



Reversing Clausewitz: A History of a Mistake

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This paper traces the result of the reversal of the Clausewitzian dictum that war is the continuation of politics in post-structuralist political theorizing. I argue that much can be gained by not reversing the dictum (hence, making the reversal a mistake) and retaining the conceptual relation between politics and war Clausewitz espouses. I then show what a neo-Clausewitzian position would contribute to the debate on the relation between war or violence and politics by arguing that, in the case of Clausewitz, it is better to be a Kantian than a Nietzschean.

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Reversing Clausewitz: A History of a Mistake

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This paper traces the result of the reversal of the Clausewitzian dictum that war is the continuation of politics in post-structuralist political theorizing. I argue that much can be gained by not reversing the dictum (hence, making the reversal a mistake) and retaining the conceptual relation between politics and war Clausewitz espouses. I then show what a neo-Clausewitzian position would contribute to the debate on the relation between war or violence and politics by arguing that, in the case of Clausewitz, it is better to be a Kantian than a Nietzschean.

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I. Introduction

In her famous *On Violence*, Arendt captures nicely the thrust of this article. She credits Clausewitz with emphasizing that violence is always determined by what precedes it, i.e., politics or economics; hence, it is always a subordinate phenomenon.¹ However, she also finds fault with him and claims that “If the essence of [political] power is the effectiveness of command, then there is no greater power than that which grows out of a barrel of a gun.”² According to her reading, Clausewitz emerges as the 19th century strategist who understood the importance of distinguishing violence from politics, while opening the dangerous conceptual possibility of reducing politics to a mere act of war. Indeed, Arendt’s entire text is an argument against the (still widely) held position that “peace is the continuation of war by other means.”³ This article follows Arendt’s suggestion to see Clausewitz as both the originator of an important distinction between politics and war, thereby subordinating the latter to the former, while simultaneously, by placing both on a continuum, opening the

¹ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” in *Crises of the Republic* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 111.

² *Ibid.*, 136. This is a paraphrase of Mao. However, Arendt is quite correct in claiming that Mao is heavily indebted to Clausewitz. See T. Derbent, “Clausewitz, Mao et Le Maoïsme,” *Clarté Rouge* 4/1 (2013), http://centremlm.be/Clarte-Rouge-Organe-theorique-du-Centre-Marxiste-Leniniste-Maoiste-Belgique-No4#outil_sommaire_3.

³ Arendt, “On Violence,” 111.

possibility of the reversal of the subordination of war to politics and thereby undermining any possible distinction between the two.⁴

However, I go a step further than Arendt, by arguing that Clausewitz has put in place important conceptual obstacles in order to prevent the reversal of his famous dictum. There are at least three in number: the distinction between the “pure” and “real” concepts of war; the distinction between the grammar and the logic of politics and war; and finally, the trinitarian definition of war being composed of people, military command, and government. In this article, I will focus on the first two aspects.⁵ The rich history of the reversal, from Lenin to Foucault, is both a testimony to how complex theoretical works open diverging paths for thinking, but also reveals something particular about a specific demand of critical theory and militant action: to justify violent resistance to what is conceived as an intolerable state of affairs. Thus, without rejecting the conceptual possibility of the reversal and concretely showing that Clausewitz opened this possibility himself, I argue that we gain a fuller understanding of both politics and war by taking his project as a whole; that is, by situating politics and war on a continuum all the while guaranteeing the dominance and specificity of the former.

This article will follow a three-fold structure. The first part, which is more historical, will briefly show how the reversal of the Clausewitzian dictum was introduced into political theory via Lenin’s reading of Clausewitz. Though Lenin himself never reversed the dictum, he opened this possibility by seeing war not only as inter-state war, but as civil war. Nonetheless, the Marxist division of society into two opposing camps entailed the idea that a better, proletarian future is possible, where war and politics will no longer be mixed together. With the introduction of a Nietzschean reading of Clausewitz, and the advent of post-structuralism, however, the possibility of a better future was abandoned for the sake of an overarching, quasi-ontological argument in favour of the generative and creative character of war and its permeation through all forms of sociability. This observation will enable me, in the second section, to reject Julian Reid’s contention that post-structuralists such as Foucault, Deleuze or Negri are neo-Clausewitzians.⁶ In the third section, I will contend that Clausewitz, who arose from the tradition of German idealism yet tempered it with a healthy dose of practical experience, succeeds in preventing the dire consequences of the dictum’s reversal, i.e., by refusing to understand all political relations as inherently aimed at destroying an enemy. To state it in more Clausewitzian terms, blocking the possibility of pure war is essential. Thus, I show how revisiting Clausewitz can open the path for a different agonistic understanding of politics. In order to do so, I will focus on Howard Caygill’s recent work, *On Resistance*.

II. From Lenin to Foucault

Given that Marxism had a dramatic impact on all the thinkers discussed in this paper and that its conception of politics rests “upon an imaginary owing a great deal to Clausewitz,”⁷ I think

⁴ It seems that the issue of the relation between politics and violence was a source of constant preoccupation for Arendt, even beyond “On Violence.” See the first pages of her *On Revolution* where she ponders the question of whether or not there is any possibility of distinguishing between revolution and war (specifically civil war). Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 1–10.

⁵ Concerning the trinitarian definition of war, see Andreas Herberg-Rothe, “Clausewitz’s “Wondrous Trinity” as General Theory of War and Violent Conflict,” *Theoria* (December 2007): 48–73.

⁶ Julian Reid, “Re-Appropriating Clausewitz: The Neglected Dimensions of Counter-Strategic Thought,” in *Classical Theory in International Relations*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 277–95.

⁷ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed (London; New York: Verso, 2001), 67–68.

it is important to start making sense of the reversal from one of Clausewitz's most astute readers, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. It seems somewhat unfair to simply blame Lenin for the militarization of Marxism due to his deep engagement with Clausewitz and his understanding of what brings Clausewitz and Marx together (Hegel) as well as what drives them apart (Hegel again).⁸ Indeed, Lenin did not need to do much in order to militarize Marxism. Even if one accepts Gat's contention that neither Engels nor Marx were drastically influenced by *Vom Krieg*,⁹ Marxism was already, in their writings, quite militaristic in its orientation. Indeed, understanding modern society as one plagued by "a veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to that point where that war breaks out into open revolution [...],"¹⁰ leads one very quickly to deduce that even such things as the work day are the result of a "protracted civil war between the classes."¹¹

Lenin was a careful reader of Clausewitz. He engaged with *Vom Krieg* extensively while in exile in Bern during 1915, copying entire sections of the work and highlighting the importance of Book 8, chapter 6B, titled "War is an Instrument of Policy."¹² Via his notebooks from 1915, we can establish that Lenin's reading of Clausewitz is Hegelian through and through. Moreover, Clausewitz played a crucial role in moving Lenin from dialectical materialism into a more abstract form of dialectics.¹³ However, though Lenin attaches crucial importance to the dialectics he sees between defence and attack in Clausewitz's work, his understanding of the relation between politics and war is most relevant for this paper. Indeed, while Clausewitz understands politics as "unitary" and his emphasis on the state may be Hegelian, Lenin's commitment to Marx forces him to reinterpret politics as class struggle and the state as a "committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."¹⁴ Within such a framework, the formula that war is the continuation of politics dramatically changes meaning. If politics is not understood as a unitary affair that unites the interest of the entire nation as a whole, then we can rewrite the formula as 'war is the continuation of a certain kind of politics,' i.e., the politics of the bourgeoisie, applied both against other states (imperialist war) and just as well against the working class.¹⁵ When Clausewitz states that war is a matter for the entire population, Lenin corrects this and writes as follows: "an inaccuracy: belonging to the bourgeoisie and perhaps to everyone."¹⁶ Indeed, Lenin takes special notice (highlighting with a *nota bene*) that Clausewitz admits that politics can be understood as something different than "representative of all interests of the community."¹⁷ It seems that Clausewitz understands very well that when positioning politics and war on a continuum, if politics is understood as

⁸ Jacob W. Kipp, "Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914-1921," *Military Affairs* 49, no. 4 (October 1985): 184-91.

⁹ Azar Gat, "Clausewitz and the Marxists: Yet Another Look," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 2 (April 1992): 363-82. Gat states that Marx "himself never read *On War*." (367) and that Engels', though more familiar with Clausewitz, had his own sources for similar statements (368-370).

¹⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 232.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990), 412. We will see that the civil war thesis comes back in Foucault's writings from the early seventies later on in this paper.

¹² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1989), 605-10. Vladimir I. Lenin, "Lenin's Notebook on Clausewitz," trans. Donald E. Davis and Walter S. G. Kohn, *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual* 1 (1977): 209.

¹³ Kipp, "Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914-1921," 186.

¹⁴ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 221.

¹⁵ Vladimir I. Lenin, "Socialism and War," Marxist Internet Archive, n.d., www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s-w/index.htm.

¹⁶ Lenin, "Lenin's Notebook on Clausewitz," 206.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 212; Clausewitz, *On War*, 607.

anything else than representing the whole of society, then war can easily be confused with civil war and becomes a tool in the hands of a partisan section of society to fight other parts of it in order to compel them to do its will.¹⁸

This potential for transforming war between states into civil war within a given state came to haunt political theory throughout the 20th century. If one takes Lenin's insight that certain kinds of politics cannot represent society as a whole, one opens the formula to the possibility of understanding politics as instrumentalizing war as a tool for intra-state social domination. However, if one adds to this Trotsky's argument that "in any 'normally' functioning state [...] the monopoly of brute force and repression belongs to state power,"¹⁹ we quickly get to the conclusion that the state is a mere "organ of power" and that war is its concrete form. Nonetheless, even though Marxism-Leninism opened the possibility for the reversal, it never actually formulated it. This is for the simple reason that it maintains a distinction between the state understood as a repressive tool in the hands of the ruling class, and politics as such. War can be a tool of politics in the hands of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, but its aims remain limited: taking control of state power to achieve the first phase of the revolution, i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Turning the reversal into an ontological statement about what politics *is* would have to wait until Foucault's work and experimentation in the early seventies with the thesis that civil war is the matrix for understanding all social relations.²⁰ Indeed, it was only after the breakup of the *telos* of Marxism, and the end of politics entailed in the dream of a communist society, that the reversal could be canonized as its own statement, i.e., that politics is the continuation of war by other means.²¹

Most of those who engage with Foucault's reversal of the dictum have quoted, until recently, from his famous 1971 lecture, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" or from his 1975-76 lectures at the Collège de France, *Society Must be Defended* (published in 1999).²² However, recently published material, and specifically the lecture courses from 1971-72, *Penal Theories and Institutions* (published in English in 2019) and from 1972-1973, *The Punitive Society* (published in English in 2015), enables us to appreciate to what extent the civil war thesis and its implied reversal in the relation between war and politics was for Foucault a constant source of inspiration. His references to Germanic Law in *Penal Theories and Institutions* all emphasize that the reversal enables us to think of an act of justice not as establishing peace, but "rather to pursue a war according to the rules."²³ Indeed, for Foucault, the establishment of a clear distinction between a state of civil peace and one of war served the interests of the rising administrative-repressive state apparatus, thereby enabling it to distinguish between political

¹⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

¹⁹ Leon Trotsky, "My Speech Before the Court, Meeting of October 4 (17) 1907," Marxist Internet Archive, n.d., <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1907/1905/ch31.htm>.

²⁰ Philippe Chevallier, *Michel Foucault: Le pouvoir et la bataille* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014).

²¹ For more on the crisis of Marxism being the first step in the formulation of post-structuralism, see Razmig Keucheyan, *Hémisphère gauche: une cartographie des nouvelles pensées critiques* (Paris: la Découverte, 2017). Concerning Foucault's statement that it is Clausewitz that reversed the dictum and that the original formulation should be that politics is the continuation of war by other means, see Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 47-48.

²² Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, La Généalogie, l'histoire," in *Dits et Ecrits*, by Michel Foucault, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald, Quarto, vol. 1, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1004-24; Michel Foucault, *Il faut Défendre La Société: Cours Au Collège de France, 1975-1976* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1997).

²³ Michel Foucault, *Penal Theories and Institutions: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1971-1972*, ed. Bernard E. Harcourt, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Plagrave Macmillan, 2019), 116.

crime and individual crime, thus leading to outcomes from systematic repression of social opposition to new forms of taxation.²⁴

While all of these can be reduced to historical observations concerning the impact of Germanic law, the session of January 10, 1973 sees Foucault confronting a position that he called for the week before: “Civil war is the matrix of all struggles of power, of all strategies of power, and consequently, it is also the matrix of all the struggles regarding and against power.”²⁵ Here, Foucault equates civil war with political power, thus arguing for understanding civil war as the inherent logic of politics. If for Clausewitz, war has its grammar but not its logic,²⁶ for Foucault, it is politics that (in 1973) has no independent logic. It is a mere “continuation of civil war.”²⁷ During the session of January 10, 1973, Foucault elevates civil war to a methodology. He opposes Hobbes who, he argues, sees the end of civil war as the moment when politics is born. Indeed, after a detailed analysis as to the reasons why Hobbes theorizes the war of all against all as a natural state, Foucault argues that based on the Hobbesian paradigm, sovereignty is equated with the end of war. Only in this way of thinking politics and war can the two be conceived as two distinct states where the beginning of one marks the end of the other.²⁸ However, Foucault’s civil war is not the same thing as Hobbes’ theoretical war. It is a concrete state of war of group against group which not only pitches these groups against each other, *but which constitutes them*.²⁹ Indeed, for Foucault, who remains faithful to the idea of the continuity between war and politics and not their separation, one can say that:

Civil war is not a sort of antithesis of power, what exists before or reappears after it. Civil war and power are not mutually exclusive. Civil war takes place on the stage of power. There is civil war only in the element of constituted political power; it takes place in order to keep or conquer power, to confiscate or transform it.³⁰

The notes of that lecture push the point even further. Foucault’s point is that civil war “reconstitutes” political power; it gives rise to it.³¹ It operates as the passage from one form of power relations and constitutes a new one.

If a contradiction exists between power and civil war, it is that between established political power and the ongoing management of war; what strategists today call “low intensity conflict.” One could go as far as arguing that low intensity conflict is in fact civil war managed by a “combination of means, employing political, economic, international, and military

²⁴ Ibid., 130–32.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, ed. Bernard E. Harcourt, trans. Graham Burchell (New York ; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 13. For more on the relation between the civil war thesis, repressive state apparatuses and Althusser’s Marxism, see Guilel Treiber, “From Choirboy to Funeral Orator: Foucault’s Complicated Relationship to Structuralism,” in *Historical Traces and Future Pathways of Poststructuralism: Aesthetics, Ethics, Politics*, ed. Gavin Rae and Emma Ingala (London: Routledge, 2021), 53–76, <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781000222593>.

²⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.

²⁷ Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, 32. See as well Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 15–16, 48–47, 165.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *La Société Punitive: Cours Au Collège de France 1972-1973*, ed. Bernard E. Harcourt, Hautes Études (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 29.

²⁹ Ibid., 30. Foucault states that “Civil war is rather a process whose protagonists are collective and whose effects, moreover, are the emergence of new collective protagonists.” Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, 28–29.

³⁰ Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, 29.

³¹ Ibid., 29.

instruments,” within the state structure itself.³² According to Foucault, established political power is always *in preparation* for civil war, while peace is nothing but a masquerade which enables the conflicting sides to arm themselves and work through the means just stated in order to undermine their opponent’s capacity to resist. “One should be able to study the daily exercise of power as a civil war [...]. And, if it is true that external war is the continuations of politics, we must say, reciprocally, that *politics is the continuation of civil war*.”³³

As we have seen in this section, the possibility of the reversal of Clausewitz’s formula is made possible by disintegrating state politics as unitary into an intra-state conflict between diverse groups. This possibility was opened by Lenin and Trotsky, however it reached its full formulation in Foucault’s work and, as will be shown in the following pages, in the works of other post-structuralist thinkers. However, before moving on to the next section, one must ask the evident question: why is that problematic? Why is arguing that the logic of politics is war an issue for political theorists at all? What challenge does the reversal represent? I argue that equating politics and war and reducing the former to the latter is both dangerous and problematic. It is dangerous as it is simply explicit encouragement for sectarian violence. Though perhaps a privilege resulting from the relative civil peace that has reigned in Europe for the last several decades, the rise of new forms of political extremisms (religious and secular) brings the issue of sectarian political violence to the fore once more. Yet, the real issue lies in the falsely simplistic view it encourages of political life. Some of these thinkers, and Foucault is exemplary in this respect, simply confuse the distinction between struggle and war. While the former is local, and answers to certain rules and codes of behaviour, the latter can easily spill over and erase the lines between an opponent and an enemy, making not war into “something pointless and devoid of sense,” but politics.³⁴

III. The Counter-Strategic Tradition and its Failings

In an important article published in 2006, Julian Reid argues that a specific strain of post-structuralist thought can be understood as giving a “Neo-Clausewitzian account” of the relation between politics and war.³⁵ This strain, including thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Negri or Virilo, amounts to nothing less than a “counter-strategic tradition.”³⁶ Indeed, though using very different methods and working on a diverse range of issues, these thinkers all share an attempt to reconceive war as something that exceeds and is uncontrolled by state power. According to Reid, the great contribution of these thinkers, in attempting to reconceive the relationship between politics and war beyond the state, to have rethought war as “a condition of possibility for the development of new forms of political subjectivity [...]” Indeed, for them, war is nothing less than the “generative principle for the formation of social relations in the composition of modern political orders.”³⁷

³² "Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict" (Washington, DC: Department of the Army and Air Force, 12 May 1990), https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/100-20/10020ch1.htm#s_9. See chapter 1, “Fundamentals of Low Intensity Conflict: Definition.”

³³ Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, 32. Emphasis added. For a similar point see Youri Cormier, *War as Paradox: Clausewitz and Hegel on Fighting Doctrines and Ethics* (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 142–43. However, I argue in the latter part of this essay that this simple critical reading of Foucault reversing the dictum does not do justice to his engagement with Clausewitz.

³⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 605. Concerning the issue of the relation between violence and sense and the argument that violence is senseless, see James Dodd, *Violence and Phenomenology*, Studies in Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2009).

³⁵ Reid, "Re-Appropriating Clausewitz: The Neglected Dimensions of Counter-Strategic Thought," 284.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 278.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 278.

Therefore, for this group of thinkers, politics is not even the continuation of war by other means, but a mere epiphenomenon of an ontology of war. It seems somewhat bizarre to call Neo-Clausewitzians a group of thinkers who constantly blur the distinctions between politics and war, retaining from Clausewitz only the argument of their existence on a continuum. To be fair to Reid, by the term “counter-strategic”, he wants to capture the sense in which these thinkers understand Clausewitz well beyond reversing the dictum or not. They emphasize other aspects of Clausewitz’s definition of politics and war, for example, as being a “conflict of living forces.” For Reid, Clausewitz’s interpreters have been arguing as to whether he follows Kant or Hegel for far too long. He contends that Clausewitz follows neither. For him, Clausewitz is “the first figure within a tradition [the counter-strategic one, G.T.] that is to be expressly anti-Hegelian and anti-Kantian in its pertaining to wage war upon the limitations for political being established by these philosophers of duty.”³⁸ Though not clearly stating it, the Clausewitz that emerges from Reid’s reading is indeed neither Kantian nor Hegelian, but Nietzschean through and through. In this Nietzschean Clausewitz, the relation of enmity established between two opponents and understood qua forces vying for survival and domination is the only point of the entire work.³⁹

A. Deleuze and Guattari’s War Machines

If indeed, my hypothesis is correct, namely that Reid misreads the counter-strategic tradition as Neo-Clausewitzian while in fact its thinkers are reading Clausewitz through a heavily Nietzschean perspective, Reid’s chronology which starts with Foucault and then moves on to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaux* (published in French in 1980) is misleading.⁴⁰ Though Deleuze and Guattari do indeed mention Clausewitz by name as well as his dictum in the book, their use of him is at best cursory.⁴¹ Indeed, if we want to find the importance of understanding war or politics as only a “conflict of living forces,” one must refer to Deleuze’s 1962 *Nietzsche and Philosophy* which is the infrastructure of both post-structuralism, Foucault’s genealogy, and subsequent engagement with the civil war thesis and any other post-structuralist reading of Clausewitz.⁴² Indeed, even if one sees the power of the modern state as that which must be opposed, as Reid claims all counter-strategic thinkers do, one can relate it only to a specific reading of Clausewitz in which “pure war” is a different *kind* of social relation. The critical question that Reid does not ask of these thinkers is what kind of social relation is possible (if any) under the conditions of an absolute war defined as “complete, untrammelled, absolute manifestation of violence.”⁴³

³⁸ Ibid., 280.

³⁹ Here, I am making a reference of course to Clausewitz’s wrestlers in Book 1, chapter 1, section 2, “Definition.”

⁴⁰ For a similar chronology of events influenced by Reid’s description, see T. Derbent, *De Foucault Aux Brigades Rouges Misère Du Retournement de La Formule de Clausewitz* (Bruxelles: Les Éditions Aden, 2016).

⁴¹ They use Clausewitz’s name mainly to discuss the issue of real war vs pure war and a few casual citations of the dictum. I do not think that these can justify calling either a neo-Clausewitzian. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 219. Their main discussion of Clausewitz is in pages 419-421.

⁴² For an argument which highlights the significance of Deleuze’s *Nietzsche* for post-structuralism, see Alan D. Schrift, “Nietzsche and the Emergence of Poststructuralism,” in *Historical Traces and Future Pathways of Poststructuralism: Aesthetics, Ethics, Politics*, ed. Gavin Rae and Emma Ingala (London: Routledge, 2021), 26–28, <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781000222593>.

⁴³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

However, for Deleuze and Guattari, the “war machine” is not precisely related to war.⁴⁴ Rather, their effort is to reconceptualize state logic as a form of stratified, layered, hierarchical social relations and oppose it to the logic of the war machine which is that of constant differentiation on multiple levels and forms of life. The real aim of the war machine “is not war but the conditions of creative mutation and change.”⁴⁵ Therefore, for Deleuze and Guattari, war has little to do with Clausewitz’s concrete, real war or even with the pure war of complete violence. Indeed, the state tries to “capture” the war machine mainly because it is a challenge to its logic since it is all that escapes it, constantly. While the state creates a homogenous space divided neatly into squares, dots, and lines where each has their position, the war machine creates a smooth space of deterritorialization, of lines of flight, and is the constitutive space of transformation and differentiation.⁴⁶ Hence, for Deleuze and Guattari, war, actual war, is a result of the collision between these two logics of organizing space.

If one goes into Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis in *A Thousand Plateaux*, one finds both an exact understanding of Clausewitz and at the same time an honest statement as to their divergence from his theorization. Though for Reid, the argument that the state captures war is to be found in Clausewitz,⁴⁷ for Deleuze and Guattari, in order to make such a claim, “a different criterion than that of Clausewitz” has to be applied.⁴⁸ It must be emphasized that in order to argue that the state can “capture” war in order to make it a continuation of its policies, war has to have a different, independent logic to that of the state. I do not think that it is contentious to say that Clausewitz would categorically reject such a possibility. One cannot mistake “ambiguity and tension” for a concrete argument. *On War* is a magnificent work of theory but it is an “unfinished symphony” and as such, is always ambiguous. Deleuze and Guattari are more careful than Reid. They subject their analysis of the formula of war being the continuation of politics by other means to three considerations: 1. That pure war is a concept that does not exist in experience. 2. Real wars are submitted to state politics. 3. However, if a real war is a war of annihilation, it can move through a movement of extremes towards the pure concept, while never fully reaching it.⁴⁹

Though this seems quite in line with Clausewitz’s argument, Deleuze and Guattari argue that in order to make something concretely valuable of the distinction between pure and real war to their system, one must transform Clausewitz and replace the pure idea of war as aiming at the complete “elimination of the enemy” to “a war machine that *does not have war as its object* and that only entertains a potential or supplementary synthetic relation to war.”⁵⁰ Indeed, this merely potential relation to war enables the state to appropriate war machines as a tool for other ends, but it also opens up the possibility that the war machine, due to “Clausewitz’s vacillation” concerning the relation between pure war and the war of annihilation pushed to its extremes, will subjugate the state. Through a war of annihilation, the war machine takes

⁴⁴ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), 109. For an argument that war can be easily equated with the concept of war machine, see Derbent, *De Foucault Aux Brigades Rouges Misère Du Retourneement de La Formule de Clausewitz*, 29–35.

⁴⁵ Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 110.

⁴⁶ For a similar formulation, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195–200; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78*, ed. Michel Senellart (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9–10.

⁴⁷ Reid, “Re-Appropriating Clausewitz: The Neglected Dimensions of Counter-Strategic Thought,” 292.

⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 420.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 419–20. See as well the illuminating discussion in Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 109–15. For another explanation, this time completely anchored in Deleuze-Guattarian terminology, see François Zourabichvili, *Le vocabulaire de Deleuze* (Paris: Ellipses, 2004), 46–48.

⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 420.

control of the state and aims at making states its own tool within a new worldwide order.⁵¹ Deleuze and Guattari then conclude that

This is the point at which Clausewitz's formula is effectively reversed; to be entitled to say that politics is the continuation of war by other means, it is not enough to invert the order of the words as if they could be spoken in either direction; it is necessary to follow a real movement at the conclusion of which the States, having appropriated a war machine, and having adapted it to their aims, reimport a war machine that takes charge of the aim, appropriates the States, and assumes increasingly wider political functions.⁵²

And indeed, as they clearly indicate, such an argument portrays nothing but fascism, and the peace resulting from such a state is the peace of terror and complete political subjugation. We can conclude from these passages on Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation that they are quite aware of the dangers of the reversal. As they state, the reversal cannot just amount to a play with catchy words. The reversal amounts to a reversal of concepts, opening a specific way of thinking about the relation between war and politics, one that strikingly resembles a fascist reading of Clausewitz. Such a reading is the one proposed by Carl Schmitt in his famous *On the Concept of the Political*.⁵³

*B. Negri and Hardt: "All violence fades to grey"*⁵⁴

Negri and Hardt dedicate the first section of their second volume of the *Empire* trilogy, *Multitude, War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004) to the issue of war as a "worldwide war machine,"⁵⁵ which they call "the global state of war."⁵⁶ They dramatically state that war is becoming "the *primary organizing principle of society*, and politics one of its means or guises." Indeed, in the following pages of their book, Negri and Hardt develop Deleuze and Guattari's contention as stated in the above quote. Before plunging into the text of Negri and Hardt, it is worth stating that it is quite surprising that Negri waited so long to engage with Clausewitz. One would have expected that already in his lengthy commentary on Lenin (during 1978), specifically on the Lenin of 1915, Negri would say something about the relation between the Russian revolutionary leader and the German general, but this is not the case.⁵⁷ Indeed, Negri's references to Clausewitz before *Multitude* are at best negligible, not to say non-existent.⁵⁸ Hence, again, to argue based on this minimal textual evidence that Negri is neo-

⁵¹ We shall see in the next pages how this argument is revisited and concretized by Hardt and Negri.

⁵² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 421.

⁵³ For a detailed and critical reading of Schmitt's manipulation of Clausewitz, see Edouard Jolly, "Esquisse d'une Philosophie Politique de La Première Guerre Mondiale: Schmitt, Clausewitz et Le Problème de l'hostilité," *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie*, 79 (2017): 747–74, <https://doi.org/10.2143/TVF.79.4.3284700>. See as well Howard Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 104–10.

⁵⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2005), 32.

⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 421.

⁵⁶ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 12.

⁵⁷ In the third part of the book, "Interregnum on the Dialectics: The Notebooks of 1914–1916," Negri dedicates crucial pages to Lenin's reading of Hegel. However, Negri offers no word concerning Lenin's 1915 notebooks dedicated to Clausewitz, which I mentioned earlier and which were accessible in French since 1945. Gat, 'Clausewitz and the Marxists: Yet Another Look', 380.

⁵⁸ I thank Dimitris Gakis, a specialist of Negri's thought on the issue, for his help. Though the terms of strategy and tactics are omnipresent in his work, Clausewitz is not one of Negri's usual references.

Clausewitzian seems to me to be somewhat of an exaggeration. If anything, Negri follows Foucault and specifically Deleuze and Guattari in his engagement with Clausewitz as will become clear.⁵⁹ However, Reid does have a point in claiming that in the context of *Multitude*, Negri and Hardt do show a real engagement with Clausewitz, at times referring to him nostalgically. Compared to the nightmarish predicament of global war they present, his dictum for them is a true “moment of enlightenment” concerning the necessity of anchoring war in a legal structure that both governs it (*jus in bello*) and legitimizes it (*jus ad bellum*).⁶⁰

Furthermore, the most Clausewitzian element in Negri and Hardt’s analysis is their commitment to a historicist understanding of war. Their entire argument in the first part of the book hinges on the statement that a global “war machine” has been created through the generalization of the state of exception and the globalization of civil war.⁶¹ Their argument is anchored both in Foucault’s thesis of the civil war as a matrix for social relations and in Deleuze and Guattari’s argument that war, when globalized, will take over the logic of the state and subdue it to its own structures.⁶² Indeed, *Multitude* develops the argument first formulated in *Empire* yet gives it a darker, less optimistic turn. According to Hardt and Negri, a supra-national sovereignty has been taking shape through a network of institutions, movements, and states. This sovereignty, a form of “governance without government”, they term Empire.⁶³ Following Deleuze and Guattari, Negri and Hardt argue that while modern war was a spatially and temporally limited condition, an exception in conditions of peace, post-modern war has no such boundaries.⁶⁴ The lack of spatio-temporal boundaries both in the structures of sovereignty and that of war lead to a state of indeterminacy which erodes any possible distinction between war and peace, violence and politics.

Indeed, in a feat of astute analysis, Negri and Hardt argue that Clausewitz’s dictum should be read as meaning that only nation-states can do war and this only under specific political conditions and against other states. For Clausewitz, war was “a limited state of exception” mainly on the international level.⁶⁵ Once the distinction between politics and war becomes blurred in post-modern wars, then, and only then, can Clausewitz’s dictum be reversed. “War [...] is becoming the primary organizing principle of society, and politics merely one of its means or guises. What appears as civil peace [...] only puts an end to one form of war and opens the way for another.”⁶⁶ This leads them to argue that war becomes the “normal” functioning, “everywhere and always” of politics.⁶⁷ Indeed, in words which echo Foucault almost to the letter, they write that “War, in other words, becomes the general matrix for all relations of power and techniques of domination, whether or not bloodshed is involved.”⁶⁸ In such a case, every conflict is an “imperial civil war” even when it is spatially and temporally

⁵⁹ Concerning Negri’s indebtedness to Deleuze and Guattari, see his own narrative recently published in Antonio Negri, *Marx and Foucault* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016). See specifically chapter 13, “How and When I read Foucault,” 155-165, and chapter 14, “Gilles Felix,” 166-182.

⁶⁰ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 14.

⁶⁴ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 5, 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

limited.⁶⁹ War, in terms very similar to those used by Reid, is then responsible for the production of “all aspects of social life”⁷⁰ and becomes “properly ontological.”⁷¹

Indeed, one can wonder if war produces all aspects of social life, how then does social life persist? Here, one realizes that just as Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of war has little to do with war, Hardt and Negri’s concept of war is similarly enlarged to such an extent that one is left wondering if anything of a concrete battle remains in their understanding. They are aware of this point though they do not address it explicitly. While modern war was a part of sociality, post-modern war rules over all of life. Indeed, if Clausewitzian war was a dialectic between destruction and construction, according to them, post-modern wars veer towards the “absolute” with the development of mass-destruction, “the pure production of death.”⁷² War cannot reach this absolute movement towards the extremes since it will lead to an eradication of life and the power that sustains it. “Global war must not only bring death but also produce life.”⁷³ In order to do that, war must be transformed into a new logic of government which they call “security.” War can no longer be a source of political destabilization; it has to become “an active mechanism that constantly creates and reinforces the present global order.” Though they argue a few pages earlier that war has subsumed political rationality, it seems that within war, a purely political reason suddenly emerges once more. Indeed, though security tends to equate police action and war and to introduce war into the heart of society by treating citizens as enemies, it is basically a political rationality which manages political life with tools taken from the arsenal of war. Hence, unknowingly, Hardt and Negri, having abstracted war so utterly, are left only with its political reason. When war stops being real war and becomes a concept which aims at capturing a new global order, it is not politics that is subsumed by war, but war that becomes purely political. Indeed, once again, Clausewitz’s statement that war has no independent logic, i.e., no rationality of its own but senseless destruction, seems to have the upper hand. Once the logic of war is replaced with anything else, it is not politics that is militarized, but war that is politicized. Indeed, violence becomes grey, mundane, and in the end, completely political.

IV. Can the Real Neo-Clausewitzian Please Stand up?

When Foucault returns to the Clausewitzian dictum in his *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, he appears more hesitant than he did three years earlier. In the crucial chapter on “Method,” wherein he develops his analytics of power most extensively, after suggesting that power may be understood nominally as “the name one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society,” he wonders whether the reversal of the Clausewitzian formula has, in the end, any utility for developing a concept of power. Though his rejection is uncertain, he writes “If we still wish to maintain a separation between war and politics, perhaps we should postulate rather that this multiplicity of force relations can be coded—in part but never totally—either in the form of “war,” or in the form of “politics.””⁷⁴ I contend that this passage gives an insight into Foucault’s distinction between an ontology of forces and power itself.⁷⁵ Moreover, Foucault indeed seems to get closer to Arendt here, by trying to argue that there

⁶⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

⁷² Ibid., 18.

⁷³ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 93.

⁷⁵ Leslie Paul Thiele, “The Agony of Politics: The Nietzschean Roots of Foucault’s Thought,” *American Political Science Review* 84/3 (September 1990): 907–25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1962772>.

is some importance in keeping a distinction between politics and war.⁷⁶ However, Foucault does not define these as totally distinct, but precisely as being a continuum of *forces* which share a grammar that is not of the order of war or politics, but of forces.

He pushes this analysis even further in his later “The Subject and Power.” Against Reid, I argue that politics and war are not to be conflated in Foucault’s “strategic model.”⁷⁷ Foucault reinstates the distinction between politics and war in his work through his discussion of the notion of strategy. According to Foucault, there are three everyday meanings of the word strategy. First, it refers to the means used to reach a specific end (instrumental rationality); second, it expresses how one estimates the adversary’s actions in order to counter them and gain a hold on them; lastly, it captures the overall processes used in a confrontation in order to force the other to renounce the struggle (*lutte*, the same term used for wrestlers) and reach victory.⁷⁸ In relations of enmity (*relations de confrontation* or enmity, as Clausewitz would say), these three meanings are inseparable.⁷⁹ The most crucial point for Foucault in these pages is the interaction between relations of power (“politics”) and relations of enmity (“war”). Both are distinct, but, as quoted above, they are always at risk of collapsing into each other. Indeed, they are the *limits* of each other. A relation of enmity is entirely open, unstable, unpredictable, and defined by its own grammar. Since it is completely dynamic, it can reach a resolution in domination — where the enemy has lost their capacity to resist entirely — or in a relation of power — where there is a certain degree of stability and predictability. Indeed, governing or “politics,” which entails a more equal power relation, cannot be fully dynamic since governing requires stability, such that others’ conduct proceeds in a predictable fashion.⁸⁰ These two “codes,” possibilities or readings are not sharply distinguished in Foucault’s conceptual schema since each can collapse into the other. Power relations are always “under threat” of becoming a violent struggle for survival. The presence or absence of violence means that the relationship of forces is either of the order of a relation of enmity, a battle for survival, or that of a game, a fencing match, a struggle, where the rules of engagement are clear.⁸¹

Going back to Reid’s statement that Clausewitz is neither a Kantian nor a Hegelian, and my own point highlighting the fact that Clausewitz becomes Nietzschean through and through for the counter-strategic tradition, it is interesting to note this results in making the metaphor of the two wrestlers predominant as we have seen in previous pages. Though the metaphor appears in the crucial section of Clausewitz’s “Definition,” it rarely resurfaces throughout the rest of the work.⁸² Moreover, by emphasizing it so much, we risk neglecting the fact that this specific definition leads to what Clausewitz terms the “third extreme,” i.e., “the maximum exertion of power.”⁸³ As a result, Clausewitz’s mitigating factors are relegated to a secondary position and become superfluous additions to the entire theory. Doing so completely effaces the fact that for Clausewitz, war is not an independent sphere of action and that it is “incomplete and self-contradictory”; that war cannot follow its own rules as an

⁷⁶ On the proximity between Arendt and Foucault on this issue, see Amy Allen, “Power, Subjectivity, and Agency: Between Arendt and Foucault,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10/ 2 (1 January 2002): 131–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672550210121432>.

⁷⁷ Julian Reid, “Foucault on Clausewitz: Conceptualizing the Relationship between War and Politics,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 28/1 (February 2003): 1–28.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, “Le Sujet et Le Pouvoir,” in *Dits et Écrits*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald, Quarto, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1060; Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

⁷⁹ Foucault, “Le Sujet et Le Pouvoir,” 1060.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1061.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1060.

⁸² It appears three times to be exact, see Clausewitz, *On War*, 75, 216, 219.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 77.

abstract concept, as it is never pure.⁸⁴ Indeed, there are at least three reasons for which pure war can never concretize and hence why political logic will always rule supreme, as well as why “real life” replaces the “absolute and the extreme required by theory.”⁸⁵ For Clausewitz, the three mitigating factors he mentions in Book 1 are that war is never an isolated act, but is rather a series of actions that can always be re-calculated and that its result is never definitive. These three make the two wrestlers in a struggle nothing more than a metaphor, and moderate the movement to extreme and the pure concept. While a struggle between two wrestlers can be understood as isolated, composed of one act and with a possibility of a definitive result, war as a process cannot.

In a recent contribution (2013) to the study of Clausewitz within political theory, specifically of the nonessentialist and post-structuralist vein, Howard Caygill develops a truly neo-Clausewitzian position.⁸⁶ To do so, he positions Clausewitz against both Nietzsche and Marx (and Hegel) and returns to a firmly Kantian Clausewitz.⁸⁷ Caygill’s engagement with Clausewitz stretches from his first book on Levinas (2002), which he wanted to title “Levinas and Clausewitz.”⁸⁸ For Caygill, Clausewitz was closer to Kant than many of his more official followers. However, the Kant by which Clausewitz is influenced is the one mediated by his teacher Kiesewetter and Kant’s later works where he emphasizes actuality over potentiality. For Caygill, Clausewitz emphasizes “enmity and chance” over “possibility and choice.” Hence, Clausewitz develops a “strange Kantianism,” a philosophy of actuality that does not rely on any concept of freedom.⁸⁹ For Caygill, *Vom Krieg* could have been titled *The Critique of Military Reason* since it is a “significant contribution to post-Kantian philosophy.”⁹⁰ Caygill’s main contribution is to read Clausewitz through the modal categories of actuality and potentiality, since it allows him to emphasize the general-philosopher’s realism as a countenance to Kantian idealism. In Caygill’s interpretation, the relation between potentiality and actuality is captured by the concepts of pure war and real war. While absolute, pure war stands as the potentiality of real war, the latter, shaped by chance and enmity in its actuality, drives the work forward and is the main Clausewitzian contribution to contemporary political thinking on the relation between politics and war.

Caygill flips typical readings of Clausewitz around by insisting that *Vom Krieg* is more about resistance to attack (i.e., defence) than war. He goes as far as to state that Clausewitz is “the first theorist of the war of resistance” who is long mistaken for the philosopher of “the wars of nation-states.”⁹¹ If Caygill starts as well with the metaphor of the wrestlers, he highlights that the issue at hand is the capacity not to attack, but to resist; a capacity which Clausewitz famously defines as the sum of material means and the will itself to resist.⁹² However, for Caygill, this is only the first step. He is quite aware that the metaphor of the wrestlers is precisely of the domain of absolute war and not real war. There is a danger for Clausewitz, who is Kantian in sensitivity, concerning the movement from a spatio-temporal limited event to one unlimited and absolute. However, Clausewitz does not construct a dialectical

⁸⁴ Ibid., 606.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁶ Caygill is not the only neo-Clausewitzian around. As he states in the book, other preceded him in formulating different positions that do more justice to Clausewitz, like René Girard and Raymond Aron.. Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*, 77–90.

⁸⁷ Caygill, 30–41.

⁸⁸ Alastair Gray and Philip Homburg, ‘Howard Caygill: Author of “Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance” - Interviewed.’, *Studies in Social and Political Thought* 22 (2013): 4.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁰ Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*, 16–17.

⁹¹ Ibid., 10.

⁹² Ibid., 16; Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

movement between these two. The logic of escalation is inherent to any concrete war, however limited it may be. It is this logic of escalation, accentuated by the warring sides' emphasis on fortifying their capacity to resist, that opens the possibility of absolute war. However, as we have seen, Clausewitz introduces a series of obstacles to the logic of escalation, not the least of which is the emphasis on defence rather than attack (for Caygill, Book 6 holds the key to the entire oeuvre).

Indeed, for Caygill, Clausewitz proposes a Kantian oriented "regulative idea" which is inherently related to the proper formulation of the dictum and its stakes. In the formulation that war is a continuation of "political action," he states that

Politics and war do not have the same status — war is an approximation to the "logic" or the thought of politics, its analogue, but expressed in a "different writing, a different speech." The laws of politics and peace may be articulated through logic, but war is the grammatical actualization of this logic, its actuality as an event.⁹³

War is an actualization of the logic of politics itself. The logic actualized in this "grammatical actualization" is that of struggle. However, as stated previously, it is *not* struggle qua war. Stated differently, the proper formulation of the dictum allows us to see that the logic of struggle does not originate in war. War is only one actualization of a specific form of struggle, one which is locked in a movement of escalation. However, if we adopt Caygill's emphasis on the relation between politics as potentiality and war as actualization, we do get remarkably close to what Foucault argued in his later text, "The Subject and Power", as mentioned earlier: struggle is the shared logic of politics and war. However, political struggle does not aim at eradicating an enemy or at reducing his capacity to resist and forcing him to do the bidding of the victor. Warlike struggle, one infused with relations of enmity, is one possible actualization of politics. Therefore, it is indeed its continuation. However, as a constant threat, we are responsible for maintaining the clear distinction of war and politics and attempt, as Clausewitz would have had us do, to formulate a concept of struggle that is political to its core and that uses none of the terms or concepts of war. Caygill thus enables us to see that if Clausewitz founded a tradition, it is the agonistic tradition of political thought. Indeed, such a father figure, with his Kantian moral sensitivities and worry that war would overcome politics (precisely because it is its actualization) is a better, more apt, figure than the more commonly referenced Schmitt with his glorification of enmity and fascist affiliations.⁹⁴

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrated the problematic aspects of the reversal of the Clausewitzian dictum within a specific tradition of thought which Julian Reid names "the counter-strategic tradition." I showed how this tradition is not neo-Clausewitzian, but Nietzschean. I argued that indeed, only a proper formulation of the dictum would enable us to fully appreciate Clausewitz's originality and dramatic future contribution to political thought. I finished by suggesting reading Clausewitz as an alternative figure to the agonistic tradition and stating that he gives us the possibility of thinking of struggle not as originating in war, but as being the logic of politics of which war is only the extreme actualization. Indeed, it is better to

⁹³ Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*, 19. The quotes are paraphrases of Clausewitz, *On War*, 605. My emphasis.

⁹⁴ Here, I make a reference to Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2009); Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London; New York: Verso, 2013).

follow Foucault in “The Subject and Power” and argue that struggle has more of the game with its rules, competition, and open-ended results than with war and the logic of enmity. The Greek *agon* does not mean only *antagonistic* sides engaged in conflict. The word is also used to describe competitors in a game, in a trial, or in a music or theatre festival. There is no need to reduce the meaning of the term to that of two warring enemies; it can be used as such in order to capture the meanings of both game and struggle. Another important element is that we should commit ourselves to thinking in terms of plurality, hence agonisms, or struggles-games. A game always has a plurality of forms, concrete manifestations, and various actualizations. Even *Monopoly*, with its clear rules, is never played the same, as the rules are always contested by the players.

Struggle as game prevents us from thinking that there is only one general struggle between a master and a slave, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the Jew and the Aryan or the Ego and the Id. Struggles as games are general qua structure (logic), local, and specific qua content (grammar). As Foucault states, even if one wants to analyse all social relations (epistemological, ethico-political, human-nonhuman) in the framework of agonism, the struggle cannot be operative as such on a general level. If this were to be the case, we would quickly find ourselves again working with one basic contradiction which covers all aspects of human existence. “The theme of struggle only really becomes operative if one establishes concretely — in each particular case — who is engaged in struggle, what is it about, how, where, by what means and according to what rationality it evolves.”⁹⁵ Never why, of course. Hence, struggle-game is a general relational structure, but it is always specific. Agons are always historical, localized in space and time. Their incessant struggles-games create more opportunities for others, and they can also overlap, contradict, echo each other and have feedback effects.

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⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 164.

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