The Ontology of War as the Spatial Expansion of Identity

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Abstract

This article examines the ontology of war through an analysis of violence understood as the application of force constituting and transforming social space. Beginning with Clausewitz's conception of war as an act of violence, the study critically engages twentieth-century philosophical interpretations of *Gewalt* in Heidegger, Derrida, and related thinkers. The author argues that violence should not be regarded as an anomaly but as a structural form of social existence: violence is defined as the application of force that expands the actor's social space through the reduction of the victim's space. On this basis, war is interpreted as a form of the spatial expansion of collective identity and as an attempt to resolve the discrepancy between subjective and objective social space. The article distinguishes between associational forms, whose collective space remains derivative from the social spaces of their members, and corporate subjects, whose relatively autonomous social space acquires priority over those of their constituent individuals. This distinction makes it possible to explain why collective identity tends toward the expansion of social space and under what conditions such expansion becomes war. The article concludes that decentered forms of identity do not guarantee the avoidance of war but preserve the possibility of expanding social space without reducing the space of another subject.

Keywords: war; violence; force; social space; collective identity; collective subject; corporate subject; associational form; decentered identity; Clausewitz.

"War," wrote Carl Clausewitz, "therefore is an act of violence (*Akt der Gewalt*) intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will" (Clausewitz 1997, p. 35).[1] He further states: "Self-imposed restrictions, almost imperceptible and hardly worth mentioning, termed usages of international law, accompany it without essentially impairing its power." "Violence, that is to say, physical force (*die physische Gewalt*) (for there is no moral force without the conception of states and law), is therefore the means (*das Mittel*); the compulsory submission of the enemy to our will is the ultimate object (*der Zweck*)" (*Ibid*., p. 35–36).

These quotations are taken from the first chapter, "Was ist der Krieg?", which Clausewitz rewrote several times, leading Raymond Aron to regard it as an independent treatise (Aron 1976). In this chapter, Clausewitz

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[1] I use as a basis the English translation by J. J. Graham, revised by F. N. Maude, but also Clausewitz 1905.

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attempts to understand war as a unified phenomenon, to reveal its nature (ontology) and meaning (purpose, *Zweck*). He identifies and seeks to overcome a paradox that appears unexpected to him: war initially seems self-evident (violence intended to impose one's will), yet upon closer examination reveals numerous complexities and contradictions that compelled the German thinker to rewrite the chapter repeatedly. I shall attempt to demonstrate these contradictions, though somewhat later, beginning instead with the key concept in this definition, namely violence (*Gewalt*).

It is important that Clausewitz distinguishes between physical and moral forms of *Gewalt*, while inseparably connecting the latter with the state and law. I will attempt to show that twentieth-century philosophy – from Heidegger to Derrida – gradually blurred the distinction between violence (physical force) and the normal order of sociality (moral force, in Clausewitz's terminology). This, in turn, transformed war from an anomaly into one of the fundamental (and inevitable) forms of the constitution of the social world. I shall present my own concept of violence, which will allow for a different understanding of war and, consequently, of the possibility of resisting it.

Despite repeated attempts by scholars of various disciplines to address this phenomenon, violence still retains ambiguity on three levels: terminological, denotative, and essential. Descriptions and analyses of practical forms of violence most often focus on the first two levels, yet fail to achieve conceptual clarity. At the level of theoretical reflection on the nature and causes of violence (the essential level), it remains difficult to escape the ancient ethical circle of opposition in which, since antiquity, two poles have been clearly distinguished: the negative and the positive (Homer, *Iliad* 18, 107–110 *vs.* Heraclitus DK 42).

The problem at the terminological level lies in the fact that the term "violence" (*violence*, *violenza*, *violencia*, *Gewalt*, *geweld*, *vold*, *насильство*, *przemoc*, *násilí*, *násilie*, *насилие*) in almost all European languages is connected to the concept of "force" or "strength".[2]

Consequently, depending on context, it frequently functions as a synonym for power, aggression, war, suppression, possession, and several other notions. Attempts to establish rigid terminological distinctions have not proved entirely successful (Arendt 1969, Volavka 2002).

Accordingly, this ambiguity persists at the denotative level whenever scholars attempt to isolate the phenomenon of violence and define it. A considerable number of existing definitions of violence[3] ultimately derive from Kenneth Moyer's definition of aggression as "overt behavior involving intent to inflict noxious stimulation or to behave destructively toward another organism" (Moyer 1976, p. 2). These approaches are grounded in a legal framework, effectively equating violence with the violation of law. Critics, however, rightly point to the limitations or ineffectiveness of such definitions in cases where law itself appears as a form

[2] See Rix 2001; Pokorny 2007; Kroonen 2013; Vasmer 1955; Derksen 2008.
[3] See, for example, *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002); Muller 2002; Tolan 2007; Farrington 2007; Volavka 2002, etc.

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of violence (Agamben 1995, 2003; Arendt 1969; Balibar 2002, 2015; Benjamin 1978; Butler 2020; Derrida 1967; Docker 2008; Sorel 2004; Žižek 2008). The term "systemic violence" even emerged to designate such forms of oppression. In essence, this corresponds to what Clausewitz referred to as "moral violence," associating it with the state and law.

As a result, a contradictory situation emerges: violence is almost universally regarded as terrible and undesirable, yet as a form of resistance to "systemic violence" it may appear justified and even positive – for example, in anti-colonial struggle. It therefore becomes exceedingly difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between violence, justified resistance to violence, and other forms of human activity.

The same ambiguity persists in attempts to understand the essence of violence itself. Particularly illustrative is Martin Heidegger's analysis of the concept of *Gewalt.* Heidegger interprets *Gewalt* as the "placing of Being into the world of beings." This granting of place to Being becomes an act of violence because the world of beings is already constituted and therefore itself represents violence – systemic violence (which Heidegger designates by the term *Überwältigende*, the overwhelming or overpowering). According to Heidegger, humanity's vocation consists precisely in introducing Being through creative activity. When a human being accomplishes this, he realizes his nature as historical being, and creativity itself appears as violence: "This disclosedness of beings is the violence that humanity has to surmount in order to be itself first of all – that is, to be historical in doing violence in the midst of beings" (Heidegger 2000, p. 167).

This specific understanding of violence also allows Heidegger to interpret it as knowledge, since knowledge is both the precondition and the result of one's own action (violence). Here Heidegger reproduces the Hegelian scheme of the activity of absolute spirit in the historical world (he explicitly interprets Hegelian dialectics as metaphysics [Heidegger 2000, p. 192]). Emmanuel Levinas, reflecting upon the moral experience of the Second World War (Levinas [1961] 1971), associates this conception of knowledge – violent and futile – with attempts by totality (the human principle) to comprehend infinity (God). At the next stage, in Jacques Derrida's interpretation of Levinasian philosophy (Derrida 1967), the concept of the general "violence of knowledge" emerges, opening the possibility of identifying a condition of systemic violence exercised through language, ideology, and similar structures. Derrida writes: "La violence apparaît avec l'articulation" ("Violence appears with articulation") (Derrida 1967, p. 219).

Regardless of whether such an approach can ultimately be justified, its reverse side is the destruction of the boundary between violent and nonviolent action, so that virtually any action may plausibly be interpreted as violent. Derrida goes so far as to claim that even inaction in certain situations may appear as the worst form of violence: "Nonviolence is, in a certain sense, the worst form of violence" (Derrida 1967, p. 218). Inaction "works" toward the reinforcement of existing hierarchy, that is, of already existing systemic violence, which in turn transforms the human being into an instrument and resource of the dominant system. Violent action thus becomes almost elusive and highly dependent upon context.

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This understanding of violence in Derrida finds distinctive projections in the thought of Étienne Balibar, Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, and others. Although each of these thinkers proposes a different interpretation, they generally do not address the ontological level directly; therefore, I shall not examine them here.

To summarize the discussion of violence, one may say that we encounter a kind of closed circle. The original "normal" condition itself appears as the "systemic violence" of language, ideology, understanding, dominant social practices, and so forth. Such a condition obstructs the free development of the human being, reducing the individual to an element of the dominant system. In this sense, inaction (that is, nonviolence) may itself be understood as a form of violence, insofar as it contributes to the reinforcement of systemic violence. Creative freedom appears as the sole alternative to systemic violence, yet for this very reason it too must become violent, while its boundaries remain impossible to define. In its extreme forms, it turns into terrorism, revolution, civil war, or interstate military conflict.

The only criterion that remains – and it always remains uncertain – is the question of the values attributed to one side or another. Freedom, like Being itself in Heidegger, lacks an absolute normative dimension. Consequently, whether one speaks of freedom or totalitarianism ultimately depends upon an arbitrarily chosen system of ethical axioms. Such a choice is determined by a set of fundamental assumptions concerning the nature of humanity and the world, assumptions which themselves may be regarded as a "normal condition," since under any formalization they are readily susceptible to ideological manipulation.

This article is devoted to the ontology of war, and since I agree with Clausewitz's proposition that war is an act of violence, it must be examined through the ontology of violence itself. I have already had the opportunity to propose my own understanding of violence (Shevtsov 2022; Shevtsov 2026), so here I will outline only its principal theses. Reflection on violence should begin with its *genus proximum* (without *differentia specifica*), and such a genus is any application of force. To make the model more concrete, at this stage let us understand force as a physical vector quantity, that is, as a measurable action exerted by one object upon another. This connection is supported not only by the etymological evidence already mentioned.

The main justification lies in the fact that no form of violence can be conceived without the use of force (even in inactivity, as Derrida understands it, force is indirectly present). Violence, insofar as it is the application of force, possesses two inseparable characteristics: first, intentionality (force is always directed toward something); second, hierarchy, since the actor (the one applying force) always differs from the object of its application (the victim) by virtue of the status imposed by the situation itself. This is an elementary model. In the case of violent confrontation (war), for example, we encounter a more complex structure involving at least two oppositely directed elements (vectors of force application). The combination of these two characteristics (intentionality and hierarchy) leads to the assumption that the application of force transforms the space in which it occurs, while violence, as a phenomenon of the social world, leads to the constitution or transformation of social space.

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The fact that interactions, including the application of force (I am still speaking only of the genus), take place in the physical space of this world, three-dimensional or four-dimensional if, following the general theory of relativity, time is taken into account, is sufficiently obvious. But why, then, can we speak of social space? The function of the concept of space in scientific description consists in bringing together elements that are heterogeneous in nature into a single system by abstracting from those aspects of their nature that are irrelevant to the structure in question and reducing them to common characteristics selected according to the type of space. As the degree of abstraction decreases, the range of relevant characteristics expands and becomes more complex. In mathematical space, the nature of the elements can be completely bracketed out: what matters are only those relations and characteristics implied by the operations within the corresponding structure. In physical space, the nature of the elements is taken into account, but only those characteristics that are relevant to a given physical model and can be formalized by means of the corresponding mathematical apparatus. Different physical models therefore presuppose different mathematical apparatuses and, accordingly, different types of space.

Thus, the possibility of speaking of social space depends on the extent to which heterogeneous events of reality can be reduced to social relations by abstracting from their other characteristics. In this case, we shall proceed not from the concept of the "social fact" (as in É. Durkheim or his followers), but from the concept of society. Accordingly, the elements of social space should be understood as those entities whose presence or activity is incorporated into a system of social relations and capable of altering its structure. Social space, correspondingly, disregards the physical properties of its elements that have no social significance and structures those that are relevant to social relations.

Social space, if understood not as a metaphor, is similar to spacetime in the general theory of relativity in that it is not an unchanging background external to the processes occurring within it; changes in the elements themselves and in the relations between them enter into the formation of its structure. It presupposes not actions introduced from outside, but autonomous actions of its own elements within the space (a person ploughs the land) and therefore takes the nature of the element into account, although it considers only those properties that can have a social dimension. For example, a particular territory containing a silver deposit is not in itself an element of social space, but becomes one for a certain period when a mine is established and loses this status some time after the ore reserves have been exhausted (as occurred in ancient Attica and in the Arab Caliphate). Secondly, it presupposes the possibility of changes in the functioning of an element initiated by the element itself and therefore incorporates time in a fundamentally different way from the physical space of classical mechanics.

The application of force is a physical characteristic, but it has a social dimension: it distinguishes an active principle, the one who applies force, the actor, from the passive object to which force is applied, the victim. Within mathematical space, an original object and its projection, for example in a symmetry transformation,

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differ only in their coordinates. In the physical space of classical mechanics, this distinction is registered but not evaluated; it is merely related in a determinate way ("the force of action is equal to the force of reaction"). The result of the physical impact of one object upon another (their interaction) is considered primarily in metric terms, because the aim is not merely to record a change in relations but to identify the regularities governing the process.

In this sense, the structure of social space presupposes something analogous to functional dependence: a change in one element or in the relation between elements makes it possible to register a corresponding change in the social status of another. Thus, if we can identify two objects that actually exist and an interaction between them that is equally real and that makes it possible to determine the social status of at least one of them in a definite way, we can speak of social space, provided that, when one of the objects or the relation between them changes, we are able to register a corresponding change in the social status of the other.

At this level of the model, the question of whether the actor or the victim is individual or collective is not essential, since this parameter determines only the scale of the social space involved. Intentionality, as a vector, generates space, since without it space does not exist, but intentionality alone is insufficient for structuring it. This function is fulfilled by hierarchy, which acquires a spatial expression. Together with the nature of the actor and the victim, intentionality and hierarchy determine the constitution or transformation of social space. This is my first thesis for considering the ontology of war: the generic form of violence is the application of force, which appears as the constitution of social space.

Any space, including social space, is defined by permissible and impermissible forms of interaction between its elements and limited by the sphere within which these relations remain effective. Since my primary concern here is war, I will focus mainly on collective actors and victims, although Clausewitz himself constructs his model of war precisely on the notion of a duel (*Zweikampf*). He also ties his model to politics, though he never clearly defines what he means by the political. For the model of violence as the construction of space, I employ Carl Schmitt's concept of the political (Schmitt 1932), through which the model also acquires a political dimension (or, rather, space itself simultaneously becomes political). Opposition to the Other is recognized as fundamental for the constitution of social space by thinkers from very different traditions. Examples include the understanding of space in the work of the neo-Marxist Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1974; see also Łukasz Stanek 2011, p. ix) and the phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels (Waldenfels 2001; 2007), though many other examples could easily be added. In other words, space is always structured and thereby limited: the "Other" essentially means another structure, that is, another organization of space (this organization may be known, as in "foreign territory," or unknown, as in *terra incognita*). What matters here is that the hierarchical relation between actor and victim structures social space politically as well.

If we move beyond the simple application of force to productive and cultural practices, these too can be represented as active relations that necessarily employ force (though not necessarily violence – I am still

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speaking not of violence itself but of its genus). On the basis of the intentional structure of force application, three types of practices may be distinguished: the reproduction of existing relations (ritual), their transformation (innovation), and the imposition of certain practices upon subjects previously free from them (capture). This distinction also determines the quantity of force applied, from lesser to greater respectively.

Accordingly, the quantity of expended energy and force – which at this level of the model may be identified with one another – is connected to the anticipated final result as the satisfaction of a certain, and importantly conscious, need. Stable and repetitive practices require less effort (thanks to experience), while their execution within the same space also reduces expenditure (because resistance from the environment diminishes). Such an economy of energy and force encourages repetition and forms institutional chains of action, provided that the original needs and satisfactory outcomes are preserved. Institutions do not eliminate the necessity of applying force; they merely economize its expenditure. Since the institutional repetition of practices unfolds in time, time itself becomes inscribed into the structure of social space. Institutions function not only as stabilizing elements of space but also as factors determining its further development: to a considerable extent, it is through them that the present shapes the future, because they channel the expenditure of force and make it intelligible and calculable.

The most important and indispensable element of social space is the subject, as the sole source of energy and action. If we are speaking of a human being, it should be understood that the moment of birth is the moment at which the individual is placed within a network of relations, including social relations. In this sense, the process of his or her formation (development) is necessarily determined by the social space (or spaces) in which he or she exists. This follows from the understanding of social space proposed above as the unification of heterogeneous elements into a single system through a certain functional dependence between them: a change in the relations between elements entails a change in their social status, and vice versa.

If we can identify this social function within space, it follows that a person determines (transforms) space through his or her actions, while the result of these actions determines (constitutes) the person him- or herself. An increase in the degree of the subject's autonomy and the transformation of his or her social space are interconnected processes. The collective subject will be discussed later, when the object of consideration once again becomes war.

Several further points should be noted. The social subject is a multilayered entity, and the character of its existence in social space at each level is determined by its needs. At the lowest level, it appears as an organism; here its needs may be called biological, and they are given to it from birth, although not all of them manifest themselves immediately (sexual needs, for example, emerge only later). Yet even at this level, the organism does not simply occupy a space – it extracts from physical reality its own space of significant distinctions. Here we can draw on Jakob von Uexküll's concept of the *Umwelt* and his theory of the functional circle (*Funktionskreis*). (Uexküll 1934; 1940) An organism has needs that determine the character of its perception

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of and relation to its surrounding reality. It does not merely distinguish objects but endows them with meaningful distinctions, evaluating them in a particular way – as an obstacle, food, danger, or partner. In this way, it structures its surroundings on the single basis of its own needs and creates its own (subjective) space. The diversity of its perceptions (the attribution of meaning or evaluation) of external objects leads to the formation of a system of values.

At a higher level, the same process becomes more complex because human reflection enters into it. From the surrounding world, the human being selects various kinds of objects in relation to which he or she begins to construct a personal system of values. At the initial stage of this process, which may provisionally be described as the infant state, the world does not yet constitute a social space but rather an environment, because for some time the child remains formally involved in its existence without the ability to act. With time, however, the child begins to orient its behaviour precisely toward these values (while, of course, not ignoring values of the lower level). This formation of a value matrix is a precondition for reflective activity: once activity begins, the subject perceives its result, relates it to the system of values, and then chooses a strategy of living – whether to increase its efforts or switch to something else, to overcome itself or to follow what gives it pleasure, and so forth. At the same time, its activity inevitably becomes goal-directed, and the goal is determined by the hierarchy of values: at each moment, it chooses some values and ignores others. This is why asceticism, for example, so often plays a significant role in spiritual practices, with the limitation of biological needs serving as a condition for achieving higher-level goals.

This strategy of choice is to a significant extent the basis for the formation of the Self, but the process is ultimately consolidated through the realization of the choice in activity. The results of external activity directed toward the achievement of particular values become objects of inner reflection (similarly to speech in Vygotsky's theory) and thereby determine the subject's conception of its own position in relation to what it has selected as its values. This is why education plays such a significant role in this process: although it remains problematic whether education can determine a life strategy (apart from purely coercive forms of upbringing), it does determine the sphere of reality within which the choice of values takes place.

In a certain sense, one can say that the application of force determines the human Self, because the practice of "expending force" and the amount of force required to achieve a result determine the person's position within his or her subjective social space (enmity–friendship, domination–subordination, creation–reproduction, and so forth). The formation of strategies is a direct result of the refusal or resistance of an external object, of the impossibility of incorporating it as a function into one's space, while the amount and direction of the effort expended both determine and are determined by the scale of values. In some cases, concentration on a higher level entails open violence directed inward, against the needs of a lower level (suppression), as may be seen in practices of extreme asceticism. Reflective interpretation of the results of activity (the application of force) leads to a reflective formation of the conception of one's own personality as

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one's position and interaction with external objects, one's possibilities and tasks (goals). This is why the application of force can be regarded as the formation of the Self, which only later acquires explicit reflective awareness.

It should be noted that human activity does not always lead to a change in social space (here I am still speaking of subjective space, that is, of the person's own representations); it can equally strengthen it. It is no less important that human activity, or at least part of it (apart from "inner work"), takes place within the external physical world. Social space is constructed within physical space, but its significant relations are radically different, sometimes constituting a direct alternative to it. Refusal or the inability to achieve something often endows such a goal with a special value, which is experienced as a direct challenge to the subject's status: the subject forms its system of values to a significant extent as a projection of the scale of effort expended, so that what is most difficult to attain appears as the highest value. Human beings do not strive for the impossible, but they are to a significant extent defined by how difficult a goal they choose for themselves within the realm of the possible. Human beings could not fly, but they saw this possibility in birds and therefore for centuries exerted effort to acquire this ability, initially without assigning it any practical purpose. Christian theology, at least from the fourth century onward, presented deification (theosis) as the highest goal, which was regarded as attainable within the ancient tradition; the subsequent development of theology therefore moved toward an increasingly elaborate justification of the impossibility of attaining such a result while insistently affirming the necessity of the process itself.

Objective social space has no single source of formation, since there is no single objective system of values. Its existence is the result of the combination of multiple individual (subjective) spaces, within which they may enter into complex multidimensional vector relations with one another. This situation makes the role of the subject in social space not merely crucial but fundamentally subject-oriented.

The constitution of the subject itself (its identity) and the constitution of its social space are, in essence, two different projections of the same process. The acquisition of identity begins with corporeality (see, for example, Fromm 1941, ch. 2; Merleau-Ponty 1976; Loewald 1980; Waldenfels 1997). Bodily space is created not by a single center ("I"), but through its relation to the world (the external object); indeed, the "I" itself turns out to be the product of this space, which from its earliest moments possesses a social character. Corporeality (for example, in the thought of Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 1976), and also, though on partially different grounds, in psychoanalysis (Loewald 1980)) presupposes the acquisition of boundaries, and such boundaries can only be constituted by the spaces of others – a problem explored extensively by Waldenfels (Waldenfels 1997, 2001, 2007).

The application of force is directed toward a concrete object, yet its true aim is the transformation of the actor's space. More precisely, this should be described as the elimination of the discrepancy between the actor's subjective and objective space (a point to which I shall return later). That the application of force

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changes status is obvious: the murderer becomes either a hero or a criminal; the creator becomes either a master or a failure; the orator becomes either a leader or an enemy of society. Neutral cases, in which status remains unchanged, are merely the result of failed action due to insufficient expenditure of force, though even such cases may lead to a new awareness of one's own status.

In the case of success, the object (victim) becomes incorporated into the actor's space, though not as an autonomous entity, but merely as a functional projection, another instrument or resource. The victim's own space, in the case of defeat, is reduced to a function within the victor's alien space, thereby altering the victim's status as well. Force plays a decisive role here, because the reduction of another's space – whether the object is a thing, a living being, or an abstract entity such as science – is carried out through the application of force and changes the boundaries of what is permissible. Relations based on mutual equality – friendship, cooperation, symbiosis – also necessarily presuppose force; equality in relations is merely a balance of forces.

Thus, a preliminary conclusion regarding the basic position of this article may now be formulated: violence is not a deviation or anomaly, but a necessary structural element of the social world. Strictly speaking, violence differs from any neutral application of force only in the fact that its result is the reduction of the victim's space and its incorporation into the actor's own space. This constitutes its specific difference. "Violence" is a characteristic that necessarily presupposes the existence of a victim, whereas for the actor such action appears merely as the natural realization of its inner nature (see in greater detail Shevtsov 2026). This is my second preliminary thesis for considering the ontology of war: violence is the application of force that expands the actor's social space at the expense of reducing the victim's social space.

The political dimension (in Schmitt's sense, followed here by Waldenfels (Schmitt 1932; Waldenfels 1997, p. 45 ff.)) can arise only on the basis of two already constituted social spaces belonging to subjects (as a rule, collective ones). Both of these spaces are formed through the application of forces, which need not necessarily be understood as physical; intellectual spaces are constituted according to the same structure. It should also be noted that the limitations of one's own space become perceptible only through collision with an alien, differently organized external space, which will inevitably be perceived as a challenge.

It is precisely in this sense, I would argue, that one should understand Clausewitz's famous statement that "war is nothing but the continuation of state policy by other means" (Clausewitz 1997, p. xii). The key word here is "continuation," and it should be understood in the sense that a clear distinction between military and non-military political actions becomes possible only through the introduction of an additional criterion (here I depart from interpretations of Clausewitz proposed by Aron or Girard) – namely, the means employed. What, then, does the introduction of other means signify while pursuing the same line of policy? Prior to this transition, state policy still regarded the opponent (and, according to Carl Schmitt, even an ally) as an enemy, but sought either to impose its will without reducing the opponent's social space or to persuade the opponent voluntarily to reduce its own space (its boundaries of the permissible). In other words, we were dealing with

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the generic form – the application of force without violence. Clausewitz's thesis then acquires the following meaning: "War is an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds; as one side dictates the law to the other, there arises a sort of reciprocal action, which logically must lead to an extreme" (Clausewitz 1997, p. 38).

Interpreting Clausewitz's theses in light of the proposed understanding of violence, we arrive at the following conclusions: 1) Any politics is an attempt to establish (or preserve, or expand) a social space – that is, a space within which the actor-subject can realize its will without obstruction. 2) At a certain point, this actor-subject begins to employ different (forceful) means in order to reduce the space of the Other (the victim), thereby enabling the unobstructed realization of its will within a newly acquired space.

The central question therefore remains whether it is possible to avoid this transition to "other means." Philosophy, as always, offers divergent answers, though it generally concedes that this is theoretically possible; history, however, testifies that in practice it is almost never achieved. Periods of peaceful coexistence certainly exist, but they do not constitute the norm and resemble periods of accumulated force more than genuine peace. Explanations for the impossibility of avoiding this transition vary considerably. A significant number of theories of violence (and war) are devoted to this issue: some explain it through innate human nature (Girard 1972; Burkert 1997; Smith 1978; Docker 2008), others through the level of development or "savagery" (Popper [1947] 1962; Muller 2002), through social conditions (Tolan 2007; Farrington 2001; Farrington 2007), or through a general law of historical development (Hegel 1924). It nevertheless remains unclear which of the two states should be regarded as the norm – assuming it is even possible to speak of a norm in this context – peaceful periods or war.

From the perspective of the understanding of violence proposed above, however, the question may be reformulated differently. It then becomes: is it possible to carry out the process of constituting social space (self-identification) without reducing another already existing space? From Heidegger's perspective, as is easy to see, this is impossible, since only through violence can the human being fulfill its destiny as a historical being – that is, "expand" the existing world of beings in order to make room within it for Being. In other words, this becomes a form of political "creativity." One might object to Heidegger here by insisting on a distinction between living and non-living entities. Let us suppose that effort may be applied to reduce the space of deserts, mountains, or oceans. In such cases, of course, the problem of ecological destruction and violence against the planet immediately arises. Yet when one speaks of reducing a space constituted by language, ideology, or religion, the concept of "violence" is employed in a metaphorical sense.

If one accepts Carl Schmitt's conception of the political (as already noted, Lefebvre and Waldenfels both interpret space through Schmitt's concept of antagonistic relations), then any politics necessarily presupposes violence. In a different way, the same idea was expressed by Leon Trotsky at Brest-Litovsk, and later

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reformulated by Max Weber in his definition of the state.[4] Attempts to overcome this understanding appear more like ethical programs of recommendation than analyses of the actual state of affairs.[5]

Yet presupposing violence does not mean exercising it. Politics presupposes violence but refrains from actualizing it under conditions of balance of forces. Here confusion arises between generic and specific concepts: the use of force is not always violence. If force restrains an aggressor and seeks only to preserve its own status, such an application of force is not violence. Nonviolent existence therefore appears possible not only when the subject directs itself toward impersonal objects or abstract entities (the farmer applying force to virgin soil, the woodcutter to the forest, the poet to language, the sculptor to stone, the composer to harmonic tonality, the philosopher to a system of categories, and so forth). Yet even in such cases, behind these impersonal forms one may discover affected victims who immediately begin to resist. At that point, the application of force is characterized as violence. In practice, however, the term "violence" is always used from the position of whoever experiences restriction by another; yet no objective criterion currently allows us to distinguish between a subject whose development is being obstructed (a colony resisting colonial domination) and an aggressor that has acquired sufficient force to transform social space. The question therefore remains unresolved whether every process of individuation necessarily occurs through the reduction of another's interests (another's space).

Upon closer examination, the key issue becomes the formation of identity: can it occur without violence? The problem of identity formation, to which an immeasurable amount of literature has been devoted, obviously cannot be fully addressed within the limits of an article such as this. Yet since we are concerned only with the social aspect, and at a level that allows us not to distinguish between individual and collective subjects, an approach through social space makes it possible to reveal certain characteristic features of the mechanics of this formation.

What seems almost beyond doubt is the objectal character of identity formation. This process is carried out through interaction with external objects, regardless of their ontological status; what matters is that they function as a kind of "support" for the subject. Freud, for example, in "Mourning and Melancholia," (Freud 1999) pays particular attention to the internalization of the absent object and its crucial significance in the process of ontogenesis or individuation. Despite criticism of several aspects of Freud's theory – from both psychoanalytic and philosophical perspectives (for example, Mitchell 1988; Kernberg 1992; Ratcliffe 2008) – the objectal nature of this process is acknowledged by most researchers across a wide range of disciplines,

[4] "The state is seen as the sole grantor of the 'right' to physical force." (Weber 2015, p. 136). In the German original Weber uses *physischer Gewaltsamkeit*, which may be translated as both "physical force" and "physical violence." Weber explicitly refers to Trotsky's statement.

[5] See, for example, Mouffe 1999.

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from philosophy to psychology and sociology. R. Fairbairn (Fairbairn 1952) even advanced the thesis that libido should be understood not as a striving for pleasure, but as a striving toward the object.

The assumption of the objectal character of the formation of the "I" may serve as the basis for our thesis regarding the identity of the "I" with a specific social space, since this space, like any other, is defined by a system of relations among the objects within it. In other words, identity both emerges and continues to exist only as spatially realized activity. The internal representation of one's "I" is an internal projection of already realized activity and an ideal projection of future activity. The difficulty lies in the fact that social space is an example of a complex or composite space, constituted by the unity of objects of different ontological types, unlike homogeneous spaces such as physical, geometrical, or architectural space.

In the 1980s, intense debates took place among anthropologists and cultural theorists concerning the emergence of chiefly power – between proponents of economic and ideological explanations (Earle 1991, p. 2), behind which one can easily discern the opposition between Marx's approach (wealth) and Weber's (charisma) to the origins of political authority. This allows me to advance the hypothesis that social space is "multilayered": it unites economic, ideological, corporeal, and other spheres into a single whole. Moreover, for the process of identity formation, one or several spheres may be sufficient, provided they play a decisive role. Yet once a subject forms a representation of its own identity ("its I") on the basis of one sphere, this identity demands realization in other spheres as well. In other words, the "I," as a construction grounded in one type of ontological object, strives to bring itself into balance with other spheres that are significant for the subject.

At this point, an almost inevitable conflict arises between the subject's subjective and objective space. As already noted, a subjective representation alone does not constitute identity unless it is realized in external activity, that is, within social space. Since the discrepancy between subjective and objective space is experienced as a threat to the integrity of the subject (the product of completed activity in the past), the subject seeks to project its understanding of itself from one sphere into another (or several others), thereby expanding its social space and reaffirming its identity in the present. Such direct expansion entails the application of force toward what lies outside the subject's social space. If the space against which expansion is directed is limited by something impersonal (uninhabited territory, new forms of combining elements in art, and so forth), we have an activity akin to creativity (which subjects themselves sometimes call "violence" in a metaphorical sense); if, however, it is limited by the social space of another subject, the inevitable consequence of such application of force is aggression and violence (an attempt to restrict the other's space). An excellent illustration of this is Michael Corleone's inheritance of power in *The Godfather*: within the family, he encounters no obstacle in inheriting his father's position, but he faces severe difficulties in securing recognition of that position among the other New York "families."

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This hypothesis concerning the role of space in the formation of the subject's identity, it seems to me, makes it possible to understand the causes and mechanisms of war. In this sense, war represents an attempt to impose one's own identity (one's subjective representation of it) upon those spheres in which a collective subject perceives a discrepancy between its self-understanding and its realization in the external world. In other words, war is a form of such a transformation of social space that entails a significant increase in the subject's status within the social space of another subject (and, indirectly, an increase in its status within its own social space as well). War therefore entails the application of an enormous amount of force both to its own space and to the space of the Other. Of course, there are spheres that remain insignificant for the subject and upon which it makes no claim. Yet predicting which spheres will become essential and which will not is possible only through the analysis of each concrete case. Poetry usually interests politicians very little, but Nero, imagining himself a poet, transferred his imperial status into the poetic sphere, while Frederick the Great transferred his into the musical one. In general terms, therefore, the expansion of social space inevitably presupposes violence as the intrusion of a new object into an established system of relations; when a collective subject is involved, such an intrusion presupposes one form or another of war.

The reason for this is that the spiritual dimension belongs exclusively to the individual subject: a collective subject possesses neither feelings, nor self-consciousness, nor spiritual needs in its own sense. Yet the social nature of human beings inclines individual subjects to unite in order to share their spiritual pursuits, support one another, and so forth. Such a union constitutes an associational form, but not an independent subject: its collective space remains composed of the social spaces of its constituent members and does not claim priority over them.

The situation is different when collective space acquires relative autonomy and begins to subordinate the activity of its members. A corporate subject emerges, which does not itself acquire a spiritual dimension, but may incorporate the spiritual contents of its members, transforming them into norms, rituals, rules, and other forms of organizing collective activity. The distinction between associational form and corporate subject in some respects resembles Tönnies's classical distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, although it reveals its basis in a substantially different way.

For us, what matters is that an associational form engages only part of the social spaces of its members: thus, a wildlife rescue society may unite people on the basis of a common interest without claiming priority over the other spheres of their social lives. An associational form may have an authoritative center and may even temporarily acquire a sufficiently stable structure, but the center does not acquire independent priority over its members.

A corporate subject, by contrast, creates its own relatively autonomous social space and therefore claims priority over the individual social spaces of which it is also composed. The external expression of the values and orientation of this space is ideology. Such a corporate subject may emerge from an associational form, but

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it does not appropriate the spiritual dimension of its members: rather, that dimension is transformed into common norms, rules, rituals, and ultimately into stable forms of collective organization, such as a church. The corporate structure merely organizes the activity of people connected with this dimension.

In terms of activity itself, the difference between associational form and corporate subject may be almost indistinguishable, but in terms of the transformation of the results of this activity into the identity of the subject, it is radical. For an associational form, the results of joint activity remain the results of the activity of its constituent individuals. A corporate subject, by contrast, acquires an identity because the activity of its members is attributed to it: their actions change its social space, and these changes define it as a subject—as the one who conquered, subjugated, liberated, created, expanded, and so forth. At the same time, no spiritual dimension emerges, despite ideology's attempts to proclaim otherwise, because the collective subject exists only as a structure of social relations and their organization.

This system of social relations requires organization and coordination and therefore entails a tendency toward centering in the corporate subject. The center is necessary for such a subject as the source of determining the direction of all its activity, that is, of its hierarchical organization. If a corporate subject seeks to change its own social space, its activity may, in principle, be directed either toward the restructuring of its constituent elements or toward external expansion. In the first case, we are dealing with reforms or, in the event of structural conflict, civil war; in the second, with expansion beyond its own space. If this expansion takes place at the expense of the social space of another subject, it takes the form of aggression and war.

Is war inevitable? The redistribution of relations between spaces is inevitable; it is a condition of development itself. Yet changes in the relations between spaces should not be understood as a zero-sum game. For a centered corporate subject, fundamentally lacking a spiritual sphere, the possible directions of development boil down to the restructuring of its own structure or to external expansion, which may take place either at the expense of space that does not belong to another social subject or at the expense of the Other's space (war). The problem is that such restructuring does not produce as obvious an external effect for the self-assertion of the corporate subject (and its ideology) and often threatens to diminish the significance and influence of the center itself. Therefore, with a strong and active center, external expansion becomes the preferred mode of development, and when another subject is the object of expansion, it takes the form of war. The alternative is not the elimination of the center, but the limitation of its powers by establishing checks on its activity through other elements of the structure. If the mini-structures constituting the center remain unchanged, sooner or later they face a dilemma: either to reform themselves, thereby losing influence and power, or to strengthen themselves by redirecting the application of force toward external expansion. Decentration does not guarantee the avoidance of war, but it preserves the possibility of avoiding it. In principle, a decentered mode of organizing space allows its social space to expand by incorporating ever new individual spaces, provided that these different individual spaces preserve their integrity (which means a

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gradual relinquishment by the center of an increasing share of its powers). This is an extremely attractive path for the population, but an extremely difficult and energy-intensive one for the structures at the center. For the center, war appears to be a much simpler and, above all, more convenient and safer way of development.

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