Article

Targeting the Ontology of War: From Clausewitz to Baudrillard

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Abstract

Against a surprising level of agreement between Clausewitz, contemporary military doctrines and critical war studies on an ontology of war as fighting, we suggest that the study of contemporary warfare needs to focus more on war as processing. Through Jean Baudrillard we argue that at least some of what is referred to as 'war' is no longer characterised by encounters through fighting. We exemplify our argument by how the repetitive battle-rhythm of military targeting strives for perfect war. What remains is not war as an object in itself, but a reified 'war' that obscures the disappearance of that very object. The debate on war contributes to the reification of such a war, as an imperative telling us: 'we have a concept, you must learn to think through it'.

Keywords

ontology of war, critical war studies, Baudrillard, disappearance, targeting, warfare, Clausewitz

Introduction

Recent debates emanating from critical war studies have prompted renewed academic attention to the question of what war *is* – the ontology of war.[1] Understanding ontology

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1. Such recent literatures include Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton, 'Powers of War: Fighting Knowledge, and Critique', *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 2 (2011): 126–43; Shane Brighton, 'War/Truth: Foucault, Heraclitus and the Hoplite Homer', *Cambridge Review of*

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to be 'not a foundation, but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into … discourse'[2] on war, we argue that these debates have involved a perhaps surprising level of agreement – between Clausewitz, contemporary military doctrines and large parts of critical war studies – on an ontology of war as fighting. When we observe something we call 'war' based on the assumption that we will see a particular kind of 'fighting' there, this risks making us blind to the way in which warfare has become a reiterative process which strictly speaking lacks antagonistic engagement with 'an enemy'. We suggest that military targeting exemplifies one such obscured ontic reality, and that reading it through Jean Baudrillard's notion of disappearance may shed new light on this and on the disconnect between the notion of war and warfare more broadly.[3]

In the first part of this article, we outline the apparent agreement between Clausewitz, contemporary military doctrines and critical war studies on war as antagonistic fighting, with recent emphasis on its generative aspect (a discussion particularly indebted to Michel Foucault and the notion of 'excess'). The second part draws on Jean Baudrillard to propose one alternative to the Clausewitzean account, where we see instead that the military effort to reach a 'perfect war' makes the underlying principles of war-as-fighting fade and disappear. In the third part we exemplify our argument by way of military targeting, which works according to a repetitive battle-rhythm that symbolically dissolves subjects and targets.[4] We argue that at least this one important process of warfare – military targeting

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     International Affairs, 26, no. 4 (2013): 651–68; Caroline Holmqvist, 'Undoing War: War Ontologies and the Materiality of Drone Warfare', *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 3 (2013): 535–52; Caroline Holmqvist, 'War, "Strategic Communication" and the Violence of Non-recognition', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 4 (2013): 631–50; Swati Parashar, 'What Wars and "War Bodies" Know about International Relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 4 (2013): 615–30; Christine Sylvester, *War as Experience: Contributions from International Relations and Feminist Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2013). These and other literatures now cluster under the label 'Critical War Studies'. However, the ontology under scrutiny in this paper is not, as we will show, confined to this fairly limited grouping.

2. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 189.

3. We employ a distinction between war as ontological and warfare as ontic in order to make a strategic separation between the 'nature' of war and warfare as a practice. For an example of how this distinction has been employed in relation to politics and the political, see Chantal Mouffe, *On The Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 8–9. We also refer to the specific ontology that we question in this article as 'war-as-fighting', which, we will argue, assumes a reciprocal and a generative aspect.

4. The targeting process discussed here is based on US and NATO documents. As such it is representative of most western regular militaries. We focus our discussion on the outline of targeting in *Allied Joint Publication 3.3 'Joint Air & Space Operations Doctrine'* (NATO PfP Unclassified, 2002), *Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.9* (US Air Force, 2006) and *Joint Publication 3-60 Joint Doctrine for Targeting* (2002) as they are the leading military manuals regarding targeting. However, as argued elsewhere, the Clausewitzian ontology has striking similarities to ontologies of war developed in other traditions, see Astrid H.M. Nordin, 'Radical Exoticism: Baudrillard and Others' Wars', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 11, no. 2 (2014).

– is no longer principally characterised by encounters through fighting. In the fourth part we thus suggest that it is not enough to see wars as generative fighting, but that the idea of 'war' works as an imperative to thought which tells us 'we have a concept, and you must learn to think through it'. This imperative forces us to measure disparate violent events through its lens and justifies its various incantations: enabling the soldier to understand his or her war experience as real, the voyeur to participate in it at a distance, and the theorist to study war as a legitimate object of knowledge. This article therefore does not propose a 'better' or more complete ontology, nor thinking beyond ontology. We point simply to how much recent discussion of the ontology of war falls back on the same principles, and that these assumptions about war may limit what we see. In examining disappearance, we suggest one way in which we may complement current debates in critical war studies and beyond.

The Ontology of War: From Clausewitz to Critical War Studies

In contemporary scholarship the phenomenon of 'war' appears in numerous guises: regular war, irregular war, high-intensity war, low-intensity war, civil war, guerrilla war, just war, virtual war, and so on. A significant proportion of these debates fall back on a notion of war as destructive and productive fighting. Commonly deployed illustrations of war include the wrestling match, the battle of wills, the game of chess, or the two armies clashing on the battlefield. As recent debates emerging from critical war studies have shown, these claims involve a reliance on an ontology of war which is rarely explicitly discussed and critically interrogated. This ontology has echoed in subsequent critical scholarship on war, and has recently been identified as well as proposed by Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton for a new 'critical war studies' discipline.[5] It rests on an understanding of war as an antagonistic and generative process with the power to undo and order political life. As such, its idea of war falls back on two guiding principles: that it contains an antagonistic exchange and that it contains an inherent potential for differentiation, which gives it a generative character.

These debates on the ontology of war draw directly on the work of Clausewitz, who places *fighting* at its centre. Clausewitz claims that fighting is as definitive for war as monetary exchange for economy.[6] He explicitly defines war as fighting, a duel with violence as its means. War is an act of politics, where the dictation of the law by one side to the other gives rise to 'a sort of reciprocal action'.[7] War always consists of hostile bodies and each has the same object – to force the other to submit.

Clausewitz's ontology of war is explicitly used in contemporary military doctrines. For example, the United States Army and United States Marine Corps' *FM 3-24* doctrine on counterinsurgency states that '[w]arfare remains a violent clash of interests between organized groups characterized by the use of force', and discusses war in terms of a

5. Barkawi and Brighton, 'Powers', 127.
6. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 97.
7. Ibid.

'contest' involving 'will'.[8] Similarly, the *JP 1 Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* explains war through quoting Clausewitz's *On War*:

> Clausewitz believed that war is a subset of the larger theory of conflict. He defined war as a 'duel on a larger scale,' 'an act of force to compel our enemy,' and a 'continuation of politics by other means.' Distilled to its essence, war is a violent struggle between two (or more) hostile and independent wills, each trying to impose itself on the other…. These observations remain true today and place a burden on the commander to remain responsive, versatile, and adaptive in real time to create and seize opportunities and reduce vulnerabilities.[9]

The ontology of war that is under discussion in this article, then, is explicitly involved in important military doctrine and justifications of contemporary warfare.

This ontology, and particularly Clausewitz's notion of war as fundamentally *reciprocal*, also echoes in contemporary scholarship. Traditionally war studies tends to ignore the ontology which supports its common claim that war is fighting between states, or asymmetric fighting between counter-insurgents and insurgents.[10] However, recent approaches look to war as directly related to ontology. What precisely constitutes the subjects or opponents that meet in war varies significantly between accounts. Deleuze and Guattari outline two irreducible forms – State and War machine – that perpetually interact.[11] Hardt and Negri write that 'all of the world's current armed conflicts … should be considered imperial civil wars, even when states are involved',[12] thus alluding to war as being acted out within a framework of Empire and local combatants. Schmittean ideas of politics build on the idea that politics involves an 'agon', which may clash with others in war.[13] To some, the exchange involved is primarily discursive and gives rise to war between cultural forms of identity.[14] Yet others emphasise an antagonistic exchange between military regulatory regimes and forms of counter-subjectivity.[15] The understanding of which type of formation, subject or agon constitutes the basis for the ontology of war thus varies. So does the understanding of which kind of violent meeting or exchange is involved. Nevertheless, there is broad agreement on the idea that war

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8. *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Boulder, CO: Paladin, 2006), 1-1; 1-9; 1-35.
9. *Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (2013), I: 3.
10. For examples, see James S. Corum, *Fighting the War on Terror* (St Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2007); David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003).
11. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 352, 360.
12. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 3.
13. Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'The Ontology of "Political Violence": Action and Identity in Civil Wars', *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (2003): 475–6.
14. David Campbell, *Politics without Principle: Sovereignty, Ethics and the Narratives of the Gulf War* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1993); Josef Teboho Ansorge, 'Spirits of War: A Field Manual', *International Political Sociology* 4, no. 4 (2010): 362–79.
15. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), 1–6, 79–81.

involves an implicit or explicit (re)production of opponents – subjects, discourses, spaces, agons – and an antagonistic exchange between them.

Today, the idea of war as involving some form of exchange lives on in war studies, including the literatures that have begun to cluster around the name 'critical war studies'.[16] Barkawi and Brighton have discussed the possibility of a specific discipline under such a name, and have outlined what they think a discipline of war studies should be concerned with. Barkawi and Brighton's discussion is strongly attached to the signifier war. In their suggestion of how to study 'war's fundamental properties', Barkawi and Brighton build directly and explicitly on Clausewitz's idea of war as fighting. To them, '[f]ighting is that which thematically unifies war in general and in particular – "war" with "wars" – and no ontology of war can exclude it'.[17]

However, what fighting actually *is* is not taken for granted by Barkawi and Brighton. To them '[c]learing the ground for a new ontology of war requires recognition that fighting understood instrumentally, as the Clausewitzean duel, the test of arms, as "kinetic exchange," misses its wider application and importance'.[18] Instead, they argue '[f]ighting marks the disruption of this wider order and the people and other entities which populate it, the unmaking and remaking of certainties, of meaning, of – potentially – the very coordinates of social and political life'.[19] In Barkawi and Brighton's account, as in a number of other accounts referred to above, conventional distinctions between agons of war – such as combatants and civilians – are thus destabilised. War and society are embroiled in mutually constitutive relations, thus there is an 'excess' or 'capacity of organized violence to be more than kinetic exchange, to be constitutive and generative'.[20] This excess at the core of their ontology of war gives war its status as an ontological event and a problematising framework, resulting in an ontology that avers to 'hold on to the ontological primacy of fighting, but wrest it from the instrumentality its historicity demands'.[21]

This excess of war, claim Barkawi and Brighton, gives war a generative character. It means that war 'shapes the social relations in which it is embedded' and 'is present beyond the war front and beyond wartime'.[22] The key to understanding war as generative goes via the Foucauldian insight that the struggle of fighting is in itself a productive force.[23] The notion of war as generative is also further developed by Brighton in a more recent article

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16. A couple of recent examples of scholarly activity organised around this term include the workshop 'Critical War Studies: Emerging Fields, Developing Agendas' held at the University of Sussex, 11 September 2013, and a special section on 'Critical War Studies' in the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 4 (2014), emanating in part from discussions of a research agenda around this term at the International Studies Association 2012 annual convention in San Diego.
17. Barkawi and Brighton, 'Powers', 135.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 136.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 132.
23. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 15–18. For a detailed discussion on Clausewitz, Foucault, Baudrillard and the relationship between war and politics see also Dan Öberg, 'Forget Clausewitz', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 11, no. 2 (2014).

when he draws upon Foucault to discuss how the 'brute economy of fighting' and 'war's constitutive powers' haunt political and social theory.[24] A (renewed) emphasis on this morphogenetic aspect that arises from the turbulence of warfare and its associated differentiation is also evident in the work of others. Manuel De Landa, Antoine Bousquet, Julian Reid and others see war as a material force that gives rise to chaos and order, destruction and creation, which help social formations self-organise, aggregate, reproduce and make various orders emerge.[25] To Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and Éric Alliez, war is constituted and challenged in a way that is generative in relation to social orders, something which in turn enables an asymmetric and violent exchange between Empire and attempts to challenge it.[26] On this view war is not an aggregate for self-organisation but rather a result of an 'ordering power' through an imperial framework. Nonetheless, this understanding of war also falls back on the idea that antagonistic exchange is enabled through differentiation, which in turn leads to genesis.

Whether this thinking was ever truly lacking in thought on war is debateable. What is clear is that this characteristic is emphasised in current critical war studies literatures, particularly in the argument that war and truth are mutually constitutive. What is more, Barkawi and Brighton argue that Clausewitz's understanding of fighting and subsequent efforts to rethink it provide resources to think war and knowledge in this manner. On their reading, the Clausewitzian idea of fighting forms the basis of war's 'generative powers' that stem from 'uncertainty and contingency on the battle field'.[27] The 'nature of war itself' is as 'an unmaker of truths'.[28] This in turn becomes generative of new and reorganised forms of knowledge.[29]

Thus, what has emerged in the discussions of a new critical war studies is a sense of agreement on the basic characteristics of an ontology of war. It spans thinking from Clausewitz to current military doctrine. Yet, it also invites us to critically question such ontological claims. Barkawi and Brighton have questioned what they take to be a common assumption that war is known. They take 'war' to possess 'social power as a destroyer and maker of truths'.[30] In what follows, we ask what 'war' as a signifier does to such 'truth', by way of its depiction as antagonistic and generative fighting. Could it be that the idea of war as 'fighting' evokes a 'reality of warfare' that makes us blind to other things in what we designate as 'war'? Could other underlying principles be identified in contrast to those based on the supposition that war is about fighting and antagonistic exchange? In

24. Brighton, 'War/Truth', 656, 665.
25. Antoine Bousquet, 'Chaoplexic Warfare or the Future of Military Organization', *International Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2008): 915–16; Manuel De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent machines* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 3–8, 11, 19; Julian Reid, 'Deleuze's War Machine: Nomadism against the State', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 32, no. 1 (2003): 57.
26. Éric Alliez and Antonio Negri, 'Peace and War', *Theory, Culture and Society* 20, no. 2 (2003): 111, 116; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 30–2.
27. Barkawi and Brighton, 'Powers', 127.
28. Ibid., 133.
29. Ibid., 127.
30. Ibid.

what follows we draw on Baudrillard's notion of disappearance to outline an alternative understanding of war and illustrate this argument with regards to the processing of targets and the concept of warfare.

From an Ontology of War to its Disappearance

It is possible, then, to identify a surprising level of agreement about the ontology of war. Despite this, we need to return to Judith Butler's urging that we think of ontology as a normative injunction. Barkawi and Brighton discuss *the* ontology, or *the* nature of war in a way which risks making of it something unitary (they indeed at times lament the lack of 'enabling coherence' in the debate on war's ontology).[31] However, as Caroline Holmqvist points out there are critical ontolo*gies* of war. Holmqvist outlines how war's ontology (if there is such a thing) might find resonance in debates on materialist ontologies, bodies and experience.[32] We want to emphasise that our point here is not that Barkawi and Brighton write of war's generative aspect as the 'be all and end all' of the ontology of war – they do not. We simply highlight here that we benefit from thinking war through the notion of plural 'ontologies' as it keeps open the question of what underlying principles relate to war and warfare.

   Emphasis on the particular ontology of war-as-fighting is a cause for concern, and there are indeed other 'ontologies of war'. The most important alternative arguably stems from feminist theorists, such as Christine Sylvester who understands war as experience. For Sylvester, we need to view war through the way it is experienced by people, and she urges us to take this experience as a starting point for studying war.[33] Drawing on the work of Butler and Elaine Scarry among others, she argues that war signs have 'intensified rather than diminished social connections between friends and foes'[34] and that war is best understood through focusing on injury.[35] Along similar lines, the research on the relationship between the body and war is vast and points to important connections between how the body is represented and the way warfare is acted out.[36] For example, Victoria Basham has noticed that wars have made possible (as well as require) gendered and racialised representations of bodies (by, for example, the military). The potential for representation in 'war-bodies' points to the important insight that war is being enacted and embodied by the military in various ways. [37]

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31. Ibid., 133–4.
32. Holmqvist, 'War, "Strategic Communication"', pp. 645–8.
33. Christine Sylvester, *War as Experience*, 1–2, 65.
34. Ibid., 50.
35. Ibid., 11.
36. A vast range of literature (most notably feminist research) deals with the body and embodiment in war from various perspectives. For an extended list of this literature see Kevin McSorley (ed.), *War and the Body: Militarization, Practice and Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 26–7, n. 17. McSorley's book deals explicitly with the ontology of war as an embodied experience as he urges us to pay attention to the specifics of 'how war is embodied and experienced through all constituencies…' (ibid., 12). At face value it might seem as if we disagree with this. However, our point is not that wars are not embodied but that the processing of war forces it to disappear symbolically (thus emphasising its *dis*embodiment).
37. Victoria Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal state* (London: Routledge, 2013), 86–8, 140; see also Parashar, 'What Wars and "War Bodies" Know', 619.

These accounts raise further questions regarding what kind of experience war is. Are there processes of warfare through which experiences of injury are made to appear distant and irrelevant, much like what happens through the often noted 'sanitising' language of war?[38] If so, how do we make sense of these? Could warfare (and particularly military planning and conduct) be said to allocate, manage and manufacture such experience? What does the process of war do to human agency? Might the feminist emphasis on war as 'intensified social relations', like Clausewitz's 'exchange between subjects', make it difficult to fathom a kind of war in which there strictly speaking is no 'foe'? Where Sylvester, Basham and others indicate that we should take bodies as the contested entities and frameworks for an understanding of war,[39] we ask if warfare may manage bodies and experiences in ways that reduce them to particular processes of war. Could such processes also be considered the framework and entities for experience? With these questions in mind we read Baudrillard below, in order to introduce an understanding of war based on disappearance caused by warfare.

In Baudrillard's notorious critique of the Gulf war he identifies traditional conceptions of war as involving the ontology we have seen in critical war studies and contemporary military doctrine: 'war is born of an antagonistic, destructive but dual relation between two adversaries'.[40] However, he argues, if this is war, then there is no war taking place in the Gulf. One important but hereto neglected reason for this argument is Baudrillard's claim that war has disappeared into the *processing* of warfare. Baudrillard never fully developed this discussion, but he wrote extensively on the subject from a general perspective in his final works. Therein Baudrillard points to the way subjectivity disappears in operational processing as part of the attempt to fulfil and perfect potential.[41] Baudrillard sees subjectivity becoming a subordinated part of technological media, 'a perfectly operational molecule that is left to its own devices and doomed to … reproduce, self-identically, to infinity'.[42] In his view, we are faced with a situation in which subjectivity, social relations and will are essentially liquidated by operational practices. They are not supplanted by a higher will or a higher purpose. Rather, they vanish into processing entirely devoid of symbolic meaning.

This indicates that it is not physical disappearance Baudrillard discusses, but disappearance which strictly relates to the symbolic. Baudrillard on numerous occasions illustrated this idea through Alfred Jarry's novel *The Supermale*, which tells a story of how automated processing dissolves limits between man and technology. The apex of the story is a 10,000-mile bicycle race – the perpetual motion race – which takes place

38. For discussion of such sanitisation, see for example Holmqvist, 'War, "Strategic Communication"', 631–50; D. Bolinger, *Language – the Loaded Weapon: The Use and Abuse of Language Today* (London: Longman, 1980); M.B. Smith, 'The Metaphor (and Fact) of War', *Peace and Conflict* 8, no. 3 (2002): 249–58.
39. Christine Sylvester, *War as Experience*, 79.
40. Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 62.
41. Jean Baudrillard, *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* (Calcutta: Seagulls Books, 2009), 12–15.
42. Jean Baudrillard, *Passwords* (London: Verso, 2003), 67–8.

between a five-man bicycle and an express train. In the race the cyclists function as a collaborative machine to challenge the train over long distance. The cyclists reach a speed that enables them to ride side by side with the locomotive – to become limitless automatons in the rhythm of the machine. This becoming comes at a price, since the cyclists gradually disappear as humans, as they reach the speed of the train. One of them disappears quite literally as he dies on his post. However, his decomposing corpse, strapped to the bicycle, pedals on. The corpse stands as a symbolic marker for how the rest of the bodies also disappear by being absorbed into the process itself. In the end, the five-man machine rides alongside the train with the living and dead corpses riding at maximum speed in order to keep up. This theme, of transformation of man into machine, is also evident in the rest of the novel, which ends with its key figure dying while transforming into a machine.[43]

As Rex Butler points out, the novel helps to draw up the:

> [V]ision of a society in … which humans are unnecessary. We see this vision coming true in those self-enclosed and self-perpetuating systems of simulation that Baudrillard analyses, which have no outside and no need to be explained by an other, and whose best model would be the bicycle proposed by Alfred Jarry, which still continues to pedal long after its riders have passed away with fatigue.[44]

The image Jarry paints in the novel illustrates the symbolic disappearance of subjectivity by emphasising the repetitive and inherently meaningless relationship we have with various media that surround us. The attempt to reach a perfect speed and efficiency by way of the mechanic process works back on subjectivity.

It is not far-fetched to see the recent conceptual inventions in military thought, such as the Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO), Comprehensive Approach (CA), or Network Centric Warfare (NCW), as part of the characteristic that Baudrillard is concerned with and Jarry's novel illustrates. The common denominator of these concepts is the way they attempt to synchronise, coordinate, and make warfare more efficient through staff procedures. They are all based on the idea that perfect operationalisation generates a war in which all means and capabilities are interconnected in ways that aim to create a seamless economy of violence. This in turn indicates that the subject of warfare dissolves into operationalised repetition. Such an argument does not entail that militaries, insurgents, weapon-systems, logistical capacities and so forth are disappearing on a material level. Rather, as part of a symbolic disappearance through the fulfilments of technological processes, warfare strives towards perfection and symbolic aspects disappear through a model which is being operationalised *as if it is war*. This should not be taken to mean that there is an end to violence or suffering. There is of course bodily violence and death in military operations despite the attempt to fulfil wars' every potential through repeated calls for 'high-precision munition' and 'zero-death warfare'.

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43. Alfred Jarry, *The Supermale* (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2009), 49–71, 140–1.
44. Rex Butler, 'Commentaries on Baudrillard's "On Disappearance"', in *Jean Baudrillard: Fatal Theories*, eds David B. Clarke et al. (London: Routledge, 2009), 31.

However, processing and repetition also participate in making the representation of bodies and subjects disappear in operationalisation.

The concern here is that focusing on the violence displayed in war-as-fighting might obscure a systemic violence which stems from the way in which war is operationalised. Baudrillard argues that the type of violence the military normally battles (such as terrorism) is far less lethal than the violence which replaces the subject with the will of an operational and technocratic structure.[45] What we have, then, is a certain kind of disappearance which is obscured by (among other things) the focus on war as violent exchange between subjects.

How do we go from the ontology of war as generative to an ontology of war as disappearance? To understand the transition it is helpful to return to the idea that war is considered generative as it *exceeds* social orders. Albeit helpful in order to understand war's excess in terms of productivity it is also possible to understand excess differently, as a force of disappearance. Baudrillard argues that social reality disappears not because of a lack, but rather because of excess, arguing precisely that wars fought by the US tend to be 'wars of excess'.[46] One under-analysed aspect of the ontology of war is therefore the way in which the excess it gives rise to is not simply generative of appearances, but in turn forces disappearances. If we complement the generative notion of war's excess with Baudrillard's argument that excess is in and of itself a cause of disappearance, we can appreciate that the ontology of war might at times be generative, and at times erase the preconditions for appearance. On one hand it is correct that bodies, experience or materiality frame our understanding of war by generating narratives. On the other it is important to acknowledge that subjectivity disappears through the excess of the processes themselves. Through such an acknowledgement we can see that warfare conditions the possibility of appearance as it 'always, already' works as a process of disappearance. Arguably targeting is a prime example of the latter.

Although Baudrillard highlights technology as integral to the effect of war's disappearance into process, he does not dwell on the exact mechanisms it entails. This is a task that we therefore undertake here. The next part examines the military targeting process as one example of the attempt to create the perfect war. This process creates 'an iterative logical methodology for development, planning, execution, and assessment of effectiveness'.[47] In what follows, we examine how this methodology works to rid war of its underlying principles: subjectivity, antagonism and exchange.

Target Processing and the Disappearance of War

How are we to interpret targeting doctrines? As Josef Teboho Ansorge argues, military doctrine has a particular form of arrangement, which helps to 'both describe and make the world'.[48] Doctrinal text relies heavily on abbreviations and contains an impersonal

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45.   Jean Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 83–4.
46.   Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2000), 65–6; *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, 33.
47.   *JP 3-60*, I:5.
48.   Ansorge, 'Spirits', 362.

and administrative language. It is as if the potential for symbolism – for the text to mean more than itself – has been subtracted from the paragraphs in favour of Orwellian 'new-speak'. We might say that military doctrines not only make a world appear, but also dissolve meaning and are therefore acts of disappearance. We can also read the charts, appendices, images, power-point slides, meeting protocols and organisational routines as part of this disappearance. One amusing example is the well-known and extremely intricate 'Afghanistan Stability/COIN dynamics' slide (also called 'the sprawling spaghetti diagram') which went viral in 2010.[49] This slide was supposed to convey meaning about how to 'win' the war in Afghanistan. The flow chart listed pretty much every targetable process relating to irregular warfare as part of this attempt. While it utterly failed to make the conflict meaningful (despite its excess of meaning) it succeeded, by virtue of becoming an overexposed internet joke, to obscure the fact that war-as-fighting, or *war as such*, had long since disappeared from Afghanistan.

A common conception of targeting processes is that they are related to the operational level of warfare (linking tactical with strategic and political aims). As such they are an integral part of how warfare aims to translate strategic aims into tactical effects (and *vice versa*). Military doctrine represents targeting as the process of selecting and prioritising targets and matching actions in order to achieve strategic objectives.[50] The purpose of targeting is therefore to 'provide the commander with a methodology' and 'a logical progression'.[51] This is done by virtue of constructing targets, conceptualising them as a system, linking them to outcomes as part of synchronising other parts of military operations, and by creating organisational routines – all with the aim of supporting the 'battle-rhythm'.[52] Technically speaking, a battle-rhythm can be understood as 'the combination … of procedures, processes … and … actions' which 'facilitates extended-continuous operations'.[53] Taken to its limit, this implies heeding the tempo of the operational process regardless of human subjectivity (just like the bike-train in Jarry's novel). In the doctrines, effective targeting is measured by how well it facilitates operational planning and chosen objectives in an area of operations.[54] Importantly, it is also measured by how well it enables a particular tempo during operations. Consequently, targeting *ideally* strives towards maximum efficiency according to the model constructed in operational planning, while agency disappears in the search for a perfect process.

If we look closely at the underlying principles of targeting we notice that they do not emphasise adversaries, exchange or antagonism, but focus on how to perfect the model of warfare. We read in *JP 3-60* that key principles are: coordination and synchronisation, rapid response, a minimal duplication of effort, expeditious assessments of executed

49. See http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1269463/Afghanistan-PowerPoint-slide-Generals-left-baffled-PowerPoint-slide.html (accessed 2 September 2013).
50. *AJP 3.3*, 506; *AFDD 2-1.9*, 1.
51. *JP 3-60*, I-1.
52. Despina Tramoundanis, *Australian Air Power in Joint Operations* (Canberra: Air Power Studies Centre, 1995). See also the doctrinal definitions of targeting in *AJP 3.3* and *JP 3-60*.
53. Gene C. Camena, 'The Dying Art of Battle-rhythm', in http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/call/call_99-3_chap5.htm.
54. *JP 3-60*, v.

operations, a common perspective on targeting efforts, and a full integration of capabilities of the process. This means that targeting provides a cycle to describe how warfare should be conducted.[55] This cycle is on the one hand indicative of a methodology of contemporary warfare, and the actualisation of a model that makes war a type of processing *ad infinitum*. War gets its own (battle) rhythm, which territorialises a space (the area of operations) and the pace of the operation (into current time and future time). This creates a reality-principle which helps us appreciate that the war conducted is a modelled, repeatable war. It is dispersed into an enormous amount of operational meetings, power-points, steering groups and so forth.

On the other hand, we can read targeting as a subtraction of meaning which pulverises subjectivity through attempted perfection. On a symbolic level there is no 'warrior' in this warfare. Granted, the doctrines often invoke subjects such as 'the warfighter' or 'the targeteer' as those who are supposed to decide upon, detect, deliver effects of, and assess the targeting process.[56] However, the 'agent' here is the medium itself which helps to reduce each aspect of subjectivity into fractal, self-identical molecules which merely mirror functions of the process. This is not to say that individuals are absent from targeting. The nomination and approval of potential targets is a process that involves not only the military but also politicians, lawyers, political advisors, gender advisors and environmental advisors, to mention but a few. It also involves a number of boards (such as the Joint Target Coordination Board, Joint Target Working Groups), lists (Target Nomination List, Joint Integrated Prioritized Target List), and support cells (Target Support Cell, Information Operation Cell), all involving complex meeting schedules. Not to mention what the doctrine aptly calls 'the myriad processes, sub-processes, and cycles associated with joint targeting'.[57] Through these, target-processing proclaims to be concerned with means and ends, thus linking tactics to politics and creating a seamless economy of violence. What it really accomplishes is to make subjectivity disappear in the excess of the process itself.

Judith Butler argues in *Frames of War* that:

> Surely, common sense tells us that persons wage war, not the instruments they deploy. But what happens if the instruments acquire their own agency, such that persons become extensions of those instruments?… persons use technological instruments, but instruments surely also use persons (position them, endow them with perspective, and establish the trajectory of their action).[58]

We similarly ask what happens when the process of warfare as such acquires its own momentum, uses persons, and forms and erases subjectivity. In short, what happens when the process becomes not only the means but also the end-point of war? Importantly, if the subject is disappearing in repetitive excess, what happens to the enemy Other?

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55. *JP 3-60*, I-2, II-1.
56. *AFDD 2-1.9*, 20, 32 for reference to 'targeteer' and 3, 57, 77 for reference to 'warfighter'. For a discussion of the 'D3A methodology' (decide, detect, deliver, assess) as part of targeting procedures, see *JP 3-60*, Appendix C-2.
57. *JP 3-60*, Appendix C-1.
58. Butler, *Frames*, x, xii.

As *JP 3-60* states no target is critical in and of itself. A target is measured only by how it is part of target-sets, target-systems or matrices.[59] However, on a symbolic level, a target is nothing but a 'target folder'. This folder contains mainly a classification code, a name, coordinates, photograph and information on which weapons are suitable for usage. Since a target in the doctrines is 'an area, complex, installation, force, equipment, capability, function or behaviour identified for possible action'[60] the process subsumes all possible things as targets: subjects, objects, ideas, emotions, networks.[61] Therefore, although targeting involves violence it does so not as exchange, or as symbolic appearance, but rather as an inclusion of 'targetable' objects. Targets depend on the targeting procedure itself, as it processes objects through meetings, nominations, and documents into the end-point of a spreadsheet. In this sense the target is a result of a medium that erases the very conditions of its appearance and forces it symbolically and literally to disappear as object.

As targets are nominated by a number of organisational sub-components (such as tactical army, navy or air force staff) one integral aspect is to keep up with the pace of operations. Low-ranking commanders typically need to nominate targets in order to keep up with the battle-rhythm. Processing demands an excess of targets (which is also an excess of disappearances), enough so that the medium is saturated, which occurs at meetings when the spreadsheets are full and nothing more can be acted upon. In fact, the doctrines explicitly state that there will always be more targets in an area of operations than it is possible to destroy.[62] As Peter Row puts it (with regards to the NATO bombings in Kosovo): '[t]he reality of the situation is that those objects which military commanders wished to attack, for whatever reason, were attacked'.[63] The milieu of warfare is in this sense very much a derivative of its process as a military methodology. However, the methodology includes all manner of things as targets, and their disappearance has less to do with wishing destruction (as Row claims) and more to do with the way antagonistic exchange is supplanted for the repetition of war as a process.

How are we to understand the temporal aspects of such targeting processes? We have argued that subjects disappear in the 'battle-rhythm'. If we look closely at the temporal aspects of targeting we find that it involves planned aspects and dynamic-real time aspects.[64] What are we to make of this? Planned targeting is strictly speaking taking place from the future. The organisational routine projects a number of days into the future. Operational warfare does not take place merely in real-time but also in future time. In the processing of targets the meetings occur on 'D+3' or 'D+6'. It is one aspect of what we might call operational time, where the present moment is appropriated by the vantage point of a modelled future. In this modelling the possibility of a human

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59. *JP 3-60*, II-4, I-2.
60. *JP 3-60*, I:2.
61. *JP 3-60*, C-3.
62. *JP 3-60*, 1:2-1.3.
63. Peter Row quoted in Catherine Wallis, 'Legitimate Targets of Attack: Considerations When Targeting in a Coalition', *Army Lawyer*, December (2004): 48.
64. All targeting is subsumable into these two temporal categories although the exact names might vary (*AJP 3.3, JP 3-60* and *AFDD 2-1.9* all deal extensively with this issue).

encounter in the here-now disappears, since 'now' has been pre-planned days earlier. Dynamic (or time-sensitive) targeting on the other hand is war in real-time from an instantaneous present. This process helps to follow and take out targets in real-time as a complement to pre-planned targeting. This is a costly and difficult part of targeting. The doctrines lament that so few targets can be followed in real-time: 'not all targets can be tracked constantly due to limited resources'.[65] This arguably complements an operational time that contains both an appropriated future and an instantaneous present. Finally, both aspects of targeting – pre-planned and dynamic – end up in delivery through a type of (weapon) system. This delivery needs to be extremely high paced – preferably immediate. Former United States Under-Secretary of Defence William Perry sums up this principle: 'as soon as you can see the target, you can expect to destroy it'.[66] And indeed, a missile is absent until it hits the target. It appears only to disappear and to make the world around it disappear in turn.

Thus, the temporal aspect of targeting can be understood as a disappearance of encounters. Operational warfare does not work as an antagonistic exchange between two opposing subjects, at least not from the perspective of the system generating these targeting strategies. Exchange and encounters disappear into the real-time of dynamic targeting and in the future instant of pre-planned targeting. The same happens to the experiences, bodies or narratives introduced as a basis for a different ontology of war. Targeting as a method and as part of war at a distance makes encounters impossible. In this type of predetermined battle-rhythm, where the military duty is to attend and facilitate this process, target nomination becomes repetitive and mandatory. This means that the battle-rhythm works as a 'processor' that grinds out targets and applies not so much means to ends, but rather the process itself as an end. It is a kind of war 'so predicted, programmed, anticipated, prescribed and modelled that it has exhausted all its possibilities before even taking place'.[67] Just like Jarry's five-man machine had to keep pace with the rhythm of the machine, so does the tandem of soldiers need to keep pace with the battle-rhythm in operational planning. The repetitive procedures force a certain reality around war to disappear. This aspect of disappearance is evident in the way targeting involves a particular repetition, which develops target packages, nominates targets, and tasks and weaponeers against those targets.

What happens when we take this logic to its end-point? As we have seen, targeting implies that everything in an 'area of operations' is a possible target, and any area is a possible area of operations. Moreover, not all targets are possible to track due to limited resources – but ideally all targets are possible to track at all times. There is no agent left in this procedure, as it is replaced by the momentum of the targeting process itself. Subsequently, a target is not the Other of the pulverised subject or of the targeting process – but a folder corresponding to something which is destroyed as it appears. There will always be more targets than it is possible to destroy. The process aims to pre-plan them all into folders. Ideally they can all be destroyed. In short, symbolically, every subject, object or exchange is

65. *JP 3-60*, C-3.
66. In Paul Virilio, *Lost Dimension* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 130.
67. Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 130.

potentially gone from the (global) area of operations – lost in the rhythm and scope that appropriates them. When this is achievable in a seamless process – efficient, synchronised, integrated – by virtue of operational modelling, we have reached the perfect war.

The War that Remains

We have argued to this point that critical war studies, in Clausewitz's footsteps, is emerging as a field of study that is strongly attached to a particular ontology of 'war'.

We have also argued, however, that contemporary warfare (particularly in NATO countries) can alternatively be understood, not through the type of 'war' their ontology implies (war-as-fighting), but rather through various operational procedures. Our point has been to suggest that there is little or no symbolism left in a warfare which processes targets as spreadsheets, target packages and tasking-orders, through a predetermined rhythm of meetings which leads it, not to a battlefield, but to an administrative model. This model finds its ontology in Baudrillard rather than in Clausewitz. Through military operations we move from war as antagonistic exchange between subjects, to war as technical realisation. The race between targeting process and battle-rhythm resolves subjectivity, the Other and symbolic exchange through the repetition of operational procedures. This is not an example of war-as-fighting, but the enactment of a pre-planned script. This characteristic is by no means exclusive to the targeting process; rather it is indicative of how military planning is conducted in most NATO countries. It is therefore crucial to think of disappearance – enabled and exacerbated by the way warfare is infinitely repeated – as an integral part of thinking about an ontology of war.

However, if target-processing and associated ways of operationalising warfare is making war in the Clausewitzean sense disappear, then why is warfare made to appear as fighting? We are constantly immersed in 'war' through television, art, computer games, military recruiting campaigns, and arms industry projects. They call forth 'war' as antagonistic and generative exchange. Consider the (simulated) fighting between warriors in the stream of screenings that includes *Spartacus, 300, Troy, Braveheart, Apocalypto*, or *The Last Samurai*. Computer games centred on war and politics – *Civilization, Hearts of Iron, Total War* – unfold through the idea that war is a struggle between antagonistic forms of political life. Andreas Behnke argues (correctly in our view) that the Western notion of war has lost its ontological grounding. He reads this as part of a paradox since despite its loss, warfare needs to be aestheticised and legitimised 'beyond the purely instrumental'.[68] The explanation for why this is the case often lies precisely in the way representation helps to reinforce and militarise society, as it justifies a liberal world order.[69] Arguably, this explanation eschews the prior question of why the study of war needs to imagine an antagonistic and generative war in the first place. What does the idea

68. Andreas Behnke, 'The Re-enchantment of War in Popular Culture', *Millennium: Journal of International studies* 34, no. 3 (2006): 937.

69. See for example Paul Virilio, 'Aliens', in *Incorporations*, eds Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992), 446; and Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), 15–16.

that war is antagonistic and generative obscure? Or put more crudely, who gains from reifying war as 'war', or war-as-fighting?

As an attempt to answer this we complement the prior explanation by suggesting that recent theories of 'war' have underplayed the way in which operational warfare is also, in and of itself, an act of disappearance. In doing so, they overemphasise genesis at the expense of disappearance, and obscure the loss of exchange and subjectivity from the 'war' they claim to depict, at the same time as they feed from its reification as such. This 'war' allows NATO's member countries to send out war correspondents in body armour and helmets; to give first person shooters like *Battlefield* enough status as reality; to give movies like *Hurt-locker*, television dramas like *Generation Kill*, and documentaries like *Armadillo* their necessary ontological back-drop. Moreover, it is there to allow for spending vertiginous amounts of money on recruitment, arms production, government transitions, advertising, aid, education and – last but not least – military operations and target-processing. Crucially, 'war' is there to allow the researcher to study war in peace. All of us who feed from this are part of an extreme reification of war – which hides not only that 'war' may have ceased to be a meaningful term which structures reality, but also that these renditions of war is the closest we have to 'war' as it is described by Clausewitz. The ontology of war debates in which we engage are therefore part of this reification of war.

In this way, the distinction between an act of warfare and the attempt to understand wars' underlying principles is lost through the notion of war-as-fighting. Every attempt to wage war or think war in its own right (or to oppose or neglect war for that matter) refers back to this loss of meaning and distinction. Understood in this way, the focus of research on the ontology of war or on better understanding 'war' as an object (to make it appear as meaningful), also bestows a reality to the attempts to deal with war. The question of whether the notion of war as antagonistic and generative exchange is *real* is therefore not the issue, as any ontology of war risks this type of reification. Rather, we should ask why it might seem so costly to leave this particular ontology behind. Could it be because the various ways of grappling with war's ontology are active parts of how this reality remains intact?

Should we (and could we) forget the reality of 'war'? Moreover, is a world without referents like 'war' a world with less violence? No, says Baudrillard, it is not: '[t]he immanence of the death of all the great referents … is expressed by exacerbating the forms of violence and representation that characterized them'.[70] This helps us understand why, paradoxically, in an era in which war-as-fighting has disappeared, we all speak about it, analyse it, play it on our computers and experience it through books and films – and why a calling for war studies is a logical step in the disappearance of war-as-fighting. This argument could be directed against other disciplines too – 'war' is not a privileged object in any respect. Nonetheless, to call for a renewed discipline of 'war studies' – encouraging as it may be, especially to all of us who receive research funding based on the existence of such a discipline – is therefore not without problems. It is not so much a call for an understanding of war as it is a call to supplant the absence of war

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70. Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1987), 61.

in International Relations with a particular categorical blindness, since strictly speaking *war is never there*. Rather, it provides a 'simulation of perspective' as Baudrillard would call it.[71] The problem is that the organised violence to which we constantly refer has no other reality than that of the model.[72] That is, it has no other reality than the reality provided by representations of war (which is not to say that they are one and the same). Through this simulation, war returns as an imperative to thought. It is an explanation or an understanding *through* a particular category ('war') and not *of* a state of things (actions, reactions, challenges, automatism, repetition, processing). 'War' works as an imperative:

> 'You've got a military and you must learn how to use it well'
> 'You've got a weapon-system and you must learn how to operate it'
> 'You've got a target and you must learn how to task it'
> 'You've got an ontology of war and you must learn how to think through it.'[73]

Conclusion

War is understood in recent debates on critical war studies as characterised by antagonistic and generative exchange. This amounts to a view in which 'war' helps provide a context in which acts of violence become meaningful. They receive a pattern, reciprocity and a 'natural' demarcation that can be named and criticised. This article has argued that contemporary understandings of war and warfare are well advised to find new ontolog*ies* complementing the notion that war is fighting. We have presented one such attempt, resonating with Baudrillard's notion of war-processing, based on an analysis of the planning and conduct of military operations (in NATO countries). This attempt outlines how warfare strives towards its own 'perfect' and self-referential model. We illustrate this through an analysis of military targeting so as to point to how warfare becomes a reiterative and automated process which constructs a seamless economy of violence. We read targeting as a perpetual motion to keep up with the battle-rhythm of military operations and argue that it rids what is termed 'war' of its underlying principles: adversaries, antagonism and exchange.

An understanding of war which neglects this aspect risks missing that war (as processing) strictly speaking lacks an antagonistic engagement with 'an enemy' and in so doing calls into question many of the underlying principles that the notion of war-as-fighting rests upon. Doing so leaves the theorist of war and IR with a blind spot: the conception of 'war' that has become operational while being obscured by the reification of 'war' as fighting. Barkawi and Brighton associate the absence of a discipline of war studies with an 'othering of violence from inquiry'.[74] We again state explicitly, therefore, that we are not advocating the continuation of such othering. To say that war as

71. Ibid., 41.
72. Ibid., 25.
73. Cf. Ibid., 24.
74. Barkawi and Brighton, 'Powers', 128.

processing lacks antagonism is not to say that it lacks violence. Warfare is a highly violent practice but it seems to occur amidst a breakdown of symbolic relations between a subject and an Other. This would point to acts of insurgency or terror being ways of acting out, rather than a response as such.[75] The 'perfect war' we have described is highly violent indeed – but that does not make it 'fighting'.

This is not to say that war should be reduced to an automated process between man and machine. Rather we want to point out that war-as-fighting neglects the way in which subjectivity, symbolism and exchange are often lacking in military targeting – something which needs to be considered if we are to better understand the relationship between the ontic realty of warfare and the ontology of war. In light of our argument, the ontology of war can be read not only as a way of thinking 'war' but also as an imperative to thought. We are aware that this imperative does not work through simple causality. The targeting doctrines we have looked at are not representative of all warfare. A task for future research would be to contrast it to, for example, the way 'insurgents' or 'civilians' subjected to military violence represent warfare. Another would be to examine disappearance in the wider contexts of counter-insurgency and network-centric warfare.

Nevertheless, there is a risk that (critical) war studies in invoking the ontology of war-as-fighting is led back to an antagonistic and generative exchange between subjects – whether this is actually taking place or not. Attempts to think of politics, ethics, security or gender risk being forced through the mould of this particular ontology of war. Following Baudrillard, an attempt to rethink and complement the ontology of war should challenge it in a way that forces its 'truth to withdraw – just as if one were pulling the chair out from under someone about to sit down'.[76] We therefore need to think war in a way that pulls the chair out from underneath the gamer, policy maker, military officer or theorist about to sit down to 'do war'. What does this act of 'pulling the chair' from underneath thought leave us with? Our hope is that it opens up for the possibility of rethinking ontologies of war in a fashion that helps us better understand and challenge their relationship to various ontic realities. Taking this question seriously gives us a new vantage point on (critical) war studies for future debates.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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75. See Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2002), 7; *Screened Out* (London: Verso: 2002), 102.
76. Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1988), 101.

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