

## THE INTENSIFICATION OF TIME

by Eric Kluitenberg

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» "We went up to the three snorting beasts, to lay amorous hands on their torrid breasts. I stretched out on my car like a corpse on its bier, but revived at once under the steering wheel, a guillotine blade that threatened my stomach.

The raging broom of madness swept us out of ourselves and drove us through the streets as rough and deep as the beds of torrents. Here and there, sick lamplight through window glass taught us to distrust the deceitful mathematics of our perishing eyes.

I cried 'The scent, the scent alone is enough for our beasts.'

And like young lions we ran after Death, its dark pelt blotched with pale crosses as it escaped down the vast violet living and throbbing sky.

But we had no ideal Mistress raising her divine form to the clouds, nor any cruel Queen to whom to offer our bodies, twisted like Byzantine rings ! There was nothing to make us wish for death, unless the wish to be free at last from the weight of our courage !

And on we raced, hurling watchdogs against doorsteps, curling them under our burning tires like collars under a flat-iron. Death, domesticated, met me at every turn, gracefully holding out a paw, or once in a while hunkering down, making velvety caressing eyes at me from every puddle.

'Let's break out of the horrible shell of wisdom and throw ourselves like pride-ripened fruit into the wide, contorted mouth of the wind ! Let's give ourselves utterly to the Unknown, not in desperation but only to replenish the deep wells of the Absurd !' «

The intense sensations of near-death experiences that the poet Filippo Tomasso Marinetti describes in the preface to his founding manifesto of Futurism (published in Le Figaro on the 20th of February 1909) relate above all to two things.

First of all his **love for the automobile**. The preface describes a nightly drive at maximum speed through the city by Marinetti and his friends, which he emphatically describes as an almost orgiastic experience that culminates in a furious accident. But on picking himself up from the 'maternal ditch', there is nothing that might stop him to resume his original course.



The second important aspect is **a more general glorification of speed**. What the impressions described above relate to, is not the inner workings of the machinery of the automobile, nor the sound of its engine. Rather Marinetti seeks a metaphor to express his excitement for the subjective experience of speed. The automobile introduces a new dimension of speed to the system of transportation, and importantly this new vehicle is not as much a collective as it is an individual form of transportation. This might account for the subjective intensification that Marinetti experiences, something that would not occur as easily in a collective form of transportation such as the train.



**Giacomo Balla – Anstract speed of a car passing by**

The speed of the technologized world generated a new sensibility that the Futurists claimed for their generation. Indeed a new aesthetic of speed was born, as Marinetti declares: » **"We affirm the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath - a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*."** «

The mood is violent and aggressive, and the Futurist's adoration of speed and technology is inherently anti-historical. **"We stand on the last promontory of the centuries!..."**, Marinetti writes. **"Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the impossible ? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created the eternal, omnipresent speed."**

And this glorification of speed and technology is thus connected with an almost divine idea of omnipresence. The last element that almost inescapably links these elements with the contemporary global system of electronic media, is that of war (as will be explained further on), and Marinetti appears to have sensed the inevitability of the connection between technology, speed and war, when he maintained: **"We will**

**glorify war - the world's only hygiene - militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn woman.**"<sup>i</sup>



War for Marinetti was not the destruction of this new machine-society, but instead its necessary completion; as Marinetti was later to defend in his manifesto on the Ethiopian Colonial War (1934): "For twenty-seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the branding of war as anti-aesthetic... Accordingly we state: .. War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metallisation of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony. War is beautiful because it creates new architecture, like that of the big tank, the geometrical formation flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages, and many others... Poets and artists of Futurism!.. remember these principles of an aesthetic of war so that your struggle for a new literature and a new graphic art... may be illuminated by them!" (citation from Benjamin's *The Work of Art...* - Epilogue).

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<sup>i</sup>Taken from: F.T. Marinetti *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, in: Umbro Appolonio, *Futurists Manifesto's*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1973, pp. 19 - 24.



→ **Images:**

- Aesthetics of speed: a. o. use of stroboscopic-like images.

(zie Balla hierboven)

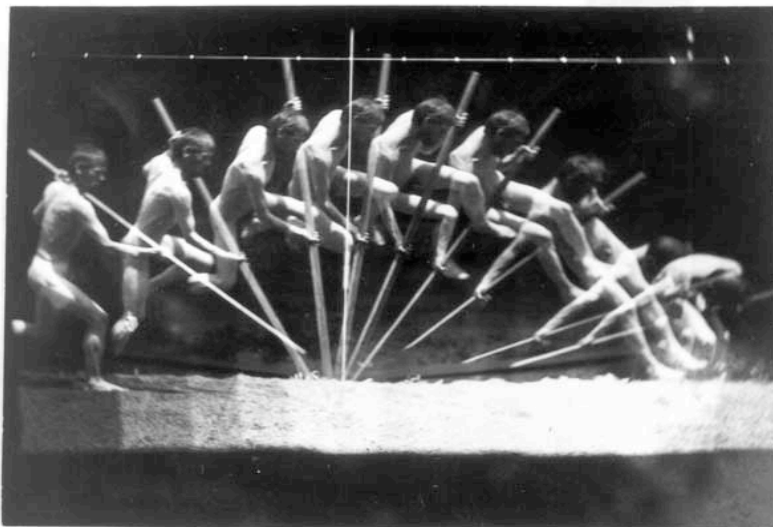
- Simultaneity



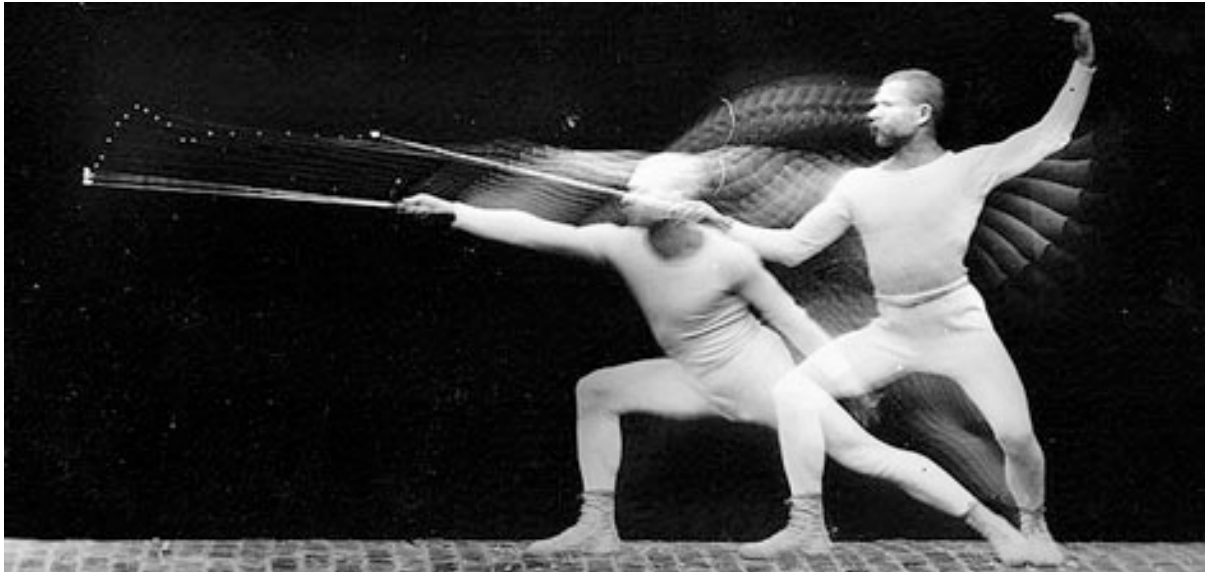
Giacomo Balla – Dynamism of a dog on the line - 1912

**Etienne Jules Marey:**

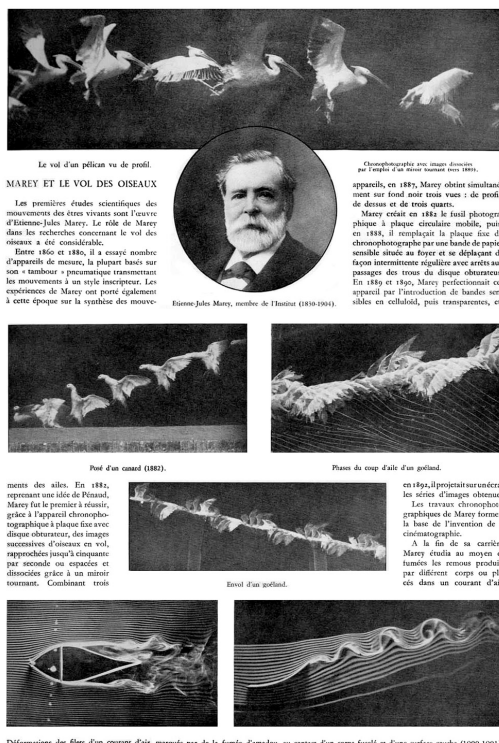
- **Motion studies:** birds, horses, humans



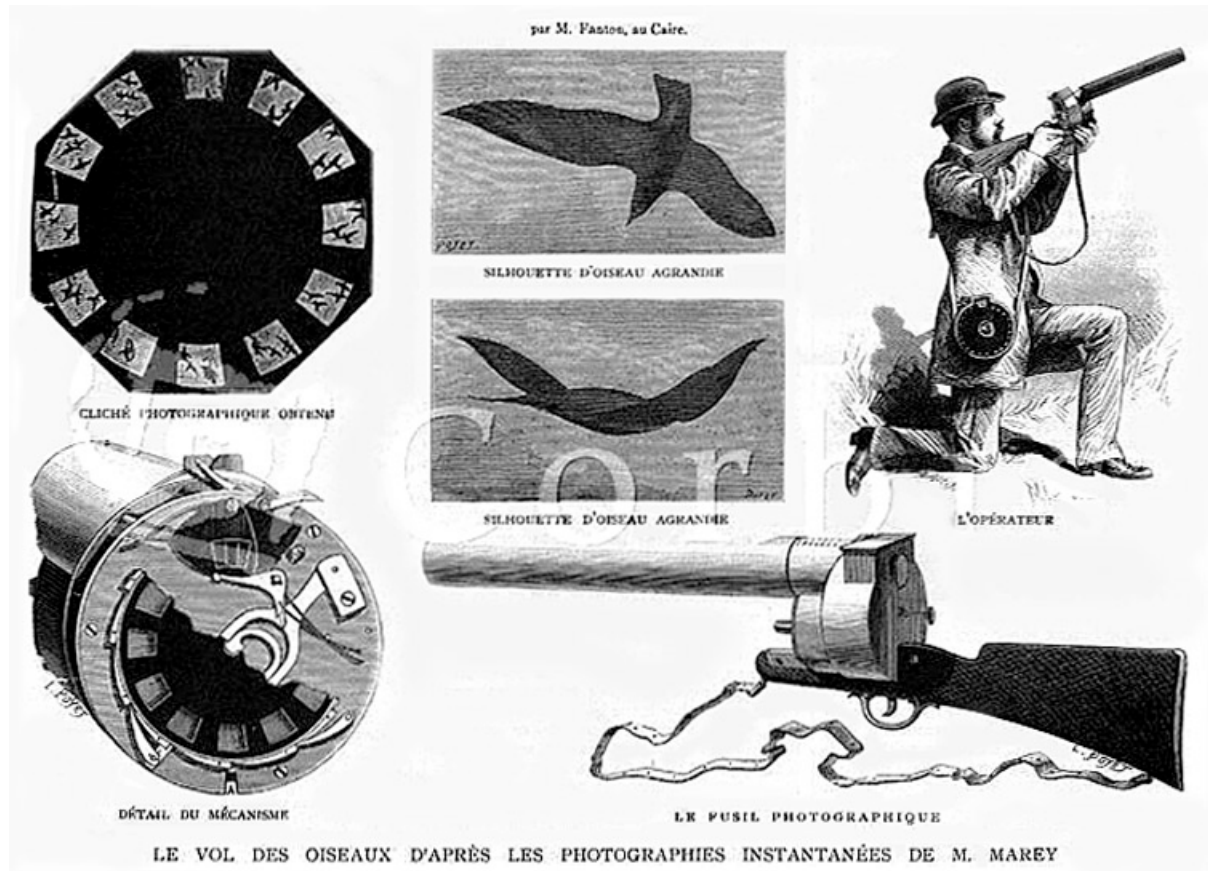
Use of **multiple exposure** (meervoudige belichting) as apposed to the serialised images of Edward Muybridge → especially with this Marey had an enormous influence on avant-garde artists of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most notably on Frantisek Kupka, Marcel Duchamp and of course the Futurists.



- Also registration of physical temporal processes, for which he built special observation and registration machines – example: smoke engine and photo-series of observations of smoke trajectories and turbulence patterns.



- The chronophotograph-gun ("fusil") to capture movement outside the controlled conditions of the laboratory – ties his observation techniques intimately to a whole history of later military observation technologies.



## Desert Screen

The Futurist sensitivity for the dynamism of the machine-driven society, with all its implicit connections between technology, speed, violence and war, only recently filtered down into public consciousness. The Gulf-war more than any other event has been crucial in bringing about this 'Futurist' sensitivity with a wider audience. The Gulf-war was the first war broadcast live on global television and it was the first true information-war. More important even than the physical engagement was the control over information gathered in the battle-field (to maximize the effectiveness of operations) and the control over the information released to the public via the global media-system.





It is frightening to see how clearly Marinetti has forefelt all the elements that contemporary commentators of our media-dominated society attach so much importance to. Marinetti's idea that space and time have died, to be replaced by the dominance of the omnipresent speed, has been worked out most convincingly by the great French theorist Paul Virilio. What Marinetti, however, could not foresee was that this has primarily been a result of our technological extensions of seeing; the invention of ever increasingly sophisticated devices for recording, storing and transmitting images. Virilio has examined this process in great detail and has, for me, been the most worthwhile commentator of the current media-ecology.

### **Indirect Exposure**

According to Virilio a new light has emerged that shines into the living rooms, a light that no longer is reflected from an object, not the direct refrlected electrical light, but an indirect light that flows from the TV and computer screens. This light was once reflected from an actual object, an event, and perceived by an artificial eye, transported and relayed again as a new light that has become a more dominant exposure of reality than the light the natural eye has caught on the street.

This indirect exposure integrates world events in a new artificial light scenography that has achieved truly absurd dimensions. The landing of American troops on the beach of Mogadishu in Somalia was the perfect illustration of this absurdity. newsteams from various international TV networks had settled in on the coast the day before the actual landing of troops, which was to take place in "secrecy" in the middle of the night. Once the first soldiers set afoot on the shore the Tv crews swiutched on their generators for the high-tech mobile set-ups that lid the shore in bright electrical light, which was captured by electronic camera's, relayed by satellite up-link and broadcast live across the globe by global media players such as Cnn and BBC World in the indirect light emitted by cathode ray screens in countless homes and offices around the world, and not least in Mogadisu itself.



## Real-Time

The systems of image-transmission that emerged from the electronic audio-visual media have lead to the current world-wide television and information networks. This system of audiovisual technologies (video, television, computers and transmission technologies) has created the image in 'real-time' through "live-transmission". For Virilio this means that we have become subjectively tele-present all over the world, while the events taking place in the world have achieved a paradoxical 'presence-from-a-distance' for us in real-time.

Virilio: **"The logical paradox ultimately is the logic of the image in real-time, that dominates the thing represented, in that time, that from now on has priority over the actual space. The virtuality that dominates the actuality, even breaks down the concept of reality. This explains the crisis in the traditional (graphic, photographic, cinematographic...) forms of public representation. From it benefits a presence, a paradox presence, a tele-presence of the object or essence from a distance, that replaces its own existence, here and now."**<sup>ii</sup>

Aside from their use as a system of information and amusement the image transmission technologies are most often utilized as systems for observation and control. Virilio maintains that the intensification of control and observation points at a tendency within public representation, a change that relates not only to the civil and police domain, but also to military and strategic aspects of defence. In taking counter-measures to the threat of an enemy the aim is not to make them obvious and visible, as a defence line. Rather it is the aim to "hide the information strategically through a process of dis-information". In a grand orchestration of contradictory strategic maneuvers it becomes unclear which are the essential moves of the enemy. Thus, gathering reliable information becomes essential to predict the behavior of the enemy.

In the strategy of deterrence this process of gathering information has become electronically mediated. Images and data are gathered and transmitted in real-time to enhance an immediate process of action and re-action. The three time-forms of the decided action; past, present and future, were secretly replaced by the dominance of the *real-time* of telecommunications. The future has disappeared partly in the computer programs (that predict and simulate things to come), and partly in this so called *real* time, that entails both the present and a part of the future; when one sees on the radar or on the video screen a threatening weapon in real-time, then this mediated present already contains the immanent impact of the projectile (the future).

Virilio: **"The meaning of the concept of deterrence can be recognized as such: The abolishment of the truth of a real war in favor of the frightening deterrence by weapons for mass-destruction."**<sup>iii</sup>

The strategy of deterrence has become a choice for an 'atomic non-war'. The object of

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<sup>ii</sup>Paul Virilio, *La Machine de Vision*, Éditions de Galilée, Paris, 1988 / *Die Sehmaschine*, Merve Verlag, Berlin, 1989, p. 150

<sup>iii</sup>Virilio, '89, p. 151.



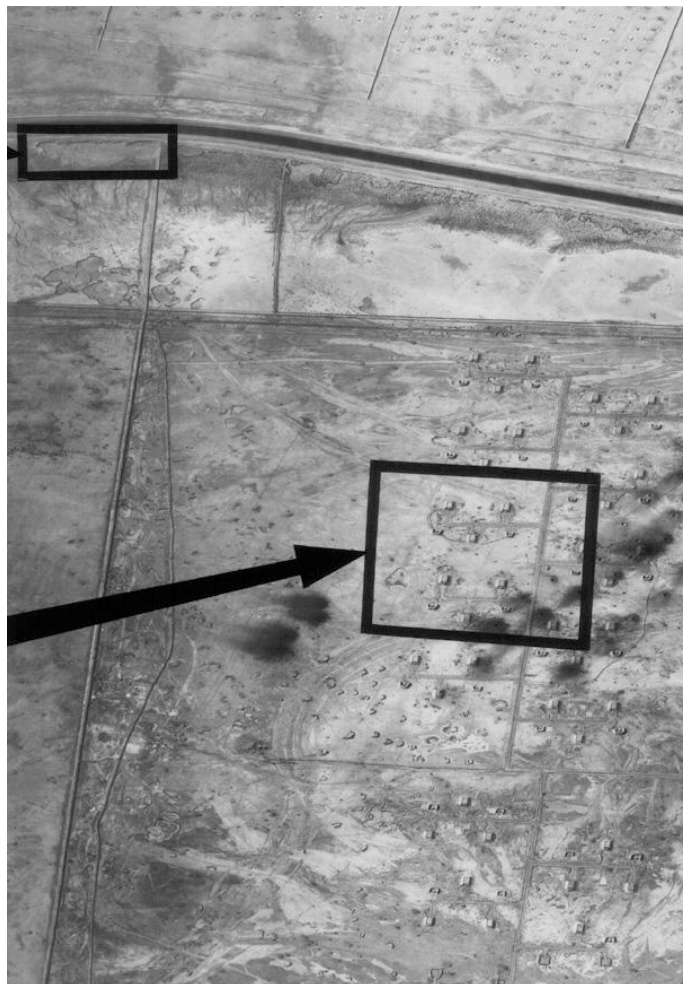
this strategy is not to engage in conflict at all, but rather to achieve a maximum capacity for preventing it. This capacity relies on the ability to monitor and predict the actions of the enemy. For this purpose a huge apparatus of observation devices has been developed.

Virilio insists that there is a clear succession of image-transmission technologies whose origin is largely military. During the first world war reconnaissance planes for the first time made extensive numbers of photographs from the air of enemy positions. The techniques for air-reconnaissance have from there on been perfected up to the standard of current advanced satellite observation systems. The evaluation of these images formed a kind of pre-action for the military that increasingly determined their future strategic moves. The analysis of the situation on the battle-field progressively removed itself from the actual scene of the fight as these techniques became more sophisticated. *(This might have been a reason for the commander of the American forces (Schwarzkopf) during the Gulf War to call the battle-field an 'action-theater'.)*

The strategy of deterrence thus entails a continuous process of gathering information and creating disinformation. The concept of deterrence and the 'atomic non-war' create a shift from actual war to virtual war. The balance of deterrence finally comes to rely on the mutual insecurity about the intentions and strength of the East and West, of which the whole SDI program (Strategic Defence Initiative) and its inherent uncertainties (even about its existence) is the most clear example. The desire to counter this insecurity has driven the industrialized countries into a technological race and enhanced the militarization of industry and science, at enormous economic costs for both sides.

**In this technological race the image has become an instrument of power, whose effectiveness relies on the ability to interpret the image correctly.** The speed of

the interpretation is of course essential: The time involved in the transmission and interpretation of the images delays the appraisal of correct counter measures to the enemies actions.



## La Machine de Vision / the Vision Machine

With satellite transmission the transmission of images and other forms of information has become instantaneously on a global scale. On the human side, however, there is a limit to this process of acceleration (or rather *intensification*), which relates to the perceptual system. Perception is not merely an act of light passing through the lens of



an eye. There is a certain amount of time involved to fix the image on the retina and store it in visual memory. This is a still not properly understood act of construction and ascription of meaning. The retinal image lives on as a mental image that creates the extension of the image in time. Virilio compares it to the momentary image of a cinematic film that lives on as a memory in the viewers head. Although not perceptible the reality of this mental image can not be denied.

The human factor thus places a constraint on the speed of interpretation of the strategically crucially important images. This has prompted the need to develop a machine that could analyze images at greater speeds than the human perceptual apparatus to create a strategic advantage, or at least prevent a strategic disadvantage (although it remains uncertain how far the other side might have developed *its* technology).

The project of the intensification of (strategic) perception therefore involved the automatization of perception, the invention of an artificial form of seeing. The *vision-machine* (as Virilio calls it) is created out of the fusion of electronic camera's with systems for digital image processing and analysis. The human factor disappears from this process once the images (transmitted in real-time) are read by a device rather than a person. With it the subjectivity is taken out of the process of seeing. There is an act of **substitution** taking place here, rather than that of simulation.

The process of transmission thereby transcends the human time-frame; transmission, interpretation and reaction are automated and take place at a speed that cannot be monitored or understood anymore by humans. Every image-recording Virilio stresses is also a time-recording, because the recording relates to the time exposure required for the recorded image. The objective character of the image therefore does not relate as much to a material carrier as it does to the time, the exposed time that makes something visible or that makes it impossible to see anything (because its duration is too short to be perceived). The vision-machine operates in a time frame below this border of visibility, and Virilio holds that our ability to understand what happens in the system is given only by our ability to understand the (undetectable) existence of the virtual mental image, since the images viewed by the seeing machine have the same imperceptible virtual status. Within this system the **intensive time**, that makes the future disappear in the ultra-short duration of the real-time transmission in telecommunications, replaces the **extensive time**, in which the future was still available in the form of weeks, months and years to come.

Virilio: **"The unimaginably distant single combat between the weapon and its armorment, between aggressor and defender, loses its relevance, both melt into a new 'technological double', that paradox object, in which deceptive manoeuvres and counter-measures are developed ever further and soon take on a predominantly defensive character, in the course of which the image becomes a more effective weapon as the one it was supposed to show !"**<sup>iv</sup>

## Fatality

There is a fatality inherent in the acceleration of such crucial processes by the development of (information-) technology. The fatality can be found in various areas of society, and they all relate to the acceleration of events beyond the border of human perception that is rendering us unable to react to these events. Virilio presents the Wall Street Crash of 1987 as a favorite example, where the trade-computers reacted to each other in a time-frame that was no longer accessible for the stock-traders themselves and ultimately lead to the collapse of the market.



The Gulf War has shown a military fatality, where in particular the patriot missile systems were an interesting example of this automatization of perception. A distant radar-system would constantly survey a certain part of the air to detect flying objects, which could be enemy missiles coming in (in this case Iraqi Scud missiles fired at Israel). There was a possibility to have a person monitor the system and intervene in the action. But this was only possible if there would be enough time left to respond, and this in turn of course was a function of the speed of the incoming missiles. For the Patriot system to function effectively it should be given the right instructions as a computer program beforehand so that the system could control its own actions accordingly below the border of a humanly perceptible time-frame. As the missiles become more sophisticated, there will be an increasing reliance on these automated defence systems operating in an intensified time frame, the *intensive time*, outside of human control, but whose operations only become apparent in the *extensive time* of human perception when there is an accident; when the missile is actually fired.

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<sup>iv</sup>Virilio, '89, p. 154.



The most dramatic fatality of the real-time transmission systems, may however well be political. I want to cite again the concerns Virilio expressed in reaction to the CNN coverage of the Gulf War.

Virilio: **"The immediacy, the omnipresence and the complete visibility are the elements of the politics of tomorrow. Momentarily nobody controls the 'real-time'. Nobody is asking the questions of the induced effects. All distances have been reduced to zero. This world-wide reduction will have fatal consequences for the individual, for our customs. It is time to develop a media-ecology.**

- *Who is really threatened ?*

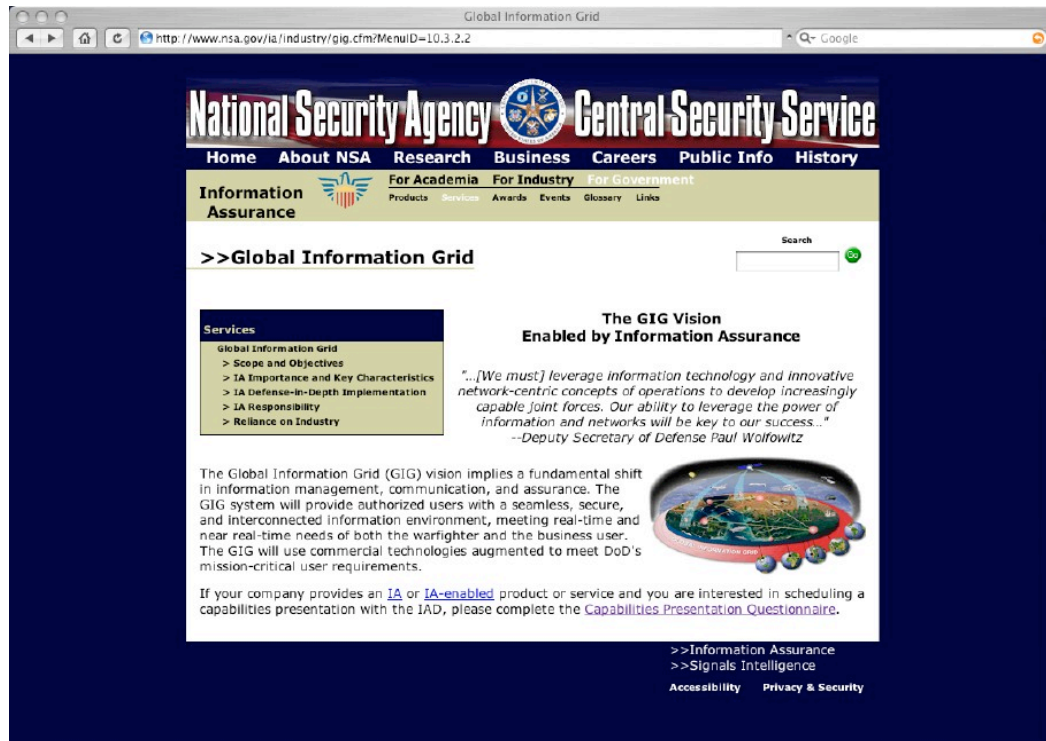
(V)- **The threat is the fusion and confusion. Politics in real-time is impossible. Politics is time and reflection. Today one no longer has time to think. The things you see have already taken place. And there has to be an immediate reaction. Is politics in real-time possible ? An authoritative yes. But real democracy is based on the division of powers (shared powers<sup>ek</sup>). When there no longer is time to share, what is shared then ?"**<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>v</sup> From an interview with Paul Virilio republished in: Kunstforum international, Bd 114, Imitation und Mimesis, Köln, July/August, 1991, pp. 270-271.

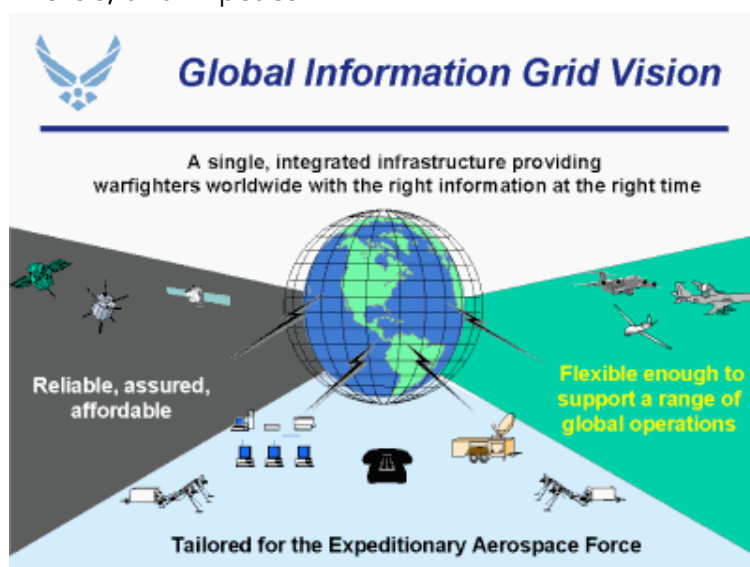


## Epilogue: Global Information Grid



## Scope and Objectives

"The Global Information Grid (GIG) will be a net-centric system operating in a global context to provide processing, storage, management, and transport of information to support all Department of Defense (DoD), national security, and related Intelligence Community missions and functions-strategic, operational, tactical, and business-in war, in crisis, and in peace.



GIG capabilities will be available from all operating locations: bases, posts, camps, stations, facilities, mobile platforms, and deployed sites. The GIG will interface with allied, coalition, and non-GIG systems.

The overarching objective of the GIG vision is to provide the National Command Authority (NCA), warfighters, DoD personnel, Intelligence Community, business, policy-makers, and non-DoD users with information superiority, decision superiority, and full-spectrum dominance."



Website: National Security Agency – Central security Service, 14 November 2004.  
[www.nsa.gov/ia/industry/gig.cfm](http://www.nsa.gov/ia/industry/gig.cfm)

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