War, Violence and the Modern Condition

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War, Violence and the Modern Condition

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I.

The twentieth century opened with the first modern war which killed almost ten million, experienced another world war, the Holocaust and other genocides, the explosion of nuclear bombs and the ensuing fear of holocide, forty years of a dubious peace for which it coined the term 'cold war', and after this period of warfare without military battles finally came to an end, it is marred by an unprecedented omnipresence of violence in wars, civil wars and civil societies. There can be little doubt that this century was characterized by an extraordinary presence of violence. However, surprisingly little theorization has been devoted to violence. Throughout the history of philosophy and political and social theory, the concept of violence has rarely attracted attention commensurate with its importance and has often been discussed only implicitly under concepts such as 'war', 'state', 'city', 'power' or 'civilization'. In the history of the European literature from Homer onwards, violence has been addressed prominently, its abstract and even fleeting character leading, however, to representations through concrete images, constellations of characters and scenes. It was only during the twentieth century, and in particular with the rise of abstraction, that codes and specific aesthetic techniques have emerged which can be interpreted as representations of violence. Apart from few precursors such as Kleist, Georg Büchner or the late Beethoven, it was not before the turn of this century that literature, arts and music changed perception and aesthetic representation by redefining violence as their integral element. A new awareness of a hitherto unknown 'violence of representation' emerged.[1] Ex-

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1   Cf. Armstrong and Tennenhouse, ed.: *The Violence of Representation*.

perimental psychology and theories of perception developed in the school of Empirico-criticism were instrumental in developing techniques of experimentation, categories and approaches for observing and theorizing the violent nature of perception and the artistic process. Radical changes in the structure of modern literature, the arts and music can be attributed to a changing attitude towards violence which was no longer understood in terms of individual acts of deviant behavior but as a constitutive element of the very process of constructing and relating to reality under conditions of modern Western civilization. The experience of the First World War was paradigmatic for this change in the mentality of the West. Strong and continued attempts notwithstanding, the experience of this war could no longer be integrated in traditional patterns of creating meaning through ideals of heroism and identification with the nation. Instead, it generated a new consciousness and lasting memory of the destructiveness of modern technology and civilization which can be observed at the center of the contradictory relationship to violence characteristic of the century. It was this turning point in the definition of Western civilization in terms of philosophical and anthropological conditions rather than the end of heroism or questions in relation to the nation state or morality and war guilt which made this war paradigmatic for, and for some witnesses indeed identical with, the experience of a crisis of Western civilization.

The contrast between an under-theorization in relation to violence and the significance of violence for the construction of social reality is particularly noteworthy in a century in which war and various forms of open and concealed violence have affected so many millions of lives and shaped collective memory as never before and in which, it can be argued, an unprecedented outburst of violence, namely the First World War, led to the creation of a global collective memory. It is even more surprising to note the continuation of the common faith, originating during the eighteenth century, in modern civil society's incompatibility with violence. It is one of the disturbing experiences of this century that the line dividing war and peace has been blurred beyond recognition and civil society does not lead to the eradication of but continues to co-exist with violence. Yet, despite the ever more threatening presence of violence in the worlds of both physical and emotional experiences and their representations, there is evidence that Western civilization continues to perceive itself in terms of one of its foundation myths which tells a story concerning the intertwining of a process of rationalization and the abolition of violence, of progressing civility and peace. The vision that Western civilization continues to project of itself as one concerned with creating conditions for the emergence of a world free from war and violence is at variance with its own collective memory and continued political and cultural practices. It is the

obsequious maintenance of this self image, it can be argued, which has become one of the major obstacles for the development of more effective and rational approaches towards the persistent problem of war and violence under conditions of the modern world. It is an injudicious image of self that can be interpreted as the precondition for the many ill-conceived attempts to fight violence with violence and create peace through increased armament. The USA, at present arguably the most violent and militaristic among the industrialized western societies and obsessed with ever more graphic representations of violence and brutality,[2] is at the same time guided by the belief that its domestic and international policies are making a major contribution to the creation of a future free from wars and violence. Its collective consciousness is in the firm grip of the image of modern western civilization en route to its ultimate destination and therefore considers violence a legitimate means to protect itself from its adversaries. More guns, more military actions, more police and more prisons are therefore not perceived as contradictions but rather as contributions to achieving the propagated objective of a world of peace and justice.

Representations, in words and images, of violence in the families, at the work place, in the cities or between religious or ethnic groups as well as the violence between states in other parts of the world from Bosnia to Argentina provide striking examples of resistance against an insight into the violent nature of modernity. Dominant practices of representing violence and destruction are characterized by *techniques of relegation*. It is the other both spatially and temporally where illegiti mate violence and senseless destruction can be observed. It is this technique of relegation which makes it possible to perceive one's own world as a sphere where violence and destruction are exceptions to the rule of the otherwise peaceful and rational reality. Banishing violence to a contained sphere separated from one's own is a prerequisite for maintaining the cherished image of modernity engaged in redeeming the pledge of its own origin.

In this respect, the Holocaust is the most challenging of the deranging experiences of the century. Until recently, there was little dissent from the dominant approach to the extermination of six million Jews which is couched in a language of historical and social-psychological atavism. The murderous program is regarded as a disastrous deviation from the standards of modernity, a

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2 In his recent book "On Killing", Dave Grossman argues that a continuous presence of images of violence threatens to blur the line between entertainment and the conditioning of army soldiers. He refers to a "stage of desensitization at which the infliction of pain and suffering has become a source of entertainment ... We are learning to kill, and we are learning to like it." Dave Grossman: *On Killing. The Psychological Cost of Killing in War*, p. 311.

return to humanity's dark past, often summed up in terms such as barbarism or primitivism. This pattern based on the polar opposites of civilization and barbarism was persuasive enough to remain without serious alternative for a long time, penetrating deeply into the semantics of academic as well as public discourse. An increasing dissatisfaction with this approach has for some years now led to challenging its basic assumption and creating a growing body of research demonstrating the extent to which the mass murder was intertwined with and dependent upon the conditions of a modern society, its bureaucracy, industrial-military complex, transportation system, division of labor, the sciences, work attitudes, abstraction, and many other aspects of the modern society.[3] The smooth organization of the Holocaust was based upon the infrastructure of an advanced urban society. The individual perpetrators (and often their victims) operated efficiently even under the most extreme conditions, never questioning their role. This division of labor and responsibility is characteristic of the operations of modern production and presupposes mental structures of the kind Max Weber identified at the center of the process of rationalization. Indeed, the icon of modernization and industrialization during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the smoking chimney, has been identified as the symbol of Auschwitz.[4] The concept of production is common to both. The production of goods and the production of corpses were registered by meticulous book-keepers. It was in particular Zygmund Bauman's work which made this changing approach popular.

In Bauman's view, Auschwitz was the logical outcome of a civilization that is not the opposite of but a modern version of barbarism. He argues that the Holocaust has "uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body." He refers to "Holocaust-style phenomena" as the "legitimate outcomes of ... the civilizing tendency, and its constant potential."[5] In Bauman's account, the process of civilization has created a sphere of civility only by concealing the simultaneously growing destructiveness and violence underneath its surface. Through increased concen-

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3   Among other aspects, the implication of the ideology of racial purity in Darwinism, biological theory and the international politics of eugenics has recently attracted considerable attention. Weingart, Kroll, Bayertz: *Rasse, Blut und Gene*; Friedlander: *The Origins of Nazi Genocide. From Euthanasia to the Final Solution.*

4   Feingold: "How unique is the Holocaust?," pp. 399f. Raul Hilberg writes: "The machinery of destruction ... was structurally no different from organized German society as a whole." *The Destruction of the European Jewry*, vol III, p. 994.

5   Bauman: *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 7 ff.

tration and intensification of power vested in the state, modern man is increasingly subjected to anonymous techniques of coercion and threatened with violence. The separation of agents of power and violence from ethical discourse, characteristic of the process of rationalization of modern societies, he argues, inevitably leads to a-morality and subsequently to outbursts of cruelty on a scale larger than it was possible in previous and less organized and modernized societies. Under modern conditions, he argues, civilization is continuously creating a mentality and social fabric designed for the perfection of structures ready to be applied towards any goal including massive violence and mass murder. Bauman's position is the reversed image of the optimism displayed in the theories of civilization which, since the eighteenth century Enlightenment invented the pattern of progressing civility, credited Western civilization with the emancipation of mankind and the creation of a world of peace. It appears that the simplicity of the thesis which maintains the basic structure of the argument replacing the optimistic by a pessimistic result has made Bauman's books popular. Skepticism in relation to the process of civilization expressed in terms of political theory by Max Weber or philosophy in Martin Heidegger's investigation into the condition of technology[6] is of a different and more complex structure. In the tradition of Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Weber's philosophical writings, Horkheimer and Adorno's seminal study "Dialectics of Enlightenment" (1946) provided the first attempt to deal with the experience of fascism and industrialized mass murder by examining their relationship to modernity and its process of rationalization. It presupposes ambivalence and, instead of reversing the judgment as to the valence of the teleological paradigm, makes an attempt to define the problem in different terms. The presupposed simultaneity of Odysseus and modern man, theses concerning the continued productivity of mythology, the ambiguity of reason, expressed in their term 'instrumental reason', or the violence vested in conceptual language contribute to defining a paradigm for the investigation into the modern condition in which the Holocaust and modernity are inextricably linked without, however, resorting to a language of inevitability or necessity.

Such insight into the conditions and structure of the Holocaust forms only a thin layer of knowledge which has failed to have a deeper effect on the image which modern civilization constructs of itself. The authors' reluctance for many years to authorize a new edition of their book was indicative of their own ambivalence in relation to their interpretation of modernity. In Germa-

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6 Heidegger: "The Question concerning Technology," p. 283–317.

ny, the organized and highly efficient destruction of the European Jewry
tends to be treated as *unique* and is thereby, interpreted as an aberration from
the path of civilization, involuntarily excluded from the history of modernity
and relegated to a sphere of atavism. Public opinion of the USA tends to per-
ceive the Holocaust as a specific national and German problem.[7] Neither
mounting evidence nor compelling theoretical considerations have made a
significant contribution to changing the common image that perceives this
outbreak of murderous destructiveness as one contained in terms of time and
space but not related to the construction of the modern condition. As a re-
sult, the Holocaust can be remembered in isolation from the construction of
self.[8]

The relationship between fascism and modernity is crucial to the under-
standing of modernity. In an essay on violence, Adorno once argued that eve-
ry relapse (Rückfall) to open and physical violence in the present period is at-
avistic and deserves the term barbarism.[9] It is precisely this model of
modernity – which places our own society at one end and barbarism at the
other and sees them as separated by a 'process of civilization' – that needs ex-
amination.[10] As long as the concept of Western history as one of progressing
civilization is maintained, open and brutal violence will never be perceived as
part of our own world. In this construction of self, violence tends to become
part of another world, a world beyond the northern border of Greece, where
the barbarians lived, a world beyond the border of our own civilization, where
all the others live. Violence becomes an intruder from this outer sphere and is
present in our world by default, as an exception, a deplorable relic, a foreign

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7   Fischer analyses such "fallacious or misleading theories of political causation and psycho-
    logical motivation," which are based on the assumption that the Holocaust is "rooted deep-
    ly in German history and in the German character" and he demonstrates that this perspec-
    tive results in necessary twistings and turnings of German history. Fischer: *Nazi Germany:
    A New History*.

8   Goldhagen: *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans* appeared after his essay had been
    completed, and there is no space for more detailed comments. Its extraordinary success, it
    seems to me, is not only due to marketing strategies but corresponds to a strong demand
    on the part of the majority of readers that had been frustrated by previous Holocaust stud-
    ies. Goldhagen's book reduces complexity by applying on oversimplifying pattern based on
    the category of 'national character', and relegates violence to a clearly defined other: the
    Germans before our present time. It thus produces relief for many whose image of self
    had been troubled by recent trends of Holocaust studies. It is regrettable that the more in-
    sightful aspects of this book are lost in its streamlined reception.

9   Adorno: *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, p. 130.

10 Elias: *Der Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. Vols. 1 and
    2.

body in an otherwise civilized system. The disbelief that such brutalities are 'still' possible in our world is a hidden part of the semantics and visual codes with which violence in Yugoslavia, Nigeria, Georgia and the far side of our town is commonly referred to. The atrocities of the twentieth century give rise to reactions of disbelief, Walter Benjamin wrote, "but this is not a philosophical" response, he added. "It is not the beginning of new insight, safe the one that the concept of history that gives rise to it, has become untenable."[11] Individuals and societies have a tendency to see violence associated not with themselves but with others, distanced by space and time, in pre-modern, primitive or developing societies, societies of the East or the South, people in the poor and uneducated quarters of our cities. But is there a difference between a sniper in a Sarajevo street and the frustrated worker in Detroit who pulls a gun, or between looting an aid-convoy in Mogadishu and drug dealing in affluent quarters of Berlin or New York?

Just how deeply the image of the peaceful society in the tradition of the eighteenth century moral imperative is anchored in the public image which the USA prefers to create of itself was demonstrated at the occasion of a planned exhibition commemorating the dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[12] Protests from veterans' organizations, senators and a wave of public opposition made the Smithsonian Institute in Washington withdraw its original plan and change the concept of the exhibition in such a way that it did not harm the cherished self image of a nation that had fought a just war with justified means. This debate ensured once again that the problem of the bomb is kept within the framework of a debate concerned with military strategy and political decision making. Among the popular issues was the numbers game calculating how many thousands of lives had been saved by dropping the bombs and shortening the war.[13] However, the problem of the atomic bomb, Karl Jaspers wrote in his "Reflections on the Atomic Bomb

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11 Benjamin: *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. Gesammelte Schriften vol. 1, 2 p. 697.

12 In a substantial essay entitled "War over the Bomb," p. 26–34, Ian Buruma reviews major contributions to the heated debate concerning the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki including the domestic scene in the USA. Among the noteworthy contributions to the debate are: Nobile, ed.: *Judgment at the Smithsonian's 50th Anniversary Exhibit of the Enola Gay*; Alperowitz et al.: *The Decision to use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth*; Lifton and Mitchell: *Hiroshima and America: Fifty Years of Denial*; Allen and Polmar: *Code-Name Downfall: The Secret Plan to Invade Japan - and why Truman Dropped the Bomb.*

13 In the present debate the argument of the small number of casualties has been given prominen ce, whereas in 1945 it played no significant role in the decision making process. The figure of 500 000 American casualties as the likely result of an invasion of Japan was inflated at the time and has not gained credibility since.

and the Future of Humanity" (1958),[14] cannot be understood as one among other questions. The importance of questions concerning military opportunity and political decision making notwithstanding, Hiroshima poses the problem of an absolute standard for human behavior.

In an interview with the New York Times at the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of August 6, 1945, the director of the Hiroshima Memorial, Akihiro Takahashi again raised Jasper's question, irritating the American interviewer who continued to ask his 'American questions' concerned with political and strategic issues. For Takahashi, however, the incommensurability of the political and military rationale on the one side and the philosophical problem of the bomb on the other was self evident to the extent that he did not bother to address this issue explicitly. As a result, communication was almost impossible. The interviewer asked questions about a specific event in the history of the USA, whereas Takahashi referred to a crime against humanity, not because of the number of casualties. In the twentieth century, 300 000 victims is a figure that pales in comparison with many other events. The decisive issue is a different one and concerned with the question as to whether human behavior is at all restrained by inhibitions or recklessly prepared to turn into reality the ultimate consequence of modern technology of destruction and risking the end of humanity. The nuclear threat has radicalized the question concerned with the relationship between war and morality. The distinction between conventional and nuclear war is significant in as far as the possibility of nuclear war forces us to acknowledge that "anything short of a radical change in our thinking has the remotest prospect of success"[15] in dealing with the issue of war and violence. Thinking Hiroshima has the potential of subverting conventional illusions inherent in attitudes towards war and violence. However, as long as Hiroshima is being remembered in terms of military and political history, its image will continue to provide the means for remaining blind in relation to its most challenging dimension. "Any line can be crossed, whether in the use of weaponry or in their production when the capability is possessed. What makes the difference is the attitudes toward war itself. The risk of nuclear war is the function of more than the mere possession of nuclear weapons; it is a function of attitudes concerning ideology, national interest, self-defense, conflict resolution, and, perhaps most importantly, toward the use of violence and the taking of human life."[16] Hiroshima has led to a change

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14 Jaspers: *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen.*
15 Holmes: *On War and Morality*, p. 10.
16 Ibid., p. 9.

in the conditions of modern existence in as far as the absolute termination of live has become a real and is no longer a mere hypothetical possibility. The taboo of pre-modern societies has no equivalent under the conditions of modernity. The sectarian motto of the Persian *Assassins* "Everything is permissible and nothing prohibited!" has become universally acceptable and is kept in check only by pragmatic considerations and superior military power. However, the ways in which the issue is being framed in public debate provides the means for shielding the collective consciousness from realizing this threat. One of the lessons of Hiroshima is that human behavior, under the extreme conditions of war, is not governed or restricted by ethical imperatives.[17] However, in order to become effective for changing *attitudes*, this lesson needs to be included in the forms of collective remembrance. Only once the images remembered and the story publicly told will associate Hiroshima with the transgression of the threshold which separates relative prohibition, such as killing in warfare, from absolute taboo will Hiroshima make a contribution to changing a collective mentality deeply implicated in violence. To date, Hiroshima has contributed to maintaining the self deceptive conviction that it is possible to maintain a system driven by a mentality of violence but eliminate its consequences, namely individual acts of violence and wars.[18]

A comparison of Hiroshima and Auschwitz would be absurd in most respects. What has made several critical observers link the two heterogeneous events is their significance for the concept of modern history. We find Auschwitz beyond comprehension because it is impossible to conceive of it as a part of a *human* history. Industrialized mass murder cannot be reconciled with the concept of history produced by man believed to be made in the image of God. The novel forms of death require a new language and imagery and cannot be constructed in terms of traditional military or political history without losing their specific significance for the history of humanity. Traditional discourse, Jaspers argued, remains blind in relation to the problem posed by the nuclear threat and therefore more often than not will turn into aggression.[19]

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17 In 1945, neither the nuclear physicists nor the politicians involved were plagued by moral scruples. Cf. Barton Bernstein's *Afterword* to Nobile, ed.: *Judgment at the Smithsonian's 50th Anniversary Exhibit of the Enola Gay*. Summing up the position of US politicians, Bernstein writes that the use of the A-Bomb "did not create ethical or political problems for them ... " (235) In: "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern Memory."

18 Argued from a combined psychoanalytical and moral position, cf: Lifton and Markusen: *The Genocidal Mentality.*

19 Jaspers: *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen*, p. 20.

Focusing on the rationality in the motivation, planning and execution of the bombing bars the gaze from perceiving the threat inherent in the memory of Hiroshima for imaging the future. Only in as far as an approach concerned with national responsibility and its complement, that is national victimization, can be overcome, will the reflection upon the bomb be liberated from ritual. Auschwitz and Hiroshima are linked in this one respect namely that both signify a historical experience that gives rise to the problem of nihilism. Despite fundamental differences separating the two events, both demonstrate that under extreme conditions no ethical imperative will create an inhibition from making use of all means available, even of those leading to unlimited destruction. The memory of human beings who evaporated in a fraction of a second leaving behind nothing but shadows on walls has changed the image of history in a way not dissimilar to the memory of the reduction of men, women and children to moving objects of destruction in the extermination camps. Both Hiroshima and Auschwitz have led to the experience of man as the animal with no biologically inherited inhibition whose culturally learned inhibitions are unlearned under extreme conditions. The violence unfolding in the memory of these two events has produced an irreparable fissure in the image of the human face. However, public rituals, ceremonies and narratives all contribute to creating modes of memorializing which veil the fissure to the extent that it is absorbed in meaning and becomes invisible.

A perception in which violence tends to be excluded from our own civilized world as a deplorable digression from its 'true' constitution is not only one of self-deception but has the paradoxical effect of making violence acceptable. It could be time not so much for the revision of moral positions in relation to violence and attempts to return to conventional values but for a change in the very perception of violence. The response which the experience with modern macro-violence requires is a change in perspective and a novel concern with perception rather than morality. An inquiry into the grammar of seeing rather than the standards of evaluation is needed.[20] The understanding of the ways in which reality, including the enemy, is constructed rather than a critique of ideologies and systems of belief will more appropriately respond to the challenge posed by the insights into the violent nature of the modern condition.

As long as events such as Auschwitz or Hiroshima are being perceived in terms of national history, ideologies and moral justification, the dimension of

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20 Among the stimulating more recent attempts in this regard are the essays by Virilio: *War and Cinema.*

structural violence and its relationship to technological society will remain invisible. It seems too harmful to the cherished self-image to accept a perspective from which violence appears to be inextricably intertwined with modernity. It is much safer to continue defining violence as individual acts in terms of civil law and remain fixated on issues of ideology. It seems doubtful, however, whether the specific violence of the modern world can adequately be comprehended as long as an essentialist position is being maintained and identifiable nations, groups, or individuals are being defined as the respective agents of violence whereas anonymous structures and macro-scale conditions determining individual and group behavior are excluded from the construction of violence. This reduction of complexity makes it possible to relegate violence to the sphere of the other and, as a result, perceive violence in one's own sphere as either regrettable exceptions and relapses to atavistic acts or as justified by a greater good.

The strategy of relegation can be observed at the center of the contradictory relationship of modernity to violence. It is the result of a specific way of constructing rather than morally evaluating self and the other. The strong resistance against deconstructing the grand narrative concerning the peaceful nature of the process of civilization adheres to the fundamental belief that violence is a legitimate element of modern society in as far and only in as far as it contributes to the aim of the final eradication of violence. Violence that cannot be justified in theses terms needs to be excluded from the sphere of modernity defined as civility and peaceful civilization and consequently eludes the gaze. While it continues to determine the conditions of existence, it is made disappear through techniques of relegation. Foucault analyses the violence vested in asylums and institutions of discipline which confine, against their will, those who have broken rules, are insane, deranged, mentally or physically distorted or otherwise do not correspond to the image of perfectible man. These institutions, created in order to protect the public from having to face bodies that physically represent disorder and rupture, make disappear from public sight the bodies of those stigmatized and legally incapacitated. Such eye sores must not mar the cultivated image that the civil society projects of itself. Locking them away guarantees that violence of nature and society is removed from public sight and memory sanitized. What might disturb harmony is hidden from the public eye through institutionalized violence. Most of these institutions are now closed and their system of coercion has been abandoned. But modern public ceremonies, celebrations and narrations have a function not dissimilar to these institutions of discipline and order. They make disappear the mutilated face of modernity without having to use open violence. They are designed and the public are educated in such a

way as to guarantee mutual consent in the confinment of memory and the in-
capacitation of the visualizing faculty.

II.

In the genesis of violence and the relationship to it, two turning points can be
determined. As a result of the process of centralizing power and monopoliz-
ing it under the authority of the state,[21] violence was subjected to a process of
de-naturalization. It was declared a predicament of a past governed by preju-
dice, irrationalism and arbitrary power relations and considered an illegitimate
product of modernity. The Encyclopedists in France, English and Scottish
philosophers and historians such as Edward Gibbon, James Dunbar, Adam
Ferguson or Adam Smith and German philosophers of the Enlightenment
movement like Wolff, Kant and his student Ehrhard produced a body of liter-
ature devoted to the idea of the beginning of a new period in world history
distinguished by civility and progressive exclusion of violence and cruelty
from civilization. In their view, modern European society was guided by the
ideal of self determination, absence of coercion and employing force "only
for the obtaining of justice, and for the preservation of national rights."[22]
With growing skepticism in relation to these ideals of reason and progress
and a teleological concept of history, another turning point emerged. Now
the position of violence in the modern world of technology was radically re-
evaluated. Only the first of the two turning points in the relationship to vio-
lence has been incorporated into the Western vision of civilization and has
shaped its collective memory. The disillusioning critique of the modernist
concept of civil society has remained marginal ever since its emergence in the
late nineteenth century. It has had only a superficial impact beyond the philo-
sophical and intellectual margins of collective consciousness. It was Friedrich
Nietzsche who used the most provocative metaphors, often taken from the
language of war, in his attempt to unmask modernity and enlighten the En-
lightenment about its intrinsic violence. His theory of the violent nature of
representation itself prepared the foundation for the coming century's skepti-
cism in relation to the optimism of the Enlightenment heritage and, in partic-
ular, Horkheimer's and Adorno's inquiry into the dialectics of the process of
Enlightenment or Foucault's theory of power relations.

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21   Elias: *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. Vols. 1
     and 2.
22   Ferguson: *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767).

The denaturalization of violence was an intrinsic and constitutive element of the emerging definition of modern Western civilization in contradistinction to all previous cultures. Civilization, defined as both a process and the desired outcome of this process, targeted violence, defined as pre-modern barbarism, savagery, nature and incivility, as its adversary. Edward Gibbon's history of the decline and fall of Rome provided a widely recognized model of civilization and its fragility in confronting barbarian violence.[23] It was read as a warning against the possibility of regress in history and the reassurance that modern Europe was better equipped on its path toward civilization and would therefore not fall victim to renewed threats of uncivilized barbarians. As a result of their alleged irrational principles of constitution, violence was constructed as an accepted part of an organic or God-given order of 'primitive' or 'natural' societies. It was open, endemic, always associated with identifiable agents and normality. It has been demonstrated that in pre-modern revolts an adequate concept of collective social practice was absent.[24] These revolts were directed against specific acts of violence and domination, but lacked an appropriate understanding of violence as an element of the construction of social reality, and therefore were not driven by visions of a just and peaceful society. Beginning in the seventeenth century, violence was no longer considered a natural element of life but increasingly defined as an undesirable heritage of times gone by or an equally undesirable by-product of the present. Called before the court of reason, violence had to produce a legitimation of its existence and, as it was unable to do so, the objective of a society free from violence began to emerge. Consequently, ethical discourse, from the eighteenth century on, demanded the complete eradication of violence in a society under the rule of reason.[25]

Evolutionary social theories of the nineteenth century resonate with trust in the power of reason to create a non-violent society, now defined as an unfailing implication of the process of rationalization. In Herbert Spencer's concept of social evolution or Fustel de Coulange's history of the city as a spatial realization of reason, violence is associated with the irrational religious beginnings of human civilization and is increasingly mastered by the forces of civilization progressing towards the age of reason and a modern, rationally designed space of urban life. Another example of this faith in progress was Alfred Nobel's dream of the inevitability of a society free from wars and vio-

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23 Gibbon: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788).
24 Fourquin: *Les soulèvements populaires au Moyen Age.*
25 Kant: Mutmasslicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte – *Werke* vol. 6, p. 99–101. See also: *Der Streit der Facultäten*, ibid., p. 365f.

lence as a result of innovations in military technology leading to such power of destruction that waging war would become self-destructive and therefore irrational to the degree that it was impossible. In these constructions of modern civilization, violence is destined to lose its right of residence in a world increasingly governed by reason. The emergence of a society free from wars and violence was considered inevitable and during the decades preceding the outbreak of war in 1914, there was no shortage of political theories arguing that, as a result of international trade, economic integration and mutual dependence, war had become impossible. The logic of the process of modernization had, according to this view, finally taken care of this atavistic relic of a despised past.

Paradoxically, the denaturalization of violence and its construction as a product of social and cultural conditions also marks the birth of a new concept of *legitimate* violence. The end of its natural history led to the emancipation of violence from ritual mythical and religious structures. Violence was turned into a means and within the spheres of politics, social institutions and the military was freed from conventional restrictions as long as it could be justified by moral reasoning. It could now be defined as violence against oppression that is, against unjustified violence and was therefore justified even before the court of reason. In November 1793, in his address 'Sur la situation politique de la Republique', Robespierre coined the term 'violence progressive' initiating a modern discourse on 'just violence' of revolutions, strikes, wars and terrorism. Definitions of violence in the service of equality and liberation from oppression provided the origin of the modern contradictory relationship to violence. Marx's, Sorel's or Fanon's theories of liberation are prominent examples of this ethical justification of violence in the name of peace and justice.

Once modernity freed violence from traditional, ritual or metaphysical restrictions, it was not only justified through moral theory but could also become part of an instrumental and extra-moral means-end relationship. Under these conditions, violence is no longer a partial element embedded in social-cultural constructions which define its time, space and dimensions nor is it restricted by morality. Instead, it becomes a constitutive element of modern societies developing its own momentum within their various sub-systems. An early example of this tendency is provided by Carl von Clausewitz's reflections on the nature of modern warfare, written during the years following the anti-Napoleonic 'Wars of Liberation'. This analysis from the perspective of an enlightened rationalist discovers a tendency of modern war towards the *absolute*. Modern warfare, he argues, is not regulated by ritual conventions or restricted by moral considerations. Its limitations, which he calls 'inertia' and 'friction', are intrinsic to war itself. He defines them as qualities generated by

and inherent in its system.[26] As soon as technology overcomes these limitations, the path from 'absolute' war, which for Clausewitz was a 'tendency', to total war will be clear. It is this tendency of violence, 'liberated' from rules and restrictions of pre-modern societies, to determine its own rules and turn into a force aiming toward totality and omnipresence that is significant of modernity. Hannah Arendt was among the first to reflect on such disturbing changes in the nature of violence. While modernity defined itself in opposition to pre-modern times by banishing violence from its self-image and branding it as an outlaw, its political and cultural practices were being built on an emerging omnipresence of open as well as disguised and diffused forms of violence.

In an attempt to capture this tendency, Johan Galtung invented the term *structural violence*.[27] Because this is a very loosely defined concept, its analytical value has been doubted. Nonetheless, it is an emotionally suggestive term that also draws attention to a distinction between violence that originates in social actors, both individuals and groups, and a novel form of violence which is inherent in anonymous structures. In doing so, it has the potential to draw analytical attention to a central aspect of violence in modern societies which can be interpreted in terms of *spaces of violence*. The structure of the technological battlefield, of which the First World War was the first example and which historical research only recently began to explore in greater detail, seems to provide us with a number of clues for the understanding of structural violence in terms of spaces of violence.[28] This space is characterized by an apparently unlimited and ubiquitous threat, despite the absence of visible actors. Associated with this is the experience of helplessness in the face of anonymous forces. In the wake of the First World War, the view became popular that violence under the conditions of modern technology has led to the re-emergence of a public space not dissimilar to that of a "natural state" of society, associated by Hobbes[29] and his school of thought with the regime of unrestricted violence. Structural similarities between primitivism and moder-

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26 von Clausewitz: *On War*, p. 75–89.

27 Galtung: *Strukturelle Gewalt*.

28 Lewin: "Kriegslandschaft"; cf. Hüppauf: "Walter Benjamin's Imaginary Landscape," p. 33–54.

29 Hobbes interpreted "the condition of Man" in primitive societies as "a condition of Warre of every one against every one; in which case every one is governed by his own Reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him , in preserving his life against his enimyes ... " Hobbes: *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, 1,14.

nity were observed – and propagated – not only in the arts but also in the ways in which modern societies constructed their public spheres and collective practices. In the grip of an uncontrollable technology, modern Europe seemed to experience conditions similar to that of cultures which, in the absence of developed means of controlling their social and natural environment, lived under the spell of animistic beliefs. Abstract space of modernity can be interpreted in terms of a return of violence that pervaded pre-modern space. Under pre-modern conditions it was endemic, originating in physical or meta-physical agents, while, under the conditions of modernity, it has been transformed into an abstract and anonymous constituent increasing its threatening might. One of the major manifestations of anonymous violence in this new space can be called macro-criminality.

Linked to the denaturalization of violence was its psychological redefinition in terms of *ambivalence*. The combination of pleasure and horror seems particular to modern forms of a subconscious desire of imagining and experiencing violence both as actor and victim. The poetics of many of the most remarkable and at the same time disorientating works of modernism is indebted to images of an inescapable violence. A confrontation of banalities and blind routine of the every-day with extraordinary and radical fantasies of violence can be seen as a matrix of modernist imagination. Desires of destruction, mutilation, dismembering and disfiguration are indicative of production techniques of modernist theater, film, photography, art, music and literature. The human body became the most important site of such artistic practices after the end of the First World War.[30] The inescapability of violence is reiterated in Freud's theory of culture and, based upon Gestalt psychology, the beliefs of the ethological school of Konrad Lorenz, Eibl Eibesfeld and others. Freud's concept of the *uncanny* has provided a conceptual context within which the exclusion of death "from sight," leading to a heightened sense of death as "uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal," is connected with transformations of violence in images and imaginations.[31] The culture industry successfully transforms this desire into a large and profitable market.

As far as literary reflections on this issue are concerned, authors associated with the concept of modernism such as Kafka, Musil, Benn, the early Döblin and, with expressions of satisfaction if not of triumph, Ernst Jünger, share this view. Some of the most intriguing and disturbing pieces of modern-

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30   See now Tatar: *Lustmord. Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany.*

31   Freud: *The Uncanny.* Freud: *The Standard edition of the Complete Psychological Works,* vol. 17, pp. 219–52.

ist literature are the product of this image of inescapable violence. The confrontation between the banalities of everyday life and extraordinary and radical forms of the desire for destruction and violence are at the core of modern literary imagination. Many of Kafka's parables, say, or Musil's figure Moosbrugger, murderer of a prostitute who mutilates his victim and to whom the narrator feels more closely related than to his own ego represented in a photograph from his early childhood, should prevent the common but inappropriate reference to these authors as representatives of 'classical modernity'. It has to be realized that this literature is not, as the term might suggest, one of timeless beauty and classical harmony but to the contrary; it gives shape to a specific modern form of violence that is ambivalent and, in as much as it is constitutive for the aesthetic process, also inescapable.

Much reflection has been devoted to the relationship of destruction and production which, under the modern condition, have become indistinguishable. Destruction is no longer a relic of a barbarian past, a deplorable byproduct or an unforeseen implication of the process of production that will be eliminated with time. In fact, destruction has in the twentieth century become another form of production. In his many scattered remarks and essays, Walter Benjamin was among the first to suggest that the modern mentality has reversed the relationship replacing the central category of capitalist society, productivity, with its opposite, the 'destructive character'. In this interpretation, the quest for innovation and incessant change, quintessential quality of the modern, inevitably leads to destruction and the production of the destructive mentality. Examples are numerous and, again, the structure of the battlefield after 1916 is well suited to serve as an illustration. The ingenuity and innovative power of the most advanced industrial societies in Europe turned war into an extension of the industrial complex. War was no longer experienced as the exception, a time that suspended the rules of the world of capitalism and, for a short period of time, introduced into the world of bourgeois order conditions for the creation of heroes. Instead, this war turned battlefields into gigantic systems of production which, devoted to the destruction of lives, landscapes and material and symbolic goods, followed the rules of capitalist order more thoroughly than in times of peace. Contemporary photographs convey this inversion of the traditional concept of production. With the gestures of pride and success normally displayed by owners of factories or merchants looking at the visible symbols of their entrepreneurial success, German officers pose on huge piles of rubble.[32] Standing on the

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32 Many of these photographs were taken as attempts to demonstrate the recklessness of the enemy whose artillery had destroyed its own villages.

ruins of blown-up houses, castles, forts and whole villages, these officers demonstrate to the viewer the astounding success of the latest technological innovation: 42 cm guns, shells so heavy that they needed cranes to be lifted into the barrels, long-distance bombardments which depended on sophisticated ballistic calculations and precision work of designers and engineers at Krupp, Skoda or Schneider-Creuzot, and aerial photography and new techniques of cartography that required new skills of reading abstract representations of geographical space. The gaze of these proud soldiers is consistently directed to the lens of the camera expecting the consent of the viewer. It is an expectation of mutual agreement that directs the desired fusion of the perpetrator's gaze with that of the distanced viewer. This is significant of the fact that this destruction was not one confined to the battle field but transcended the time of war. Henri Barbusse was the first to coin a term that captures this inversion: he called modern soldiers 'les ouvriers de la destruction'. Arnold Zweig and Ernst Jünger used their own terms respectively: 'Arbeiter der Zerstörung' and 'Proletarier der Zerstörung'. This is a further example of the inversion of labor, in which the production of goods is transformed into the production of destruction. With it, the character of representation changed and images were not only representations of acts of destruction but became themselves intrinsic to the process of destruction.

Theories of perception[33] and modern aesthetics from the late nineteenth century have stressed the paramount importance of *fragmentation* as a constitutive element in the process of both production and reception. Perception under the conditions of modern cities, through window frames of fast-moving vehicles, discontinuities in the flow of time and the breaking-up of the homogeneity of space, new images of the body represented in states of dismemberment, or the dislocation of subjectivity have been analyzed as contributions to the emergence of a world which is no longer experienced as cohesive. Modern reality is no longer perceived as an object of the senses but the product of a complex process of construction. The violence inherent in this process is of a constitutive nature and beyond the level of moral value judgments. It may well be that the apparent failure of pacifism and peace movements results from confusing these levels. If the modern period is characterized by violence inherent in the structure of producing and perceiving reality, then the moral approach adopted by all peace movements locates the problem on an inappropriate level. War defined as "a problem of our own

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33   Of the first and most highly influential studies concerned with the dismemberment of the self in terms of a psychology of the senses was Mach: *Die Analyse der Empfindungen.*

making" in such a way that an understanding of "the moral problem of war" will contribute to resolve this problem through acts of willed "determination" and "courage"[34] presupposes a continued rational control over collective practices which have disengaged themselves from systems of morality and reason. In as much as theories of modernity based upon fragmentation as one of its fundamental characteristics are an appropriate reflection of the modern condition, violence would have to be seen in *anthropological* terms as an element of modernity's very structure rather than of individual and political decision making, which is subject to moral evaluation. In contrast to conventional theory which is predicated upon a subject of destruction who "*chooses* to do these things"[35] and which disqualifies a language of anonymity and contingency as mere rationalization, the shift to theories of perception and construction requires a different focus including a suspension of moral assessment.

I can only briefly point at the ambivalence of this argument. The gradual dismemberment of philosophical systems based on concepts of a homogenous world centered around the commanding subjectivity and engaged in a continuous process of rationalization has been perceived as a threat to civilization. But it has also been hailed as the liberation from the intrinsic violence of order and the fetters of integrated systems. The shattering of inherited systems and the ensuing loss of orientation, Döblin wrote in the twenties, does not at all lead to feelings of loss or despair but to those of a newly gained freedom and self-determination. In a scene that is as disturbing as it is funny,[36] Robert Musil makes an officer of the Austrian army discover that life cannot exist without structures of cohesion and systems of order which require force, but that order pursued to its essence consequently equals death. Life therefore requires the destruction of systems which impose order onto it.[37] Michel Foucault's archeological approach to the systems of signification is the extension of this anti-programmatic program. Musil's fascination with the mode of the subjunctive interpreted as a category of grammar and of ontology, is a precursor of Foucault's commanding attempt to demonstrate history's contingency by demonstrating that comprehensible grounds and reasons for the emergence of events can be found without, however, subscribing to notions of necessity or teleology. It is the destruction of conventional systems of order and progress designed in the name of the grandiose foundation

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34 Holmes: *On War and Morality*, p. 14.

35 Ibid, p. 3.

36 Musil: *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, p. 127–28.

37 Ibid., p. 19.

myths of modernity, of freedom, equality and eternal peace, which lead Foucault to the celebration of new experiences of freedom and self determination. Only once the self-deceiving narrative of Western civilization's commitment to the eradication of violence is being debunked will, according to this view,[38] the liberation from the powerful coercion of these systems clear the path for the creation of local regions of and spontaneous approaches to self determination and non-violence.

The critique of this position as one of dark pessimism and cynical nihilism is widespread. An implication of the ongoing disintegration of the grand narratives, namely the erosion of conventional systems of ethics, has been interpreted as an exercise in the preparation of inhumanity and fascism through perversions of attitudes and inhuman distortions of mental dispositions. Frequently associated with a postmodern position, a skeptical assessment of the relationship between modernity and violence tends to be identified with an antimoral position that plays with and even advocates violence.[39] However, an association of a critique of the position of the Enlightenment in relation to violence with an antimoral position is misguided. It confuses wishful thinking with analysis. The responses to the civil war in Bosnia can be interpreted as a case in point.

The world was to an unusual extent united in opinion and, as far as it was in a position to articulate its position, condemned the continuation of the senseless killing and destruction while politicians and, it can be assumed, the large majority of their voters, were equally determined to do nothing. Statements of outrage and moral declarations provided a verbal smokescreen behind which inertia could be maintained with great comfort. No economic or strategic interests of those who had the power to intervene were affected. Nearly three years of cruel civil war and 300 000 casualties failed to persuade those who morally condemned the war to turn their words into action. Pragmatic considerations were so strong and the power of morality so weak that all nations involved did not even bother when the credibility of the United Nations was shattered. Once its term 'safe haven' had been turned from a grandiose promise into a grotesque joke, the credibility of the UN which rests upon moral grounds was destroyed beyond repair. The only power remaining was that of armed forces, of NATO and American military supremacy. In the name of the 'greater good' the international community was prepared even to

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38 Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison.*

39 Critical and often polemical responses to Enzensberger's recent essays on civil war have fallen victim to this common misunderstanding. Cf. A. Glucksmann: "Ein neuer Vogel Strauss," Der Spiegel, No. 37, 1993, p. 247–49.

live with war criminals and mass murderers elevated to positions of presidents, ministers and senior statesmen. In his account of the events, David Owen goes so far as to suggest that the Vance-Owen plan failed to receive support from the US government because it had the wrong originators, namely European and not American diplomats.[40] He claims that the USA were prepared to run the risk of renewed war and then watch three years of bloodshed for no other reason but its interest in demonstrating its superior role as a world super-power. It is remarkable that for years it was possible to keep moral arguments separated from political and diplomatic action and both co-existed as if they belonged to two separate worlds.

Acceptance that morally grounded positions vis a vis war and violence have lost their credibility and persuasive power must not be confused with accepting war and violence. While Nietzsche's philosophical speculations about the violent nature of Western civilization have at times been confused with war mongering and Sigmund Freud's anthropological speculation about patricide as the origin of human culture dismissed or ridiculed, more recent studies that closely associate the construction of cultural order and violence are supported by an abundance of anthropological, historical and mythological evidence. It has been argued with considerable persuasion that violence exists at the very origin of human society, and is transformed into cultural practices. René Girard's association of the holy and bloody sacrifice[41] is an example of the conversion of earlier speculation into disciplined academic theory. Also, while the theses of Konrad Lorenz and his school[42] have remained controversial because of their oversimplifying analogy between human and animal behavior, the basic pessimism concerning the human evolutionary heritage is currently experiencing strong support through research in experimental psychology and neuro-physiology. By now it appears beyond reasonable doubt that no human society has ever been free from violence and war. Anthropologists and historians seem to have abandoned their search for a peaceful hu-

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40 David Owen: *Balkan Odyssey.*

41 René Girard: *La Violence et Le Sacre.*

42 Konrad Lorenz is still the best known exponent of a school of ethologists who explain human aggressive behavior on the basis of a theory of 'instinct' and therefore as an element of natural history. Initially developed in contradiction to Sigmund Freud's theory of aggression as a culturally conditioned impulse of destruction directed towards others and the self, Lorenz maintains that aggressive behavior among animals, and for much of human history, served a purposeful function and is therefore not evil but has, under the conditions of modern society, been distorted and lost its legitimate place in society. His 'solution' to the problem of the inevitability of aggression is 'sublimation', not unlike Freud's view. K. Lorenz: *Das sogenannte Böse. Zur Naturgeschichte der Aggression.*

man society. Acceptance that the world has never been free from war and violence must not be confused, however, with a position in support of violence. Acceptance that modernity is inextricably intertwined with structures of violence and attitudes of destructiveness must not be confused with fatalism and a resigned acceptance of violence and destructiveness.

Any serious attempt to come to terms with modern forms of violence is conditional upon developing perceptions and attitudes that are not built upon the exclusion of the devastating experiences of this century. In his popular theory of aggression, Erich Fromm argues that there are two forms of aggression which need to be kept apart, a productive and a destructive one. It seems to me that this distinction has remained popular not only because it introduces a simple and binary moral opposition, but also because it suggests to neglect this century's experiences with violence since the First World War. Theoretical insights to which Nietzsche and Fromm's own mentor, Sigmund Freud, made substantial contributions in relation to ambivalence and modernity's implication in a destructive system are sacrificed in favor of simplicity and exclusion. The two aspects of aggression, modern experience suggests, are inseparably intertwined and, more than this, under the modern condition destruction appears to have liberated itself from specific acts and is no longer in need of specific objects. Instead, it has become a pervasive force which can be called *destructiveness*, a term that refers to a general attitude towards life which manifests in individual acts of destruction. The subjective condition called destructiveness can be interpreted as the mental equivalent of the social concept of 'structural violence'. The continued co-existence of a flattering self image that civil society maintains of itself and conflicting practices requires a considerable degree of reduction of complexity, a process to which the printed and electronic media make invaluable contributions day and night.

In this context two general issues need clarification. What is the social-cultural locus of these two complementary concepts and in what way can they be seen as characteristic of the modern period? When Walter Benjamin introduced the terms barbarism and new barbarians into discourse on modernity, he made use of a favorite theoretical tool of his time, namely the construction of ideal types. His 'destructive character' is a representation of the major characteristics of a society based upon a destructive mentality; it is not a portrait of an individual person nor does it refer to a statistical mean value. This then opens the question as to the relationship between individual violence and the violent structure of modern society. It seems obvious that the violent structure of modern societies cannot be understood as the sum total of individual acts of violence. Individual acts of violence can be seen as manifestations of a violent structure generated in the space of modern technological

society. With the emergence of a post-industrial society these spaces are again subjected to fundamental changes which create new forces of violence and destruction. Contemporary wars and civil wars have perforated the dividing line between war and crime contributing to the emergence of a violent space of "criminal anarchy."[43] The ways in which individual responsibility is being affected by structural violence remains an open question which, to my knowledge, has never been seriously debated by theoreticians of the law. The maintenance of civil society as well as all reasonable expectations of justice require individual accountability. Yet, the alarming inclination towards macrocriminality and the growing number of jails and those sent to prison should provide sufficient reason to face this issue in a serious fashion. The unforgettable ending of Kafka's *Der Prozeß* in which the victim is killed like a dog makes the two perpetrators insignificant in relation to the violent and anonymous power structure of which they are but contingent agents. Kafka's cool account of this structural violence and the complementary mentality of destructiveness are paradigmatic of the approach taken by many authors of modernism.

III.

One of the underlying assumptions of this collection of essays is that a very specific and intricate relationship between violence and the modern condition exists. It is further assumed that the First World War was experienced as a paradigm of this constitutive relationship, and the unprecedented wave of literature in its wake consequently associated this experience with a crisis of Western civilization. There is good reason to believe that the project of modernity, to quote Jürgen Habermas, entered its terminal phase during the First World War or, to be more precise, in the wake of this war, in the process of gradually understanding the events of 1916 and the following years of the war.

(1) The violence of the First World War spelt the end of the belief that violence can be controlled and ultimately eradicated by reason. It unleashed a destruction out of proportion to any reasonable aim that developed independence and a momentum of its own. It came to an end not as a result of a conscious decision imposed on it from outside but only because of intrinsic necessity. Like the period of modernity, this war accepted no scale outside its system and defined its standards with no reference to a transcendent authority. (2) This war created a new space which became paradigmatic for the expe-

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43   Kaplan: *The Coming Anarchy*. Atlantic Monthly 273, February 1994, p. 44–76.

rience of space in the twentieth century. Its morphology requires continuous destruction and is signified by movement without changing places. The violence generated in this space of destruction has no point of termination and is continuous by its own nature. This type of violence did not end with the end of the war. It returns as a constitutive element of the city[44] and of life in modern industrialized society and is reflected in the art and literature of the present. (3) The structure of technological destruction for ever changed the relationship between violence and morality, liberating violence from the confinement of ethics. This war gave rise to the most forceful movement of pacifism in history and at the same time spelt the end of moral pacifism. One of the powerful moral maxims of the century: 'Never again!', 'Nie wieder Krieg!' mobilized masses and turned out to be one of the greatest illusions of the century. I make this point without the slightest feeling of satisfaction. However, intellectual rigor requires us to call a dream a dream, even if that dream describes a desirable world.

The relevance of considerations of the nature of violence and war is beyond doubt. Wars and civil wars, new forms of undeclared war in the cities, from Los Angeles to Calcutta, and a hidden and often not so hidden daily violence of normal life: the violence in families, schools, factories and offices, and of public and private languages leave no doubt that contemporary modern reality and violence are inseparable. In a recent collection of essays Hans Magnus Enzensberger argued that we now live in an age of global civil war.[45] According to his diagnosis, traditional conflicts between nation states are being replaced by new forms of conflict which, he argues, are the result of changing definitions of ethnic, ethical, religious and economic interests, the global distribution of wealth and the trend towards the decentralization of state powers. These conflicts produce a ubiquity of violence which is reinforced by the omnipresence of its images. It has become common for families to continue their dinner while graphic images of violence, death and mutilations appear on their television screens. Recent research has shown that mental disturbances of children after watching horror movies in which the dismemberment of human bodies is shown in graphic detail seem to have become part of the experience of every day or night.

Until recently, a specific pattern of argument was commonly used for providing justification for apparent contradictions between academic discourse on violence and its subject matter. It was argued that by advancing our understanding of war and violence, research contributes to bring about a society

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44   Hüppauf: *Die Stadt als imaginierter Kriegsschauplatz*, p. 317–335.
45   Enzensberger: *Civil War*.

free from wars and violence. When viewed in the light of this century's experiences, the optimistic conceptual framework for this work appears illfounded and dated.[46] An admission of ignorance in relation to violence seems more pertinent than the maintenance of a cherished ideal. The ideal of a society in eternal peace, which Kant in his small book *Zum Ewigen Frieden,* published in 1795, so persuasively developed and which was based upon a broad consensus of eighteenth-century authors to whom this phrase was like an icon, has lost much of its persuasiveness. It appears to be one of the victims of the end of an era of grand narratives. Once this ideal is debunked, academic discourse on violence acquires a certain aspect of perversity and at the same time of urgency. The loss of faith in the inevitability of growing civilization provides the debate with a new openness and indeterminacy, and an increasing skepticism in relation to the current knowledge about violence makes attempts to understand it even more urgent.

The common fuzziness and contradictory use of the terms "war," "violence" and "modernity" are significant of the larger problem. Conceptual problems in distinguishing between war and peace are exaggerated in the attempt to distinguish between violence and its opposite that can be denoted only through negativity, non-violence. Its relationship to concepts such as power, aggression, coercion, domination, destruction varies from discipline to discipline, language to language and with time. Translations of this terminological field in other European languages create insoluble problems. Medieval and early modern as well as non-European art and literature remind us that standards vary significantly and acts which were once considered acceptable or entertaining become, with changing contexts and perceptions, unacceptable cruelties. Public floggings and executions or the new awareness of domestic violence and child abuse are but few extreme examples of radically changing standards of evaluation. Under close scrutiny, distinctions between actors and victims often begin to blur and, to add a final point, answers to the question as to the origin of violence vary from narrow legal definitions in terms of identifiable subjects breaking articles of the positive law to philo-

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46 The sixties and early seventies, a number of institutes devoted to research on war and peace were founded world wide. The optimistic mood of these years created great expectations and in Germany the term 'Friedensforschung' was coined in an attempt to create a new interdisciplinary field of study. After a decade of research, conferences and publications, few projects and even fewer institutes had survived an atmosphere of growing disillusionment and dwindling financial support. Well endowed institutes (for example in Starnburg or Kronberg) were discontinued. The Institute at Stockholm continued to publish highly valuable data about international developments of the military complex but the time for publications on 'theories of peace' is clearly over.

sophical responses which, in the tradition of Nietzsche, Foucault or Derrida, will associate language with violence in as far as it is the means of domination over reality.

The following collection of essays makes an attempt to contribute to the clarification of some of the issues raised. A history of interpretations of the First World War has not yet been written. It could be revealing in many respects. Diaries, letters and literature from the years after 1915 and the period immediately following the war bear witness to the disturbing effects which the killing and devastation at the front and the hunger and privation at the home front had on men, women and children. However, nothing else could be expected. The interpretation of the war as the first modern war of technology which led to a fundamental crisis of European civilization emerged only many years after the end of the war and is associated with a wave of literature emerging during the late twenties. To date, no other war has given rise to such a huge number of works of prose, poetry, drama and essays as well as of the visual arts. Later in the century, concern with the Second World War overshadowed that of its predecessor. Soon after that war ended, a view was developed merging the two wars into one period of a new Thirty Year War of the twentieth century, incorporating the violent inter-war years into an epoch of war without battles or peace without peace. During the two decades after 1918, the ways of remembering World War I differed significantly between societies which were able to cushion their memories by celebrating a victory and those of the vanquished. At the end of the century, a difference in referring to this war as either the "Great War" or "World War I" can still be felt. After 1945, even greater discrepancies emerged creating memories of the war that greatly differed from nation to nation. For many years the First World War disappeared from public memory in Germany and Austria, until the publication of Fritz Fischer's controversial book re-opened an emotionally charged debate about guilt and the politics of the war. In contrast, memories of the invasion had remained very much alive in Belgium and in eastern France, and the issue of war guilt was of a lesser importance there as it had been settled previously. In some English speaking countries, Armistice Day is celebrated to date keeping alive ambivalent feelings in relation to the military and political history of the war.

A turning point in the history of the war came in the seventies when books by Paul Fussell and Eric Leed, soon followed by others, made this war the subject of a reconstituted cultural history.[47] Historians now discovered a

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47 Fussell: *The Great War and Modern Memory*; Eric J. Leed: *No Man's Land. Combat and Identity in the First World War*

dimension of this war which literary authors, philosophers and cultural critics such as Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, Alain (Emile Auguste Chartier), or Marc Bloch had begun to investigate during the inter-war years. The war was discovered as an *experience*. Local histories of the war, histories of the every-day life at the front and the home front were written. New questions concerning the impact of the war on collective memory, changing patterns of perception and imagery, public manifestations of changing mentalities and collective psychology, artistic practices or the role of technology began and continue to be developed. A broad consensus emerged, ascribing to this war a central position for the history of the modern condition and collective experience in the twentieth century. This view has never been uncontested. The volume opens with an essay that challenges this approach. *J.M. Winter* argues that conventional ways of responding to the war enabled the bereaved to live with their losses and finally come to terms with their experience. The essay refers to an opposition between 'modernist' and 'traditional' forms of imaging war and argues that the modernist view has been overstretched and needs to be reevaluated. This essay is juxtaposed with a decidedly modernist attempt to read the landscape of devastation produced by this war in terms of a spatial history of the early twentieth century. *Cornelia Vismann* observes an extension of the front line to a zone of combat, danger, annihilation and nihilism, linking this geographical and military space to philosophical and juridical conceptions of modern reality. *Frank Trommler*'s essay addresses the ambiguous issue of turning the war experience into a factor for social integration. Healing wounds through political, social, or psychological therapy can be interpreted either as another way of instrumentalizing victims or, alternatively, the appropriate way of addressing the consequences of nationalist violence. Therapy, as much as reckless destruction, seems to be part of a specific modern concept of war. *Wolfgang Michalka* follows the traces of specific structures of the war economy in the designing of economic concepts for the early twentieth century. He refers to an ideal of an economy modeled in analogy to a machine or to the rationalized battle field, shedding light on military aspects of modern economic systems.

The following chapters are concerned with clarifying individual aspects of the relationship between modernity and violence in wars and in civil society. *Jeffrey Verhey* demonstrates that propaganda, which was systematically used during for the first time in history World War I, is ill-understood as a habit of lying. His underlying assumption that language in modern media is never a representation of a given reality but makes a substantial contribution to the construction of reality, necessarily blurs the dividing line between war propaganda and the genre of news information. An interpretation of the term

"Blitzkrieg" serves *Karlheinz Barck's* discussion of fascism's tendency to substitute cognition with will and transforming will into violent action. His examples of overlap between political, cultural and military discourse based on the common use of the metaphor Blitzkrieg are striking. Based on literary reflections on the destruction of Dresden, *Andy Spencer* demonstrates to what extent the relationship between modernity and destruction is an unresolved issue. Spencers's juxtaposition of two approaches, a biographical one and a generalizing one that removes the events from any historical concreteness, reveals the undesirable implication of constructing a universal story of violence that may make death and destruction acceptable as a given part of life. In her contribution, *Andrea Slane* discusses twenty years of associating fascism and sexual license by both juxtaposing and fusing sexuality and brutality, emotional perversion and violence. She pursues the intriguing questions how it was possible that the movement of philistine brown shirts, congregating in Munich beer halls and led by a celibate, could be turned into images of sexual subversion, freedom from state control and radical experimentation. The essay presents fascinating elements of a pictorial and linguistic history of responses to Nazism, empirical and fantastic.

Wolfgang Eckart opens a dark chapter in the relationship between modernity and violence, namely the deep involvement of the sciences and medicine in modern warfare. The medical profession and, in particular, neurology, psychology and also psychoanalysis made a considerable contribution to the war effort and, in turn, enjoyed a period of innovation, growth, and increased respectability by using the battlefield as their laboratory and sphere for experimentation. After the end of the war, this involvement continued, as the medical profession was then involved in designing large programs of rehabilitation and reintegration of war cripples into the production process. The opposites of war and love, in *Lisabeth During's* reading of texts of modern literature, no longer exclude one another but enter into unusual relationships and states of mutual exchanges. *Crystal Mazur Ockenfuss* approaches Gottfried Benn, radical innovator of poetic language through aggressive violations of conventional aesthetic codes and, for a short time supporter of the NS revolt, through a reading of the body as a metaphor. *Phillip D'Alton* is concerned with a specific aspect of the construction of the female. Women's continued exclusion from central areas of the military may well give rise to ambivalent responses. Why should women wish to be included in the 'privilege' to kill which has been a male domain for most of human history? D'Alton's argument is a different one. He raises the issue of the cultural construction of images of masculinity and femininity in relation to violence that serves specific political purposes in discourse on power.

Richard Cork provides the reader with an authoritative survey of German artistic representations of the war experience and is puzzled by the artists' determination to continue to produce even under the most adverse conditions. Literary reflections on war and violence are being pursued in a group of essays ranging from interpreting a novel on the Thirty Years War by Alfred Döblin, to Heiner Müller's and Thomas Bernhard's fascination with destruction and violence in our own contemporary world. *Robert Cohen* writes about Arnold Zweig's changing and at the same time surprisingly consistent attitude toward war. *Harro Müller* compares Döblin's early and experimental novel about Wallenstein and his much more conventional, late three volumes on the First World War and its aftermath. *Tim Mehigan* pursues traces of continuity in dealing with violence in the works of two Austrian authors, Robert Musil and Thomas Bernhard; and *Justus Fetscher's* essay reconstructs representations of the French Revolution in German literature and theater after World War I. Finally, *Wolf Kittler* analyses Heiner Müller's texts and theater about the war mentality and the destruction of bourgeois society.

Violence and Modernity

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The Great War and the Persistence of Tradition: Languages of Grief, Bereavement, and Mourning

Abstract: Those who argue that the First World War was a landmark in the history of Modernism ignore a salient feature of the war: it's legacy of universal bereavement. The strength of what may be termed 'traditional' forms in cultural life, in art, poetry and ritual, lay in their power to mediate bereavement. The cutting edge of 'modern memory', its multi-faceted sense of dislocation, paradox and the ironic, could express anger and despair, and did so in enduring ways; it was melancholic but by and large it could not heal. Traditional modes of seeing the war, while at times less challenging intellectually, aesthetically or philosophically, provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind.

The history of the Great War is a subject of perennial fascination. In some ways the end of the twentieth century appears disturbingly close to its beginnings. We have witnessed recently the collapse of elements of the European state system and the ideological and geo-political divide which grew out of the 1914–18 conflict. The end of the 'Cold War' has brought us back not to 1939 or 1945, but in a sense back to 1914. Ethnic and nationalist divisions that seemed past history are painfully present today, resurrected by unscrupulous leaders as if nothing had occurred between 1914 and 1994.

In other ways the chequered recent history of European integration makes even clearer the need to recall the bloody history of European disintegration. If we want to understand and ultimately to put behind us the cataclysmic record of European history in this century, we must revisit the war that set in motion these enduring centrifugal and centripetal forces, propelling us away from and towards a unified Europe.

In some respects, this historical terrain is very familiar. Whole libraries exist on the military, economic and diplomatic history of the period. Less attention has been paid, though, to the process whereby Europeans tried to find ways to comprehend and then to transcend the catastrophes of the war. The

many sites of memory and sites of mourning, both public and private, creat-
ed in the wake of the conflict have only recently been treated to study in a
comparative framework.

Remembrance is part of the landscape. Anyone who walks through north-
ern France or Flanders will find traces of the terrible, almost unimaginable,
human losses of the war, and of efforts to commemorate the fallen. War me-
morials dot the countryside, in cities, towns, and villages, in market squares,
churchyards, schools and obscure corners of hillsides and fields. Scattered
throughout the region are larger sites of memory, the cemeteries of Verdun,
the Marne, Passchendaele and the Somme.

Contemporaries knew these names and the terrible events that happened
there all too well. The history of bereavement was universal history during
and immediately after the Great War in France, Britain, and Germany. In the
military service of these three countries alone, more than four million men
died, or roughly one in six of those who served. This figure represents nearly
half the total death toll in the bloodiest war in history to date.[1] Among the
major combatants, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that every family was in
mourning: most for a relative – a father, a son, a brother, a husband – others
for a friend, a colleague, a lover, a companion.

Transcendence was a privilege, not a commonplace experience. To re-
member the anxiety of 1500 days of war necessarily entailed how to forget; in
the interwar years those who couldn't obliterate the nightmares were locked
in mental asylums throughout Europe. Most people were luckier. They knew
both remembering and forgetting, and by living through both, they had at
least the chance to transcend the terrible losses of war.

In the years following the war, in the face of the army of the dead, the ef-
fort to commemorate went beyond the conventional shibboleths of patriot-
ism. Yes, these millions died for their country, but to say so was merely to
begin, not to conclude, the search for the 'meaning' of the unprecedented
slaughter of the Great War. Even to pose that question was bound to be ap-
pallingly difficult; full of ambivalence and confusion, charged with tentative-
ness and more than a fragment of futility. But that search went on in all the
major combatant countries from the first months of the war.

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1   For full casualty figures, see J. M. Winter: *The Great War and the British People*, ch. 3.

I. The 'Traditional' and the 'Modern'

Current historical interpretations of the cultural history of the Great War focus on two basic components of that process of understanding. The first is encapsulated in the term "modern memory".[2] It describes the creation of a new language of truth-telling about war in poetry, prose and the visual arts. 'Modernism,'[3] thus defined, was a cultural phenomenon, the work of the elite whose legacy has touched millions. It had sources in the pre-war period, but flowered during and after the 1914–18 conflict. As Samuel Hynes has argued, the war turned back the clock on cultural experimentation at home. But at the same time, soldier/writers brought the 'aesthetics of direct experience' to bear on imagining the war in a way far removed from the 'lies' or 'Big Words' of the older generation which sent them to fight and die in France and Flanders. Their vision paralleled that of the non-combatant modernists – Eliot, Pound, Joyce – whose break with literary tradition seemed so valid after the upheaval of the war.[4]

The second way of understanding the war entails what many modernists rejected: patriotic certainties, "high diction"[5] incorporating euphemisms about battle, 'glory,' and the 'hallowed dead,' in sum, the sentimentality and lies of wartime propaganda. Some modernists, notably the Italian futurists, struck nationalist poses during the war; most were more ambivalent about the war. But the power of patriotic appeals derived from the fact that they were distilled from a set of what may be called 'traditional values' – classical, romantic, or religious images and ideas widely disseminated in both elite and popular culture before and during the war. It is this set of values and the languages in which they were expressed which I call the 'traditional' approach to imagining war.[6]

Of course, both the 'modernist' and the 'traditional' forms of imagining the war were evident long before the Armistice. Furthermore, the distinction was at times more rhetorical than real. Modernists didn't obliterate traditions;

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2 Fussell: *The Great War and Modern Memory*.

3 The best formulation of this position is by Samuel Hynes in his remarkable book *A War Imagined: The Great War and English Culture*. It subtly develops and goes beyond the earlier, seminal work of Fussell. For the latest (though certainly not the last) study in this tradition, see Christopher Coker: *War and the Twentieth Century*.

4 Hynes: *A War Imagined*.

5 See Fussell: *The Great War and Modern Memory*, and Bogacz: "'A Tyranny of words': language, poetry, and antimodernism in England in the First World War."

6 For a similar argument, see Rosa Bracco: *Merchants of Hope: Middlebrow Writers of the First World War*.