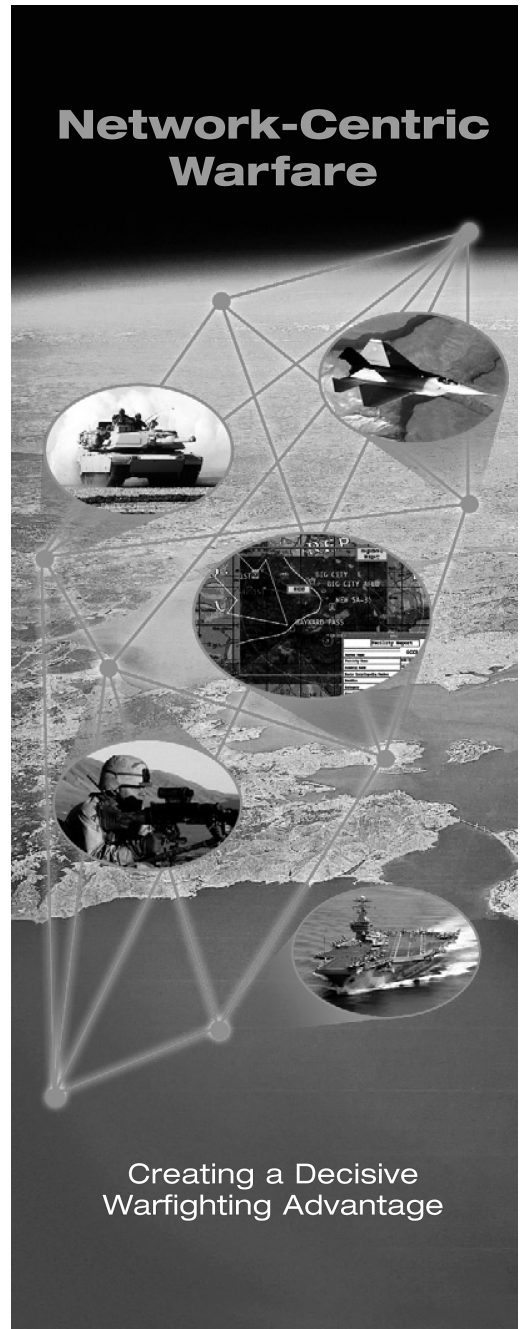


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Target of Opportunity: Networks, Netwar, and Narratives

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What is most fascinating about the developments taking place at the cutting edge of military formation at the beginning of the 21st century is therefore this. The very means by which phenomenality is itself en-generated—the intimate correlation between appearing and what appears, enacted through the power of signification—has become, above all, the prowess to which martial embodiment, paradigmatically represented by the United States military, now aspires. Strictly speaking, the contemporary military body is no longer a mere “formation.” It frankly recognizes itself to be “in-formation.” The word play is deliberate and revealing. A creature of the age of information and code, it espouses the view that the very power of en-gendering—en-gendering itself—is, fundamentally, a function of code, subject via digitalization and geneticization to electronic and molecular modulation and control. It embraces the allied view that, as a function of code, any (military) body must be endlessly mutable, and that the way to command this mutability is to develop a strategic virtuosity in the employment of information in order to refashion (military) bodies-in-formation according to any and every eventuality. Having cracked the code, military corporeality now embraces martial becoming.

—Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War*¹

“Transformation,” “technology,” “information,” “networks,” “the need for rapid change”: once upon a time, not so very long ago, such words and phrases could still be associated with an Enlightenment tradition of progress and rationality. In the past decade, however, and without simply betraying that heritage, such discourse has begun to assume a somewhat different tone. Consider the following:

Nearly all nations are moving from the industrial age to the information age. One of the tenets characterizing entry into the information age is the plummeting cost of very high quality information technology. Virtually ubiquitous, this equipment is broadly available and you do not

have to be one of the leading world economies in order to have access to very advanced technologies. All of the major technological advances, energetics, propulsion, explosives, bio-engineering, are all achieved by virtue of information. As we move into this new age there are new rules that emerge, new power centers, new relationships and people behave in different ways. These are very profound changes.²

So far so good, one might think: Enlightenment universalism is served by technological transformations that make “entry into the information age . . . broadly available” by virtue of “the plummeting cost of” such technology. “New rules” emerge, “new power centers,” “new relationships,” and new modes of behavior, individual and collective: “people behave in different ways. These are,” we are told, “very profound changes.” But we need only continue reading the passage to its end to discover that the consequences drawn from these “profound changes” are perhaps not those that many readers might have expected: “These are very profound changes. The United States has been in a leadership position and this is not a position that we can or should give up. This is a wholly changed strategic development.”³

The author drawing this conclusion is retired Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski, who, after a distinguished career in the U.S. Navy, was named by Donald Rumsfeld in 2001 to serve as director of the newly founded Office of Force Transformation, reporting directly to the secretary of defense. In the interview from which these remarks are taken, dating from August 2002, Admiral Cebrowski introduced his observations with the following caveat, which makes clear the urgent need for the newly created office that he leads:

The United States is the big kid on the block. Everyone else studies us. Everyone else designs against us. As a consequence . . . to the extent that America does not transform, its military force is ultimately doomed. That is because while we now occupy a far superior military position, the rest of the world is changing and what constitutes superior military positioning is equally likely to change.⁴

America must transform or its military force is ultimately doomed—and perhaps not just its military force. In September 2002, one month after Admiral Cebrowski gave this interview, the U.S. government issued its “National Security Strategy” report, which placed Admiral Cebrowski’s caveat in a wider historical perspective: that of a caveat *preemptor*. Beginning with the conviction that “The United States possesses unprecedented—and unequalled—strength and influence in the world,” the report contrasts the dangers and challenges of the post–Cold War period:

It has taken almost a decade for us to comprehend the true nature of this new threat. Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. . . . We cannot let our enemies strike first. . . . To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively. . . .

. . . In exercising our leadership, we will respect the values, judgment, and interests of our friends and partners. Still, we will be prepared to act apart when our interests and unique responsibilities require.⁵

This statement thus marked a radical transformation in official American foreign policy, consisting in the abandonment of the cold war principle of multilateral deterrence, which, however often it had been ignored in practice, had nonetheless still been accepted by postwar American governments as a basic principle in dealing with other nations. The new document still attempts to pay lip service to the notion of “balance of power,” although attention to linguistic detail suggests that a very different notion was in fact at work here. Thus, President George W. Bush, in his statement introducing the document, stresses that “In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage. We seek instead *to create* a balance of power that favors human freedom.”⁶ A “balance of power,” however, is not generally spoken of as something that can be “created,” precisely because it *is* a *balance*, and hence presupposes a certain equality among the elements composing it. The notion of *creation*, by contrast—however secularized it has become over the past centuries—still remains tethered to its theological origins and hence to a certain transcendence or exceptionality. “To create a balance of power” suggests that there was previously no such balance and that it must be brought into being. And the manner of such a creation will have to be precisely that which the quoted passage begins by disavowing: namely, “unilateral” action. Whatever is created has to be created unilaterally. Between the Created and the Creator there can never be a “balance of power.”⁷

And, indeed, the three basic tenets of the new, transformed American foreign policy outline a contemporary version of the doctrine of American exceptionalism, now however based not simply on the moral superiority of a “manifest destiny” but also, and above all, on uncontested military and technological *supremacy*, which could be construed, legitimized, or at least *presented* as both the *expression* and the *condition* of a corresponding moral, political, and social supremacy. At the same time, something like a dialectic of power became the justification of a new policy. Global supremacy, in large measure based on technological superiority, was asserted as being supremely

vulnerable given the relative availability of such technology, particularly its destructive potentiality, to “rogue states” and nonstate “terrorist” groups. As President Bush puts it, again in his introductory remarks:

Defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government. Today, that task has changed dramatically.⁸ Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, *shadowy networks* of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us. . . . As a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed. . . . History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act. In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action.⁹

And given the “shadowy” nature of those elusive “networks,” it is only “common sense” that the “path of action” must be “proactive”—a word not used in this document but which in its widespread currency today indicates the solidarity of the new political and military rhetoric with the discourse of business management and its avatars.¹⁰

The new policy of military supremacy, to be enforced if necessary with preemptive and unilateral action, has a history that closely parallels that with which we are concerned here, that of “netwar.” Both can be said to begin, or at least to manifest themselves, in the years immediately following the end of the first Gulf War in 1991. One year later aides of then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney—including Paul Wolfowitz, I. Lewis Libby, and Zalmay Khalilzad—prepared a draft of a document designed to provide a geopolitical framework for the assessment of military needs. This classified document, entitled “Defense Planning Guidance,” was leaked to the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and thus became the object of heated public discussion and criticism. It defined three major objectives of American foreign policy: first, preventing the emergence of any global or regional superpower capable of contesting American objectives; second, the defense of national interests, defined to include “access to raw materials, primarily Persian Gulf Oil” and opposition to the “proliferation of weapons of mass destruction”; and third, the pursuit of these objectives by unilateral military action if necessary. The controversy provoked by this draft document was so great that Secretary Cheney was compelled to have it withdrawn and rewritten.

But although it did not become official policy at the time, the draft—

or rather the ideas it articulated—did not simply disappear. In 1993 Andrew Marshall, an adviser both to Cheney and leading Democrats, “provided the incoming Clinton administration with a working paper that warned that Cold War weapons ‘platforms’ . . . were becoming obsolete in face of precision weapons and cruise missiles. Marshall instead proselytized for cheaper, quicker, smarter weapons that took full advantage of American leadership in information technology.”¹¹ Marshall also warned, however, that by developing such “precision weapons” America would force its enemies to rely on terrorist activities that would be more “difficult to target” than traditional military formations.¹²

The 1992 “Defense Planning Guidance” draft and Marshall’s 1993 working paper helped shape the strategic context in which theories of “netwar” would in the following years emerge. We are, then, dealing with a relatively recent development, scarcely a decade old. It is therefore hardly surprising that it has so far hardly coalesced into anything like a coherent doctrine, much less a consistent concept. However, from the first the word has harbored two very different, although profoundly interrelated, tendencies. One is “Network-centered warfare” (NCW), which was initially associated with Vice Admiral Cebrowski, who coauthored, with John Garstka, what is generally considered to be the paper that marked the emergence of NCW as an official military doctrine.¹³ The other major use of the term, which goes back at least to 1993, is much broader in scope. In contrast to NCW, which is specifically aimed at developing military strategies and planning, *netwar* embraces the effects and potentialities of information networks on conflicts *in general*, rather than on just their military forms. Two of its best-known practitioners are John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, both researchers at the National Defense Research Institute of the RAND Corporation. In a recent publication, *Networks and Netwars*,¹⁴ Arquilla and Ronfeldt take pains to distinguish their concept of *netwar* from its purely military counterpart, which they prefer therefore to designate as “cyberwar”:

Back in 1992, while first wondering about . . . cyberwar as a looming mode of military conflict, we thought it would be a good idea to have a parallel concept about information-age conflict at the less military, low-intensity, more social end of the spectrum. The term we coined was *netwar*, largely because it resonated with the surety that the information revolution favored the rise of network forms of organization, doctrine, and strategy. Through *netwar*, numerous dispersed small groups using the latest communications technologies could act conjointly across great distances. We had in mind actors as diverse as

transnational terrorists, criminals, and even radical activists. Some were already moving from hierarchical to new information-age network designs. (2)

Whereas “network-centered warfare” designates the essentially *military* effort to adopt to changes in conflict deriving both from the use of computers in general and, in particular, from the shift in computing and organization that arose with the introduction of networks and the internet—that is, the shift from “platform-centered” to “network-centered” computing—the notion of *netwar* as developed by Arquilla and Ronfeldt has, despite its name, never been “centered” upon or restricted to “war” in the traditional, military sense. Rather, it embraces all forms of “network-based conflict and crime” that can be said to be “short of traditional military warfare.” Thus, whereas discussions of “network-centered warfare” tend to approach conflict from the perspective of the military institutions of the nation-state, discussions of “netwar” often focus upon nonstate “actors” and conflicts, while at the same time exploring the ways in which the notion of “network” itself can be used. In *Networks and Netwars*, for instance, Arquilla and Ronfeldt distinguish between three types of network:

1. The *chain or line* network, which, as its name indicates, is organized in a linear, sequential manner: contact or communication travels from one node to another in a process that is construed as more or less fixed, or, as they write, as “end to end.”

2. The *hub, star, or wheel* network, in which the components of the network—which they often refer to as “actors”—“are tied to a central (but not hierarchical) node or actor” through which or whom all communication must pass.

3. The *all-channel or full-matrix* network, in which elements are connected to one another *without* having to pass through a *center*. (8)

These three types can of course be combined in various ways and in response to specific situations, but what they have in common is that they are organized, although to different degrees, *horizontally* rather than vertically. This indicates that the most distinctive form of the network, in comparison to previous forms of organization, is the “all-channel” type, because it is least hierarchical and most dispersed:

Ideally, there is no single, central leadership, command, or headquarters—no precise heart or head that can be *targeted*. The network as a whole has little to no hierarchy: there may be multiple leaders.

Decision-making and operations are decentralized. . . . Thus the design may sometimes appear acephalous (headless), and at other times polycephalous (Hydra-headed). (9; emphasis added)

Note that the major change in warfare brought about by this type of network affects the nature of the *target*; it is no longer the “head” of the enemy group or organization, because the latter has no single head. Rather, the “all-channel” network is potentially either acephalous or polycephalous or a mixture of both. This trait can be extended to the phenomenon of netwar in general, which, the Arquilla and Ronfeldt assert, “has two faces, like the Roman god Janus” (21). They are referring to the moral and political ambiguity of “netwar,” which can serve both civil and “uncivil” society, criminal groups as well as those seeking social reform or revolution.¹⁵ In this respect, however, netwar might seem to be not so very different from traditional war. But the reference to Janus suggests something more complex; namely, that the *same* war can serve different purposes at what appears to be one and the same time. This implies however that the “one” time is not simply self-identical, not simply “one and the same.” It thereby calls into question the relation between “war” and the structure of the “network,” or indeed, as we shall see, between the “work” and the “net.”

Already, however, it is clear that one of the traits that distinguishes traditional concepts of war from the notion of netwar elaborated by Arquilla and Ronfeldt is the relativization, although by no means the elimination, of the vertical, hierarchical structures usually associated with the nation-state and in particular with its military and police institutions. It is precisely a certain “stasis” associated with those vertical military-political structures that, tentatively at least, is challenged by the horizontal organization of “netwar.” This challenge, however, does not simply entail the replacement of a centralized-hierarchical form of organization by a relatively decentralized horizontal one. Rather, the very concept of “organization” itself seems also to be changing. Arquilla and Ronfeldt stress the importance of this by insisting that although “netwar” and “networks” are concepts that respond to developments in technology and, in particular, to information technology, they nevertheless must not be understood strictly in technological terms but rather as a new “form of organization” (19). At the same time, while granting that the organization of networks cannot be isolated from its social context, the two researchers refuse to embrace an approach to networks and netwar that would be either primarily sociological or technological. One reason for this reluctance has to do with the need to elaborate concepts that are independent of previous disciplines in order to account for the distinctive characteristics

and effects of networks and netwar. Two of these concepts are “swarming” and “blurring,” words that suggest the elusive and unstable movement and structures toward which networks tend. First, swarming: “Swarming occurs when the dispersed units of a network . . . converge on a target from multiple directions. The overall aim is *sustainable pulsing*—swarm networks must be able to coalesce rapidly and stealthily on a target, then disperse and redisperse, immediately ready to recombine for a new pulse” (12). This notion of “swarming” demonstrates that networked conflict can be distinguished from traditional military conflicts and even from guerrilla warfare through its reliance upon the *dispersion* of force rather than upon its massing or concentration: the latter emerge as an effect of the former rather than the reverse. This predominance of dispersion can perhaps be generalized to characterize the network as a distinctive form of organization.

“Blurring” and “blending,” on the other hand, appear at first to be the opposite of “dispersion”: in both, elements or operations are not “spaced out” extensively but rather are superimposed upon one another, thus “blurring” the distinction between “offense and defense” or blending “strategy and tactics” so that they can no longer be clearly distinguished from one another (13).

What *blurring* and *blending* have in common with *swarming* is the tendency to suspend, up to a point, the oppositional logic of mutual exclusivity and hence also of the clear-cut distinctions informed by it. Such “blurring” of distinctions can however go further and affect not just the individual components or nodes of a network but the network itself, rendering its enabling limits difficult if not impossible to determine. This can result in a certain indeterminacy about where a network begins and ends, spatially as well as temporally.¹⁶ And this indeterminacy can carry over and affect the conflicts in which the network engages. This is why “netwar,” unlike traditional war, requires no formal declaration to begin or to end and why such declarations today seem increasingly superfluous even on the part of nation-states, as with the recent war against Iraq. At the same time, what stands out against this background of indeterminacy is the one notion that netwar shares with traditional war: that of *targeting*. There is still an enemy, and however acephalous, or Janus-faced it might be, it must still be targeted—which is to say, located and subdued, either by being killed, destroyed, or rendered dysfunctional. As we shall see, the notion of targeting plays a significant role in discussions of netwar.

The spatial-temporal dispersion and relative indeterminacy of both networks and netwar lead Arquilla and Ronfeldt, in the concluding chapter of *Networks and Netwars*, to pose a disarmingly simple but difficult question:

“What holds a network together? What makes it function effectively?” “The answers,” they respond, “involve much more than the organizational aspects emphasized” previously (323). Of course, they pose this question in the particular context of *netwar*, which involves a struggle to target, overcome, and neutralize adversaries in what is a more or less manifest conflict, if not an actually declared “war.” But given the underlying structural transformations implied in network organization and, above all, what might be summarized as its underlying structural traits of *dispersion* and *mobility*, the question can perhaps be extended to other domains as well. What holds networks together? What is the relation of that “holding”—the cohesiveness of networks—to conflict? Is *targeting* something that occurs independently of the network, or is it part and parcel of how the “net” works? If so, how then does a *net work*, and what is involved in the association of these two rather different notions—*net* and *work*—to constitute what claims to be a single concept?

If the question of how a network holds together thus emerges as decisive, it is because traditional factors of organizational and structural cohesiveness can no longer be taken for granted. This is also what distinguishes the notion of a network from that of a work *tout court*. A work, at least as traditionally construed, is the product of conscious, deliberate intent. It requires a “head” as the source of its unity. In this perspective a collective organization is also usually defined with respect to an animating, informing intention, a leading idea, principle, or person—often all three convergent in a single figure. According to Arquilla and Ronfeldt, this changes in *netwar* but by no means disappears:

In *netwar*, leadership remains important, even though the protagonists may make every effort to have a leaderless design. One way to accomplish this is to have many leaders diffused throughout the network who try to act in coordination, without central control or a hierarchy. This can create coordination problems—a typical weakness of network designs—but, as often noted, it can also obviate counter-leadership targeting. Perhaps a more significant, less noted point is that the kind of leader who may be most important for the development and conduct of a *netwar* is not the “great man” or the administrative leadership that people are accustomed to seeing, but rather the doctrinal leadership—the individual or set of individuals who, far from acting as commander, is in charge of shaping the flow of communications, the “story” expressing the *netwar*, and the doctrine guiding its strategy and tactics. (327)

Where networks lack a single center or leader, they are thus “held together by the narratives or stories that people tell” (328). If this is the case of other

organizations as well, it is particularly important for networks that lack a “great man,” a leader or leading idea. The question of a cohesive factor then becomes increasingly associated with the *stories* that hold together, or at least define, a network as a structure distinct from other, more hierarchical forms of organization. The ability to tell stories in turn involves the capacity to disseminate those stories; that is, to be heard, read, understood, and to convince those who are the “targets” of the stories and the potential nodes or components of the network. And if the telling of stories plays a decisive role in the establishment of networks, then the means or media by which such telling is disseminated will constitute an essential factor in the shaping and maintaining of networks.

This question could be responded to in a variety of ways. But to address the questions articulated, all such responses would all have to relate the process of “telling” to the medium that allows it to be effective. In the discussion that follows, I will explore two such avenues. The first leads back to Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the German seventeenth century and its theater. Benjamin describes—or rather, because he too is telling a story, *recounts*—the demise of a certain Christian *Heilsgeschichte* and its partial replacement through a theater of death and destruction, the allegorical *Trauerspiel* or “mourning play.” The “mourning play” is allegorical insofar as the eschatological narrative and institutions in force prior to the Reformation no longer provide an unchallenged principle of social cohesion and conventional meaning. Baroque allegory, in contrast to its medieval predecessor, is less a “conventional expression” of meaning than an “expression of convention” that is not “meaningful” but rather *significant*, because the convention it expresses is, qua expression, as problematic as it is unavoidable. It is unavoidable, since the attribution of meaning presupposes a certain consensus. But it is problematic insofar as the historical bases of that consensus have been shattered. In the case of the German baroque this shattering is related to the emergence of the Reformation, with its challenge to “good works” and to the eschatological story, the Christian *Heilsgeschichte*, that hitherto had legitimated them. Hence, the authority of baroque allegory, Benjamin remarks, “is secret as to the dignity of its origin” but “public as to the range of its validity.”¹⁷ In the political realm, a corollary of this absence of an original, originating authority is that the “sovereign,” who no longer has the power or legitimacy to rule, is increasingly overshadowed by the “plotter” (*der Intrigant*), whose manipulations and conspiracies attempt to fill the gap opened in the political realm by the decline of the Christian eschatological narrative. Iago comes to mind, but also Hamlet, who, unable to assume the role of sovereign, schemes, plots, and stages in a vain attempt to reestab-

lish an inaccessible legitimacy. In short, political power, usually associated with the executive, reveals a “telling” dependence upon a narrative power, associated with the medium of a certain theatricality, an allegorical theater.

Yet Benjamin’s account of the “origin” of this allegorical theater still remains tied to a political structure, that of a court still understood as being organized around a “center,” however “figural” the latter might be: “Allegory brings with it its own court; the profusion of emblems is grouped around the figural center, which is never absent from genuine allegories.”¹⁸ Because what Benjamin here calls a “figural center” (*figurales Zentrum*) is a function of that which surrounds it rather than one that precedes and grounds the structure, and because that which surrounds the center is in constant flux, the result is a certain *confusion* (Benjamin refers in this context to the title of a play by Lope de Vega, *The Confused Court*). The court is confused insofar as the elements that compose it are brought together only to be dispersed once again: “‘Dispersion’ and ‘Collection’ [*Zerstreuung und Sammlung*] are the laws of this court.” Benjamin’s discussion thus suggests that, insofar as it is allegorical, a certain spatial-temporal transformability is built into the very structure of the network. Implicit in his other analyses—for instance, those related to the relation of sovereignty to the state of exception—is the suggestion that this transformability can be stabilized only through some sort of violent intervention: a war, a coup d’état, an assassination, and hence a certain *targeting* is required in order to turn a *net* of relations into a determinate *work*.

The question of the kind of violence thus required to stabilize a network leads us to another text, written some ten years after Benjamin’s study of the German baroque mourning play and hence still well in advance of the explicit thematization of netwar. It is a text that revolves around the relation of the “great man” to networks but also to narratives and indeed to novels and their respective roles in the constitution of a collective. I am referring to Freud’s essay on *The Man Moses and Monotheistic Religion*, better known in English as *Moses and Monotheism*.

Despite the concision of this familiar title, I prefer to use a more literal rendition of Freud’s German, one which retains the reference to Moses as a “man,” something that is lost in the English translation of the title. Freud repeatedly insists that Moses must be interpreted as a man—although no ordinary one but rather a “great man.” The question to which he returns again and again in this essay is how the “greatness” of Moses can become historically significant without resorting to a theological explanation that would diminish the distinction between the human and the divine. What Freud’s discussion demonstrates is that the “man Moses” is made great through his *relation to*—and indeed his *structure as*—a kind of *network*:

If, therefore, the investigation of a determinate case demonstrates the outstanding influence of a single personality, our conscience need not reproach us that through this assumption [*Annahme*] we blatantly dismiss [*ins Gesicht . . . geschlagen*] the significance of general, impersonal factors. Fundamentally there is room for both. . . . We will therefore keep a place for “the great man” in the chain [*Kette*] or rather in the network [*Netzwerk*] of causations.¹⁹

Just what sort of place the “great man” occupies in this “network” can be of considerable interest with respect to the question of the cohesiveness of networks generally. For what becomes clear throughout Freud’s text is that the “network” itself is defined by a certain indeterminacy: it is constitutively open throughout, at its borders and in its components, which in this case Freud describes as “images” or “figures.” Thus, the “image” of the “great man” derives its fascinating power from its link to a prior image, a *Vorbild* or model: that of the father (*Vatervorbild*). But the chain or network does not stop at or originate in any determinable *Vorbild*, even that of the father, as the following passage indicates:

When, on the one hand, the figure (*Gestalt*) of the great man has grown into a divine one, it is time to remember, on the other hand, that even the father was once a child. The great religious idea for which the man Moses stood was, as we have indicated, not his own [*nicht sein Eigentum*, not his *property*]; he had taken it over from his King Ikhnoton. And the latter, whose greatness as a founder of religion is attested beyond all doubt, perhaps followed intimations that had come to him from the Near or Far East, through the mediation of his mother or by other means.

We cannot trace the network any further.²⁰

Which is to say, the beginning of this network can never be clearly determined. But the same is true of its ending, which obviously does not coincide with the disappearance of Moses himself:

It would be wrong to break off the chain of causation with Moses and to neglect what his successors, the Jewish Prophets, achieved. The seed of monotheism had not taken root in Egypt. The same failure might have happened in Israel . . . [had there not] arisen again and again men to refresh the fading tradition.²¹

But if such dynamic concatenations are essential to the maintenance and survival of the networks they constitute, the source of their cohesive force still remains something of a mystery, as we see from Freud’s highly allusive

conclusion in the passage just quoted. In it Freud points to the “particular psychic disposition” (*besondere psychische Eignung*) of the Jewish people as evidenced in the number of prophets “who were ready to take upon themselves the burden of the Mosaic religion in exchange for the reward of being chosen [*Ausgewähltseins*] and *perhaps for other supplementary benefits [Prämien]* of a similar order.”²² One of those unnamed “supplementary benefits” or “premiums” (*Prämien*) would doubtless consist in the messianic hope, which Freud does not mention here but which he does introduce at a point in his discussion that bears precisely on the question we are exploring—namely, that of the cohesiveness of the network that here constitutes the tradition of the Jewish people. The emergence of messianism as a constitutive part of this tradition is related by Freud to what he takes to be the true “origins” of monotheism, which he identifies *not* simply with its “immediate causes”—that is, its beginning or emergence—but also with its ability to persist and survive. This origin is traumatic, which means, among other things, that it is split and operates belatedly, after a period of what Freud refers to as “latency.” The split taking-place of the traumatic event is thus associated with two distinct episodes or, indeed, chapters in the story Freud is unfolding, a story he refers to, in a letter to Arnold Zweig, as his “historical novel.”²³ If narratives prove to be indispensable to the cohesiveness of networks in netwar, then these two chapters of Freud’s narrative might be helpful in suggesting at least one manner in which this cohesion operates.

The first chapter consists in the killing of Moses by “his” people, the people he is said to have created as a unified collective by bringing them the religion he had inherited from Ikhnaton. In support of the historical plausibility of this act, Freud finds a single and solitary scholarly source in the work of the highly respected Berlin archaeologist and biblical scholar, Ernst Sellin.²⁴ The killing of Moses interrupts the ostensible continuity of individual life but qua interruption sets the scene for the emergence of a network²⁵ that will survive for millennia. It is not the initial and initiating *act*, however, that as such can explain this survival, but rather that to which it gives rise and whose very belatedness testifies to the trauma that it both perpetuates and obscures. This brings us to the second chapter of the story, not just to a killing, but to its “traces.” Let us reread the passage in which Freud describes the *act* as well as its long drawn-out aftermath, which Freud compares to the belated development of a negative long after the photograph itself has been taken.²⁶

In 1922 Ernst Sellin made a discovery of decisive importance. He found in the book of the prophet Hosea . . . unmistakable traces of a tradition to the effect that the founder of their religion, Moses, met a violent end

in a rebellion of his stubborn and refractory people. The religion he had instituted was at the same time abandoned. . . . According to Sellin, this tradition . . . was the basis of all the later expectations of the Messiah. Towards the end of the Babylonian exile the hope arose among the Jewish people that the man they had so callously murdered would return from the realm of the dead and lead his contrite [*reuiges*] people—and perhaps not only his people—into the land of eternal bliss. The palpable connections with the destiny of the Founder of a later religion do not lie in our present course.²⁷

The factor that links the first chapter to the second, the killing of Moses to the expectation of the messiah, is suggested by a word used almost in passing to designate the situation of the people who, after having violently done away with their Leader (and Father), much later reinstate him and his religion together with the hope of his return. That word is, in German, *Reue, rue*, and it points to what Freud elsewhere in this text will call *Schuld*, guilt. But this guilt, according to Freud, remains unacknowledged by the people who in a sense are the result of—that is, who sustain themselves and survive through—its effects.²⁸

What sustains the network here, endowing it with a certain cohesion despite the overdetermination of its individual components, is this *Schuld*, which I hesitate to translate simply as “guilt” because it involves much more than remorse for an action committed. Rather, such guilt has to be understood in the dual sense elaborated by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals*, where the moral sense of “guilt” is derived from a prior relationship of indebtedness. In what does this relationship of indebtedness consist? Why do the Jews kill Moses? This question in turn implies another one that might seem redundant: Why do the Jews target Moses to be killed?

To be sure, Freud does not address this issue as such, and nowhere speaks of targeting. He is mainly concerned with the result, not its condition or execution. The actual execution of the deed, together with its motivation, are largely ignored by Freud, for obvious reasons. The killing of Moses is nowhere attested as such, and its details therefore would be impossible to reconstruct. But Freud does briefly touch in passing on some of the motivating circumstances. In short,²⁹ the Jews “do away” with Moses for the same reason that the Egyptians, in Freud’s account, do away with the religion of Ikhnaton: in order to escape the burden of a religion that in prohibiting representation dissociates the *constitution* of the network from its *representability*. Such representability involves above all the possibility of representing life after death. The prohibition on such representation, and hence on the hope of

personal immortality, is a burden that proves too heavy to bear, for the Egyptians as for the Jews. But the way each reacts to this burden is significantly different. Whereas the Egyptians are willing and able to wait until nature takes its course, the Jews are impelled to take matters into their own hands by violently putting an end to the life of their leader and founder. The death of Moses, in contrast to that of Akhenaton, is depicted by Freud as the result of a voluntary and deliberate act. This act first involves the *targeting* of Moses as an object that is then to be “done away with”—or, as Freud writes in German, *beseitigt*. The term *Beseitigung*—literally, “shunting to the side, doing away with”—stresses what is perhaps the decisive factor here: that of removing from view that which cannot be seen. In other words, the act of targeting—targeting as act—transforms the prohibition upon representation into an act that represents the prohibition itself, personified as Moses. By first targeting and then removing Moses, death is represented as an object of conscious action and volition, as an act that can be implemented and realized. This act targets the other and thus seeks to do away with its alterity by locating it and then removing it from its location. In so doing, the “aim” of the targeting is to transform a net of nonrepresentable relations into a “work”—albeit the work of *removing* the Other.

In a certain sense, then, the act of killing Moses—at least as Freud stages it—amounts to a declaration of war against the heterogeneity of the religion that Moses brought to the Jews, but only, as Freud insists, by “imposing” it upon them. However, like most declarations of war, the process it initiates rarely begins with its proclamation or ends with its enactment. And this is true because the *targeting* of an enemy does not mark the beginning or end of the conflict—which is to say, of the net in which it is enmeshed. Every act, whether individual or collective, including the act of killing, whether as murder or as war, is inscribed in a network that makes it possible but also exceeds it, thereby shading away into indeterminacy. And this in turn endows every act with a significance that exceeds its enactment. Moses might be “*beseitigt*,” as Freud often writes—not just “done away with” but more literally, “shunted aside”—but this position “*abseits*” (“offside”) becomes uncannily determining for what is to come.³⁰ The killers of Moses might have hoped simply to put, as Freud writes, a “violent end” to the life of their leader, but in so doing they laid the groundwork for an afterlife whose limits continue (to this day) to defy definition. It is not the afterlife of a Self but rather of the alterity of its significance, which is why such significance is inevitably *allegorical*, in the sense given the term by Benjamin when he writes that in German baroque allegory, “death engraves the jagged line of demarcation between *phusis* and significance.”³¹ Significance is thus always cut off from actual manifestation,

from enactment, and yet is also inseparable from it. The image of such a cutoff that also defines an inseparability is the teeth of this jagged line of demarcation, which become a particularly *cutting edge* when they are the result not just of death but of a deliberate act of targeting and killing. This act *initiates* the concatenation of signification while also *suspending* it in what appears to a self-contained, cognizable, meaningful phenomenon, a “work.” By thus interrupting the movement of signification, targeting as killing seeks to overlay death with meaning, thereby giving it the semblance of a work.

This is perhaps all the more applicable to those acts of killing that are informed by the binary, teleological alternative, victory-or-defeat: namely, war. But the same logic also applies to the cognitive, volitional condition of killing as deliberate act: targeting, which with respect to its target can either hit or miss.

In short, something like targeting seems to be required to transform a net—which is to say, an indeterminable complex of relations—into a net-work, if by work is understood the self-contained object of a consciousness, the meaningful result of an intention, of a volitional and deliberate *act*. Targeting would thus constitute the condition of all *execution*—the execution of acts no less than that of judgments and sentences. Every such execution, as targeting, would be potentially and tendentially lethal, for it would seek to remove all others from the place it seeks to secure; that is, to occupy and to appropriate.

Because, however, the place targeted is always enmeshed in a relational net that is intrinsically inexhaustible—or, as Freud would say, *overdetermined*—the act of targeting is never definitive, even though it can be more or less successful in its immediate aims. Moses can be targeted and done away with, but although his life is brought to a violent end, his significance does not cease to produce effects. His position proves impossible to occupy and appropriate, because it is desired and detested only insofar as it is the position of the other. The execution of the act is undercut precisely by that which seems to enable its fulfillment; namely, “guilt.” Guilt is what results from the impossible attempt to clear and occupy the place that would turn the *net* into a *work*, the *network* into a *people*, *nodes* into *great men*. Guilt, marking the *unredeemable* debt to the other, to the *net without work*,³² appears in Freud’s text to serve as the glue that ultimately “holds together” the network, but only by dividing and deferring it through a “latency” that stamps it with an irreducible virtuality. This virtuality is then articulated in legends and stories, which could be classified in two kinds. First and most familiar, those that seek “redemption” from the obligations and ligatures of the *net* through the advent of a redeemer: eschatological or soteriological *Heilsgeschichten*, or their secular continuation in certain types of novels, which are perhaps the

secular heirs of those *Heilsgeschichten*, insofar as they seek to release their readers from the sense of being *trapped* in a network without discernible beginning or end. This at least is the function of the novel as described by Benjamin in his essay on “The Teller” (*Der Erzähler*). Readers are drawn to such novels, he writes, “in the hopes of warming their freezing lives on a death about which they read.”³³ In other words, the end of the novel is read and experienced as though it were the *end of the other*; indeed, one could say that the other is targeted as the site of finitude and that this in turn allows the reader to draw solace from the sense of having survived the end—or at least being able to put down the book and stop reading. In the tale, by contrast, no such end is available. Instead, there is always room for the question, “And what happened then?”³⁴ As a result, whereas “the reader of novels is solitary,” the reader and/or listener of stories remains in touch with a network of virtualities and latencies: “To tell stories is to continue to tell them [*sie weiter zu erzählen*].” That continuation, Benjamin stresses, requires memory and commemoration, *Erinnerung* and *Eingedenken*, but these in turn, Freud (and before him, Nietzsche) reminds us, entail forgetting and foregoing, and through them *Verschuldung*: indebtedness to what has been excluded in the process of filtering and selection, which, qua excluded, remains the telling limit of anything that can be told. This is why, as Benjamin writes with great precision, “memory founds the chain of tradition” but that this chain is also a “net, which all stories form with each other in the end.” [*Erinnerung stiftet das Netz, welches alle Geschichten miteinander am Ende bilden.*]³⁵ Note that the stories described by Benjamin come together *in the end* to form a “net” but not a “network.” For the “end” of this net of stories is very different from that of the novel, which Benjamin suggests is heir to the tradition of the epic. Such networked stories involve different kinds of memories and different types of targets: “What emerges in this place is the opposition of the eternalizing memory of the novelist to the short-lived memory of the teller. The former is consecrated to the *one* hero, the *one* wandering journey [*Irrfahrt*], or the *one* battle; the latter, to the *many dispersed events* [*den vielen zerstreuten Begebenheiten*].”³⁶ *Schuld* interrupts and suspends the stories, framing them but never simply ending them. For “in the end” there is the “net,” the many dispersed events that cannot be gathered into any sort of definitive unity. It is precisely such a unity, however, that constitutes the end of the epic, and by implication, of the novel. It targets “the one hero, the one journey, the one battle.”³⁷

And yet, such an alternative itself is too clear-cut, for its ostensible poles are never mutually exclusive but always *linked* in an ongoing process of negotiation and compromise, not unlike that described by Freud in the aftermath

of the “doing away” of Moses. The result is neither the one and only god, nor the many, neither Jahwe nor Eloheuu, but a compromise between the two. Such negotiations and compromises often go on over the heads of those whom they affect and whose history they indeed constitute. They are not always the deliberate and voluntary acts of self-conscious subjects but often the result of an interplay of forces resulting precisely from a mutual interconnectedness that does not exclude incompatibility.

These discussions in Benjamin and Freud of nets, works, and networks remind us of the aptness of Freud’s remark, in *The Man Moses*, that “everything new must have its preparations and preconditions in what came before [*in Früheren*]”³⁸—a truism, no doubt, but nevertheless one worth repeating and meditating upon. For what seems to be lacking, if not excluded, from contemporary discussions of netwar—not to mention NCW—is precisely reflection upon the temporal and historical dimension of conflict, which cannot be reduced to questions of speed and mobility or even perhaps of dispersion and concentration. It is as if the centering of the network and even the concentration upon its dispersion were both designed to overlook and short-circuit the past, in order to better “move forward” and control the future. What is to come is approached only as a potential *target of opportunity*. And yet, the emphasis upon mobility and speed as means of overcoming disparities tends to etch a line of demarcation between past, present, and future that is all the more jagged and porous for its being largely ignored.³⁹ Perhaps this has something to do with the way the notion of “targeting” is taken for granted in both NCW and most studies of netwar. For targeting, even when it hits the mark, is rarely entirely opportune.

Notes

1. Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War* (forthcoming). I wish to thank the authors, Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, for making their unpublished manuscript available to me.

2. Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski, in “An Interview with the Director,” August 2002, <http://www.cdi.org/mrp/tt-28oct02.pdf>, 3.

3. Cebrowski, 3.

4. Cebrowski, 3.

5. “The National Security Strategy of the United States,” 17 September 2002; available from: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/print/nssall.html>.

6. “National Security Strategy”; emphasis added.

7. It should be noted that the attachment to creationism remains one of the strongest articles of faith of the Christian Right that forms a powerful constituency of the Bush administration. According to a poll taken in 1999, 79 percent of Americans felt that creationism should be taught in public schools. James Glanz, “Poll Finds That Support Is Strong for Teaching 2 Origin Theories,” 11 March 2000; available from: http://www.umass.edu/journal/450/creationism/poll_origin_theories.html.

8. That task has indeed “changed dramatically,” not least by virtue of this declaration itself. For if President Bush asserts that “defending our Nation” is the “first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government,” the Preamble to the Constitution upon which his Government is based, places the establishment of “Justice” *before* all other objectives, *including those of national security*: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, *establish Justice*, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America” (emphasis added). The formation of “a more perfect Union” thus seems predicated, first and foremost, upon the establishment of *justice*. According to the Constitution, then, considerations of national security should be informed by considerations of justice rather than the other way round. To “justify” the reversal of these priorities “today,” which is to say in the post–Cold War world, an atmosphere of fear and crisis has to be sustained, and it is this that defines the dominant political function in the United States of the attacks of September 11, 2001. This interpretation or presentation of 9/11 as the inauguration of a state of permanent exception differs radically from that prevalent in other parts of the world and contributes to the growing gap between public policy and opinion in the United States and the rest of the world.

9. “National Security Strategy”; emphasis added.

10. One increasingly used phrase that suggests the tenor of this phenomenon is the often-stressed need to “move forward” and not remain mired in the mud of history.

11. Mike Davis, “Slouching toward Baghdad . . .,” ZNet Foreign Policy, 28 February 2003; available from: <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=11&ItemID=3150>.

12. Davis.

13. Arthur K. Cebrowski and John J. Garstka, “Network-Centric Warfare: Its Origin and Future,” *Proceedings of the Naval Institute* 124, no. 1 (January 1998): 28–35.

14. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001). Future references to this volume are indicated in the text body.

15. The experience of recent decades suggests that the difference between these two groups is not always as clear-cut as one might expect.
16. “The boundaries of the network, or of any node included in it, may be well-defined, or blurred and porous in relation to the outside environment.” Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 8.
17. Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Gesammelte Schriften (GS 1), (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1980), 351; my translation.
18. Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Mourning Play* (London: Verso Books, 1988), 188.
19. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 137–38.
20. Freud, 141.
21. Freud, 141.
22. Freud, 141–42; emphasis added.
23. Freud, in a letter written in 1932 to Arnold Zweig, writes, “In the face of new persecutions, one once again has to ask how the Jew has become what he is and why he attracts such eternal hatred. I have found the following formula: Moses created the Jew and my work will have as its title, *Moses, An Historical Novel*.” Cited in Michel de Certeau, *L’écriture de l’histoire* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1975), 314; my translation.
24. Freud is quite open about the importance and significance of this source; it allows him to develop a hypothesis already elaborated in *Totem and Taboo* with a semblance of scholarly support, but not much more. As Freud puts it, Sellin’s hypothesis “allows us to spin our threads further, without contradicting trustworthy results of historical research. But independently of these authors, we still dare to ‘follow up our own trace’ [*einherreten auf der eigenen Spur*];” 43. Sellin, in short, allows Freud to continue constructing his own interpretive *network*—nothing more nor less.
25. I am using *network* here in its temporal dimension, as a more dynamic notion of what is usually called—and what Freud himself in his essay calls—“tradition.” If “network” stresses the spatial dimension of this organization, “tradition” reminds us that its spatial coherence always entails a temporal dimension as well.
26. Freud, 162.
27. Freud, 42–43.
28. It is only with Paul and Christianity that this guilt is, as it were, acknowledged and atoned for by the sacrificial death of Jesus. To be sure, the “acknowledgment” here is at the same time a disavowal, insofar as the death of Christ is attributed to others than those who founded their community on it. See Freud, 174.
29. While I cannot here elaborate in detail, I will try to do so in a forthcoming book.
30. I have touched on the relation between such a lateral position, *abseits*, and Freud’s discussion of the Uncanny in “The Sideshow: Remarks on a Canny Moment,” in Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 207–38.
31. Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, GS 1, 343.
32. “Without”—as Derrida has shown of the Kantian suffix, *-los* (as in “*interesseloses Wohlgefallen*,” pleasure without interest)—here marks not the negation or abrogation of a relationship, but its irreducible exteriority and alterity.
33. Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in Gesammelte Schriften (GS II.2), 457.
34. Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 455.

35. Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 453.
36. Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 454.
37. It is difficult here not to hear the echoes of the Nazi slogan, "Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Führer."
38. Freud, *Der Mann Moses*, 118.
39. The persistent and organized looting and destruction of the artifacts of Iraqi history and its Mesopotamian heritage after the conquest of Baghdad by American troops is perhaps a manifestation of this. But if so, it is also one that underscores how the effort of the victors to eradicate traces of the past bodes ill for their future. The British journalist Robert Fisk makes this link clear in a recent article in the British newspaper *The Independent*, in which he suggests that the end of one story is the beginning of another: "So the people of Baghdad are asking who is behind the destruction of their cultural heritage: the looting of the archaeological treasures from the national museum; the burning of the entire Ottoman, Royal and State archives; the Koranic library; and the vast infrastructure of the nation we claim we are going to create for them." And from this situation he "dares to make an awful prediction": "America's war of 'liberation' is over. Iraq's war of liberation from the Americans is about to begin. In other words, the real and frightening story starts now." *The Independent*, 17 April 2003.