
Chris Hables Gray

# PEACE, WAR, AND COMPUTERS

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For Jane Lovett Wilson. When the horrors of September 11 started, I was sitting next to her on our couch in Great Falls, Montana, watching Katie, Matt, Al, and Ann. As life has continued to unfold we have often talked about how current events are shaping the chances for the real peace that we have both been working for since long before we met. Many of the ideas in this book have been influenced by her wisdom. Our first encounter, in 1980 when I went to New England to protest against the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant, did not begin well. There was the matter of Jane's dead parakeet, victim of an unfortunate late-night misunderstanding. But since then she has forgiven me my role in that small tragedy, and for many other things large and small. We have continued to work for peace and justice and have been involved in many difficult radical projects together, most notably raising our two sons Corey and Zack. Thank you, my love.

—C

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# contents

# acknowledgments

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*Issues in Contemporary Culture and Aesthetics,* Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastrict, Netherlands, 2001; "Star Wars 2001" in the *CPSR Newsletter,* vol. 19, no. 2, Spring, Internet; "Real War 2000: The Crisis of Postmodern War" in *Strategy and Tactics* (English, in press), *Teleopolis* (Internet— German), and also in Turkish as the forward to *Postmodern Savas,* 2000; "Real War and Postmodern Illusions" in *Globalize Liberation,* David Solnit, ed., City Lights, 2004; "The Second Cold War and Postmodern Terrorism" for Na*tionalism and Terror After 9-11: Global and Local Discourses,* Begoña Aretxaga, Joseba Gabilondo, and Joseba Zulaika, ed., Routledge, 2004; "Agency, Technology, and Peace" for *War, Violence and Agency,* Michael Flynn, ed., Rowan & Littlefield, 2005; "New Information Technology and Warfare" for *Global Communication and Global Change,* Peter Wilken, ed., Manchester University Press, 2004; "The Perpetual Revolution in Military Affairs" in *Information Technology and International Security,* Robert Latham, ed., The New Press, pp. 199–214, 2003; "Empire in the 21st Century" for *Peace News,* December, 2003; "The Future of War" for the *At War* Catalog, Antonio Monegal and Francesc Torres, ed., Center of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona and Diputacio de Barcelona, pp. 358–369, 2004; "Cyborgs, Aufmerkamkeit und Aesthetik" in *Kunstforum.,* Dec.–Jan., pp. 131–135, 2000; and various versions of "The Cyborg Body Politic," coauthored with Steven Mentor. Much of this last piece is folded into various sections of this book, in particular Chapter 7, and I must thank Steve for most of the good ideas it contributed.

# introduction

## TERRORWAR IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

> Terror is a relationship.
>
> —Diane Nelson (2002, p. 199)

War is a relationship, one of humankind's most intimate. The outlines of the grotesque intimacy of terror and war in the twenty-first century are becoming starkly clear. The conquest of Iraq is over; a deceptively easy victory. The subjugation of Iraq may never happen. In the long run, despite thousands of civilian dead, the Iraqis could end up better off when the Americans leave, perhaps not. But the United States and the world will pay a high price—the perpetual Cold War of terror will continue. For the United States this means the occupation troops in Iraq and elsewhere will be attacked but the "homeland" will remain the highest priority target. And it won't just be a wounded Al Qaeda seeking to strike the American heartland; they have new allies now across the Moslem world and even beyond. The enemies of the United States are increasing and they are increasingly united, both as a direct result of the policies that are exemplified by the invasion of Iraq.

Fighting will also continue in Afghanistan, U.S. troops will still operate in Colombia and the Philippines, and U.S. security forces will conduct raids in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and the Sudan with regularity. The world system of nation-states will balance constantly on the brink of terror. Just as dangerous as the nonstate actors who relentlessly seek weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are such flash points as Korea, Israel-Palestine, and India-Pakistan.

The proliferation of WMD will increase. They are now the only guarantee of safety from U.S. preemptive war, as North Korea has proved. Each new WMD program spawns responses in neighbors and other potential enemies. At the United Nations (UN) and in other international bodies consensus, or even clarity, on most matters of substance will be nearly impossible to achieve. Some of these bodies don't even include the United States (Kyoto Accords, the International Court), others are collapsing or becoming superfluous (Nonproliferation Treaty, North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and still others are disempowered by U.S. actions (UN).

There will almost always be opposition to U.S. initiatives and it will be substantial, especially from the new "superpower" of global public opinion, or as the Zapatistas called it in the 1980s, International Civil Society. The worldwide protests before the Iraq War were the largest in history, and the network that produced them continues to spread and evolve, focusing much of its energy on ending war.

War is always a struggle for meaning. Today, the most important contested meaning of all is that of war itself. This book is an intervention into this "battle." One could accuse it of being a netcentric war for the hearts and minds of the readers and be only half wrong. For shaping how people think and feel isn't just war's purview, it is what culture itself is about. War just happens to be one of the most frightening and obvious ways of bringing about cultural (including economic, political, and social) changes. It is also obsolete, we just won't admit it. This irony produces Cold Wars.

Today's international system of ongoing fear and tension is the second Cold War. It grew directly out of the first Cold War between state communism and neoliberal capitalism, but it most certainly has its own particularities. It is part of the same postmodern war system that has been in effect since 1945 (Gray 1997). Since then it has become obvious that today war (and the threat of war) is terror and terror is war. There is no real difference between the two. TerrorWar must end; it cannot be used to produce real peace.

This has all been true for quite some time, but it took 9/11 and the U.S. response to make it crystal clear.

## POLITICS AND SEPTEMBER 11[1]

Man is by nature a political animal.

—Aristotle (Rawson and Miner 1986, p. 272)

Politics is the art of the possible.
—Otto von Bismarck (Rawson and Miner 1986, p. 273)

Aristotle is wrong. Men and women are not political animals and that is to our credit. We are social, and there is a difference. Otto von Bismarck may have been right in the past when humans didn't have apocalyptic weapons, but now he is very wrong. Politics must now be the art of the necessary, not the possible. Technology has raised the stakes. So a large part of this book is about how technology, especially computer and telecommunications technology, underlies the current world crisis and its effect on attempts to create a peaceful international system. But this book was also profoundly shaped by two important events. A few weeks before the first draft was due, two commandeered commercial airliners were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, killing almost 3,000 people. A third was crashed into the Pentagon and a fourth went down in a field in Pennsylvania. As the final draft was being finished, the United States invaded Iraq in the face of international law and opinion.

Any discussion of the prospects for peace in the twenty-first century has to take these horrors into account. The people of Oklahoma City refer to their postbombing lives as the "new normal" (Linenthal 2001). There is a new normal for the whole world now, and the scary thing is that it doesn't feel new at all because the new normal is much like the old "normal" of the first Cold War. We have been in a "new" Cold War for a number of years now, we just did not realize it. To understand it we must study history, of course, especially the first Cold War and the long story of war itself.

What particularly marks these times as unique is the incredible power of modern technology. It makes globalization possible, it makes the weapons we use to threaten and kill more powerful and easier to attain, and it allows billions of humans to occupy the planet at once. The most important of these technologies process information; they undergird all the others, from biotechnology to structural engineering to weapons production. So we must pay particular attention to information technology's direct influence on international relations and, just as important, its indirect effect on the very way we conceive and consume information.

I won't start with information theory, as interesting as it is, although I do comment on it briefly later. After this introduction, the first half of the main narrative (our current situation) begins in Chapter 1 with a discussion of the meaning of terror and how war has become terror and terror

has become war. This is followed by a close analysis of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Islamist[2] terrorist attacks, and what they reveal about possible futures. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are also about today's international system—Chapter 2 on contemporary war, Chapter 3 on the political struggle over the organization of the world economically and otherwise, and Chapter 4 on globalizing technologies and their politics, including contemporary information theory and its political implications.

The second half of the book, focuses on peace: Chapter 5 on contemporary peace movements and theories, Chapter 6 on what could be called the semiotic struggle (or *kulturkampf*) over the very assumptions of society, which is known on the street as culture jamming or even art. Here I apply the political idea of prefiguration to art and other cultural processes. Chapter 7 explores the implications of our intimate relationship to technology in terms of subjectivity, character, and citizenship. Finally, Chapter 8 searches for reasons for hope.

These are new times and words are particularly slippery at such junctures, so let us take a moment here to define a few especially important terms.

## KEYWORDS[3]

The following keywords are not presented in alphabetical order but rather as they seem to lead one to another. These definitions are not definitive, and all of these terms are explored at greater length later.[4]

### Information

> Information is intangible.
>
> —Paul Levinson 1997, p. xi

> To lead them to the light by a faithful information of their Judgments.
>
> —J. Spencer 1665

The first meaning of *information* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) is "the formation or molding of the mind or character." We don't just *use* information; information forms us culturally and psychologically. On a deeper level even our corporal selves are shaped through information. As the dictionaries also say about the root word form: "(in)form" in English was first "to put into material shape." In 1590 the poet Edmund Spenser

said in *The Faerie Queene*, "Infinite shapes of creatures' Informed in the mud, on which the Sunne hath shynd."

Information can also be thought of as one of the key building blocks of reality along with energy and matter. Although this definition isn't in many dictionaries, it is in common use within academia and the computer industry: information as pattern, as plan, as specificity. It is this sense of information that is meant in this book.

The mushroom cloud of a nuclear explosion is proof positive that matter can be turned into energy and we have often turned energy into matter in our gardens, but information is much harder to think through because we have to use it to think about it.

So, our understanding of information is very uneven. Certain aspects, such as its transmission and the subcategory of mathematics and other formal information systems, are pretty well advanced. But our set of accurate rules and effective metaphors for information remains rudimentary. These issues are expanded on in the second part of Chapter 4, but there is one particular point that needs to be emphasized here. The most important thing that we do know about information is that our knowledge of it, or of anything else of consequence, can never be perfect. The details of this will be filled in later, as well as some of the positive things we know about information. But for now, just remember that we can't know it all. Ever. Finally, information is about relationships and the rules and metarules that govern them. It is no accident that so is power. "Information wants to be free," cyberactivists proclaim, and "Information wants to be alive" (Thomas Ray, quoted in Maret 2002, p. 68), but actually information wants nothing. It can, however, serve human desires, particularly in the quest for power.

## Power

The meaning "to be able" comes first. This says much of what we need to know about power. It is not just about power "over" someone or something, it is creative as well. At the end of the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition there is a quotation from 1325 "And Shaf to man fre power to chese." Power to choose. That says most of the rest. But it turns out it is the details that are important if we are to understand and use power.

For example, agency is there besides, animal at the least, often human, sometime our own. Sure, the dams of the Great Falls on the Missouri produce hydropower in the form of electricity, but the power is real only because humans built the dams and the generators and we use the

resulting electricity to power our lives. Nature is nature and running water is running water. It becomes a home when the beavers build their dams; it becomes a power source when humans build ours.

Power is a relationship (and therefore part of information theory). Usually the relationship is complex; it is made up of other relationships. The relations can be physical (energy/matter) or of meaning (information) or a combination. In any event, there is always causality (with no apologies to David Hume[5]). Power is the ability to do something. Power cannot exist in and of itself or in a vacuum. It has to be useful. Things do act on each other; that is what a relationship is—even if it can't be proven to the satisfaction of certain logics. That shows their limits, not the absence of causality. This is important. One's view of causality is a position on power, and it reveals one's guiding assumptions about human nature and epistemology.

All power does not corrupt. Certain kinds of authoritarian coercive power are horrible, and Lord Acton's maxim certainly applies to them. And as absolute coercive power becomes technologically possible, we face the danger of absolute authority and corruption (see *Cyborg Citizen*, Gray 2001). But much power is constructive and some power is delightful, even edifying. Consider child rearing. Having (modeling) loving relationships is a powerful act that changes the children one is responsible for. But it is also positive, even wonderful, for the parent.

Power can be constructive, not just destructive. Power can be subtle; it need not be obvious. Yet power is mostly thought of as destructive and crude. Perhaps this is one of our key political problems. Most types of power that have been well analyzed are violent and unsubtle, such as military action. For analysis that pays attention to subtle and constructive as well as destructive power, no military theorist has surpassed *The Art of War*, which is thousands of years old. This tells us something about military thinking.

The Greek historian Herodotus said that "Power is precarious" almost 2500 years ago (Rawson and Miner 1986, p. 280). This is just as true today. Power comes out of dynamic and complex relationships. It is always shifting, collapsing, reorganizing.

Real peace depends upon a radical redefinition of power in international politics and all other human relations. Exciting as bombs and guns are, *the greatest power is in defining what is power.* That's what real peace will be: a radical redefinition of power.

## Peace

Peace, like power, has been oversimplified. "Freedom from, or cessation of, war or hostilities" is the common first definition, but that can be the "peace of the battlefield," a field of dead, or the victory of dictatorship. Those "in power" are always willing to sacrifice the freedom (power) of the rest of us to save us from war or the threat of war, leaving us with the false peace of tyranny. A later meaning, "relation of . . . concord and amity," has more to offer. There needs to be a feeling of peace between people for there to be real peace and a feeling of peace inside each of us. This is made clear in still later definitions, "reconciliation" and "friendly relations."

On first glance it might seem that "terror or peace" is an easy choice. But if war is terror and peace is complex and difficult, many will choose the bloody security of war over real peace, as humans have been doing for thousands of years. It is time to put peace into action.

Peace has long been a noun, as well it should be. As a verb its first uses were, appropriately enough, imperative, as used by Chaucer's pilgrims back in 1386: "Peace!" In those days there could only be limited, temporary, peace. Now, with the collapse of modern war and modernism things may, indeed they must, be different. That is the hope in postmodernism.

## Postmodernity

The term *postmodernity* is widely accepted now, but there are still people who rail against it. Even most of these critics would agree that the times we live in are new, they just don't like the term postmodernity. Fine, as long as one recognizes just how our age is unique.[6]

Part of it is quantitative, of course, but with qualitative implications: six billion humans, fewer species, jet planes, Mars probes, and incredibly powerful munitions. We can kill everyone on the planet; that's new. We can feed everyone; that is new as well. The qualitative differences are harder to notice, but they are just as important. The widespread acceptance of the idea that every human has inherent rights—not just my nation, my gender, my religion, my tribe, my family, myself—is new. The project to seize our evolutionary destiny and create posthumans is quite strange and it is very new.

Call it what you will, just note that postmodernity is used here in reference to these "interesting times."

## Cyborg

One of the most interesting and important things to appear out of postmodernity is the cyborg. A cyborg, or cybernetic organism, is a self-regulating system that includes working elements from two very different domains. These domains have many names: born/made, living/dead, animate/inanimate, natural/artificial, and organic/machinic among them. But the crucial point is that the cyborg idea both strengthens and explodes these binary concepts at the same time. They are strengthened because the cyborg exists only as this union of supposed opposites and, in naming the cyborg as such, they are preserved and clarified. But on the other hand, the very existence of the cyborg reveals that these elements are just co-operating subcategories of larger systems and so are not really opposites at all.

For humans, the use of prosthetic and other technosciences in modifying ourselves is the primary focus of our political concerns about cyborgs. Cyborgization represents the culmination of the long human relationship to tools and machines, which means that it includes profoundly militarized aspects as well as more sweeping implications for us that range from the epistemological to the futurological. But it shouldn't be forgotten that the idea of the cyborg extends down to the micro level of artificial life and nanotechnology and up to the realm of the global, where Gaia itself has been called cyborg (Haraway 1995).

## Globalization

Today it is impossible to deny the importance of globalization. Although the world has always been a single ecological system, it has also included subregions that had a great deal of autonomy because of the difficulty in spreading life forms from one bioregion to another and because of the differences in climate. Now, with human civilization ubiquitous, which includes the conscious and accidental propagation of other life forms, the world is more of a single ecosystem then ever before.

Important as all this is, in many ways globalization is a shift in human consciousness more than it is a new ecological, economic, or technological relationships. The realization that Earth is one system has had profound impacts on how we see ourselves. This is especially true for those "outside" the West, who have experienced globalization as Westernization. Yosef Bodansky wrote in 1999:

> The Islamists' growing hostility toward the West—fueled by the seemingly unstoppable spread of Westernization through the electronic media—motivates the terrorists, such as bin Laden, to commit more horrendous, more spectacular strikes if only to demonstrate the viability of radical Islam and its rage. Their individual struggles are the essence of the Islamist movement against Westernization. (pp. xvii–xviii)

So it is personal *and* political. The question of our age seems to be "Who will rule the World?" and until we find an answer, we won't have a truly peaceful world. If the answer is truly "the people," us, that means anarchism: self-rule.

## Anarchism

It is often claimed that anarchy means "without government" (and the resulting chaos) and that the anarchist program is about just that, when in actuality what we could have without governments is a healthy complexity, not chaos, if we work for it. Besides, anarchism is not an ideology; it is an ideal, and as such it isn't just about the absence of government or even of all oppressive and dangerous hierarchies, it is fundamentally the principle of liberty, the belief that freedom is the first value.

It doesn't necessarily focus on total freedom, now. Most anarchists, surprisingly enough, are practical, pragmatic people. Thomas Jefferson and many of his allies were pragmatic anarchists, believing in the principle that "the less government, the more freedom."[7]

However, the idea of freedom bothers some people. They fear their own desires and those of their neighbors. For some, liberty is even licentious; perhaps that is what they fear in themselves. Taverner in 1539 whines, "This unleful lyberty or lycence of the multytude is called an Anarchie." More accurately, Blount in 1656 wrote that anarchism was "The Doctrine, Positions, or Art of those who teach anarchy; also the being itself of the people themselves without a Prince or Ruler." This is not so much the absence of government, really, but of rulers and ruled; it is "the being itself of the people themselves." In a crisis people fend well for themselves, organizing rescues and other help without the prodding of centralized authority. This was seen on September 11, 2001, as it is in every disaster. If we can manage our lives in times of terror, there is hope that we can manage our lives in times of peace.

> Terror struck into the hearts of the enemies is not only a means, it is the end in itself. Once a condition of terror into the opponent's heart is obtained hardly anything is left to be achieved. It is the point where the means and the end meet and merge. Terror is not a means of imposing decision upon the enemy; it is the decision we wish to impose.
>
> —S.K. Malik (quoted in Bodansky 1999, p. xv)

S.K. Malik was an Islamist and a brigadier in the Pakistan military who wrote *The Quranic Concept of War* in 1979. In it, he argues that this Islamist (Koranic) approach to war is superior to all others because it is "fought for the cause of Allah," which meant that all acts are justified.

In Caleb Carr's novel *Killing Time*, many of his protagonists are convinced that *mundus vult decipi*, the world wants to be deceived. This is how they explain humanity's acquiescence to war, injustice, environmental degradation, and the commodification of their very desires. I deeply hope that most people do not want to be deceived; we want to know. But what is the attraction of fooling ourselves as S.K. Malik does? Fear.

Should we hope? On the one hand we have people like Malik, whose sweeping and simplistic epistemology is designed to ratify their deepest hopes and fears. We hear Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson pontificating on the causes of 9/11 in comments that Falwell later called "ill timed" but never retracted. This transcript is from Lisa de Moraes' *Washington Post* column (2001):

> Falwell: What we saw on Tuesday, as terrible as it is, could be miniscule if, in fact—if, in fact—God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve.
>
> Robertson: Jerry, that's my feeling. I think we've just seen the antechamber to terror. We haven't even begun to see what they can do to the major population.
>
> Falwell: The ACLU's got to take a lot of blame for this.
>
> Robertson: Well, yes.
>
> Falwell: "And—I know that I'll hear from them for this,but—throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools. The abortionists have to bear some burden for this, because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans and the abortionists and the feminists and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that

> an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way—all of them who have tried to secularize America—I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'

Clearly, Jerry Falwell is a world-class hater, much like Osama bin Laden. They hope for death and destruction to validate their own demons, as do many others. In a world with such as these, and our incredible technologies, how can we hope to survive?

What is the minimum we need? Tolerance, pluralism, acceptance, love? How are these manifested in life? Acts of empathy and friendship, nurturing, creating. Starhawk, the well-known anarchist witch, explains that the goal of terrorists, state or freelance, is

> to fill all our mental and emotional space with fear, rage, powerlessness, and despair, to cut us off from the sources of life and hope. Violence and fear can make us shut down to the things and beings that we love. When we do, we wither and die. When we consciously open ourselves to the beauty of the world, when we choose to love another tenuous and fragile being, we commit an act of liberation as courageous and radical as any foray into the tear gas. (November 5, 2001)

On September 29, 2001, the first big antiwar rally of the new millennium, in Washington, D.C., was on C-SPAN2. They had a chant there that I had a complex reaction to. It went: "Another World is Possible! Another World is Possible!" My first response was, "Yes, that's right. This world is not inevitable." Having been an organizer for many years, I know how hard it is to help people believe that we can indeed change the world. But then I thought, "Lots of other worlds are possible, and most of them are even worse than this one." That set me back a bit. So I thought a bit more about it and decided that, if I was into chanting (which I generally loathe, except for my old favorite "More mindless chants!"), it would have to be "A better world is possible." Not easy, I grant you, but I do know a better world is indeed possible. Even more, I know it is necessary.

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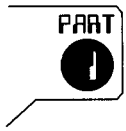


# the situation

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