ונתיא סיהולא[1]
The Future on the Counterattack

by Adolfo Fattori

"Fifteen seconds", said Mordecai Levy. "Attack mode."
The two Cobras opened up, separating themselves about twenty meters. Mordecai released all the arming safeties and fired the rocket primers. In the electronic image-intensification scope, the main street of Bend Jubail looked very much like a shooting range lane.
[…]
"You first, then me," Mordecai announced.
"Okay."
Levy reduced the thrust and watched Grabowski's plane dive toward the village.
The hail of tracer bullets swept across the street, devastating both the living and the dead...
Almost at the edge of town, a group of children ran toward a side alley. They had almost made it when Bernard Grabowski dropped the napalm bomb. The blast of 2,000-degree phosphorus incinerated the entire group and spread the fire across about a square kilometer of shacks. Screaming human torches took only a few steps before collapsing onto the blackened sand.

These lines could have been written today. They could be an excerpt from an instant book, or from a newspaper report. Instead, they are taken from a novel – not a recent one, but from 1981, *Alla fine della notte*, by Alan D. Altieri.

Altieri's fiction, defined by some as "technological gothic" for its extreme, ferocious dimension, is set in a future very close to the time his novels were published; so far, they have been considered as descriptions of a present *parallel* to our own, but today, they are increasingly closer to describing the making of current history.

[1] *Elohim itnu*,: "God is with us"

Thus, starting with this first novel, Altieri devotes himself to writing a highly dystopian narrative, which gradually shifts from one of the planet's hottest scenarios to another, from the ghettos of Los Angeles to Southeast Asia, back to the Middle East, to Europe and then to the United States.

Altieri's technological gothic is made up of an increasingly polluted planet – by industrial production but also by an increasingly widespread, endemic war – unleashed and fueled by financial/industrial conglomerates born from the merger of the great multinationals of the past (our present, we can imagine). They express not only economic and financial power, but *also*, directly, political and military power, which *are* political-military power, engaged in a necessarily eternal war.

In this imaginary (but how imaginary?) space-time dimension there is also room for a tycoon in whom we can recognize a – now deceased – Italian financier, and a "Bridge over the Strait" here reduced to a pile of rubble. A place become the scene of one of the many showdowns between the various powers that compete for the planet – this time, moreover, transformed in an infamous carnage.

These lines also tell us something else. They tell us that the future always manages to catch us off guard – and that the science fiction (be it classic *science fiction*, *speculative fiction*, *anticipatory narrative* or whatever we want to call it), which has long since ceased to claim to predict our future, manages sometimes to be more prophetic than sociological, scientific, or political predictions.

But only when it chooses to be eccentric, extreme, even politically incorrect – something that's not very popular these days. As in the case of Altieri, and some of the most sensitive science fiction writers of the "Classical Age" of science fiction, the 1950s and 1960s – Fritz Leiber, Frederik Pohl, Cyril Kornbluth, authors of still-memorable dystopias.

Instead, for just over a couple of years now, we have found ourselves witnessing events that – let's be honest – we would have never expected: the Middle East is at risk of exploding definitively, between the genocide (yes!) in Gaza, and Trump's US treacherous attack on Iran. Events that are also overshadowing the war between Russia and Ukraine, with the possible risk of finding ourselves in an apocalyptic science fiction scenario, an "imagination of disaster", as Susan Sontag wrote in the 1960s (1966).

And perhaps, what has most projected us into a time completely "out of joint", a distorted, estranged, scalene parallel universe, a space-time

continuum in which one of the pillars of the second half of the 20th century's claim to humanity risks being shattered, nullified, dissipated: the memory of the Shoah and all its implications. Within the superficiality of today's daily communication, a double, lethal movement finds nourishment: on the one hand, the stubborn institutional defense of Zionism, passed off as Judaism tout court; on the other, the instrumental resurgences of anti-Semitism, also based on the confusion between Judaism and Zionism.

The words of Gottfried Benn come to mind – applicable to this piece of "History in Reverse" – recalling the years of Nazism: he write "We shuddered at the implementation of their racist theorems […]. It was categorically excluded that in my father's house an anti-Semitic idea could be conceived or expressed […]. *It was like saying that we wanted to eradicate Europe, to block history, to destroy civilization*" (2002, italics mine).

We could replace the term "Nazi" with the word "Zionist," and Benn's consideration would acquire a paradoxical relevance, surrounding the delirium of a "chosen people" and the realization of a "millennium" in the name of God by the descendants of those who suffered Nazi delirium.

Here, speculative fiction in its various incarnations – like theoretical research on the future – have failed to imagine the direction our times are taking,[2] torn between solar punk optimism and the soft pessimism of digital dystopias while critical reflection on the future that awaits us often seems to look elsewhere, towards linear changes, without shocks, without unexpected singularities.

Once again, capitalism is demonstrating its vocation to change, to shed its skin, to renew its strategies to reorganize and strengthen itself, returning, if necessary, even to a logic of colossal destruction of resources, of barbarism, of ferocity, beyond all principles, beyond all rules. Confirming so, at least in perspective, the forecasts of Jacques Attali, advisor to François Mitterrand (and the first president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which says a lot). In a 2006 work, *A Brief History of the Future*, Attali predicted by 2025 the emergence of a "hyperempire", in which a handful of super-privileged individuals will wield all global economic and political power. These will rule over a small group of guaranteed "middle managers" (bureaucrats, professionals, mil-

[2] Except, of course, in very rare, completely eccentric cases.

itary personnel, police officers, we can imagine) and an immense mass of desperate people (Attali, 2009) – the survivors of a war that proves to be *eternal*, to quote Altieri again.

It hasn't happened (yet), but it seems like work is underway with eager and determined enthusiasm.

Thus we end up discovering that after the decades of the Cold War, the "low-intensity war" fought between the two great planetary powers of the time, capitalist development – and the definition of a world redesigned by digital and communication technologies – we are risking total, traditional war, with the definitive involvement of civilian populations in the logic of genocide, of annihilation.

The following essays, written after October 7, 2023, and before February 28, 2026, explore directly, implicitly, and tangentially the roots of the current situation. They consider the current prospects of speculative fiction, certainly within the present perspective, that of current digital and communication scenarios. Perhaps they do not directly address a possible impending apocalypse. They propose the premises for an excavation – within themselves, within the materials they cite, offering tools for further exploration – to understand the prospects opening up before us, the present ruins, and a storm perhaps just beginning. Walter Benjamin's words, written in 1940, shortly before his death, in view of the destruction of Europe, come to mind, revealing the true, profound meaning of the term *progress*:

> *There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus. It depicts an angel who seems to be moving away from something he is staring at. His eyes are wide open, his mouth open, his wings outstretched. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.* The storm is what we call progress. (italics mine)

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