Chapter Five

The Art of War

The Discourse of War

Discourse is discourse, but the operations, strategies, and schemes played out there are real.

—Jean Baudrillard, in Baudrillard and Lorringer (1987, p. 15)

What can we possibly know about the history of war? Humans have fought each other in organized groups for thousands of years. We know bits and pieces of this history but we can't completely understand earlier wars. Why? Is it because they were part of cultures not our own? In part, but to my mind even the people there, at the time, couldn't fully understand the wars they fought. Culture is too complex for full understanding, at least by the humans who construct it as they live it. But even if full understanding is denied us, we can understand a great deal. Even more, we can seek to better understand contemporary war by looking at its antecedents.

This chapter is a quick and dirty tour of certain major themes in warfare that have become crucial today. It is hardly a complete history, and it is certainly full of contradictions because it focuses on the long-standing tension in war's discourse between the desire to understand, explain, predict, and control combat and the reasons why this desire is impossible to fulfill. Perhaps the best place to start is with the earliest known guide to war.

It was written in China over 2,300 years ago. The textual evidence indicates that one author with real military experience wrote the bulk of the 13 chapters now called—along with the extensive commentary added over the years—The Art of War. I'll refer to this author as Sun Tzu, since it doesn't make much difference here whether or not the book was written in the sixth century B.C.E. by a general for Ho-Lü, the king of the state of Wu, or by some other general sometime during the Warring States period (453–221 B.C.E.). In either case, The Art of War discusses the most important aspects of both
ancient and modern war, the types of war which prevailed for more than 5,000 years up until 1945 (Griffith, 1962; Sun Tzu, c. 400 B.C.E.).

At the very beginning of his text, Sun Tzu argues that there are five "fundamental factors" in war: the moral, the weather, the terrain, command, and doctrine. Some of these factors are under direct human control, others are not. By Sun Tzu's schema those factors under at least partial human control include the logical (doctrine), the emotional (moral), and areas that are a mix of both (command). Throughout ancient and modern warfare the importance of these various elements remained in rough balance in the discourse of war, although they were called by many different names.

This balance was one reason war was traditionally labeled an art, not a science. While rationality in various forms was always considered crucial to successful warmaking, so were other forces, variously called the "moral" (Sun Tzu), "fortuna" (Niccolò Machiavelli), the "heroic" (Morris Janowitz), "friction" (Carl von Clausewitz), the "spirit" (T. E. Lawrence), or "intuition" (Col. Francis Kane).

Each of these military thinkers draws a sharp distinction between two distinct poles: the area of the natural (often described in terms of luck or human will) and the area of the rational (the logical, the planned). In his chapter called "Friction in War" Clausewitz explains:

> Everything is very simple in War, but the simplest thing is difficult. These difficulties accumulate and produce a friction. ... Will overcomes this friction; it crushes the obstacles. . . .

> Friction is the only conception which... distinguishes real War from War on paper. The military machine... and all belonging to it... appears on [paper] easy to manage. But... it is composed entirely of individuals, each of which keeps up its own friction in all directions. (1962, pp. 77–78)

For Clausewitz it was the human that brought friction to the battlefield, as well as moral sense, intuition, and heroism. Although many herald Clausewitz as the ultimate theorist of contemporary war, his theories only explained war as it was, not as it was becoming. World War I and World War II took Clausewitz's theories, and modern war itself, past the point of absurdity. It is remarkable how Clausewitz is usually portrayed as a balanced, rational philosopher of war, while actually his emotional need for war was extreme even by his own account. Consider this letter (Rapaport, 1962, p. 22) to his fiancée, Countess von Brühl:

> My fatherland needs the war and—frankly speaking—only war can bring me to the happy goal. In whichever way I might like to relate my life to the rest of the world, my way takes me always across a great battlefield; unless I enter upon it, no permanent happiness can be mine.
After the war did start, he wrote another letter (p. 416) to her, right before the battle of Jena, which was a major defeat for the Prussians: “The day after tomorrow . . . there will be a great battle, for which the entire Army is longing. I myself look forward to this day with joy as I would to my own wedding day.” This is not a rational attitude toward war. Clausewitz’s desire for war coexisted with his attempts to rationally explain it.

By the late-modern era this tension between a rational analysis of war and war’s emotional appeal had become a dominant aspect of military culture. “The history of the modern military establishment,” Morris Janowitz claims,

can be described as a struggle between heroic leaders, who embody traditionalism and glory, and military “managers,” who are concerned with the scientific and rational conduct of war. (1971, p. 21)

The emphasis in the military has historically been on rules and modeling because the reality of battle is biased in the other direction. For example, the military historian John Keegan points out that the fundamental purpose of training “is to reduce the conduct of war to a set of rules and a system of procedures—and thereby to make orderly and rational what is essentially chaotic and instinctive” (1976, pp. 18–19). But reason has never been able to make of war a science. It is impossible to completely quantify anything in war besides logistics and ballistics, let alone the emotionality of combat and the political shaping of war or peacemaking. Strategic models of rationality constantly aim for the rigid use of numbers and formulas (Walt, 1987). But reducing rationality to a system of rules and procedures may not be effective, or even rational, under many people’s definitions of the term. Still, it has long been a goal of many military men and lately it has become the goal.

To understand the powerful attraction of formal systems that deny the emotional (including the moral and intuitive) and natural in war, it will be necessary to look more closely at war as a discourse system.

A discourse system is the communicative practice in a specific domain of knowledge, and its practitioners are sometimes called a community. The importance of discourse as a framework for understanding culture has been receiving growing recognition recently. A new field of discourse analysis has been marked out that includes work from the disciplines of linguistics, psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, law, artificial intelligence, philosophy, mass communication, political science rhetoric, and poetics. What these very different approaches agree on is the central importance of language, as actually used in conversations and texts, for shaping not only a significant part of human understanding of the world but many material aspects of the world as well.

A discourse does not just involve words. For example, what warriors and soldiers do with their bodies is more important than what they say
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(Scarry, 1985). Weapons, rituals, traditions, and techniques are all parts of the discourse of war. Over time the rules of war's discourse have shifted considerably, as have the hidden metarules that determine those rules. For example, such metarules, establish who can be listened to and who can't, as well as conventions that mark out the permitted areas for discussion and those forbidden, and rationales that allow certain questions to be asked but not others. Paying attention to the rules and metarules of a discourse system reveals a great deal about the people in the discourse community and the society as a whole that nurtures it (Foucault, 1980; Shapiro, 1981).

The analytic techniques used for looking closely at discourse are those available to any close reader; they are drawn from common sense and the long tradition of rhetoric. A close look at figures of speech, style, the rules of genres, (poetics in other words) offers a way to explore beneath the surface logic of military and scientific thinking. The technical details of the rhetoric of persuasion that are employed are clues about the assumptions, symbols, and myth systems that the creators of the discourse consider irrefutable and self-evident, even if only unconsciously. In etymology, in metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony, in genre, and in style there is evidence for some of what swirls beneath the surfaces of the discourse, no matter how official, how technical. The noted literary critic Northrop Frye explains: "The only road from grammar to logic, then, runs through the intermediate territory of rhetoric" (1957, p. 331).

A discourse has many meanings. In this version of war's history the focus is on the organization of the discourse system, its explicit, implicit, and latent rules, contents, and effects. To uncover the latent (the "dynamically unconscious repressed" as Hayden White [1973] has called it), a certain "psychologic" must be employed. Tropes (figures of speech) are a very important part of this analysis, representing as they do a swerve from the literal that often marks a point of emotional importance. Where there are powerful or numerous tropes and other stylistic devices it can be assumed that the story of the text (its argument or narrative) is being carried—at least in part—by implicit messages (psychological, symbolic) and not only by explicit logic.

In the case of scientific and government texts, uses of rhetoric are all the more significant because the style of the genre is itself the style of nonstyle. The language of the scientist, the engineer, and the official is supposed to be transparent. It is not supposed to become, or even influence, the content of what is asserted (Bazerman, 1981; Hofstadter, 1955; Medawar, 1951). Lately, this claim has been criticized from many points of view. Many scientists now recognize the importance of rhetoric, especially the use of metaphors, in the construction of scientific truths (Gould, 1987; Karush, 1986; Stent, 1986).

Even the most official document is communicating on many different levels: the official explicit content; the implicit policy and political implica-
tions; and more latent, emotional appeals, threats, and other expressions of the political unconscious, psycho-logic, the mass mind, public subconscious, or whatever one wishes to call it.

This way of thinking about war is not scientific. It seems quite likely that the complex reality this book addresses cannot be understood in a purely scientific framework. My analysis is meant to be suggestive, reasonable, even persuasive. This is a historical, philosophical, and literary understanding of a technical and official type of discourse about a bloody and awe-full reality. As such, you dear reader are free to take it as you will, even as an allegory.

The idea that war can be profitably understood as a discourse is a useful one. Primitive or ritual war has been brilliantly analyzed in terms of discourse by historian Susan Mansfield:

Traditional cultures clearly understood war as a form of discourse between the human and "the other." As a result they accepted that the conversation must conform to certain syntactical rules and limits if the communication was to be effective. Moreover, they also hypothesized that war, like any other valued dialogue, was ongoing, continuous, and cyclical. The natural environment and the human enemy must, in some degree, be protected and preserved. (1982, p. 236)

Notice how important the enemy is, if war is to survive. Without an enemy there is no conversation. This is a realization that warriors have never lost, although in more modern times it has had to be disguised in the rationalization that the function of war is making peace. Actually, war has always been a conversation. This is even true of modern war, as the great scholar of war Quincy Wright was at pains to emphasize.

Modern war tends to be about words more than about things, about potentialities, hopes, and aspirations more than about facts, grievances, and conditions. . . . War, therefore, rests in modern civilization, upon an elaborate ideological construction maintained through education in a system of language, law, symbols, and values. The explanation and interpretation of these systems are often as remote from the actual sequence of events as are primitive explanations of war in terms of the requirements of magic, ritual, or revenge. War in the modern period does not grow out of a situation but out of a highly artificial interpretation of a situation. (1964, p. 356)

Still, to realize war can be described as a discourse system doesn't explain all that much. Before going on with war's historical story it is necessary to explain how the discourse of war is also what Michel Foucault labeled a system of power and knowledge.
Power, Knowledge, and War

It is because war is so obviously concerned with power that Foucault's work is particularly relevant (1980). He argued that power is not just repressive; it also involves the positive shaping and control of discourse and the establishment of what he termed a "regime of truth." Much more important than knowing the details of the imposition of power is understanding how that power's very ground is organized and the unchallenged assumptions that make this organization possible.

According to Foucault there are several ways to examine a power/knowledge system: microhistories, analysis of its discourse, and investigation of its genealogy. Foucault takes the idea of a genealogy from Friedrich Nietzsche. A genealogy makes no claim to historical (even critical historical) completeness; rather it is a look at the "ancestors" of the current regime of power/knowledge with an aim to understand something of the forces that have shaped it. A genealogy works from the point of view of doing something today (for or as or with or to the descendant) based on what Foucault called subjugated knowledges. There is no real attempt to historicize the ancestors and see their world from their point of view. A genealogy is also, rhetorically, a rejection of any claim of being a purely scientific examination, which Foucault's earlier term "archaeology" implied.

Genealogy also signifies all the complexity of a living family, involving not just facts about occupations, travels, children, deaths, and so on but also the intangible elements of myth, mystery, incompleteness and the tangle of relationships wound with the emotions of love, hate, and indifference.

Foucault defines a genealogy specifically as the chronicle of a set of different knowledges, all marginalized in some ways from the dominant defining discourse. He breaks these subjugated knowledges into two categories:

1. Erudite knowledge hidden in historical details and exceptions that have been repressed by the dominant discourse and hidden by the broad generalizations of its myths and metarules.
2. Knowledges excluded because they failed some test of the discourse rules for a certain level of complexity, practicality, or formalization of logic or science

In the case of the current war system of power/knowledge the subjugated knowledges would include perspectives coming from marginalized and specialized forms of knowledge (especially from AI's subfield of philosophy, and within it the more critical perspectives such as phenomenology and hermeneutics); from practical experience low on the hierarchy (the worker's, the programmer's, the soldier's); from those who would raise political and moral
issues; and from viewpoints rigorously excluded as unrational from science in general, as mystical, emotional, or womanly.

This conception of subjugated knowledges is not without its problems. For example, in terms of the discourse system of the present U.S. military, it would seem obvious that the viewpoint of the warrior (as opposed to the technocrat, manager, or timeserver) represents a subjugated knowledge. Yet the idea of the warrior seems to include not only critics of managing war as a technoscience and as an antidemocratic policy (Byron, 1985; Donovan, 1970; Newell, 1986) but also others whose conception of themselves as warriors encourages them to violate the law in order to make war against communism or some other pure evil (Ehrenreich, 1987a; W. Kennedy, 1987).

Despite the complexity of discourse, it seems a useful approach, especially because it helps explain a crucial dynamic: how does something like war change? Foucault suggested several possibilities:

1. **Changes in the actual material knowledge of a technoscience**—for example, the development of probability theory led to important changes in medical discourse since it meant that epidemics and infection could be viewed in a new way.

2. **The influence of official or other organized power** (e.g., medical and other professional associations, the police behind the judiciary) can directly change the rules of a discourse system; Foucault demonstrates this by citing cases of mental illness, prisons, and medicine (1972, 1975, 1977, 1980).

3. **The insurrection of subjugated knowledges**—Foucault argued that it is through the “insurrection” and “reappearance” of these knowledges that criticism does its work on the essential problem, “changing the regime of the production of truth” (1980, p. 133).

Change doesn’t always spring from within a power/knowledge system. It can also come from outside the defining rules of discourse—imported, incorporated, or catalyzed by relationships with other discourse systems or communities. There is a border around a system of power/knowledge, but it is permeable and shifting. There are also overlapping discourses. Some of them are veritable metadiscourses permeating a whole spectrum of more limited discourses, including other metadiscourses. War is certainly a metadiscourse, as basic elements of war are part of countless cultures over a vast sweep of time and space. Gender is another such metadiscourse, and one that is intimately connected to war. It may seem a digression to try explaining the gendering of war in the middle of an argument about a new type of “postmodern” war that itself is based in part on an examination of the role of computers, as weapons and metaphors, in battle. But it’s not. The recent shifts in war’s gender coding explain the development of postmodern war as well as anything does, and they are part and parcel of the phenomenon as a whole besides (Gray, 1992).
The Gendering of War

War is clearly a "man's thing," as one of my students once remarked. Yet, war would be impossible if women did not support it as mothers, wives, daughters, workers, and even soldiers, which Cynthia Enloe makes very clear in her book on women and war, *Does Khaki Become You?* (1983). But the role of women has certainly been subordinate to the part men play. Norman Dixon points out in his analysis of military incompetence that "it is in the nature of military organizations to recapitulate the psychodynamics of an authoritarian family group, one in which the paterfamilias can do no wrong" (1976, p. 218). Dixon (1976) has an illuminating chapter called "Anti-Effeminacy" on the enforcement of masculinity in the military. He recounts various British practices such as forbidding piano playing and denouncing art and cigarettes, as well as the shame of performing defensive assignments like convoy duty. Dixon lets Gen. Adna R. Chaffee introduce the chapter with his pithy remark, "Let war cease altogether and a nation will become effeminate" (p. 208).

There are several important aspects to the love some men have for war. First, there is pleasure. Even modern war has afforded men much pleasure. The World War II combat veteran and philosopher J. Glenn Gray has been one of the most honest commentators on this:

What are these secret attractions of war, the ones that have persisted in the West despite revolutionary changes in the methods of warfare? I believe that they are: the delight in seeing, the delight in comradeship, the delight in destruction. Some fighters know one appeal and not the others, some experience all three, and some may, of course, feel other appeals that I do not know. These three had reality for me and I have found them also throughout the literature of war. (1959, p. 33)

William James, many years earlier, held a somewhat similar view: "The horror is the fascination. War is the strong life; it is life in extremis." In order to do away with war, James argued, there had to be some way to fulfill its functions because in many ways war defined masculinity. Any replacement for war "must make new energies and hardihoods continue the manliness to which the military mind so faithfully clings" (1911, pp. 276, 287; emphasis in original).

But beyond war's direct pleasures there are indirect advantages. It certainly supplies a justification for privilege, especially of men over women. As such it also becomes a key element for many men (and women) in defining masculinity.

Since war is still an integral part of male identity it remains central to both positive and negative conceptions of masculinity, despite its horrific elements,
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no matter how much its emotional importance is denied. In fact, this denial can lead to serious misperceptions, as James Fallows argues:

Finally, arguments about defense that lose sight of the facts have been shaped by unexpressed emotion. Along with relations between the races and relations between the sexes, defense is one of the three areas in which public policy is most likely to be skewed by deep psychological forces. The subject under discussion—war—is life's most abhorrent activity, but also one that, through the millennia, has been, in many eyes, the ultimate manifestation of masculinity. All preparations for war are preparations to do what is universally not only condemned but also celebrated by its survivors and many onlookers. (1982, pp. 182-183)

Bernard Brodie, the influential theorist of naval and nuclear strategy, made a similar point:

Human emotions, including and especially repressed emotions, make up a vitally important part of the reasons why men resort to war or, being in an obviously unprofitable war, find it so difficult to withdraw from its clutches. Emotions enormously affect perception as well as decisions and behavior, and they certainly affect the degree of rigidity we show about any of these. No doubt there is a good deal of aggression in the normal being, especially the male human being, and just as surely there is much repressed rage among various personalities who may rise to positions of influence and power. There can hardly be any doubt that these factors are involved in the genesis of wars and in accounting for the intensity and especially the persistence with which they are usually fought. (1973, p. 312)

These factors have been explored in part already, especially by J. Glenn Gray (1959), quoted above. But some of the more insightful observations come from feminist scholars.

One of the best is Carol Cohn. After spending a year as a visiting scholar at MIT's prestigious Center for International Studies, she wrote a detailed account of the rhetoric of nuclear strategic discourse (1987). Her analysis shows how this discourse often revolves not around people and their needs but weapons (the subject in both senses), how metaphors far removed from the reality of nuclear weapons are used (sexual, the farm, food, friendship), and how, among themselves, the nuclear analysts often slip ironically into religious symbolism, even calling themselves "the nuclear priesthood" (p. 21). She claims that on this level their use of language reveals

a whole series of culturally grounded and culturally acceptable mechanisms that make it possible to "think about the unthinkable," to work in
institutions that foster the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to plan mass incinerations of millions of human beings for a living. [They use] language that is abstract, sanitized, full of euphemisms; language that is sexy and fun to use; paradigms whose referent is weapons; imagery that domesticates and deflates the forces of mass destruction; imagery that reverses sentient and non-sentient matter, that conflates birth and death, destruction and creation.

This language is actually part of their appeal for legitimacy. It is a claim based on “technical expertise” and on the “disciplined purging of the emotional valences that might threaten their objectivity.” But under the “smooth, shiny surface of their discourse” of “abstraction and technical jargon” she uncovered strong currents of homoerotic excitement, heterosexual domination, the drive toward competency and mastery, the pleasures of membership in an elite and privileged group, of the ultimate importance and meaning of membership in the priesthood, and the thrilling power of becoming Death, shatterer of worlds. (pp. 41-43)

The psychodynamics of this turn are complex and incompletely understood. Cohn mentions two possibilities she postulates from the work of the feminist theorist Dorothy Dinnerstein (1977):

1. That men involved in war-making and life-threatening actions manage their ambivalence over this activity by externalizing the negative parts of their feelings onto a group or object that is held in low value, that lacks power, and that is traditionally marginalized, even “ignored or scorned”—women being a prime example

2. That technical and scientific creation projects sometimes represent attempts by men to “appropriate from women the power of life and death” (Cohn, 1987, pp. 17-19).

One doesn’t have to accept these theories uncritically, and I do not, to be struck by the ways the language of the nuclear bomb makers supports Cohn’s interpretation. That so many witnesses of atomic blasts—from Trinity, the very first one (at Alamogordo, NM, on July 16, 1945)—have felt themselves part of some great creation is difficult to explain away. The first bomb was “Oppenheimer’s baby”; the hydrogen bomb was “Teller’s baby.” On seeing his baby explode J. Robert Oppenheimer commented that “It was as though we stood at the first day of creation.” He then quoted the words of Shiva, the great multiarmed goddess-mother, from the Bhagavad Gita: “I am become death, destroyer of worlds.”

William Laurence, a U.S. War Department historian, said on seeing the first Trinity test: “One felt as though he had been privileged to witness the
Birth of the World.” Maj. Gen. Leslie R. Groves’ official cable reporting success of the same test to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson read, “Doctor has just returned most enthusiastic and confident that the little boy is as husky as his big brother.”

Cohn has many more stories (duds were girls) and a subtle analysis of the gendering of the early bombs (pp. 19–24). Jane Caputi (1987) has similar examples. The bomb that was dropped on Bikini atoll was a real babe. It had a picture of Rita Hayworth on it, and it was named Gilda after a movie of hers (p. 156). Most startling of all, Oppenheimer was named “Father of the Year” by the American Baby Association for making the atomic bomb (p. 187).

In his work the psychohistorian Robert Jay Lifton remarks on a related dynamic—that the fear of nuclear weapons can become a love for them:

Nuclear weapons alter and blur the boundaries of our psychological lives, of our symbolic space in ways crucial to our thought, feelings and actions. The most extreme state of contemporary deformation is a pattern which may best be called “nuclearism.” By this term I mean to suggest the passionate embrace of nuclear weapons as a solution to our anxieties (especially our anxieties concerning the weapons themselves). (1970, pp. 26–27)

He connects images of the extinction of the human race with dreams/hopes for the human future. Lifton points out that Star Wars, with its intense futuristic expression, has a deeply nostalgic form, the return to a time before we were all threatened by nuclear extinction. It represents a general form of nuclearism he calls “technism,” which he defines as “an absolute embrace of technology for warding off an ultimate threat to human existence.” Technology not only becomes a shield for the humans but in many ways it seems headed toward “literally replacing human responsibility” (1987, p. 125).

Along with the redirection of fear to love/gratitude that Lifton calls nuclearism, he also postulates something analogous to Dinnerstein’s “externalization” in the idea of “doubling.” From his research with atomic bomb survivors, nuclear strategists, elite college students, and Nazi death camp doctors, Lipton has concluded that under extreme stress many people create psychic doubles. These “others” then go on to perform the tasks the “real” person did not want to, or could not, take responsibility for.

The irony is that while everyone lives within this system, the people most likely to create alternate personas are exactly the same people with the greatest chance of changing the way things are. Yet, in many ways they are the most trapped by the very webs of power and desire that they weave.

Some intriguing speculations of a general structure of this network of power and desire in these discourses can be found in the work of the Australian philosopher Zoë Sofia (1984). She studies what she terms the
“sexo-semiotics” of technology. She agrees with Foucault that in the nineteenth century the general technologizing of power, accomplished by the inscription of power on bodies and of pleasures onto the body politic, also involved the creation of an “analytics of sexuality” that in some ways was the technologization of sexual discourse. Sofia points out that this was accompanied by a balancing sexualization and mythification of technology. Where Foucault shows how disciplining technologies produced categories of perversions, she looks to undisciplined technologies “proliferating embodiments of perversions.”

She accepts Norman O. Brown’s assertion (1959) that technology is invested with erotic and bodily energy by the labor process, leading to an alienation by the human that seeks to animate the unliving while it reacts with disgust to its own living body. She traces this not to the child’s desire to emulate the father, as Brown does, but rather to masculine envy of female reproductive capacity—womb envy, as Cohn suggests as well.

Much of Sofia’s evidence is in the form of analysis of science fiction literature and movies and is too elaborate to present here. What it points toward is a set of detailed predictions about the epistemophilia, alienation, and other psychological associates of technoscience that seem confirmed by the intense, barely hidden, emotional energy revealed in the military’s commitment to computers.

Sofia suggests that

The Big Science worldview emphasizes epistemophilia (obsessive quest for knowledge, especially of origins), upward displacement (the High—or extraterrestrial—of hi-tech), and half-lives (projection of body-life into machine-life and vice versa). (1984, p. 59)

Sofia sees many of these forces or “libidinal energies” as “displaced from body to machines,” leading to man’s preoccupation with “animating excrement” and “resurrecting dead matter”—in other words, creating artificial intelligences. Such creationism runs on very set tracks. It is rationalistic in a crude lockstep way that insists every element of life and of consciousness is either unimportant or translatable into numbers and their relations.

This vulgar rationality (and no doubt the emotions that fuel it) is a major justification for war and it can still confuse seasoned observers. Military historian Michael Howard concluded after a lifelong study of the subject that

The conflicts between states which have usually led to war have normally arisen, not from any irrational and emotive drives, but from almost a superabundance of analytic rationality. . . . Men have fought during the
past two hundred years neither because they are aggressive nor because they are acquisitive animals, but because they are reasoning ones... Wars begin by conscious and reasoned decisions based on the calculation made by both parties, that they can achieve more by going to war than by remaining at peace. (1984, pp. 14-15, 22; emphasis in original)

If this is truly so, we should start to worry that maybe something is wrong with rationality. But it is only the most shallow rationality that is used to justify wars, especially in the modern era. Susan Mansfield is much closer to the mark when she argues that wars are actually fought mainly for psychological reasons. In her view, war is

a human institution that satisfies deep-seated psychic needs (the infantile desire for revenge on powerful parents, the anxiety-based insatiability for goods and power, a paranoid sense of powerlessness, etc.) and as a ritual attempt to force nature and the divine (the environment) to conform to human will. (1982, p. 19)

Yet, neurotic as it may be today, war still has a tremendous grip on human culture. To understand why this is so we will have to cover a great deal of ground, beginning with a brief exploration of the battles of thousands of years ago.

The Roots of Modern War in Primitive and Ancient War

Out of the warlike peoples arose civilization, while the peaceful collectors and hunters were driven to the ends of the earth, where they are gradually being exterminated or absorbed, with only the dubious satisfaction of observing the nations which had wielded war so effectively to destroy them to become great, now victimized by their own instrument.

—Quincy Wright (1964, p. 42)

There are many different theories about the origins of war. Most use one or more of these explanatory stories:

- War as the first machine with men as the parts
- War as a power play of unemployed hunters led by priests
- War as men's equivalent to birth
- War as a way of life for barbarian nomad-warrior cultures
- War as cancer (warrior cultures taking over peaceful cultures)
- War as the health of the state
- War because of elite or mass misperceptions
- War as testosterone poisoning
- War because humans are aggressive animals
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- War because human brains are an evolutionary dead end
- War for profits or prophets
- War as a ritual
- War as progress
- War as a self-perpetuating machine
- War as racism

All these versions of war have more than a little truth behind them. They differ because they represent different levels of explanation. Each story explains some aspects of war better than others. Which might be best for analyzing postmodern war?

One way to begin is by asking the first question of Carl von Clausewitz: De quoi s'agit-il? What is it for?

Wars by Neolithic peoples, often called primitive wars, served population and ritual needs. Early wars by city people and the early empires, so-called ancient wars, also seemed to revolve around economic and ritual needs, with notable exceptions where quite different cultures became embroiled in total wars of survival, either of people or of ideologies.

For the last 500 years war has been conceptualized as an extension of politics. In Clausewitz's famous phrase "war is politics by other means." Since World War II clearly wars of survival still occurred; but with the technoscience readily available to produce nuclear weapons, war as merely politics has become nonsensical (Brodie, 1973).

Yet, small wars burn fiercely all over the globe while noncombatants supply the arms and build for themselves the largest, most destructive arsenals in history. Of the many possible reasons for this tenacity on the part of war, only those that most effect recent history and the types of war it has produced today can be examined here. The two premodern types of war, ritual and ancient, each contributed differently to contemporary war.

Primitive, heroic, unorganized, ritual war may seem very distant from the video images of Desert Storm, but it still exerts a force in our culture, and not just in war. Sports are in some ways more like ritual war than war itself is now. Still, despite the many changes in war today it is still strongly shaped by its ritual, clearly patriarchal origins. For example, the special role of weapons in precivilized war has left a lasting imprint on battle ever since. The naming of weapons, the granting to them great magical powers, and the assumption that they fight somewhat autonomously are all ideas that have never died out, and today they are undergoing a remarkable resurgence.

To chart the intimate relationship between weapons and war is not to say that there is a necessary relationship between invention and war. New tools do not have to become new weapons. They become weapons only if
that is what seems natural to the inventors. As John Nef remarks in his book *War and Human Progress*:

A revolution in weapons was a necessary part of the revolution in tools only in the sense that the Western peoples had not managed to break away from the traditional attitude of civilized as well as of primitive peoples—the attitude that weapons are one indispensable kind of tool. (1963, p. 41)

Nef's study shows how the inventions of the Middle Ages and the early industrial revolution were not based on military necessity. However, it also showed quite clearly that "as long as war remains a part of human experience, peoples cannot change their methods of producing without also changing their methods of destroying" (p. 41).

The debate about the importance of weapons to victory rages still in military discourse.

Tools or weapons, if only the right ones can be discovered, form 99 percent of victory. . . . Strategy, command, leadership, courage, discipline, supply, organization, and all the moral and physical paraphernalia of war are as nothing to a high superiority of weapons—at most they go to form the one percent which makes the whole possible.

—Maj. Gen. J. F. C. Fuller (1943, p. 3)

General Fuller, an early proponent of mechanized warfare, is one of the purest examples of a technological determinist; Napoleon, who claimed, "The Moral is to the Material as three to one," obviously didn't agree (R. O'Connell, 1989, p. 179). This debate between those who believe that material reality determines everything and others who give human will the important role is one that haunts this story of computers and war. Both positions are correct, at times. It's sorting out the particulars that is difficult.

Ancient war was very different from the ritual war it supplanted. It was part of a very great change in human culture and consciousness, especially around the idea of mechanization. Lewis Mumford and others have said that armies were the first machines, the first soldiers being the working parts. Even if this isn't true, it seems clear that rules, order, and form are crucial elements of all organized war.

Arthur Ferrill comments on how war is defined by men using forms (line and column) in battle:

At the risk of grotesque simplification let me suggest that "organized warfare" can best be defined with one word. The word is formation. . . . When warriors are put into the field in formation, when they work as a team under a commander or leader rather than as a band of leaderless
heroes, they have crossed the line (it has been called “the military horizon”) from “primitive” to “true” or “organized” warfare. (1985, p. 11; emphasis in original)¹

Whether its organizing principle is called calculation, as Sun Tzu termed it, or mechanism, as in Mumford’s pejorative formula, or formation, as in Ferrill’s definition, it is clear that ancient war was organized in a very different way from ritual war.

The break between ritual war and ancient war is greater than any since. Modern war developed out of ancient war and kept many of the same rules and most of the same metarules. Postmodern war is very closely related to modern war and ancient war as well. The details of their differences, however, occupy a major part of this book. But before they can be explored, the key elements of modern war have to be articulated.