

Franco “Bifo” Berardi
**War and
(Senile)
Dementia**

01/05

e-flux journal #125 — march 2022 Franco “Bifo” Berardi
War and (Senile) Dementia

Annihilate

Anéantir (Annihilate), the most recent book by Houellebecq, is seven hundred pages long – half that length would have been enough.¹ It isn't the best of his books, but it does succeed in sketching a simultaneously submissive and irate representation of the decline of world domination by the white race.

Deep in France, a family gathers around their eighty-year-old father who has suffered a stroke. The patriarch, who had worked for the secret service, has now fallen into an interminable coma. Meanwhile, his son Paul, who also works for the secret service as well as the Ministry of Finance, discovers he has terminal cancer. Aurélien, Paul's brother, kills himself, incapable of continuing a life in which he has always been considered a loser. Lastly, there is the daughter Cécile, a Catholic fundamentalist married to a fascist notary who has lost his job but has found another in the right-wing circle of the Lepenists, still on the rise.

The central theme of this mediocre novel is terminal illness. In other words, it is about the agony of Western civilization.

It is not a pretty sight, because the white mind does not resign itself to the inescapable. Tragic are the reactions of agonizing, old, white men.

Here, this scene unfolds in contemporary France – a place that has been culturally devastated over the last forty years of neoliberal development. It is a ghost of a country in which political struggle now takes place in the corrupt stages of ultranationalism, racism, Islamophobia, and economic fundamentalism.

But this scene does not only unfold in France; it is the condition of the post-global world that is now threatened by the senile delirium of the dominant culture as it falls – that of the white, Christian, imperialist empire.

War, Agony, Suicide

At the Eastern borders of Europe, two old white men play a game in which neither of them can retreat.

The old white American is on the heels of a humiliating and tragic defeat. Worse than Saigon, Kabul is fresh in the global imaginary as a sign of the cognitive breakdown of the long-dominant, imperialist power.

The old white Russian knows that the base of his power is a nationalist promise: to avenge the honor of “Holy Mother Russia.”

The one who retreats first will lose everything.

The fact that Putin is a Nazi was already clear at the conclusion of the second war in Chechnya. But at the time, he was still lauded by the American president, who looked him in the



Istubalz, *Chess Game*, 2022.

eyes and praised his sincerity. The Russian also enjoyed the favor of British banks, as they were filled to the brim with rubles robbed by Putin and his friends through the dismantling of public infrastructures after the fall of the Soviet Union. Geriatric Russians and Anglo-Americans were brothers in arms when it came to destroying the social spheres produced by past labor and communist movements all over the world.

But friendship and camaraderie don't last among assassins. In fact, what use would NATO be if peace was actually brokered? And how would a successful peace have affected the bottom lines of the multinational companies producing weapons of mass destruction and death – today making endless profits.

The expansion of NATO only serves to reignite a hostility that capitalism could not let die, to keep the profitable conflict alive.

There is no rational explanation for the war in Ukraine, especially because it is the climactic movement in a psychotic crisis of the white brain. What rationality is there in the expansion of NATO, which arms Polish, Baltic, and, yes, Ukrainian Nazis against Russian Nazism? In exchange, Biden gets the result most feared by American war strategists: forcing Russia and China into an embrace that fifty years ago Nixon had succeeded in weakening.

Given that the war is inexplicable in strategic terms, to understand the war we don't need to think geopolitically, but rather psychopathologically. Perhaps we need a geopolitics of psychotic outbursts.

At stake here is the political, economic, demographic, and finally psychic defeat of white, Western, (post)colonial civilization, which cannot accept the prospect of exhaustion, which prefers destruction or suicide to the slow extinction of white dominance.

West, Future, Decline

With the war in Ukraine, a hysterical arms race begins, borders are consolidated (along racialized lines), and violence increases exponentially – all demonstrations of the senile marasmus into which the West has fallen.

On February 23, 2022, when Russian troops were already in the Donbass, Trump praised Putin as a peacekeeping “genius,”² and suggested that the US follow his lead on the Mexican border.

Let's see if we can figure out what Trump's obscenities mean. Is there a kernel of truth in his delusions? At issue is the very concept of the West.

But first, what is the West?

If by “West” we refer to a geographical definition, then Russia is of course excluded. But if we think about the anthropological and

historical meanings of that word, then Russia is more Western than any other West.

In short, the West can be defined as the land of decline and of obsession with the future. Those two traits are in fact one, given that for organisms subject to the second law of thermodynamics – as are individual and social bodies – the future can only mean eventual decline.

We – both the “we” of the West and the Westerners of the boundless Russian lands – are therefore united in futurism and decline, that is, in the delirium of omnipotence and in the desperation of impotence.

Trump gets credit for telling it like it is, claiming that our enemies are not Russians, but migrants from the Global South; China, which we have humiliated; Africa, which we have plundered. Those are our enemies, not the very white Russia, which is part of the “Great West.”

This Trumpist logic is based on a white supremacy that sees Russianness as the most extreme form of acceptable whiteness.

Biden's logic is instead based on the defense of the “free world”: a world born from genocide, from the forced deportation of millions of slaves, and organized around foundational systemic racism. Biden chooses to break the “Great West” apart in favor of a smaller West without Russia, which is in any case destined to tear itself apart and to involve the whole planet in its suicide.

So, let's define the West as a sphere of racist dominance obsessed with the future. Time stretches out in an expansive pulse: economic growth, accumulation, capitalism. It is exactly this obsession with the future that feeds the machine of dominance: a concrete present (of pleasure, of muscular relaxation) is invested into and exchanged for abstract future value.

Perhaps we could reformulate the classical Marxist analysis of value to say that exchange value is precisely this accumulation of the present (the concrete) in abstract forms (like money) that can be exchanged for something else tomorrow.

The fixation on and fetishization of the future are by no means a natural cognitive modality of the human. Most human cultures have been organized around a cyclical understanding of time, or on the insuperable dilation of the present.

Futurism is a transition to complete self-consciousness (also in aesthetic terms) of cultures of expansion. But there are many futurisms.

The obsession with the future has different implications in the theological-utopian sphere that is central to Russian culture and the techno-economic sphere of Euro-American culture.

Federov's cosmism and Mayakovsky's futurisms both share an eschatological breath that is lacked by the technocratic fanaticisms of Marinetti and Musk. Maybe that's why it is Russia's destiny to end history – and here we are.

Nazism Is Everywhere

The new horizon is war that pits one Nazism against another. In his writings from the 1960s, Gunter Anders predicted that the nihilistic charge of Nazism would not die with the defeat of Hitler.³ He presaged that it would return onto the world stage when technical power developed to such a degree that it provoked the humiliation of the human.

Nazism is reemerging as a psycho-political form of the demented body of the white race, which ragefully reacts to its own unstoppable decline. Viral chaos has created the conditions for the formation of a global, biopolitical infrastructure, but it has also accentuated the widely experienced perception of matter's ungovernability as it loses order, disintegrates, and dies.

The West has forsaken death because that concept is not compatible with its obsession with the future. It has rejected senility because it is not compatible with expansion and growth. But now, the (demographic, cultural, and economic) aging of the dominant cultures of the Global North are presented as a specter that white culture cannot even contemplate, let alone accept.

This is where the white brain (that of both Biden and Putin) enters a furious crisis of senile dementia. Then the white brain most lost to senility – that of Donald Trump – utters a truth that no one can stand to hear: Putin is our best friend. Sure, he's a racist murderer, but we are no less so.

On the other hand, Biden represents the impotent anger that old people express and feel when they notice the decline of their strength, psychic energy, and cognitive efficiency. Now that exhaustion is in its advanced stage, extinction is the only reassuring prospect.

Can humanity save itself from the murderous violence of the demented and agonized Western, Russian, and European brains?

The invasion of Ukraine will continue, whether it becomes a stable occupation (unlikely) or concludes with the withdrawal of Russian troops after the destruction of the military apparatus donated to Kyiv by the West (more likely). Regardless, the conflict will not be resolved by the defeat of either of two patriarchs. Neither one can accept retreat. Therefore, this invasion signals the beginning of a phase of continuous war that will be global (and that may

express itself in nuclear terms). The final war against humanity has begun.

In the suicidal war that one West wages against the Other West, the first victims are those who have suffered from the deliriums of both spheres of influence and power – those who want no war but are made miserable by its effects.

The only thing we can do is to desert, to abandon, to collectively transform fear into thought, to resign ourselves to the inevitable. Only in this way can we produce the unpredictable: peace, pleasure, life.

×

Originally published as "Guerra & Demenza (Senile)" in *Not Nero Editions*, February 28, 2022 <https://not.neroeditions.com/guerra-demenza-senile/?fbclid=IwAR3wGTOKIAdHLcxWeRYx86a573cFnYdvHpwq4DPkmDF>
Translated from the Italian by Andreas Petrossiants.

04/05

e-flux journal #125 — march 2022 Franco "Bifo" Berardi
War and (Senile) Dementia

1
Michel Houellebecq, *Anéantir*
(Éditions Flammarion, 2022).

2
See
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/23/trump-putin-genius-russia-ukraine-crisis>.

3
See Gunter Anders, *The
Obsolescence of Humankind*
(1956–80), from which only
select essays have been
translated into English. Some
are available here
<https://libcom.org/library/obsolescence-man-volume-i-part-two-%E2%80%9C-world-phantom-matrix-philosophical-considerations-r>. – Trans.

05/05

e-flux journal #125 — march 2022 Franco “Bifo” Berardi
War and (Senile) Dementia