Theory and Practice: the Inevitable Dialectics

Thinking with and beyond Clausewitz's Concept of Theory

Since the 1990s various influential scholars have argued that Clausewitz's theory is no longer applicable, not only in relation to contemporary conflicts, but also in general.
A series of authors consequently has attempted to develop a new understanding of Clausewitz's theory, based on the 'trinity', which differs fundamentally from his world- renowned formula as well as the absolute of war. This article further elaborates the 'wondrous trinity', the 'floating' (Clausewitz) and developing (Hegel) balance of Clausewitz's three tendencies of the trinity (violence/force, fight/struggle, warring community) for a better understanding of his concept of theory, which – to some extent surprisingly – has not been developed before.

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> The essential difference is that war is not an exercise of the will directed at inanimate matter, as is the case with the mechanical arts, or at matter which is animate but passive and yielding, as is the case with the human mind in the fine arts. In war, the will is directed at an animate object that reacts. Clausewitz, *On War* (149)[1]

Since the 1990s various influential authors have argued that Clausewitz's theory is no longer applicable, not only in relation to contemporary conflicts, but also in general. Some have suggested that it is harmful and even self-destructive[2] to continue to use this theory as the basis for understanding and as a guide to political action, given the revolutionary changes in war and violence occurring in the world's communities. Clausewitz, it is proposed, was only concerned with war between states employing regular armies, whereas conflict today would mainly involve non-state actors.

Both claims, however, are overdrawn, with respect to both the core contents of Clausewitz's theory and the unique characteristics of today's 'New Wars'.[3] With the exception of much of Africa and some very old conflicts at the fringes of the former empires, existing states, along with hierarchically organized political-religious groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, are still the decisive, if no longer the sole, actors in war. Additionally, Clausewitz has much more to say about the contemporary forms of warfare than the highly selective interpretations by his modern critics might suggest. However, the criticisms by Clausewitz's

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[1]   Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* second edition (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984). All numbers in brackets refer to this edition. Although there is a weakness in translating Clausewitz's concepts on the basis of a pure rationalistic approach, it is the most prevalent translation. I'm very grateful for the recommendations and assistance of Bruno Colson, Paul Schuurman, Paul Donker, Christopher Bassford and Alan D. Beyerchen. All remaining faults are my own.
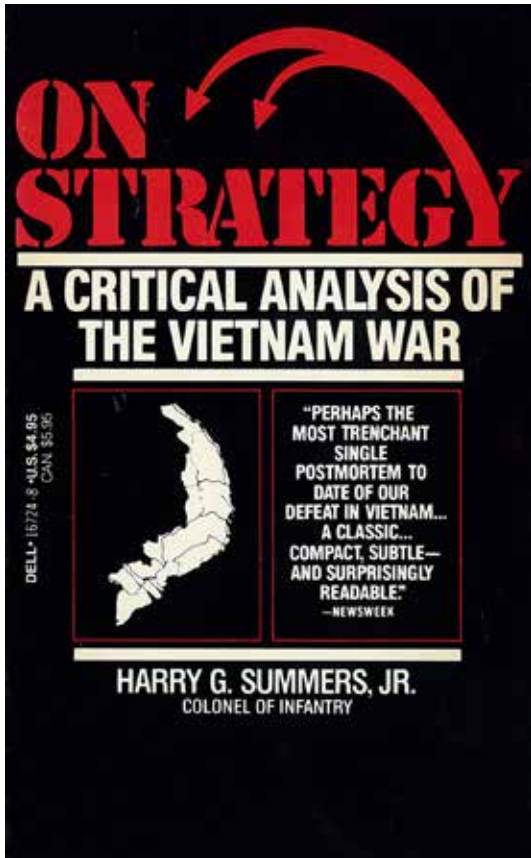
The concept of the 'trinitarian war' does not stem from Clausewitz, but was coined by Harry G. Summers, Jr., in On Strategy, an influential book in which he tried to analyze the mistakes made during the Vietnam War

Paradoxically, we find the trinity at the end of Clausewitz's first chapter, but it is his final proposition about the theory of war, because the first chapter was the last one of *On War* Clausewitz wrote before his death. Clausewitz's wondrous trinity, in my interpretation, is composed of primordial violence, the struggle of the fighting forces and their affiliation to a warring community. Based on this interpretation, I define war as the violent struggle/fight of communities. Each war is composed of these three tendencies – all wars differ from one another with respect to the applied violence (different means, wars with knives and machetes or with atomic weapons), the different forms of the struggle/fight (amateurs versus professionals, symmetry versus asymmetry) and the social composition of the warring community.[5]

The significance of the 'trinity' as the starting point of Clausewitz's theory of war is indirectly acknowledged by his critics, who impute to Clausewitz the concept of 'trinitarian war', based on a hierarchy of populace, the army and the government. The problem with this interpretation is that Clausewitz's indicated facts were merely one possible example for him, which is revealed as a socio-historical

newest detractors are both provocative and constructive, in that they force one to read Clausewitz more exactly and to extract aspects of his work that were previously underexposed.

A series of authors consequently has attempted to develop a new understanding of Clausewitz's theory, based on the 'trinity' which Clausewitz described in the last section of his first chapter under the heading 'Consequences for Theory' (Clausewitz 1984, p. 89).[4] In it the world-renowned formula of war as 'merely the continuation of policy by other means' (Ibid, p. 87) is indirectly repeated, and identified as only one of three basic tendencies of which each war is composed. Clausewitz's concept of the trinity is a very late development of his thinking.

2   Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York, The Free Press, 1991); John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London, Hutchinson, 1993).

3   Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a more sophisticated view than Kaldor's, see Herfried Munkler, *The New Wars* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

4   Concerning the trinity see especially Christopher Bassford, 'The Primacy of Policy and the 'Trinity' in Clausewitz's Mature Thought' in: Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds.), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 74-90; Christopher Bassford, 'Tip-Toe through the Trinity. The Strange Persistence of Trinitarian Warfare', *Working paper* **2**006: http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Trinity/Trinity8.htm; see also Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle***.**

5   See my attempt to develop a general theory of war based on Clausewitz's wondrous trinity: Andreas Herberg-Rothe, 'Clausewitz's 'Wondrous Trinity' as a Coordinate System of War and Violent Conflict' in: *International Journal of Violence and Conflict* (IJVC) 3 (2) 2009, pp. 62-77 (www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/6).

construct, based on the fundamentals of the 'wondrous trinity'. Strictly speaking, the concept of the 'trinitarian war' does not stem from Clausewitz, as it fundamentally contradicts the concept of the 'wondrous trinity'. This term actually wars coined by Harry G. Summers, Jr, who, when a U.S. Army Colonel in the early 1980s, wrote an influential book in which he tried to analyze the mistakes made during the Vietnam War by drawing on an *example* Clausewitz mentions in the 'wondrous trinity',[6] flipping Clausewitz's central point on its head in the process. Whereas Clausewitz proposed that the task of theory is to maintain a floating balance between the three tendencies, in trinitarian warfare these tendencies are incorporated into a hierarchy, which contradicts Clausewitz's own proposition.

In my view, Clausewitz's intellectual crisis continuously evolved during his analyses of war campaigns between 1820 and 1827, when he wrote the books about Prussia and its great catastrophy, the disaster of Napoleon's Russian campaign and the campaign which ended at Waterloo. Clausewitz finished the last book in 1827-28, but he ended his crisis with a sudden rupture in a July 1827 note. In it he wrote that he wanted to rework his whole book according to two principles: the dual nature of war and the primacy of policy. He exemplified the dual nature of war with the difference between its absolute form (the tendency to total warfare, a fight for life and death, an existential war) and a limited war. The significance of this note is embodied in the concept of the dual nature of war, because this insight put two of his former

basic concepts aside or changed their meaning: if war has a dual nature, the absolute form can no longer be the ideal form of war. And second, although Clausewitz had already embarked on the influence of policy/politics, from this moment on he needed a conceptualization which provided unity to the various manifestations of war. Policy/politics asserted not only an influence on war, but provided the basis for its unity, which led to a holistic understanding of policy/politics in Clausewitz's thinking. Policy/politics was the whole which provided the logic of war, war itself was viewed as just a part of policy/politics.[7] But the note of 1827 was not the end of Clausewitz's intellectual development: this is the dialectical nature of war embodied in the trinity and the dialectical relation between offense and defence.[8]

Despite the remarkable progress in the understanding of Clausewitz's theory of war, what has not yet been accomplished – to some extent surprisingly – is a thorough discussion of Clausewitz's concept of theory itself. Contrary to propositions made by his critics as well as his adherents, Clausewitz's concept of theory is much more sophisticated than one would expect. In congruence with his notion of the trinity as his final theory and his conceptualization of the trinity as a floating balance between opposites, this article tries to give arguments for the assumption that Clausewitz's concept of theory is an application of his understanding of dialectics, his floating (Clausewitz) and developing (Hegel) balance of opposites. Clausewitz did not give an explicit definition of theory, but implicitly revealed his understanding of theory when treating the relation between theory and practice throughout his life and work.

First I will emphasize the fundamental problem how a theory whose subject always changes could be designed. Based on Clausewitz's whole work I try to systematize his very different references to the relation between theory and practice. This can be summarized as the five functions of theory according to Clausewitz: a. describing the nature of war, b. elaborating the difference between theory and practice, c. giving recommendations for military practice,

6   Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy. A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, Presidio Press, 1982); Beatrice Heuser, *Clausewitz lesen!* (Munich, Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2005) pp. 66-69.

7   For such an approach see Paul Schuurman, 'War as a System. A Three-stage Model for the Development of Clausewitz's Thinking on Military Conflict and its Constraints' in: *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 37, Nov. 6-7, pp. 926-948. I disagree with Schuurman in assuming that Clausewitz's testament is in fact the trinity as well as the dialectical relation between defence and offense; see Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*.

8   I have further elaborated on the concept of a floating and developing balancing with regard to Clausewitz's understanding of strategy. See Andreas Herberg-Rothe, 'Clausewitz's Concept of Strategy. Balancing Purpose, Aims and Means' in: *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 37, 6-7, December 2014, pp. 903-925. (www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2013.853175).

A basically wrong translation has contributed to the most influential interpretation of Clausewitz's trinity as 'trinitarian warfare' by its adherents, for example former US Secretary of State Colin Powell

based on theory and historical examples; d. highlighting theory as a kind of practice itself (here Clausewitz is comparable to Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault) and finally e. differentiating and analyzing what is composed of tendencies and different parts. Finally I will conceptualize the tasks Clausewitz ascribes to the theory of war as the inevitable dialectics of theory and practice in the social sciences.

War as a dynamic phenomenon

Clausewitz's theory is fundamentally based on a dynamic understanding of war. A central theme in his later work is the question of 'whether a conflict of living forces as it develops and is resolved in war remains subject to general laws, and whether these can provide a useful guide to action' (149-150). The heart of the matter is: what would a theory look like if its subject constantly changes? The only approach to a solution might be not to analyze fixed points, the unalterable substance of war

or systems, but to concentrate on the changes and developments in warfare itself. Although the Howard/Paret translation (which we use throughout our interpretation) is the most prevalent, we have to mention the most decisive failure in this work. Concerning the 'wondrous trinity' at the end of chapter one the translation implies a hierarchy between the three tendencies by saying: 'and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which make it subject to reason alone.' In German, however, Clausewitz does not use the term 'reason alone', but 'pure reason' (*reiner Verstand*). This basically wrong translation has contributed to the most influential interpretation of Clausewitz's trinity as 'trinitarian warfare' by its adherents (for example Colin Powell) as well as its critics (Harry Summers and Martin van Creveld). In trinitarian warfare – which is by no means Clausewitz's concept – there is a hierarchy between the three tendencies of the trinity, primordial violence and hatred, the play of chance and probability,

which belongs to the army and its commander, and finally the primacy of politics. Contrary to the concept of trinitarian warfare, Clausewitz is clearly stating: 'Our task therefore is to develop a (floating) balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets' (89).

The task, as Clausewitz writes, would be to develop a theory about an ever-changing subject. The only possibility to develop such a theory would be to concentrate on change, movement and development itself. There is an example which vividly demonstrates such a possibility, namely a simple sinus and co-sinus function. Clausewitz's work therefore is an unfinished symphony, as Jon Sumida and Antulio Echevarria have argued. The unfinished character of this symphony does not imply however that one could emulate anything one would want to state as a general proposition. The first chapter remains the key to understanding the whole work. In my view *On War* builds a whole universe of thinking about war. But in order to explicitly reveal the structure of this universe we need to analyze the influences of the contemporary theories and ways of thinking on Clausewitz during his lifetime.

In a sinus and in the overlapping co-sinus curves everything constantly changes, but this change is subject to laws of movement and development. Of course I don't want to argue that Clausewitz's understanding of theory is directly related to a sinus or co-sinus curve. Nevertheless we know that Clausewitz mentions Johann Gottlieb Euler, one of the greatest mathematicians of his time, twice in *On War*. Euler nearly invented the mathematical concept of a function and further elaborated

sinus and co-sinus functions. Clausewitz's mentioning of Euler in *On War*, a book about a subject which seems to be quite different from the developments in mathematics, indicates how impressed Clausewitz and his contemporaries were by this progress (112, 146). One could even identify some concepts of Clausewitz such as the point of no return (*Hochpunkt* or *Wendepunkt*) in a sinus curve as its highest point.

Mathematical models can serve the purpose of better understanding a theory, but they should by no means been regarded as a whole theory in the social sciences. Nevertheless, a simple sinus and co-sinus curve enables us to get an idea how a theory which subjects are movement, development, changing compositions, fluctuations, variations and so on, should be designed.[9]
Despite his critiques of theory as a system, Clausewitz of course was trying to develop a set of rules as a theory which could be used in practice. His critique for example of the system of Bülow was aimed towards a dogmatic application of the necessities of a closed system. Although Clausewitz sometimes overemphasizes his critique of dogmatic systems, he does not exclude any kind of systematical rules, tendencies or even laws in war, most vividly expressed in his notion that although war does not have a particular logic, there is a grammar of its own like the grammar in speech (here Clausewitz is referring to the concept of grammar of his friend for nearly two decades, Wilhelm von Humboldt).[10]

The most important influences on Clausewitz were the rationalist currents of the Enlightenment, idealism, romanticism, and the findings of the natural sciences. It was from Kiesewetter, a follower of Kant, that Clausewitz learned about rationalism at an early age at the Berlin war academy. During Clausewitz's later time in Berlin (1818-1830), the idealism of Fichte and especially Hegel was the dominant current of thought in intellectual circles. In 1829 Clausewitz also spent a number of weeks reading the Goethe-Schiller correspondence. He also attended the lectures of the romantic philo-

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[9] Andreas Herberg-Rothe, 'Clausewitz's 'Wondrous Trinity' as a Coordinate System of War and Violent Conflict' in: *International Journal of Violence and Conflict* (IJVC) 3 (2) 2009, pp. 62-77. (www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/6).

[10] Concerning the relation of Clausewitz and Humboldt see my comparison between Clausewitz and Hegel, in which I also treat the relation to Wilhelm von Humboldt, too: Andreas Herberg-Rothe, 'Clausewitz und Hegel. Ein heuristischer Vergleich', in: *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preußischen Geschichte*. Jahrgang 10, Heft 1/2000, S. 49–84.

sopher Heinrich Steffens during the winter of 1824-25, and in 1827 those of the naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, which were the start of a new flourishing of the natural sciences in Germany.[11] Clausewitz took aspects of all the thoughts of his contemporaries and used them in his theory of war to the extent that they helped him to reflect on his own experiences of armed conflict. Clausewitz's own position floats within the field formed by the four currents of thought. Each of them stimulated him, but his own position cannot be traced back solely to any one of them.[12]

Clausewitz's understanding of the tasks of theory

Clausewitz didn't provide any definition of theory, but sought to determine the tasks and functions a theory should serve. For example he argues that a conflict of living forces, as can be seen in war, remains bound to general rule (or laws). His task would be to examine whether these rules and laws might provide a useful guidance for action. Additionally, he writes, it should be clear that this subject, like all others that don't transcend our comprehension, can be illuminated by the search of a mindful intellect and made clear in its inherent logic and argument (German edition, pp. 303-304). Based on this short description it becomes obvious that Clausewitz's concept of theory must be understood as the attempt to find general rules or laws of war despite its ever-changing character, which additionally should provide useful guidance for political and military action. In addition he speaks about the attempt to reveal the inherent 'logic' of war. In another part of his masterpiece he demands that theory should judge each war in the first place with regard to its character and its general tendencies given by the probability of the scale of measurement of the influence of policy (German edition, 959).[13]

We could give a lot more quotes by Clausewitz with regard to his understanding of theory, but based on *On War* as a whole, I will propose five different conceptualizations of how theory should be understood in his work.

Clausewitz uses the concept of theory in connection with his attempt to identify the nature or essence of war

1. The nature of war

Clausewitz uses the concept of theory in connection with his attempt to identify the nature or essence of war. This usage of the understanding of theory predominantly can be found in his famous first chapter where he characterizes war as a duel (in German Clausewitz uses the term *Zweikampf*, which is not totally the same as a duel), and in his 'formula', but most clearly in his 'result for theory' at the end of chapter one, the wondrous trinity, which should not be confused with 'trinitarian warfare.' Additionally in the first chapter we find the concept of 'absolute war', which Clausewitz also uses in book eight where he states that theory has the obligation to put emphasis on this absolute form of war as a guideline for action in general (German edition, 959).

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[11]   Carl von Clausewitz, *Schriften, Studien, Aufsätze, Briefe*. Edited by Werner Hahlweg, II vol. (Göttingen, VandenHoeck & Ruprecht, 1966 and 1990). Here vol. II: on Steffens, 470 and 535; on Humboldt, 534; on the Goethe-Schiller correspondence, 550. See also Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976).

[12]   For details see Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*.

[13]   Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* 19th edition. Edited by Werner Hahlweg (Bonn, Dümmler, 1991).

2. The difference between theory and practice

Only at first sight there seems to be a similar understanding of theory in relation to the interactions to the extreme, which he labels as the concept of war in chapter one (76-77). But contrary to the understanding of theory as explained above, Clausewitz now wants to emphasize the significant difference between theory and practice, of theory as nothing else than a law derived from books or abstraction (77 ff). Although Clausewitz sometimes uses the same term in relation to the absolute of

Clausewitz rejected the idea that war would have an inherent logic, but also argued that war has its own grammar

warfare (especially in book VIII of *On War*), the difference is obvious. In the first understanding Clausewitz uses the theory of war in order to enable that action is guided by these principles of his theoretical construction. Exactly the opposite understanding is elaborated in the latter. Here Clausewitz emphasizes the great difference – sometimes even the chasm – which separates theory in its abstract form and war in reality. The second understanding of theory can be found in those parts of *On War* where the 'absolute of war' is labeled as nothing else than a mere concept in the abstract, which Clause-witz contrasts with the concepts of probability and contingency, or the frictions in real war. Some authors compare this understanding of war with Max Weber's concept of an ideal-type.[14] Although I find his interpretation of

Clausewitz the most sophisticated one to date, I disagree with Raymond Aron concerning the understanding of theory as an 'unreal' concept of war.[15] If his theory would have nothing in common with empirical and real wars, this would imply a really problematic understan-ding of theory by Clausewitz.

Two different attempts of solving the problem of the concept of the absolute of war have been pursued in the history of interpreting Clause-witz. One of these historical lines of interpreta-tion argues that the tendency to the absolute is caused by the context of warfare, the political and societal conditions or policies which lead to total war. Some argue that in congruence with Clausewitz's world-renowned formula, it depends on political decisions or political relations whether a war tends to be limited or total. To his credit, John Keegan maintains that the tendency for total war depending on the societal conditions is a historical force in the development of warfare since the French Revolution.[16] This interpretation could be described as follows: the tendency to an absolute, total form of warfare is not inherent to warfare, is not an inherent logic in itself, but dependent on policy and politics and political and societal relations which are to be judged as totalitarian or antagonistic to that of the adversary. The second line of interpretation would acknowledge that for Clausewitz war is an instrument of policy, but that due to the violent form of this particular means and the unforeseeable inherent logic of war as a struggle between action and counter-action, war is also characterized by an imminent tendency to escalate, which cannot always be controlled by policy. In my view, the tension in Clausewitz's theory between the escalating tendencies within war and those escalating tendencies outside of it, the context,[17] cannot be decided dogmatically. There are passages in *On War* and even in his final first chapter in which Clausewitz seems to argue in favor of one of the two interpretations, but there are others where he seems to do just the opposite.

Although Clausewitz explicitly rejected the idea that war would have an inherent logic, he

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14 Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz* (London, Pimlico, 2002).
15 Raymond Aron, *Den Krieg denken* (Frankfurt, Propyläen Verlag, 1980). One of the most sophisticated masterpieces of Clausewitz's interpretation. I do not recommend the En-glish translation of Aron's book.
16 John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995). Nevertheless it must be noted that Keegan systematically only quotes a bisect formula, that war is the continuation of policy/politics, but deletes the second part of the sentence, a continua-tion of policy by applying 'other means' than that of policy, politics itself.
17 See for example: 'Wenn es also, um zur Hauptsache zurückzukehren, auch wahr ist, daß bei der einen Art Krieg die Politik ganz zu verschwinden scheint, während sie bei der anderen Art sehr bestimmt hervortritt, so kann man doch behaupten, daß die eine so politisch sei wie die andere (...)' (*Vom Kriege*, Germ. Edt., p. 211).

nevertheless made the proposition that war has its own grammar – and I think that this inherent grammar of war might even have become the logic of some wars we have observed in history. An explanatory example of this tendency might be World War One, whereas the previous strand of interpretation would apply to World War Two: the totalitarian politics of the *German Reich* did in fact lead to total warfare of annihilation and to the counter-action of the Western allies to fight for unconditional and therefore total surrender of the German Nazi empire. It seems to me that the three escalatory tendencies are neither necessarily exclusively militarily nor politically determined and it is quite well possible to think of politicians who partake in the escalation game as much as soldiers and their generals. Perhaps one could suggest that the *logic of escalation* has different *grammars*, i.e. different levels, including a political and a military level.

It has to be acknowledged that Clausewitz mentions the concept of a grammar only once in *On War*. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize the significance of this reference. A great deal of philosophy since Kant could be characterized as an attempt to replace the logic embodied in natural law through the grammar of speech and language, or more generally, the technique of action and speech, the rules of the game as a closed system. The famous linguistic turn of the twentieth century in general can be characterized by the replacement of what is judged as good and just by an appropriate, just method, the substitution of substance, essence by grammar, semantics by syntax, content by structure and system, and finally meaning by discourse in both Foucault and Habermas (despite their differences).

As already mentioned, although Clausewitz uses the concept of grammar only once in an isolated paragraph in *On War* with no direct connection to his other conceptualization, the usage of this concept is symptomatic for his time. It was Clausewitz's close friend, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who established grammar in this sense of a linguistic turn, in my view in a direct but hidden quarrel with Hegel. With

With respect to the linguistic turn outlined by Clausewitz's close friend Wilhelm von Humboldt, one solution of the relation of war and policy/politics would be that there is a grammar of war and a grammar of policy, which are both bound by societal developments

respect to the linguistic turn outlined by von Humboldt, one solution of the relation of war and policy/politics would be that it is not a relation of logic and grammar and not of a different logic, but one in which there is a grammar of war and a grammar of policy, which are both bound by societal developments (this was the solution of Marx, Engels and Lenin). This is also the solution of Foucault, who replaces the content of policy by techniques of political action and power.[18]

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[18] See my critique of Foucault in, Herberg-Rothe, Andreas, *Das Raetsel Clausewitz. Politische Theorie des Krieges im Widerstreit* (Munich, Fink, 2001). Foucault tries to reverse Clausewitz's formula by arguing that policy/politics is the continuation of war by other means. Although my critique of Foucault was excessive in my *Raetsel Clausewitz* book, I still think that Foucault's reversal of Clausewitz could be applied meaningfully only to some historical tendencies, not in general. Foucault's 1977 lectures, in which he developed the reversal of Clausewitz, showed the problematic consequences of his approach. If power is everything and everywhere, there is only one possibility to escape this ubiquitous power: pure resistance for the sake of resistance. Foucault might have not realized that the counter-movements of modernity are the product of modernity itself. See the modernity and violence chapter in: Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Der Krieg* (Frankfurt, Campus, 2003).

3. Recommendations for practice

A third function of theory is related to strategy and war plans, practically relevant experiences and considerations of Clausewitz: how war should effectively be fought in order to achieve the intended purpose and goals. In this sense he speaks of the theory of great power wars and characterizes this kind of theory as strategy. The theory of war is related to the usage of the means for the purpose it has to serve. Clausewitz gives an example for this understanding of theory by saying that theory would be related to the decisive points in warfare in which one can achieve a preponderance of one's own physical power and advantages (German edition, p. 1047).

Terence Holmes has vividly argued that Clausewitz's understanding of the concept of theory can not be reduced only to the contrast between theory and friction in the sense of the unpredictability of non-linear systems, as Alan Beyerchen has argued in his epochal article about linear and non-linear theory in Clausewitz's masterwork. Clausewitz, on the contrary, of course gives a lot of indications how to overcome this 'terrible friction'. If Clausewitz would not have been convinced of the principal possibility to conduct warfare in accordance with a war plan, designed in advance, his theory would be a pure abstraction. This approach is not dependent on the question whether the application of his practical advice has been successful – I would even doubt that. But without doubt we know that till the end of his life Clausewitz outlined numerous war plans against France and Russia. So, Clausewitz didn't project his plans in knowing that after the first shot in war everything changes to a degree where every plan would be useless, as Beatrice Heuser understands his concept of theory.[19] Clausewitz emphasizes the terrible friction in war in order to find ways to overcome it. For some time of his life Clausewitz saw a model for this approach to overcome friction in the kind of war Napoleon waged and in particular the military genius of the French leader. Hegel even generalized the genius of Napoleon after the battle of Jena by saying that he not only witnessed Napoleon passing by in the city streets, but also the incorporation of the absolute spirit of the world's history. Sometimes Napoleon's genius was reduced to a series of fortunate contingencies which worked in his favour. For example, neither Napoleon nor his enemies knew before the battle of Jena and Auerstedt where the other side would be in the terrain. But the difference was that Napoleon always knew where his own army was located – and this knowledge was of paramount importance for his conduct of war (I owe this clarification to Jan Willem Honig).[20]

Nevertheless Alan Beyerchen is absolutely right in emphasizing the inevitable difference between war plans and their execution. As legitimate and justified the critique of Terence Holmes on the concept of friction as an overarching subject in Clausewitz's thinking (what Beyerchen never intended to imply) at first sight might be, he himself might be underestimating the problematic of action and resistance or, to be more precise, counter-action as the decisive cause for the departure of real war from the original war plan. That's because Clausewitz already says in chapter one that in war both sides aim to win it. But in general – in his times at least – there is the systematical problem that only one of both sides will be victorious, with the other side losing the war. And the adversary may lose the war not because of friction, but due to our own efforts and vice versa, and due to the fact that war is not only the application of force to which the terrible friction would apply only, but also a real fight, a struggle of two adversaries. Consequently I would propose to supplement Clausewitz's definition of war at the beginning of chapter I. Whereas he just states that war is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will, I would add: 'and the forcible counter-action not to be compelled to do the will of the adversary.' This interaction of action and counter-action in war is directly leading to Clausewitz's 'consequences for theory', his concept of the trinity. (see Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*).

19   See Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz*; Terence Holmes, 'Planning versus Chaos in Clausewitz's On War' in: *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 129-151, February 2007; Alan Beyerchen, 'Clausewitz, Nonlinearity and the Unpredictability of War' in: *International Security*, 17:3 (Winter, 1992) pp. 59-90.
20   Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*, chapter Jena, Moscow, Waterloo.

In our times we witness a growing number of wars, where neither side is losing, nor winning. This phenomenon could be observed in the recent wars in Gaza and the 2006 Lebanon War. This development might be related to globalization and the resulting problem that an adversary can no longer be resolutely crushed in a way that would imply his total defeat. Such tendencies are visible in guerrilla and partisan warfare, in which the partisans win if they don't lose decisively. Although this proposition does not apply to be a law of war, but only a tendency in partisan warfare, in current warfare it seems to become more frequent. The most important reason for this development is that our adversary does not need to win the war in a military manner; he just has to ensure by all means that he denies us the victory. In a globalized world policy, the media, the discourse and the legitimacy of applying force play an ever more important role in the conduct of war. Current examples are Afghanistan and Iraq, but since the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the Israelis have not won a single war in a classical and traditional way. But they have not lost one, either.

4. Theory as a kind of practice itself

Clausewitz frequently explains an additional function of theory in connection with his numerous analysis of historical examples of wars and military campaigns. These historical examples are not directly a kind of theory but are used by Clausewitz in order to develop a theory. Historical experiences for Clausewitz are indirectly a kind of theory for purposes of education, a kind of 'intellectualization' of war. Here Clausewitz follows in the footsteps of his teacher Scharnhorst at the war academy in Berlin. It became a landmark of Scharnhorst, as soon as he worked for the king of Prussia in 1801, to provide students at the institute for young officers with historical examples to be studied in-depth, instead of teaching them theories. For Clausewitz, historical examples were a different kind of theory, based on reality instead of abstraction. Clausewitz was fully aware of the 'lessons of history', but solely in

Emile Simpson explains his views on war and theory to students at the Perse School in Cambridge; as author of War from the Ground up*, Simpson transformed the insights of Gramsci and Foucault into the theory of the conduct of war with his notion of a strategic narrative*

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order to 'educate the mind' and not to provide positive or dogmatic advice.

Based on these analysis Clausewitz does not excerpt direct rules for concrete action action of the commander. These example just serve the function to educate the commander, to provide experiences and knowledge of failures in the past not only for the military, but for policy as well. Although policy does not conduct war directly, it involves judging the course of action and making an estimation what the army could achieve and what not. To this kind of theory also belongs Clausewitz's approach to connect warfare with the historical, societal and political relations of its own times or a historical epoch of the past. Clausewitz emphasized this understanding with the notion that theory must be an enlightened judgment based on experience and knowledge, but by no means any kind of dogmatic application of rules (German edition, p. 290). Theory, in Clausewitz's approach, has the task to educate the mind of the military and political leaders, not to provide systems and 'positive' doctrines for them. Perhaps one could relate this understanding of theory to the notion of Antonio Gramsci that theory is a kind of practice in itself, as well as Foucault's position that knowledge and the ability to construct a discourse are not opposite to practice, but that knowledge and the performance of a discourse are a kind of power itself. Emile Simpson transformed this insight of Gramsci and Foucault into the theory of the conduct of war with his notion of a strategic narrative.[21]

5. Theory as critique (Kant)
Finally, Clausewitz maintains that theory has the task to differentiate all those aspects which are tied together in war, but which are incom-parable. With regard to this function of theory Clausewitz follows in the footsteps of Kant, who was popularized by Clausewitz's teacher at the war academy, Kiesewetter. Clausewitz uses the concept of theory very often in the sense of critique, which in Kant's theory exactly has the meaning of differentiation and laying down the boundary lines of a concept. Clausewitz additionally – via Kiesewetter – borrows from Kant the differentiation between formal and materiel logic.[22]

Summarizing one could say that there are five different functions Clausewitz ascribes to theory:

- Theory has the task to reveal the nature or essence of war (this could be seen as an approach in the path laid down by Plato). Theory serves the task of comparing different wars with one another, which leads to similarities of a number of wars and the construction of an ideal type, as Max Weber later on understood this kind of theory;
- Additionally, Clausewitz maintains that theory has to reflect the difference between theory and practice, which inevitably leads to the question how theory and practice are related to one another, when obviously they are not identical;
- Clausewitz gives numerous recommendations for military action in war, based on his own war experiences, historical analysis and his theoretical approach to war plans. In Book II of On War, in which he treats the theory of war separately, in fact he is mainly concerned with the art of warfare and not theory in the overall meaning we have tried to elaborate. The theory of war as an art of warfare is only one dimension of a theory in a wider sense;
- Theory serves the purpose to educate and cultivate the mind of the political and military leaders as well as that of the army. Within this field of a different understanding of what theory means, one could say that theory is a kind of practice itself in the sense of the concept developed by Gramsci as well as Foucault;
- Finally, theory is an instrument for gaining (new) knowledge about a subject, by differentiating between those aspects which were

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21   Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground up. Twenty-first Century Combat as Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

22   For this interpretation see especially Antulio Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Comtemporary War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007). Kiesewetter's description of the proposition of Kant is as follows: 'Jene [formale Wahrheit] besteht in der Uebereinstimmung einer Vorstellung mit den logischen Gesetzen des Denkens, diese [materiale Wahrheit] in der Uebereinstimmung einer Vorstellung mit dem Gegenstande.' In: Kiesewetter, *Grundriss einer allgemeinen Logik* (Berlin, 1806) II, §112, p. 49; Clausewitz, Carl von, *Schriften, Studien, Aufsätze, Briefe*. ed. by Werner Hahlweg, vol. II, pp. 23-28.

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Theory, Clausewitz finds, serves the task of comparing different wars with one another, which leads to similarities of a number of wars and the construction of an ideal type

previously tied together. It's main task is critique in the sense Kant and Kiesewetter understood that concept.

Conclusion: the inevitable dialectics

In my view, the above revealed differentiations of Clausewitz's understanding of theory are simultaneously the basics of every social sciences theory. This can be systematically justified if we generalize the above developed concept. Based on the difference and unity of theory and practice we just need to elaborate the following approach (which is in one aspect not the same as that of Clausewitz by introducing the difference between Plato and Aristotle in order to resolve Clausewitz's problem of the absolute of war):

- Every theory needs some kind of explanation about its subject and what the nature or essence of this subject might be. I would label this as an approach in the footsteps of Plato;
- The next step is to look at the varieties of the subject, which includes a comparison between the different forms in which the subject occurs in reality. Such a comparison was founded by Aristotle and his concept of a mediation between contrasts and transferred to the social sciences as an ideal type by Max Weber. This ideal type is the result of such a comparison;
- Whereas in the first two steps the interactions between theory and practice are treated in general, in the third one we need to be aware of and reflect on the difference between theory and practice, but also on practically relevant recommendations based on theory for our practice and performance;
- In the fourth step we will nevertheless recognize that any kind of theory itself is a kind of practice. The foundations of such an approach can be detected in the thesis about Feuerbach by Karl Marx and they were subsequently developed by Gramsci's emphasis on theory as practice until Foucault's conceptualization of knowledge and theory as a particular form of power;
- After we have arrived at this stage, we finally must be aware of the boundaries of our theory and relate it to other theories in the social sciences.

Clausewitz neither develops a pure deductive nor a pure inductive conception of theory. His task is to develop a theory which maintains a floating balance between differences (this would be the approach of constructivism in the footsteps of Heinz v. Förster, Lyotard and Derrida) or the contrasts and conflicting tendencies of the wondrous trinity, as Clausewitz emphasizes at the end of chapter one of *On War*. The question remains how to design a theory for an ever-changing subject, or a chameleon as Clausewitz writes. Additionally, the question is how to design a theory related to action and counter-action and symmetrical and asymmetrical counter-action. Clausewitz describes symmetrical counter-action as a situation in which both parties in the conflict do or intend the same, whereas asymmetrical counter-action is the attempt to eradicate the intentions and actions of the adversary not by doing the same, but – just to clarify this difference – by waiting, for example. Clausewitz at length explains these different dimensions of counter-action in his approach to the different meanings of defence. In fact, Clausewitz reveals his method immanently in his dialectically structured treatment of defence and offense, laying the basis for a different kind of dialectics, a mediation of Kant and Hegel (for such an approach see Herberg-Rothe, *Clause-*

witz's Puzzle and Herberg-Rothe, *Lyotard und Hegel* (Vienna, Passagen, 2005). Clausewitz has given a clear indication of his final solution in his result for theory, the wondrous trinity and his notion that theory has the task to maintain a floating balance between the three tendencies of the wondrous trinity.[23] What Clausewitz did not achieve due to his untimely death was to compose a theory of war based on the wondrous trinity as a starting point; his useful observations in other parts of the book (which were, in their respective context, right in particular circumstances) and his dialectical construction of defence and offense (which are in a broader sense synonyms for self-preservation and self-transgression.[24] This proposition puts in sharp light the need of retaining a floating balance in theory, just as Clausewitz wrote at the end of chapter one: 'Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies like an object suspended between three magnets.'

By developing a floating balance between[25] rationality (Kant, Kiesewetter and the Enlightment) and romanticism (Goethe) as well as between idealism (Clausewitz was influenced by Fichte and Hegel)[26] and naturalism (Alexander von Humboldt) and influenced by Wilhelm von Humboldt's concept of grammar, Clausewitz is not only the theoretician of war, but even more the theoretician of a new understanding of dialectics, which might be one which even surpasses that of Kant and Hegel with respect to the basics of such a dialectics (of course not with respect to its elaboration). The problem is that he only intrinsically applied the basics of such a new kind of dialectics – therefore it remains our task to explicitly exemplify the intrinsic dialectical nature of his theory. Clausewitz developed the seeds of such a theory – no less, but also no more. Hans Rothfels noticed the intrinsic nature of such dialectics when he made the following proposition in relation to Clausewitz: 'And if we are ever to succeed in creating a political theory worthy of the name, this will only be possible in a similar way, by means of an equally harmonious combination of conflicting elements.'[27]

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23 We find such a floating balance between contrasts later on in the work of Sigmund Freud, who distinguishes between Es, Ich und Über-Ich. What he calls Ich (or Ego) has the explicit function of mediating Es and Über-Ich. In fact, Ich is exactly the floating and developing balance between Es and Über-Ich.

24 I strongly oppose all efforts to understand Clausewitz's theory only on the basis of his notion that defense is the stronger form of war, as Jon Sumida has argued in *Decoding Clausewitz. A New Approach to* On War (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2008). In fact, Clausewitz always highlighted the interaction of defense and offense and its dialectical nature which made war up as a whole. Clausewitz says that defense is the stronger form of war with the negative purpose and offense the weaker form with the positive purpose. Sumida leaves out everything besides the notion that defense is the stronger form of war. It is the same method like that of John Keegan, who always correctly quotes Clausewitz by emphasizing that war is the continuation of policy/politics, but deletes the second 'with other means' part of Clausewitz's sentence.

25 The 'between concept' in my approach stems from Plato and Aristotle, but also from Eric Voegelin and Hannah Arendt; see Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Lyotard und Hegel. Dialektik von Philosophie und Politik* (Vienna, Passagen, 2005), chapter one.

26 For Hegel see my article 'Clausewitz und Hegel. Ein heuristischer Vergleich' in: *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preußischen Geschichte*, Jahrgang 10, Heft 1/2000, pp. 49–84.

27 Hans Rothfels, *Politik und Krieg* (Berlin, 1992) Preface.