western empire. All those journalists who set themselves up as bearers of the universal conscience, all those presenters who set themselves up as strategists, all the while overwhelming us with a flood of useless images. Emotional blackmail by massacre, fraud. Instead of discussing the threshold of social tolerance for immigration we would do better to discuss the threshold of mental tolerance for information. With regard to the latter, we can say that it was deliberately crossed.

The delirious spectacle of wars which never happened: the transparent glacier of flights which never flew. All these events, from Eastern Europe or from the Gulf, which under the colours of war and liberation led only to political and historical disillusionment (it seems that the famous Chinese Cultural Revolution was the same: a whole strategy of more or less concerted internal destabilisation which short-circuited popular spontaneity), post-synchronisation events where one has the impression of never having seen the original. Bad actors, bad doubles, bad striptease: throughout these seven months, the war has unfolded like a long striptease, following the calculated escalation of undressing and approaching the incandescent point of explosion (like that of erotic effusion) but at the same time withdrawing from it and maintaining a deceptive suspense (teasing), such that when the naked body finally appears, it is no longer naked, desire no longer exists and the orgasm is cut short. In this manner, the escalation was administered to us by drip-feed, removing us further and further from the passage to action and, in any case, from the war. It is like truth according to Nietzsche: we no longer believe that the truth is true when all its veils have been removed. Similarly, we do not believe that war is war when all uncertainty is supposedly removed and it appears as a naked operation. The nudity of war is no less virtual than that of the erotic body in the apparatus of striptease.

On the slopes at Courchevel, the news from the Gulf War is relayed by loudspeakers during the intensive bombardments. Did the others over there, the Iraqis in the sand bunkers receive the snow reports from Courchevel?

February 22 was the day of the Apocalypse: the day of the unleashing of the land offensive behind its curtain of bombs, and in France, by a kind of black humour, the day of the worst traffic jam on the autoroutes to the snow. While the tanks advanced to the assault on Kuwait, the automobile hordes advanced to the assault on the snowfields. Moreover, the tanks went through much more easily than the waves of leisure-seekers. And the dead were more numerous on the snow front than on the war front. Are we so lacking in death, even in time of war, that it must be sought on the playing fields?

Stuck in traffic, one can always amuse oneself by listening to the Gulf radio reports: the time of information never stops, the slower things are on the roads the more things circulate on the wavelengths. Another distraction was that of the young couple who switched between watching the war on TV and their child to be, filmed and recorded in the mother's womb and made available on ultrasound cassette. When the war stops, they watch the kid. At the level of images it is the same combat: war before it has broken out, the child before it has been born. Leisure in the virtual era.

The liquidation of the Shiites and the Kurds by Saddam under the benevolent eye of the American divisions mysteriously stopped in their lightning advance "in order not to humiliate an entire people" offers a bloody analogy with the crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871 under the eye of the Prussian

armies. And the good souls who cried out for seven months, for or against the war but always for the good cause, those who denounced the aberrations of the pro-Iraqi policy ten years after the event when it was no longer relevant, and all the repentants of the Rights of Man, once again do nothing. The world accepts this as the wages of defeat, or rather, on the American side, as the wages of victory. The same Americans who, after having dumped hundreds of thousands of tonnes of bombs, today claim to abstain from "intervening in the internal affairs of a State."

It is nevertheless admirable that we call the Arabs and Moslems traditionalists with the same repulsion that we call someone racist, even though we live in a typically traditionalist society although one simultaneously on the way to disintegration. We do not practise hard fundamentalist traditionalism, we practise soft, subtle and shameful democratic traditionalism by consensus. However, consensual traditionalism (that of the Enlightenment, the Rights of Man, the Left in power, the repentant intellectual and sentimental humanism) is every bit as fierce as that of any tribal religion or primitive society.

It denounces the other as absolute Evil in exactly the same manner (these are the words of François Mitterand apropos the Salman Rushdie affair: whence does he derive such an archaic form of thought?). The difference between the two traditionalisms (hard and soft) lies in the fact that our own (the soft) holds all the means to destroy the other and does not resile from their use. As though by chance, it is always the

Enlightenment fundamentalist who oppresses and destroys the other, who can only defy it symbolically. In order to justify ourselves, we give substance to the threat by turning the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie into a sword of Damocles hanging over the Western world, sustaining a disproportionate terror in complete misrecognition of the difference between symbolic challenge and technical aggression. In the long run, the symbolic challenge is more serious than a victorious aggression. If a simple *fatwa*, a simple death sentence can plunge the West into such depression (the vaudeville of terror on the part of writers and intellectuals on this occasion could never be portrayed cruelly enough), if the West prefers to believe in this threat, it is because it is paralysed by its own power, in which it does not believe, precisely because of its enormity (the Islamic "neurosis" would be due to the excessive tension created by the disproportion of ends; the disproportion of means from which we suffer creates by contrast a serious depression, a neurosis of powerlessness). If the West believed in its own power, it would not give a moment's thought to this threat. The most amusing aspect, however, is that the other does not believe in his powerlessness either, and he who does not believe in his powerlessness is stronger than he who does not believe in his power, be this a thousand times greater. The Arab *Book of Ruses* gives a thousand examples of this, but the West has no intelligence of such matters.

This is how we arrive at an unreal war in which the overdimensioned technical power in turn over-evaluates the real forces of an enemy which it cannot see. And if it is astonished when it so easily triumphs this is because it knows neither how

to believe in itself nor how to ruse with itself. By contrast, what it does know obscurely is that in its present form it can be annihilated by the least ruse.

The Americans would do well to be more astonished at their "victory," to be astonished at their force and to find an equivalent for it in the intelligence (of the other), lest their power play tricks with them. Thus, if the cunning but stupid Saddam had conceded one week earlier, he would have inflicted a considerable political defeat on the Americans. But did he want to? In any case, he succeeded in his own reinstatement, whereas they had sworn to destroy him. But did they swear it? Saddam played the Americans' game at every turn, but even defeated he was the better player at ruse and diversion. The *Book of Ruses* still harbours many secrets unknown to the Pentagon.

Brecht: "This beer isn't a beer, but that is compensated for by the fact that this cigar isn't a cigar either. If this beer wasn't a beer and this cigar really was a cigar, then there would be a problem." In the same manner, this war is not a war, but this is compensated for by the fact that information is not information either. Thus everything is in order. If this war had not been a war and the images had been real images, there would have been a problem. For in that case the non-war would have appeared for what it is: a scandal. Similarly, if the war had been a real war and the information had not been information, this non-information would have appeared for what it is: a scandal. In both cases, there would have been a problem.

There is one further problem for those who believe that this

war took place: how is it that a real war did not generate real images? Same problem for those who believe in the Americans' "victory": how is it that Saddam is still there as though nothing had happened?

Whereas everything becomes coherent if we suppose that, given this victory was not a victory, the defeat of Saddam was not a defeat either. Everything evens out and everything is in order: the war, the victory and the defeat are all equally unreal, equally non-existent. The same coherence in the irreality of the adversaries: the fact that the Americans *never* saw the Iraqis is compensated for by the fact that the Iraqis never fought them.

Brecht again: "As for the place not desired, there is something there and that's disorder. As for the desired place, there is nothing there and that's order."

The New World Order is made up of all these compensations and the fact that there is nothing rather than something, on the ground, on the screens, in our heads: consensus by deterrence. At the desired place (the Gulf), nothing took place, non-war. At the desired place (TV, information), nothing took place, no images, nothing but filler. Not much took place in all our heads either, and that too is in order. The fact that there was nothing at this or that desired place was harmoniously compensated for by the fact that there was nothing elsewhere either. In this manner, the global order unifies all the partial orders.

In Eastern Europe, global order was re-established in accordance with the same paradoxical dialectic: where there was

something (communism, but this was precisely disorder from a global point of view), today there is nothing, but there is order. Things are in democratic order, even if they are in the worst confusion.

The Arabs: there where they should not be (immigrants), there is disorder. There where they should be (in Palestine) but are not, there is order. The fact that in the Arab world nothing is possible, not even war, and that Arabs are deterred, disappointed, powerless and neutralised, that is order. But this is harmoniously compensated for by the fact that at the marked place of power (America), there is no longer anything but a total political powerlessness.

Such is the New World Order.

A variant on Clausewitz: *non-war is the absence of politics pursued by other means ...* It no longer proceeds from a political will to dominate or from a vital impulsion or an antagonistic violence, but from the will to impose a general consensus by deterrence. This consensual violence can be as deadly as conflictual violence, but its aim is to overcome any hegemonic rivalry, even when cold and balanced by terror, as it has been over the last forty years. It was already at work in all the democracies taken one by one; it operates today on a global level which is conceived as an immense democracy governed by a homogeneous order which has as its emblem the UN and the Rights of Man. The Gulf War is the first consensual war, the first war conducted legally and globally with a view to putting an end to war and liquidating any confrontation likely to threaten the hence-

forward unified system of control. This was already the aim of dualistic (East and West) deterrence; today we pass to the monopolistic stage under the aegis of American power. Logically, this democratic and consensual form should be able to dispense with war, but it will no doubt continue to have local and episodic need of it. The Gulf War is one of these transitive episodes, hesitating for this reason between hard and soft forms: virtual war or real war? But the balance is in the process of definitively inclining in one direction, and tomorrow there will be nothing but the virtual violence of consensus, the simultaneity in real time of the global consensus: this will happen tomorrow and it will be the beginning of a world with no tomorrow.

Electronic war no longer has any political objective strictly speaking: it functions as a preventative electroshock against any future conflict. Just as in modern communication there is no longer any interlocutor, so in this electronic war there is no longer any enemy, there is only a refractory element which must be neutralised and consensualised. This is what the Americans seek to do, these missionary people bearing electroshocks which will shepherd everybody towards democracy. It is therefore pointless to question the political aims of this war: the only (transpolitical) aim is to align everybody with the global lowest common denominator, the democratic denominator (which, in its extension, approaches ever closer to the degree zero of politics). The lowest common multiplier being information in all its forms, which, as it extends towards infinity, also approaches ever closer to the degree zero of its content.

In this sense, consensus as the degree zero of democracy

and information as the degree zero of opinion are in total affinity: the New World Order will be both consensual and televisual. That is indeed why the targeted bombings carefully avoided the Iraqi television antennae (which stand out like a sore thumb in the sky over Baghdad). War is no longer what it used to be ...

The crucial stake, the decisive stake in this whole affair is the consensual reduction of Islam to the global order. Not to destroy but to domesticate it, by whatever means: modernisation, even military, politicisation, nationalism, democracy, the Rights of Man, anything at all to electrocute the resistances and the symbolic challenge that Islam represents for the entire West. There is no miracle, the confrontation will last as long as this process has not reached its term; by contrast, it will stop as though of its own accord the day when this form of radical challenge has been liquidated. This was how it happened in the Vietnam war: the day when China was neutralised, when the "wild" Vietnam with its forces of liberation and revolt was replaced by a truly bureaucratic and military organisation capable of ensuring the continuation of Order, the Vietnam war stopped immediately — but ten years were necessary for this political domestication to take place (whether it took place under communism or democracy is of no importance). Same thing with the Algerian war: its end, which was believed to be impossible, took place of its own accord, not by virtue of De Gaulle's sagacity, but from the moment the maquis with their revolutionary potential were finally liquidated and an Algerian

army and a bureaucracy, which had been set up in Tunisia without ever engaging in combat, were in a position to ensure the continuation of power and the exercise of order.

Our wars thus have less to do with the confrontation of warriors than with the domestication of the refractory forces on the planet, those uncontrollable elements as the police would say, to which belong not only Islam in its entirety but wild ethnic groups, minority languages etc. All that is singular and irreducible must be reduced and absorbed. This is the law of democracy and the New World Order. In this sense, the Iran-Iraq war was a successful first phase: Iraq served to liquidate the most radical form of the anti-Western challenge, even though it never defeated it.

The fact that this mercenary prowess should give rise to the present reversal and to the necessity of its own destruction is a cruel irony, but perfectly justified. We will have shamefully merited everything which happens to us. This does not excuse Iraq, which remains the objective accomplice of the West, even in the present confrontation, to the extent that the challenge of Islam, with its irreducible and dangerous alterity and symbolic challenge, has once again been channelled, subtilised and politically, militarily and religiously deflected by Saddam's undertaking. Even in the war against the West he played his role in the domestication of an Islam for which he has no use. His elimination, if it should take place, will only raise a dangerous mortgage. The real stake, the challenge of Islam and behind it that of all the forms of culture refractory to the occidental world, remains intact. Nobody knows who will win. For as Hölderlin said, "where danger threatens, that which saves

us from it also grows." As a result, the more the hegemony of the global consensus is reinforced, the greater the risk, or the chances, of its collapse.

