

Mechanical Distance

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Typical of the worshipers of the state these days, the media-doinks spend hours describing the technology of war. With each new weapon comes a clean new explanation - in the haze of science we forget or ignore the 'who' at the end of the ride.

Somewhere, in the bleak corners of 'developing economies', insignificant people - objects to us really - get the joy of wondering if they work at a baby food factory, or for an evil dictator (believe me, the membership list of 'acceptable dictators' is constantly changing and almost impossible to keep up with), or building some feared weapon of mass destruction. They wonder if their leader is 'fighting for freedom' or a 'known terrorist' and they are often too angry, too hungry and too desperate to care. It is a waiting game for them with the sword of Damocles ever hanging over their heads. Swords of wiring built proud by Boeing or Raytheon or some other 'peace maker' enterprise.

Not that war isn't fun.. No, we certainly wouldn't want to throw a cold blanket on that.

War, and the fear of war, brought us a revolution in aerospace and communications technology.

War got us to the moon - Von Braun did all his beta testing on London. Those brave Englishman gave their lives to validate his proof of concept. The missile, the computer and many other innovations were funded by war. Can we really look a 'gift horse' in the mouth? Can we afford not to?

These technologies make war 'easier' for populations to accept, to absorb (within the scientific limits of the economy). War is made easier on the home front. Is it easier for the soldier? How can it be? War always finds a victim where NO technology can mediate - where soldiers still must fight face-to-face.

We still ask 'how do we condition the soldiers for war?'.

In earlier times, men/women stood within sight of each other and war colored uniforms not for Art but for organization. A commander needed to see his/her men on the field - the colors, flags and various costumes had an intrinsic utility and psychological power. If blood were left on the field of battle, men and women moved through it - it stained them. We still have warriors like these today, but even their uniforms provide both physical and psychological levels of distance.

In just two centuries of science and technology we have gone from killing men at the distances of an arrow or a cannon or a simple gun to killing each other from an ergonomic chair - flying remote controlled vehicles that appear toy-like until they turn mean. Not that we are killing in the same numbers or if we were how would we know? We are sanitized and separated from this other world of 'battlefields', 'enemies' and death.

We kill with precision.

During the 'war on terror' (a strange kind of war) we became a dark Santa Clause - Kris Kringle with a special list that we do check twice (once for the target, and once for the battle damage assessment).

Nuclear weapons may even become less useful. Our new weapons are tiny automaton which get smaller and more lethal as each year passes - soon, bacterial sized weapons will infest our enemy like an infection. Soon, our demons will come in all shapes and sizes - will we lose control? Have we already lost control?

Mechanical distance separates this killing from the 'cool and objective' agent. We just need to figure out 'whom' the

bad people are - the rest is almost pure determinism. Once we have our list, we launch these demons and sometimes even rig them with cameras to show this 'as entertainment' on some 24 infotainment channel.

This mechanical distance, this conscience cleaning ease with which murder is possible in a way never imagined, is a sickness. The warrior is mediated by his weapon. We really don't need to fear a future where 'killer robots take over' - the victory is done. These new weapons need not take over because we are being sublimated. We are becoming robots.