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# Foucault on Clausewitz: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between War and Power

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War is only a branch of political activity.

—Karl von Clausewitz

Pathology is no more than a branch, a result, a complement of physiology, or rather, physiology embraces the study of vital actions at all stages of the existence of living things.

—Jean Bégin

The art of war is like that of medicine, murderous and conjectural.

—François Marie Arouet Voltaire

Michel Foucault is well known as a theorist of power. Less established is his engagement with the theory of strategy and war. His interest in these concepts became apparent only toward the end of his career. *Discipline and Punish*, for example, partially examines the emergence of the art of military tactics in the eighteenth century, largely within French military-strategic thought.<sup>1</sup> His final work, *The History of Sexuality*, sees him attempt to develop a theory of the relation between war and power as well as the concept of a “strategy of power.” Close to death, Foucault declared, “If God grants me life, after madness, illness, crime, sexuality, the last thing that I would like to study would be the problem of war and the institution of war in what one could call the military dimension of society.”<sup>2</sup>

These intentions were apparent also in the breadth of questions raised in Foucault’s 1975–1976 course lectures at the Collège de France. At that point, Foucault posed the question of whether warfare is the general model of all social relations. What is the

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relationship, he asked, between the discourses of war and strategy and the organization of modern power? This article acts as a response to both of those questions. As Paul Rabinow has argued, pursuing these lines of inquiry allows us to address some important questions in relation to the genesis of modern military-strategic thought. Why, for instance, modern military strategic theory formed along the lines that it did. Why, in particular, Carl von Clausewitz thought about strategy in the seminal terms that he did as a conjunction between war and politics.<sup>3</sup>

The naming of Clausewitz in this context is crucial. In his essay "Governmentality," Foucault identifies a relationship between the emergence of Clausewitz's theory of strategy and the shift in the organization of power that occurred in the early modern era.<sup>4</sup> For Foucault, the importance of Clausewitz's theory of strategy extended far beyond the domain of the practice of war and statecraft. The conjunctive relation of war to politics, by which Clausewitz defines the art of strategy, was significant for Foucault in its representation of the basic principle upon which the strategic model of power operates within modern societies. That is to say, as far as Foucault was concerned, Clausewitz's theory did not apply primarily to war or practices of states in relation to other states. Its primary significance was its outline of the principle upon which a new form of political power had emerged, that which he sometimes called "governmentality." Thus, it applied primarily to the ways in which the relations between states and populations changed with the birth of the modern era. Outlining the importance of that relation is largely the task addressed by this article.

Surprisingly, contemporary strategic theorists have largely ignored the interest of Foucault in Clausewitz's work. That is because the concept of strategy still tends to be defined within the domain of strategic studies as a form of instrumental rationality by which the relationship between means and ends is calculated to advance the interests of states and other actors. Obviously, Foucault's work is not amenable to the planning, waging, or winning of wars. He does provide, however, one of the most acute and influential studies of the workings and execution of strategic power of the late modern era. That said, he has tended to attract the attention of scholars concerned with providing a critical analytic of power, rather than with refining its strategic efficacy.

In any case, in spite of Foucault's explicit claims as to the importance of Clausewitz's work, strategic theorists are increasingly distancing themselves from Clausewitz's theory of strategy. For example, Martin van Creveld, in his seminal work *The Transformation of War*, claims that the nonlinear political, social, and technological

changes of recent years demand a reconceptualization of strategy, one that will break with Clausewitzian traditions. He argues:

Insofar as there have always been struggles for existence, doctrines that derive from the Clausewitzian Universe, and that emphasise rationality, the primacy of politics, and cost-benefit calculations have always been wrong. Insofar as some such struggles will undoubtedly continue to take place, those theories cannot form a sound basis for thinking about them, and hence for planning a war, waging it and winning them.<sup>5</sup>

Van Creveld's prescriptions have initiated a "fourth-generation" of military strategy, amid claims of a break from the Clausewitzian tradition.<sup>6</sup> I am not going to argue that Foucault would necessarily want to dispute van Creveld's claim that Clausewitzian thought does not provide a sound basis for planning, waging, or winning wars. No discrete body of thought possibly could. However, what I think Foucault might dispute is, first, whether the value of Clausewitz's thought could ever be reduced to such purposes, and, second, the claim that the "Clausewitzian universe" was defined by rationality.

Van Creveld supposes that Clausewitz merely expressed a particular conception of strategy for the age in which he wrote—the early nineteenth century. That age has passed, and so, van Creveld argues, has the relevance and insight of Clausewitz for and into strategy.<sup>7</sup> Here, I argue through Foucault that strategic theorists such as van Creveld fundamentally misrepresent the insight and relevance of Clausewitzian thought. This is because, like other contemporary accounts of Clausewitz's work, van Creveld misrepresents his conception of strategy and the role of warfare in it. I argue that the major value of Clausewitz's work is its contextualization of the modern role of warfare in what Foucault described as the strategy of power.<sup>8</sup> This is the first direct attempt to address the relation between Clausewitzian and Foucauldian strategy. While I argue that Foucault's concept of strategy was different from politico-military strategy, I maintain that the two concepts are, nevertheless, strongly related.

### **The Confluence of Foucauldian and Clausewitzian Understandings of Strategy**

Foucault used the term *strategy* explicitly to invoke a specific model of power. He argued that in order to understand how power works

in the modern era it is necessary to distinguish the strategic from the traditional or “juridical” model of power. The juridical model of power privileges an ideal concept of the subject and presumes the emergence of power relations to be extraneous to the formation of such subjects. In opposition to this traditional model, Foucault posed the concept of a strategic model of power. The strategic model involves the study of power

not on the basis of the primitive term of the relation but starting from the relation itself, inasmuch as the relation is what determines the elements on which it bears; instead of asking ideal subjects what part of themselves or what powers of theirs they have surrendered, allowing themselves to be subjectified, one needs to inquire how relations of subjectivation can manufacture subjects.<sup>9</sup>

Foucault employs the term *strategy* repeatedly to qualify the distinction between his model and traditional studies of power. In defining his model of power, he argued that “relations of power are strategic relations. Every time one side does something, the other one responds by deploying a conduct, a behaviour that counterinvests it, tries to escape it, diverts it, turns the attack against itself, etc. Thus nothing is ever stable in these relations of power.”<sup>10</sup>

Foucault also employs the term *strategy* because he considers it a defining feature of modernity that “the force relationships which for a long time had found expression in war, in every form of warfare, gradually became invested in the order of power.”<sup>11</sup> As I explore, this observation of Foucault’s involves a number of implications. It is now well established that one of Foucault’s main contributions to political studies has been to demonstrate how modern power is reliant upon changing orders of power/knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Foucault can be read as using the term *strategy* to describe the processes by which discourses are assembled, exercised, rendered functional as well as institutionalized into coherent bodies of power/knowledge.<sup>13</sup> At various points in his later works, Foucault indicated that the discourse of military-strategic thought has been an important component within the strategic order of knowledge throughout the modern era.<sup>14</sup> However, we could also argue that it has not only been a component of that order, it has played what Foucault describes as a “directing role.”<sup>15</sup> Military-strategic thought, according to Foucault, may not only be an important component in the order of knowledge, but the strategic principle from which all other areas of discourse take their cue. In other words, it is possibly the model discourse from which power itself extracts its principles.<sup>16</sup> As he also argued,

ultimately what presides over all these mechanisms (of power) is not the unitary functioning of an apparatus or an institution, but the necessity of combat and the rules of strategy . . . in this central and centralized humanity, the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces subjected by multiple mechanisms of “incarceration,” objects for discourses that are in themselves elements for this strategy, we must hear the distant roar of battle.<sup>17</sup>

To understand the importance accorded to military strategic thought in Foucault’s schema, it is helpful to read Clausewitz with a Foucauldian bias. Such a Foucauldian reading suggests that in *On War*, Clausewitz did not simply formulate a definition of strategy for the politico-military context. He provided strategic thought with the epistemic criteria that allowed it to attain the formality of a science and that in turn, provided it with the directing role within the discursive complexes of power by which Foucault defines modernity. Clausewitz effectively made strategy a human science. However, Clausewitz not only provided military-strategic thought with formal scientific criteria, he also laid the basis from which to conceive the concept of strategy as a strategy of power in which military-strategic thought is the essential domain of contest. In other words, he conceived of strategy much as Foucault does, as the assemblage of discursive regimes built upon processes of epistemic formation. To understand this requires that we reflect again upon how Clausewitz defined strategy, which in turn is necessarily to reflect upon his understanding of the relation between war and politics.

The examination of the confluence of Clausewitzian and Foucauldian understandings of strategy that I undertake here is particularly pertinent today. As is well documented, military-strategic thought and practice has undergone substantial change since the end of the Cold War.<sup>18</sup> Some speak of a revolution in military affairs.<sup>19</sup> Of increasing significance has been the impact of information technologies as well as the forms of scientific thought that are associated with them, particularly the cybernetic sciences of complexity.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, these technologies and their sciences have affected the entire range of practices involved in the preparation of nations and alliances for war. In this sense, the transformation of Western military strategic culture appears to be a microcosm of the broad social transformations currently associated with information technology, complexity science, and the organizational logic of the “network society.”<sup>21</sup>

The network society has been the subject of a number of analyses delivered from a Foucauldian perspective known as studies of “governmentality.”<sup>22</sup> Foucault is criticized sometimes for not recognizing

the extent to which communication technologies were, in his own lifetime, transforming the disciplinary societies that he describes.<sup>23</sup> He was, nevertheless, one of the first theorists to conceive power in organizational terms of the “network.”<sup>24</sup> As he argued, “power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised as a net like organisation.”<sup>25</sup> The net-like circulation of power is particularly evident from a Foucauldian perspective in terms of the reorganization of knowledge that has occurred through the epistemic shifts associated with the emergence of the cybernetic sciences of complexity. Given the special emphasis Foucault accorded to the codification of power in military-strategic knowledge, one would expect to find this epistemic shift played out in the military domain. This, as I will demonstrate subsequently, is certainly happening. It is important to note, however, that the influence of this epistemic shift is not only affecting the social organization of militaries; it is the very definition and understanding of what strategy is and how it is theorized. Of large significance in this regard has been the emergence of what is now described as “network-centric warfare.”<sup>26</sup>

Network-centric warfare claims to offer a military-strategic architecture of power drawn from the cybernetic sciences of complexity and the managerial sociology of knowledge-based societies that seeks to extend the metaphors and insights of information to the whole domain of war. Several of the authors involved in the theorization of network-centric war argue the need for a post-Clausewitzian body of thought and practices. However, while the utility of Clausewitz’s thought for fighting wars in an era of complexity and information may be under question, his work retains a critical purchase upon these developments. Indeed, in some senses, the contemporaneity of Clausewitzian thought may seem to be rising with the phenomenon of network-centric warfare. As Foucauldian thought provides an analytic of the strategy of power that circulates the morphological networks of Western society, so Clausewitzian thought aids in interpreting the networking of the Western way of war. In this sense, this article firstly works to demonstrate the relation between Foucault and Clausewitz, and secondly to reassert their dual relevance in application to current changes in the politico-strategic order.

The rest of the article roughly divides into two halves. In the first half I recontextualize the position of Clausewitz’s formulation of strategy in the broad panoply of epistemic transformations that

beset the order of knowledge in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. In order to do this it is necessary not simply to introduce Foucault's conception of the emergence of the human sciences but to resituate early Foucauldian thought itself in the broader and older tradition of French epistemologically based philosophy. The philosopher of science Georges Canguilhem influenced Foucault's early work to a significant degree.<sup>27</sup> It was Canguilhem's preoccupation with medical science in particular that enabled Foucault to pursue his early research in areas of psychiatric and medical practice in general.

In the first section, I draw on both Foucault's and Canguilhem's accounts of the epistemic transformations that marked the beginning of the modern era in order to highlight the seminal importance of Clausewitz's formulation of strategy. Approaching Clausewitz from this perspective is to challenge prevailing conceptions of the relation of Clausewitzian thought to modern science. In the second half, I show how the later Foucault developed his concept of strategy and how this constituted a break and development from his early work. As I demonstrate through a review of network-centric warfare, Foucault's conception of strategy serves only to underline the importance as well as contemporary relevance of Clausewitzian thought. Ultimately, Clausewitz's work not only reproduced the generic epistemic structure of the human sciences at the beginning of the modern era, it also provides the theoretical scope with which to shed critical light on epistemic structures themselves. It is a quality I argue that makes Clausewitz's work of preeminent contemporary relevance.

### The Clausewitzian Dictum

Contemporary critics of Clausewitz have focused on the vulnerabilities of his assertion that "war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means."<sup>28</sup> As Martin van Creveld has argued with some success, wars fought as the continuation of circumscribed political aims and agendas often result in defeat.<sup>29</sup> Such a formulation is not a stable basis for planning, waging, and winning wars. Nor is it a stable basis upon which to define war given that so many increasingly exceed the definition. This, however, does not represent the sum value of Clausewitzian thought.

Within his critique, van Creveld assumes that Clausewitz's dictum represents either a claim about the ontological status of war or a policy prescription for how to conduct wars in order to attain their optimum advantage.<sup>30</sup> While these may be traditional and

well-supported interpretations of the dictum, we can reprobema-  
tize them through a Foucauldian reading. The importance of  
Clausewitz's assertion that war is a continuation of politics is that  
it accorded military-strategic thought with its fundamental role in  
the strategy of power. The strategy of power, to remind us, func-  
tions discursively through the ordering of knowledge. Military-  
strategic knowledge, Foucault maintains, is one of its primary dis-  
cursive domains. Now, the importance for Foucault of Clausewitz's  
dictum is that it construed the relation between war and politics in  
a manner that exemplified the recodification of power that he  
associated with the beginning of the modern era.

In order to argue this, I focus on the similarity between Clause-  
witz's formulation of strategy and other epistemic reformulations  
in the human sciences that occurred around the same period. Sev-  
eral of these developments have been the focus of philosophers of  
science such as Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem.<sup>31</sup>  
Whether Foucault can be located within the tradition of the  
French philosophy of science is a debate discussed elsewhere and  
unfortunately too large to be properly addressed here.<sup>32</sup> However,  
few would dispute that their foundational work played a significant  
role in forming Foucault's approach to the problems of human sci-  
ence. Unlike Foucault, neither Bachelard nor Canguilhem focused  
on military strategic thought in any depth. However, it is a tribute  
to their brilliance that the development of military strategy affirms  
their system of interpretation.

### The Conjunction of War and Politics

It hardly needs stating that the concepts of war and politics have  
been integral to the theorization of strategy throughout the mod-  
ern era.<sup>33</sup> It is true that, as Michael Howard demonstrates in his  
introduction to *On War*, the view that war is best subordinated to  
political ends has been regularly abused and rejected.<sup>34</sup> Neverthe-  
less, even in the rejection of that view, strategists have found it nec-  
essary to define the concept in terms of a relation between war and  
politics. Within the German tradition after World War I, for exam-  
ple, fascist military-strategists such as Ludendorff perverted Clause-  
witz's dictum by defining strategy as the subordination of politics to  
war.<sup>35</sup> As such, these two concepts remain basic to a definition of  
the field of strategic thought.

Now, the major achievement of Canguilhem was to demon-  
strate how the birth of the modern era was productive of a range  
of human sciences founded on similarly formed relations between



two basic concepts.<sup>36</sup> It is now common currency within the philosophy of human sciences that the history of the development of any subject is a history of the changing relationship between concepts.<sup>37</sup> This insight owes much to Canguilhem's original study of the birth of modern medical science and the shift it entailed in the understanding of the relation between the normal and the pathological. As he argued, at the turn of the nineteenth century a profound shift in the systems of Western scientific thought occurred. Premodern systems of thought had, he argued, all tended to operate upon a polemical understanding of the relations between concepts. Medical thought, as he documented, traditionally relied upon an understanding that health and disease were two fundamentally opposed and irreconcilable physiological states.

Medical thought has never stopped alternating between these two representations of disease, between these two kinds of optimism, always finding some good reason for one or the other attitude in an newly explained pathogenesis. Deficiency diseases and all infectious or parasitic diseases favour the ontological theory, while endocrine disturbances and all diseases beginning with dys- support the dynamic or functional theory. However these two conceptions do have one point in common: in disease, or better, in the experience of being sick, both envision a polemical situation: either a battle between the organism and a foreign substance, or an internal struggle between opposing forces. Disease differs from a state of health, the pathological from the normal, as one quality differs from another, either by the presence or absence of a definite principle, or by an alteration of the total organism. This heterogeneity of normal and pathological states persists today in the naturalist conception, which expects little from human efforts to restore the norm, and in which nature will find the way toward cure. But it proved difficult to maintain the qualitative modification separating the normal from the pathological in a conception which allows, indeed expects, man to be able to compel nature and bend it to his normative desires.<sup>38</sup>

The latter conception that Canguilhem refers to is that which emerged throughout different areas of Western thought and science at the turn of the modern era. Others since Canguilhem, notably within governmentality studies, have attempted similar analyses of related shifts in other fields. Foucault himself was heavily influenced by Canguilhem and subsequently demonstrated how psychiatric thought was subject to a similar process of epistemic formation. In his first major work, *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault demonstrated how sanity and madness were until the late-eighteenth century considered exclusive and irreconcilable human

conditions within the philosophy of mind.<sup>39</sup> As Foucault detailed, this changed dramatically with the birth of the modern era. As physicians argued that to govern disease it was essential to recognize the relation of disease to health, so psychiatrists emerged to argue that to treat the insane it was necessary to recognize the modified relation of insanity to sanity. This is because the concept of madness was constitutive of a broader conceptual form, that which Foucault sometimes calls “unreason,” sometimes “nature.” The emergence of a modern strategy of power occurred, Foucault argues, through the free exercise of sovereignty over nature or of reason over unreason.<sup>40</sup> Now, the concept of war, like that of madness, was located within the order of nature or unreason; war being, as both Rousseau and Kant argued, antipathetic to the rational order of democratic states. The point is that just as the strategy of power produced psychiatrists to identify a relation between madness and sanity, so it produced a military strategist to argue that war was only an extension of politics. Moreover, that the future of strategic thought could be based squarely on this insight.

Several studies of the social and cultural context of Clausewitz’s work already exist. Azar Gat, for instance, documents meticulously how Clausewitz challenged prevalent conceptions of the science of war in the military schools of the Enlightenment.<sup>41</sup> However, there exists no work yet that does so from the Foucauldian perspective that I am suggesting here—no analysis to clarify the position of modern military strategic theory in the strategy of power and ask what the ramifications of that are for how we understand the work that military strategy performs socially and politically. This Foucauldian interpretation does not seek to reduce Clausewitzian thought to the product of a number of contending cultural and philosophical influences, although that has been the approach of others such as Gat, as well as Raymond Aron and W. B. Gallie in the past.<sup>42</sup> It does not reduce Clausewitz, as these previous studies have done, to a position in the history of ideas. Instead, this article addresses the broad convergence of Clausewitz’s understanding of the relation between war and politics with the range of other expressions of what Canguilhem identified as a transformational shift in the human sciences. That shift involved a move from the study of phenomena as substantive essences to the study of phenomena in relationality.<sup>43</sup> This involved theorists across different human sciences establishing that the basic concepts upon which their different disciplines functioned were not disjointed essences. Instead, it was established that such concepts were, as Canguilhem described, related fundamentally only by degrees of modification.<sup>44</sup> From the beginning of the nineteenth century,

influential medical scientists such as Auguste Comte reconceived the relation of the normal to the pathological as modified states in constant communication with one another.<sup>45</sup> In order to understand the genesis of strategic thought and Clausewitz's relation to it, we have to recognize its role within these historic epistemic developments.

To construe the emergence of military-strategic science in this way is therefore also to create a distinction from previous attempts to clarify the relation of Clausewitzian strategic thought to modern science. Clausewitz's contribution was to provide strategic thought with the epistemic criteria of a modern science similar to the role played by other theorists involved in medicine, political economy, and other areas of knowledge.<sup>46</sup> This contrasts with Gat's critique of Clausewitz as a romantic attempting to counter the "scientific" influence of other late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century strategic theorists such as Antoine-Henri de Jomini, Maurice de Saxe, and Comte de Guibert.<sup>47</sup> The history of modern strategic thought, not to say the history of modern scientific thought, is not reducible to a simple distinction between enlightened Newtonianism and a romantic counterenlightenment. Gat has argued that Clausewitz was part of the counterenlightenment because he did not attempt as others did to create a universal and systematic theory of war applicable regardless of environmental context.<sup>48</sup> Instead, Gat locates Clausewitz in a German romantic school of military theory that emphasized the complexity of war and its resistance to systematic theorization.<sup>49</sup> This distinction between the two schools is apparent, according to Gat, in the revolutionary emphasis that Clausewitz placed on war as an expression of its political and social milieu.<sup>50</sup> According to Clausewitz, as an expression of a political and social milieu, war was always an expression of the particular characteristics of the environment and period in which it emerged. This "historicist" argument contradicted, according to Gat, the scientific intent with which the leading exponents of the so-called Enlightenment formulated military theory.<sup>51</sup> As such, Clausewitzian thought operated as a powerful challenge to the driving forces of enlightenment and what Gat calls the "scientific enterprise."<sup>52</sup>

However, the emergence and constitution of modern Western science was itself more complicated than Gat has recognized. As the studies of Canguilhem and Foucault show, the major moment in the formation of a modern Western scientific enterprise was when new scientific disciplines emerged upon precisely the new-found conjunctions that captured the relation of war to politics. Strategic science assumed its position in this enterprise when

Clausewitz said what Jomini, De Saxe, and Guibert were not able to say—that war is a continuation of politics by other means. The sociological conception of man as the being that represents society performs a directly similar role in the formation of modern sociology.<sup>53</sup> The entire field of human sciences, of which I am arguing military-strategic thought is part, was, as Foucault has demonstrated, subject to the same processes of epistemic formation.<sup>54</sup> Remarkably, no comprehensive study of the development of modern military-strategic thought has pointed this out. The ramifications ought to be clear. If military-strategic thought is the subject of a process of epistemic formation, then the very understanding of what constitutes strategy is at stake. After Foucault, we need no longer read Clausewitz in order to debate the sustainability of his thought as an ontological statement about war, nor as a prescription upon the conditions according to which war can be fought.

If there is a case for reading Clausewitz today, it is as a revelation of the position of military-strategic thought within the emergence of epistemic complexes that characterized the beginning of the modern era. As I have argued, this is essentially to inquire into the relation between modern military strategy and the strategy of power. There currently exist a large range of different studies especially in sociological areas that detail the emergence of a number of human sciences in this very context of the strategy of power.<sup>55</sup> Remarkably, the relation of military-strategy to epistemic power formations has yet to be fully analyzed in spite of Foucault's insistence that it is necessary to do so.<sup>56</sup> Yet, to do so is to instigate a reevaluation of the political rationalities that underlie the process by which thought upon military-strategy has emerged, including within the contemporary era.

### The Strategy of Power

Clearly, if military-strategy performs a role in the strategy of power, then it will be necessary to base any account of that role upon an understanding of the power to which military-strategy adheres. We have seen how the influence of Canguilhem allowed Foucault to conceive the emergence and function of the human sciences in the way that he did. In 1976, Foucault published *The History of Sexuality* (translated in 1979). This work marked the end of a long process of development for him. While Foucault's early work was overtly political, it was not until the publication of *The History of Sexuality* that he began to lay heavy emphasis upon the notion of a strategy of power. Part of the argument employed here is that Foucault's emphasis

upon a strategy of power both owes something to Clausewitz and also provides a significant impetus for a contemporary reading of Clausewitz. It is therefore in the context of a maturation of Foucault's ideas that I explain what the power is to which military-strategy adheres.

*The History of Sexuality* marked a significant development in Foucault's work. It was there that he began to relate the local shifts in knowledge that he and Canguilhem identified in medical science to the strategy of power. Canguilhem recognized that the epistemic shifts that occurred in medical science related to a very broad and relatively sudden assimilation of so-considered natural and irrational phenomena within the mechanisms and calculations of the state.<sup>57</sup> As a philosopher of science, however, Canguilhem's work concentrated upon correcting the scholarly traditions involved, rather than making a political point. Hence, the politics of the arguments remained downplayed and, largely, unexplored.

In early works, Foucault drew on the political implications of Canguilhem's research by theorizing the links between the epistemic shifts involved in medicine to other domains of modern experience, particularly what he described as early as *The Birth of the Clinic* as the "architecture of the human sciences."<sup>58</sup> It is fair to say that to Foucault the importance of the concept of power dates back to his very earliest work. Throughout his career, Foucault was concerned with a reformulation of the problem of power that would significantly alter prevailing conceptions of modernity. However, it was only in the writing of *The History of Sexuality* that this reformulation came to fruition in the theory and method of a "strategic model" of power.<sup>59</sup> What Foucault meant by this can be described as follows.

Foucault considered that in the classical age, power was definable by use of the juridical model; that is, power consisted then in the ability of the sovereign to deduce, appropriate, and seize life, assets, services, and labor from those it ruled over. Power, according to this juridical model, was essentially that of the power to disable. What distinguished modern power, Foucault argued, was a transformation in these mechanisms to accommodate a different type of operation in the constitution of power. The power over life expressed by disablement in the classical era made way, he claimed, for an enabling power. A life-administering power to "incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them."<sup>60</sup> This latter form of power Foucault named "biopower."

Foucault's intention in developing this alternative model of power was not to dismiss the importance of the traditional "juridical" or "sovereign" model, but to note the correlation. Although it must be said that in his study of the modern period he lays most emphasis upon the workings of biopower rather than sovereign power and never systematically analyzes the relation between the two forms of power. This was to counteract the existing overemphasis of sovereignty in studies of power. Indeed, Foucault went so far as to argue for the abandonment of the juridical notion of sovereignty in the analysis of power.<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere, however, he stated that the shift from sovereign to biopower was no more than a "shift of accent and the appearance of new objectives and hence of new problems and techniques."<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, this mutation in the formula of power, Foucault argued, entailed profound consequences for the character of war. In *The History of Sexuality*, he argues that these consequences are traceable to the shift in negative to positive content in the role of war within society that takes place in the Western transition to modernity.<sup>63</sup> War, classically conceived, was, in societal terms, a negative means to the preservation of the sovereign—a sovereign whose exertion of power is itself expressed upon society as mere disablement, or extraction. With the birth of modernity, which Foucault understood equally as the reformulation of power to accommodate an enabling, life-affirmative aspect, war takes on a positive characteristic, "as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life." "Wars" he asserts, "are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres (have) become vital."<sup>64</sup> Foucault was quite aware that essential to this reconfiguration of war was the epistemic transformation within military strategy of the relationship between war and politics. As he wrote in *The History of Sexuality*, "it is one of the essential traits of (modern) Western societies that the force relationships which for a long time had found expression in war, in every form of warfare, gradually became invested in the order of political power."<sup>65</sup> Moreover, as he confirmed in the same period, it was with Clausewitz's theory of military strategy that this event became concrete.<sup>66</sup>

In his lecture notes of 1975–1976 at the Collège de France, Foucault made even stronger assertions as to the relation between war and modern power. There, Foucault suggested that the change in the character of war does not necessarily result from the shift in the operations of power. Instead, he appears to argue that the shift

in power that he documents derives itself from war. As he asks in "Society Must Be Defended":

If it is necessary to avoid reducing the analysis of power to the scheme suggested by the juridical constitution of sovereignty, if it is necessary to think about power in terms of force relations, must it be deciphered, then, according to the general form of war? Can war serve as an effective analyzer of power relations?<sup>67</sup>

What is it, we might ask in turn, that Foucault sees in war to suggest that this modern form of power, which he calls biopower, derives from it? What is it about *relationality*, since that would appear to be the key concept in differentiating biopower from sovereign power, that Foucault sees as defining the "general form of war"? Paul Virilio's work emerges as a direct response to these questions.<sup>68</sup> Virilio argues that the essence of war resides not in the actual conduct of war, but in its preparation. The preparation of societies for war requires the construction of logistical infrastructures of relations for the exchange of information and communication in anticipation of the event of war. The degree to which a society refines its infocommunication infrastructure expresses, Virilio argues, its actual foundation on a principle of the preparation for war. Hence, Virilio interprets the heavy reliance of contemporary Western societies on the economies of information and communication as an expression of the extent to which the West continues to relate to this principle. Indeed, Virilio goes further than Foucault in arguing that war is not only fundamental to modern Western societies, but "is the fundamental concept of our civilisation."<sup>69</sup>

Foucault and Virilio confer on the relational properties of war. For Virilio the foundation of Western societies upon war has forged the degrees of social integration and unification that have led to the attainment of a state of social homogeneity that is commonly explained as "globalization." According to Virilio, war forges a radical social relationality underpinned by principles of logistical utility in the name of war preparation. The level of pacification achieved throughout the West is but an expression of the extent to which this system of social organization, deriving from war, has been refined. In fact, he argues, it is representative of neither a state of peace nor war, as such, but what he calls Pure War. Pure War "is the military procedure itself, in its ordinary durability . . . in short, the dissolution of the state of war and the military's infiltration into the movements of daily life."<sup>70</sup> Foucault identifies a similar line of development at the heart of the modern West; he, however, explains its genesis differently:

With the evolution of States since the beginning of the Middle Ages it seems that the practices and institutions of war pursued a visible development. Moreover, they tended to be concentrated in the hands of a central power that alone had the right and the means of war; owing to that very fact, they withdrew, albeit slowly, from the person-to-person, group-to-group relationship, and a line of development led them increasingly to be a state privilege. Furthermore and as a result, war tends to become the professional and technological prerogative of a carefully defined and controlled military apparatus. In short, a society pervaded by warlike relations was slowly replaced by a state equipped with military institutions.<sup>71</sup>

Now, for Foucault, as for Virilio, the evolution of states and the concentration of military power in specific institutions has not resolved, as liberals tend to argue, the problem of the relation of war to society. Instead, what occurs is a concomitant process by which the principles of war disseminate throughout society, indeed becoming the very principles upon which social relations form. This is clear, for instance, in terms of Virilio's analysis wherein all social relations reduce to a level of logistical utility based on the speed and ease of communication necessary during war. For Foucault, on the other hand, it is this concomitant process that accounts for a modern political order based on biopower in which it is not only populations that are homogenized through the force of relations but, importantly, knowledge, too. It is logistical principles that govern the realms of discourse allowing for the epistemic formation of different areas of knowledge. Hence, he argues, beneath the veneer of the complex power relations through which we map the architecture of the human sciences, "we must hear the distant roar of battle."<sup>72</sup>

Foucault suggests that Clausewitz was the first to define this essential relation of war to modern power. According to Foucault, Clausewitz brought to light the birth of the modern era in military-strategic thought, to exemplify war as a concept previously codified within the domain that Foucault called "natural life" and to recognize the assimilation of war within the mechanisms of state power. As such, without Clausewitz the discursive significance of modern military strategy simply would not be comprehensible. To put it another way, if Clausewitz did not exist, then military strategists would have to invent him. Likewise, the profundity that Clausewitz confers upon the domain of military strategy as a human science means that examining the relation between war and politics may provide an alternative understanding of the modern era—an



alternative even to those interpretations already established by Foucault and Canguilhem.

Is the conjunction of war to politics that Clausewitz brought to light parallel to the Foucauldian conjunction of sovereign and governmental power? If so, what epistemic and knowledge-foundational status does this confer on strategic thought, its genesis and history? Can tracing the development of strategic thought inform us in any way of the cultural development of Western civilization? If so, what are the consequences of these insights when considering the diabolical strategic practices that have attended the processes of state dissolution following the end of the Cold War? These are all questions of importance that remain unexamined both in the research of the history and development of military-strategic theory and in the history of modern societies.

The linking of Clausewitz's formula to Foucault and Canguilhem is important in a more localized sense since it counters many of the arguments of his contemporary critics. One of the founding if now relatively mundane observations established by Canguilhem was that the epistemic parameters of science are not stable—they are changing constantly. In the medical sciences that he documented, the formulation of the relation between health and illness has altered over time to a considerable extent. In psychiatry, the relation between madness and sanity undergoes consistent reformulation. Likewise in military strategy—and this is something that van Creveld appears to understand—the relation between war and politics is not stable.<sup>73</sup> Hence, Clausewitz's formula is not a stable statement upon the ontological status of war or a reliable guide to the waging of war. It is, rather, first a statement as to the contingency of the epistemic construction of strategy at the beginning of the modern era, but also a profound recognition of the connectivity of war to politics.

Now the argument against Clausewitz is that he poses his understanding of war as the continuation of politics by other means in the shape of a universal assertion.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, Clausewitz expresses the conditions upon which the dictum reads not as a timeless aphorism, but as a statement upon the performance of military strategic thought within the broader epistemic configurations that constitute the strategy of power. In other words, he did indeed grasp the essential connectivity of war as an expression of what we might describe, after Aristotle, as a modern epistemic *logos*. The importance of this argument is that it will allow us to establish the contemporary relevance of Clausewitz in an era of information during which the concept of strategy is undergoing substantial reformulation.

## War and Commerce

In *The Transformation of War*, van Creveld declares that the Clausewitzian view of war as the continuation of politics has been rendered obsolete.<sup>75</sup> However, he makes this argument only because he confuses Clausewitz's concept of politics with the concept of the state.<sup>76</sup> In an era wherein the power of the state is waning, so wars occur increasingly beyond their jurisdiction, and so, van Creveld argues, does the utility of Clausewitz's theory fade. There is no need to dispute van Creveld's observation that the relation of war to the state has changed dramatically since the end of World War II. That is beyond dispute. However, it would be wrong to suppose that these changes signal the obsolescence of Clausewitzian thought. On the contrary, contemporary developments suggest that a reengagement with Clausewitzian thought is more pressing than ever. In order to broach such a reengagement it is necessary to again look at *On War* itself and focus on the differing definitions of war and politics embedded within it. In particular, I focus upon Clausewitz's relatively neglected definitions of both war and politics as expressions of "commerce." The definition appears in chapter 3 of book 2:

We therefore conclude that war does not belong in the realm of arts and sciences; rather it is part of man's social existence. War is a clash between major interests, which is resolved by bloodshed—that is the only way in which it differs from other conflicts. Rather than comparing it to art we could more accurately compare it to commerce, which is also a conflict of human interests and activities; and it is still closer to politics, which in turn may be considered as a kind of commerce on a larger scale. Politics moreover, is the womb in which war develops—where its outlines already exist in their hidden rudimentary form, like the characteristics of living creatures in their embryos.<sup>77</sup>

What did Clausewitz mean when he wrote of both war and politics being forms of commerce, and how might this serve to reevaluate our understanding of the dictum that war is a continuation of politics? To date, this question has drawn the interest mainly of Marxist theorists of war. Indeed, Marx and Engels themselves both remarked on it,<sup>78</sup> which makes sense given that others have argued that war is "the thread that ties together all of *Capital*, from the first unwritten word to the last."<sup>79</sup> The concept of commerce relates in some ways to the concept of relationality that both Foucault and Virilio consider to be definitive of the laws of war and modern power. Like Foucault, Virilio focuses on the systems of epistemic

commerce that facilitate the changing orders of power/knowledge. Both are convinced of a necessary and fundamental principle of epistemic commerce between the order of power and the organization of war. In this sense, the very concept of commerce involves, for Virilio and Foucault, dynamics far more complex than the ordinary exchange of goods, services and money. Commerce for them is essential to the processes by which order is constituted. Virilio addresses this issue largely in terms of the problem of the relation between power and movement. Foucault addresses it more overtly in term of how power operates through relations.

However, there is still a large step to be taken in order to link Foucault's conception of commerce to that of Clausewitz. What did Clausewitz mean when he wrote that war is a form of commerce? We can derive some ideas by considering what the concept of commerce meant to other thinkers of the period. The political problematization of commerce dates, at least, to the relatively sudden emergence of philosophical thought upon the subject during the eighteenth century. For philosophers of the eighteenth century such as David Hume, Adam Smith, John Millar, and Adam Ferguson, commerce was a specifically political problematic. It required the development of a new set of practices to foster its regulation, correction, and stabilization in the interests of the preservation of sovereignty.<sup>80</sup> That problematic moreover was not limited to the balance of power between rival trading states and factions. Within eighteenth-century philosophical thought, the political problematic of commerce was representative of a profound challenge to the epistemic and ontological preconditions of what it was to be a political subject. As Michael Shapiro has described, with the emergence of philosophers such as Adam Smith, the world became unstuck. "In place of a static, legalistic, and protection-oriented model of sovereignty, Smith articulated one congenial to the movement of things within an 'art of government' concerned with the management of the relationship of persons to things."<sup>81</sup> In other words, within the eighteenth century, the emergence of the problematic of "commerce" was indivisible from the emergence of the problematic of "population" or "the social." Commerce emerged as the dynamic that arises directly out of the social domain. Commerce figured also in Hume's philosophy, for example, as a broadly applied metaphor to describe the complex and relational structures of interdependence that redefined both the political subject and the political population.<sup>82</sup>

The paragraph quoted above in which Clausewitz relates war and politics to commerce is headed by the title "War is an act of human intercourse," and within the paragraph itself Clausewitz

conflates commerce with “social existence.”<sup>83</sup> The issue of what Clausewitz means when he argues that war is an expression of human intercourse has been elided by van Creveld, who considers only Clausewitz’s use of the term *political intercourse*.<sup>84</sup> Connoting commerce with *human intercourse*, might Clausewitz have been writing in broad conformity with the prevailing philosophical traditions of his time—not to denote the simple trade of goods and services, but an immanent social dynamic?

In this sense, perhaps Clausewitz was using the concept of commerce to convey the extent to which war is not classifiable as an art or science with laws that pertain only to itself. Instead, he could be interpreted as conceptualizing the practice of war as one that is figurative within the logos according to which all domains of social life, including the epistemic life of human societies, is arranged.<sup>85</sup> War, he would appear to argue, is an expression of politics, and politics is an expression of this logos that governs human society.

These possibilities are exciting for a number of reasons. As I have sought to demonstrate, one of the main insights of Foucault for political studies is that power is not a simple homogeneous entity, but operates directly through the interconnectivity, or “commerce,” of bodies. Constitutive of the interconnectivity of human bodies are epistemic relations by which knowledge adheres to and performs certain types of work for power. As such, power is itself an expression of the epistemic interconnectivities of the human sciences, including that of military-strategic theory. In this sense, Clausewitz’s definition of war as an expression of commerce may be the opening upon a profounder reinterpretation of his work than currently exists.

If war is an expression of the relational logos of the strategy of power, then what, we might ask, constitutes an operationally successful or proficient military strategy? If the strategy that generates the theorization of warfare requires it to be located within networks of epistemic formation, then how do we account for the traditional rationalities of the state to which military strategy is supposed to adhere? The question might seem abstruse, were it not that epistemic conformity has recently moved from being a surreptitious quality of military-strategic thought to a policy-endorsed criterion according to which the fitness of military strategy is assessed. In arguing this, I am referring to the contemporary phenomenon of network-centric warfare. A substantive treatment of this set of concepts is beyond the scope of this article; however, a short description of it and the arguments for it will provide a final cutting insight into the extent to which Clausewitz’s and Foucault’s

concepts of strategy are helpful when comprehending current military-strategic thought.

### Network-centric Warfare

Proponents of network-centric warfare suggest that military strategists make the same adjustments to the way they think about war making as business strategists have made over recent years to the ways they think about wealth creation.<sup>86</sup> Successful organization for profit has depended for some time, it is said, upon the ability to conform to the laws of complex systems, most especially those of coevolution and self-organization.<sup>87</sup> Thinking strategically in today's business world means, they argue, being able to adapt as fast as the commercial environment is changing. It also means relying upon the informational advantages procured through self-organizational human relationships as opposed to hierarchical or formally structured channels of communication and learning. The networked structures of modern business corporations have as such become the organizational models upon which the reorganization of Western militaries in the post-Cold War era is taking place. However, not only organizational structures are subject to the logic of networked self-organization. The epistemic foundations of strategy itself are subject to them, too. There do exist certain operational arguments for the development of network-centric warfare.<sup>88</sup> However, those arguments are not the priority among the theorists of network-centric warfare. The primary argument being made for network-centric warfare is that military-strategic thought needs to reconnect and cement its epistemic links within the networks of human knowledge production.<sup>89</sup> The fear is that the commercial dynamics of complex epistemic connectivity are developing at a pace that is leaving the military as an institution behind.

This is the essential precept of the information revolution. For a number of military strategists, the information revolution has redefined the very concept of strategy and the role of military preparation and warfare in pursuit of strategy. The art of strategy in the conditions of information lies in attaining a certain level of epistemic connectivity and conformity between military science and other human and natural sciences. It is not simply a question anymore of adapting concepts in order to improve operational advantage. The end of strategy itself becomes, in the conditions of information, adaptation for the sake of adaptation. Thus, the "strategy" that the revitalization of Western military practice works

in aid of is the strategy of power, and its benchmark is the level and degree of epistemic conformity that it can procure throughout areas of human thought. Thus, warfare is conforming implicitly in its reformulation to the role that Foucault identified it with and that we can interpret Clausewitz as theorizing for. It is in this context that I have argued Clausewitz's *On War* to be the most contemporary of military-strategic texts.

In essence, the feeding of military-strategic science into the information sciences is comparable to the forms of transformation that military-strategic science underwent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Then, as Foucault described in *Discipline and Punish*, the metaphysic guiding the development of military-strategic thought was production. Assuming the generic schema of production, military-strategists of that period reinvented the art of military organization by adapting concepts drawn from the order of political economy. This made possible a number of developments, like the complex spatial orderings of men in modern battle. The transformation of battle space into Euclidean disciplinary space and the regulation of troop movements in a spirit akin to the newly established regulated movement of wealth<sup>90</sup> are all dedicated to the construction of military force as productive force, whose effect would be superior to the sum of the elementary forces composing it.<sup>91</sup> As the mode of production has been mutating to information, so the metaphysic of military strategy has similarly been shifting from production to information. The telos of military preparedness no longer simply aims at the extraction of a surplus value from the productive force constitutive of military force: its objective is the simulation of the general mobilization of concepts in ways that match and coevolve with the order of information.

This point will not be lost on a number of contemporary military-strategic theorists—particularly in the United States—who have argued that the anti-Newtonian tenets of Clausewitzian thought are eminently applicable to a complex and post-Newtonian strategic environment. The work of Alan Beyerchen stands out in this regard.<sup>92</sup> Looking at Clausewitz through the Foucauldian optic that we have here is to make a quite different argument for Clausewitz's contemporaneity from those of Beyerchen and others. It is not to argue, as they have done, that Clausewitz can be applied to the current strategic environment and help Western militaries to fight wars or conduct campaigns in a more proficient manner. What I have argued is that Clausewitz provides the framework for an analytic of the Foucauldian strategies that underlie the current transformation in military-strategic affairs and thought. The scope of Clausewitzian thought remains such that it allows the reader to

step outside the epistemic preconditions of its writing and view it as an insight into the politics of that epistemology itself. It was for this reason that I sought in the first section of the article to bring attention to the confluence of Clausewitz's formula of strategy with the developments in modern science highlighted by Canguilhem, especially. Unique to the work of Clausewitz is the reproduction of the generic epistemic structure of the human sciences at the beginning of the modern era, and doing so while also providing the theoretical scope for a critical strategic analytic of the structure itself. Possibly no other work in the history of human science can lay claim to such an achievement, and it is for this specific reason that Clausewitz deserves attention today.

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Considering the wealth and breadth of Foucault's work, his remarks on the relation between war and modern power can only seem slight. Yet their importance should be very clear. Had Foucault lived a longer life, it seems likely that this relation would have formed the subject of a book-length study in the style that he dedicated to the relations between power and psychiatry, clinical medicine, political economy, language, punishment, and sexuality. By the end of his life, the war-politics schemata that Clausewitz constructed at the end of the Napoleonic wars had become for Foucault the essential motif by which the tyranny of modern power was definable. Although he was not able to extend this insight, his observations acted as a fulcrum to the development of a range of further interventions upon the debate of the relation of war to power within French poststructuralist thought. A range of thinkers following him has developed generic conceptualizations of strategy deserving of attention from IR theorists. I conclude by briefly summarizing the directions in which three of those thinkers have taken the debate.

For Paul Virilio, the relation of war to power is apparent most forcefully in what he identifies as the military technologization of society. For him, the purpose of all forms of technology can be located in the ubiquitous will to increase the logistical efficiency of society. This aspect of the relation between war and power corrupts, according to Virilio, the essential values of the human disposition, turning all human beings into nodes within the logistical networks of war preparation. Virilio's work represents possibly the most faithful extension of Foucault's views on the relation between war and power. However, both have been heavily criticized for overemphasizing the extent to which the strategy of power pacifies

society and for failing to provide any explication of a counterstrategy through which resistance to this condition can take place.

Gilles Deleuze's work on war is a curious hybrid of Foucault and Virilio. Deleuze draws heavily on Virilio's early texts on war in order to take issue with Foucault's portrait of the relation between war and power. In his essay with Felix Guattari, "The War Machine," Deleuze directly disputes Foucault's argument that modern power emerges as a "realization" of the laws of war. Instead, Deleuze portrays the foundation of political sovereignty as what he describes as an "appropriation" of war by the state form.<sup>93</sup> The appropriative character of this relation is important, Deleuze argues, because it leaves open the possibility of its contestation. There is, he argues, an essence to war, which is irreducible to the state apparatus, lies outside its sovereignty, and is prior to its law.<sup>94</sup> Taking issue with Foucault, he develops a conception of the relation between war and sovereignty that allows for the positing of a theory of the transformability of power relations beyond that of Foucault. His task is to provide a theorization for the invocation of this power called war that "brings a furore to bear against sovereignty, a celerity against gravity, secrecy against the public, a power [*puissance*] against sovereignty, a machine against the apparatus."<sup>95</sup>

For Jean Baudrillard, the task is, likewise, to extend our understandings of the extent to which the strategy of power is encoded epistemologically in technologies that derive from war, but also to develop thought for the purpose of their contestation. Baudrillard presses the established arguments as to the incestuous relationship between the organization of military thought and social resistance that Virilio and Foucault portray most forcefully. However, he also provides a set of alternative means of response that he argues to be poststrategic and postresistant forms of political activity. As such, he attempts to create a set of concepts that escape the modern war-politics schemata that Foucault first draws to our attention through Clausewitz and that will define the beginnings of a radically different poststrategic order.

## Notes

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