

## *Conclusion: Researching the Reflexive Turn in Military Affairs and Strategic Studies<sup>1</sup>*

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### **Introduction**

With this special issue and the web platform *The Archipelago of Design: Researching Reflexive Military Practices*, we sought to shed light on a reflexive turn that deserves to be better known.<sup>2</sup> We hope we have created a stepping-stone by inviting stakeholders to share their perspectives about the promises, limits and dangers of military design thinking and other reflexive approaches. Contributors presented experiences in the classroom, in literary production, in headquarters, and in the battlefield. They also tackled questions of efficacy, education and institutional politics involved in practicing design thinking and other reflexive approaches. Whether we share the vocation of these professionals or not, we hope that this special issue made clear that we have much to learn from them. We also hope this special issue was thought provoking and will generate reflections and debates not only for military professionals, but also for many professionals intervening in complex realities. This also

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: The views expressed or implied in this conclusion are those of the authors. They may or may not be shared by contributors to this special issue.

<sup>2</sup> The Archipelago of Design is available at: <http://www.militaryepistemology.com>

applies to most scholarly communities currently facing existential crises over the modalities of intervention in political, professional and public realities.

While this special issue may contribute to new lines of thinking, the full potential to learn from past and current reflexive military practitioners is far from being covered herein. Indeed, for both professionals and scholars, the implications of this on-going reflexive turn also remains to be defined and further understood. As enthusiasts are already pondering the next phases and challenges in military design thinking, we offer, as a conclusion, a consideration of the next phases and challenges in researching this reflexive turn.<sup>3</sup> Of all the possible directions these next steps can take, contributors of this special issue have implicitly revealed three emerging ones. These directions aim to uncover the logics of *translation*, *narration*, and *power relations* involved in current and past reflexive military turns. In order to distinguish these three directions and highlight their respective promises we rely on the same cluster of cases across all of them. This cluster focuses on the development of reflexive military capacities and the organizational resistance in specific times and spaces. In what follows, we shall consider prospective methods associated with each of these in more detail.

### Translating Reflexive Military Practices

The first direction building on the sociology of knowledge comprises the study of the translation of reflexive practices among western and non-western militaries. While the sociology of knowledge is a rich tradition propelled by authors such as Karl Manheim and Thomas Kuhn, military and strategic studies have yet to fully explore it.<sup>4</sup> Military and strategic studies seem to be still too attached to the rationalist notion of knowledge as mirroring an independent reality for a serious engagement as Adam

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Zweibelson, "An Application of Theory: Second Generation Military Design on the Horizon." *Small Wars Journal* (2017), <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/an-application-of-theory-second-generation-military-design-on-the-horizon> (Consulted on March 10th, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Karl Manheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (Fort Washington: Harvest Books, 1955); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Grissom observed.<sup>5</sup> This field also tends to prefer focusing on material development such as new military technologies instead of new ideas. Theo Farrell, a leader in this field, highlighted this blind spot.<sup>6</sup> To be fair, the subfield of Military Innovation Studies comes close to providing an exception to the rule. Some studies, such as Dima Adamsky's work, investigated ideas developed by reflexive military practitioners in Israel, the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Benjamin Jensen developed a model to understand innovation in US army doctrine a few years before this reflexive turn.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, this overall literature did not take into account the productive nature of knowledge, that is, how knowledge and its translation may transform the human condition. Recently, several scholars sought to fill this blind spot by supporting the development of Critical War Studies and Critical Military Studies.<sup>9</sup> Although these developments are encouraging, reflexive military practitioners remain mostly ignored from these accounts.

In contrast, the direction we propose would seek to bring awareness of how military practitioners produce and use reflexive forms of knowledge and what this knowledge leads them to think and do in return. This direction would seek to reveal how reflexive forms of military knowledge are changing the human condition in practice. This means to pay particular attention to the effects of reflexive military knowledge on individuals, organizations, societies and conflicts more broadly. As shared by Papparone in this special issue and elsewhere, these questions are not only

<sup>5</sup> Adam Grissom, "L'innovation et l'adaptation," in *Guerre et Stratégie: Approches et Concepts* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2015). See also Adam Grissom, "The Future of Military Innovation Studies," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no.5 (2006), pp.905-934.

<sup>6</sup> See Theo Farrell, Sten Rynning and Terry Terriff, *Transforming Military Power since the Cold War: Britain, France, and the United States, 1991-2012* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); See also Raphael Marcus, "Military Innovation and Tactical Adaptation in the Israel-Hizballah Conflict: The Institutionalization of Lesson-Learning in the IDF," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): pp. 500-528; Avi Kober, "What Happened to Israeli Military Thought?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 5 (2011): pp. 707-732.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Jensen, *Forging the Sword: Doctrinal Change in the U.S. Army* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Tarak Barkawi. "Decolonizing War," *European Journal of International Security* 1, 2 (July 2016): pp. 199-214; Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton, "Powers of War: Fighting, Knowledge, and Critique." *International Political Sociology* 5, pp. 126-143.

important for scholars, but also for professionals.<sup>10</sup> The way professionals use knowledge may make the difference between blunder or success in the battlefield and beyond. Preserving awareness of the role of knowledge is a challenge since the urgency to act often leads to its dismissal. Further research can offer continuous reminders of its importance as well as providing inspiration for better practices.

This direction may pay a particular attention to the logic of translation enabling this reflexive turn on an everyday basis.<sup>11</sup> This turn is made possible by translations from theoretical to useful forms such as visual artifacts, inside and between defense organizations on local, national and global scales, and inside the classroom between mentors and student officers. Akin to simultaneous multiple games of Chinese whispers, something is lost and something is gained in each of these multiple translations.<sup>12</sup> Each translation result from explicit or implicit negotiations that may express specific idiosyncrasies as exposed in Pettit and Toczek's article, institutional logics as discussed in Martin's article or specific cultures as examined in Jackson's article.<sup>13</sup> Each translation may potentially make a difference on individuals, organizations, societies and conflicts more broadly. In other words, analyses focusing on translation aim at understanding the practices, networks and lived experiences of the contemporary craftsmen and women of this reflexive turn. This direction may, in turn, contribute to informing better practices.

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher Paparone, *The Sociology of Military Science: Prospects for Postinstitutional Military Design* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> See: Madeleine Akrich, et al., *Sociologie de la traduction : Textes Fondateurs* (Paris: École des Mines de Paris, 2006); Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); John Law, *Aircraft Stories: Decentering the Object in Technoscience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Jacqueline Best and William Walters, "Actor-Network Theory and International Relationality: Lost (and Found) in Translation," *International Political Sociology* 7, no. 3 (2013): pp. 332-334. See Ofra Graicer for a critical perspective of this metaphor in this special issue. Ofra Graicer, "Self Disruption: Seizing the High Ground of Systemic Operational Design (SOD)," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>13</sup> Steve Pettit and David Toczek, "Like Hugging Grandma: Introducing Design into a Military Organization," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017); Grant Martin, "Of Garbage Cans and Paradox: Reflexively Reviewing Design, Mission Command, and the Gray Zone," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017); Aaron Jackson, "A Tale of Two Designs: Developing the Australian Defence Force's Latest Iteration of its Joint Operations Planning Doctrine," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no 4 (2017).

From the perspective of reflexive military practitioners, this orientation already promises better practices, especially at the organizational level. These are especially needed, as the reflexive military practitioner must deal with the inherent contradictions of military organizations echoing some of the direst tensions between rationalism and reflexivity exposed in the introduction. On the one hand, military organizations require the formalism provided by rationalism in the form of a set of rules socialized in training, education and exercises to insure organizational cohesion enabling the chain of command. On the other hand, this formalism is detrimental to the adaptation and innovation required to thrive in the long term. Military organizations tend, therefore, to favor formalism to insure organizational and physical survival until they face a crisis. Only then do they provide the resources required for a small number of military practitioners to entertain a reflexive turn in the hope of saving the organization from itself and/or from external challenges. Revealing successful translation practices may provide means to bypass this inherent contradiction, diffuse idiosyncratic reflexive practices, and avoid suppression in military institutions.

Several contributors to this special issue have already successfully attempted translation practices for transcending this fundamental contradiction. After ultimately failing to institutionalize a consistent reflexive turn at the macro-organizational level, most fell back on micro-organizational levels in the classroom, journal articles and transnational diffusion to name a few. By directly intervening at the highest-ranking level, Graicer bypasses the organizational resistance often responsible for suppressing military reflexivity.<sup>14</sup> She encourages Israeli generals to develop their own reflexive capacities in the aim of never letting assumptions become ingrained. Successful generals must be able to constantly 'disrupt their thinking' to insure relevance in an ever changing and complex security environment. This option would be less possible for mentoring field officers (majors to colonels) such as for Paul Mitchell in this special issue.<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, however, was able to reduce organizational resistance by reframing the narrative of design thinking via informed courses at Canadian Forces College. In this new narrative, the structure of defence organizations inherited from the Cold War is becoming more and more at odds with the rising complexity of the security

<sup>14</sup> Ofra Graicer, "Self Disruption: Seizing the High Ground of Systemic Operational Design (SOD)."

<sup>15</sup> Paul Mitchell, "Stumbling into Design: Radical Action Experiments in Professional Military Education at Canadian Forces College," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017).

environment thereby damaging the military profession. Design thinking is, therefore, portrayed as way forward in professional excellence, despite organizational contradictions. Beyond the classroom, Ben Zweibelson explicitly camouflaged — what he calls Trojan horsing — reflexive informed ideas in public and literary diffusion as an alternative.<sup>16</sup> These are a few among several examples of translation practices that may be discovered by further developing sociologies of military knowledge.

There is perhaps no better method to explore this direction than by following reflexive military practitioners in action as Bruno Latour did with scientists.<sup>17</sup> This can be done both literally and figuratively by analyzing how reflexive military practitioners translate knowledge to their peers. Researchers can conduct participant observation in reflexive informed classes, practical exercises or in headquarters provided they have the proper clearance. In so doing, they can pay attention to the modalities required to translate reflexive forms of knowledge in specific conditions. These modalities can be both from individual to individual or via an artifact as a medium such as system maps, a metaphor or visualizations. As an example, Dufort's doctoral fieldwork (2010-2012) consisted of conducting extended participant observation at the Superior School of War of Colombia in order to understand how intrinsic forms of reflexive knowledge emerged and evolved among the officer corps. Ethnographies of various factions allowed connecting a plurality of idiosyncratic innovative practices identified through operation analyses and their fluid translation within the classrooms and corridors of the highest Colombian military School.<sup>18</sup>

Researchers can also retrospectively follow reflexive military practitioners in action. This implies observing the sites where a practitioner translated reflexive forms of knowledge and the traces they left. Conducting as many semi-direct interviews as possible with witnesses, especially those who tried to make a difference over the translation of reflexive knowledge enables to reconstruct the reflexive military practitioner in action. For instance, Beaulieu-B literally followed the footprints of BG

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<sup>16</sup> Ben Zweibelson, "Blending Postmodernism with Military Design Methodologies: Heresy, Subversion, and other Myths of Organizational Change," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, 17, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>17</sup> Latour, *Science in Action*.

<sup>18</sup> Philippe Dufort, *Critical Strategic Studies: Learning from Counter-Insurgent Practitioners in Colombia*, Doctoral thesis, (PhD diss, University of Cambridge, 2014). See also Philippe Dufort, "A Typology of Military Factions within the Colombian Corps: Origins and Evolutions of Colombian Counter-insurgency," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*. (forthcoming).



Shimon Naveh with a temporal distance of 1 to 10 years after his journeys to get a better understanding of the translation of military design thinking around the world. He conducted as many semi-direct interviews as possible with actors who witnessed or intervened in this transnational translation from Israel to the School of Advanced Military Studies in Fort Leavenworth (Kansas), to US Special Operations Command in Tampa (Florida) and up to Canadian Armed Forces.

Literally following reflexive military practitioners is incomplete without figuratively doing so as well. This means tracing and analyzing every artifact left behind by reflexive military practitioners such as books, PowerPoint presentations, articles, interviews, videos, blogs, and doctrinal texts to name a few. This reconstruction enables a deep understanding of the evolution of complex transnational interrelations provoking the emergence, and sustaining this reflexive turn to this day. This reconstruction demonstrates precisely how this turn works in practice, and how it may make a difference to the human condition. It may also reveal how military practitioners produce, in their daily work, the forms of knowledge corresponding to the realities they encounter in the wars they fight.

### **Narrating Reflexive Military Practices**

In this special issue, reflexive military practitioners not only shared their experiences and perspectives, they also developed narratives concurrently. A narrative generates a plot giving intent to actors, meaning to artifacts and weaves sequence of events constituting stories. In turn, these stories give meaning to selves and others.<sup>19</sup> The narrative tradition is well established in armed forces around the world and is, perhaps, the most influential among senior officers. Every year, commanders share reading lists online and in journal articles including several narratives of great colonels or generals.<sup>20</sup> While the third direction for research discussed below focusing on power

<sup>19</sup> Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): pp. 1-21; Geoffrey Roberts, "History, Theory, and the Narrative Turn in IR," *Review of International Studies* 32, 2006, pp. 703-714.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, see T.J. Lawson, "The Chief of Defence Staff: Guide to Professional Reading," (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy, 2014).

relations explains, in part, why there is a lack of narrative on great reflexive military practitioners, this section stresses another potential.

This potential lay in revealing and analyzing the narratives of reflexive military practitioners and of opposed parties. Narrative analysis would allow a better understanding of how reflexive military practitioners make sense of their world and of the role they play in it. These narratives are powerful as they enable group formation and provide the group with a purpose.<sup>21</sup> Scholars and professionals would both reach a better understanding of the world of reflexive military practitioners by reconstructing these narratives. Indeed, bringing implicit narratives into consciousness may open a window for intellectual emancipation or, more concretely, for solutions to contemporary issues beginning with reframing commitments sustained by these narratives. Even more concretely, revealing opposing narratives may raise the need to better circulate counter-narratives in contemporary conflicts and in institutional politics. Gen. Ospina Ovalle stresses the importance of the former in his notes from the field to sustain state legitimacy.<sup>22</sup> The aftermath of the Second Lebanon War reveals the importance of the latter. Although perhaps only one or two Israeli commanders used design thinking, the military institution blamed this methodology for failure and dismissed it afterward.<sup>23</sup> Counter-narratives developed by reflexive military practitioners were less available, if not inexistent, leading global audiences to take the institutional narrative for granted.<sup>24</sup> Last but not least, making counter-narratives

<sup>21</sup> For instance, see Philippe Dufort, "A Typology of Military Factions within the Colombian Corps: Origins and Evolutions of Colombian Counter-insurgency," *Canadian Journal of Latin American Studies*, (Forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Ospina Ovalle, "Notes from the Colombian battlefield by General Carlos Ospina Ovalle," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>23</sup> Avi Kober, "The Israel defense forces in the Second Lebanon War: Why the poor performance?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): pp. 3-40. See also Ofra Graicer, "Self Disruption: Seizing the High Ground of Systemic Operational Design (SOD)"

<sup>24</sup> For instance, Matt Matthews published a study on the Second Lebanon War confusing Effect-Based-Operations (EBO) with design thinking in 2008. Matthews pointed in part towards these concepts as a cause of failure in the Second Lebanon War. Global audiences, including James Mattis, the US Joint Forces Command at the time and now Secretary of Defense (2017), took this study as read to dismiss EBO, SOSA, and most system thinking informed approaches. Comprehensive counter-narratives for global audiences are more available now. See BG (ret.) Gal Hirsch's memoir and Ofra Graicer in this special issue for instance. Matt Matthews, "We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War," Occasional paper, no 26, Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008; James Mattis, "USJFCOM Commander's Guidance for Effects-Based-Operations," *Joint Force Quarterly* 51; Gal Hirsch,



available may also take the form of literally making them so in the form of alternative reading lists as Zweibelson provided elsewhere.<sup>25</sup>

In this special issue, repeated episodes of organizational resistance inspired most reflexive military practitioners to develop a tragic narrative cycle composed of three phases: a rise in, resistance to and downfall of reflexive capacities until a crisis triggered the cycle again as Beaulieu-B analyzed elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> A rise in reflexive capacities usually results from a crisis provoking the organizational indulgence necessary for reflexive military practitioners to change their organization. Once the crisis wanes, the organization appropriate, resist or suppress reflexive turns. Then reflexive capacities eventually wane until a next crisis begins the cycle again. This tragic narrative consolidates a collective identity of avant-garde underdogs. Motivated by recovering professional excellence, enthusiasts relentlessly pursue the adaptation, development and diffusion of alternative, and even radical ways of thinking for improving their organization despite being fully aware that tragedy awaits actualization.

This special issue provides several accounts of this tragic cycle narrative. As the IDF developed in response to the conventional armies of Egypt and Syria, the emergence of asymmetric conflicts in the First Lebanon war (1982-1985) and again in the first intifada (1987-1993) incited IDF senior officers to question their organization and to develop reflexive approaches in response.<sup>27</sup> This provided fertile ground for attempting a reflexive turn at the margins of the IDF in what Graicer calls an “indigenous phase” in

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*Defensive Shield: An Israeli Special Forces Commander on the Front Line of Counterterrorism* (Springfield: Gefen Books, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Ben Zweibelson, “Thinking beyond the Books: Sociological Biases of Our Military Institutions,” *Air and Space Power Journal* 30 (2016).

<sup>26</sup> Philippe Beaulieu-B., “Encountering Nomads in Israel Defense Forces and Beyond,” in *Concepts at Work*. ed. Piki Ish-shalom (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press). Forthcoming. This narrative echoes both the collision and the ephemeral cooperation between nomadic tribes and states developed by Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari. Shimon Naveh referred to this concept in his study of operational art in three IDF episodes including his own. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 2: Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Editions de Minuit); Shimon Naveh ‘Operational Art and the IDF: a Critical Study of a Command Culture,’ *Center for Strategic & Budgetary Assessment* (Washington D.C.: Director of Net assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense), 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Kobi, “The Israel defense forces as an epistemic authority: an intellectual challenge in the reality of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, 3 (2007): pp. 421-446. See also Naveh, “Operational Art.”

this special issue.<sup>28</sup> US armed forces, and especially the US army and marines, faced the same challenge as they proved ill-prepared for facing asymmetric conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2004 onward. They relied in part on IDF expertise to develop their own reflexive turn in the form of design thinking as Ben Zweibelson and Christopher Paparone reflect on in this special issue and Alex Ryan published elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> The more defence organizations felt threatened by the trial by fire on the ground, the more open they were to reflexive approaches in this narrative. As for Canadian Armed Forces, echoes of difficulties faced in Afghanistan in addition to influence from US armed forces would lead to similar organizational outcomes as implied in Paul Mitchell, Robert Lummack and Francis Clermont's articles in this special issue.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Colombian Armed Forces took a reflexive turn when many analysts considered that the FARC-EP might soon conquer the Colombian capital militarily (1997-1998) as noted by Alberto Ruiz Mora and Carlos Ospina Ovalle in this special issue.<sup>31</sup> In other words, defence organizations took reflexive turns only when conditions forced them to do so leading to a rise in reflexive capacities in this narrative.

The more these conditions seemed to wane, the less defence organizations felt the pressure required to adopt a reflexive turn for the long run. This lack of pressure lays the groundwork for a phase of organizational resistance and suppression in this narrative. Without the emergency required for change, both ends of the defense organization hierarchy would manifest 'sale resistance' to this reflexive turn as Paul Mitchell, Ben Zweibelson and Aaron Jackson experienced.<sup>32</sup> For instance, Mitchell faced student officers rejecting this reflexive turn by mocking exercises based on the Stanford School of Design. At worst, Defence organizations would either suppress or co-opt

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<sup>28</sup> Graicer, "Self Disruption."

<sup>29</sup> Alex Ryan, "A Personal Reflection on Introducing Design to the U.S. Army," *Medium: The Overlap*. 2016. <https://medium.com/the-overlap/a-personal-reflection-on-introducing-design-to-the-u-s-army-3f8bd76adcb2#.xhax76luo> (Consulted on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell, "Stumbling into Design." Robert Lummack, "Don't forget about Boxer: Teaching Systems Thinking, Complexity and Design to NCMs," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017); Francis Clermont, "Design: an Ethical and Moral Project, Conscious Intention for the Cybernetician," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>31</sup> Jesús Alberto Ruiz Mora, "Learning through our mistakes: the legacy of Marxism in Colombian counter-insurgency strategy," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017); Ospina, "Notes from the Columbian Battlefield."

<sup>32</sup> Zweibelson, "Thinking beyond the Books"; Mitchell, "Stumbling into Design." Jackson, "A Tale of Two Designs."

reflexive insights for serving particular interests as Graicer and Martin expose in this special issue. For Graicer, the institutionalization of a reflexive turn in the IDF ran into contradiction with the more formalistic approach of Dan Halutz, the Chief of Defense Staff taking over Moshe Ya'alon in 2005. This led to the purge of key reflexive Israeli military practitioners and the shelving of their concepts in 2006. For Martin, as crises wane, defence organizations become less interested in the substance of reflexive approaches. Rather, they are more interested in converting this intellectual capital into budget capital to ensure organizational survival and personal career promotions. In other words, this narrative understands defence organizations as detrimental to the military profession when the urgent necessity of substantial change is not evident to stakeholders.

Indeed, not all reflexive military practitioners share this tragic cycle narrative. Ryan, Jackson, and Rojas Guevara demonstrated nuances in this special issue.<sup>33</sup> They valued compromises over reflexive approaches at the macro-organizational level. This approach allowed the integration of some reflexive concepts, albeit simplified, in US Army doctrine and Australian Defence Force joint doctrine. For Ryan, this approach insured organizational learning, as a hardline position on reflexive theoretical consistency, was not sustainable institutionally.<sup>34</sup> For Jackson, a comprehensive reflexive turn did not satisfy stakeholders, thus leaving compromise as the sole option. It remains to be seen whether the Colombian Army will fully (or even partially) institutionalize a reflexive turn. The recent peaceful settlement with the FARC-EP after half a century of conflict imposes rethinking the role of the Colombian Army on national, regional and global scales. Tapping into the rich reflexive tradition developed by the most innovative Colombian commanders may provide promising means to do so. Yet, it is possible that this tragic cycle becomes a prophecy in this case as well. The lack of crises may undermine the potential of passing a local reflexive tradition for the next several generations in addition to pressures to conform to NATO doctrine.

The tragic cycle narrative is one among many narratives available in this special issue to make sense of reflexive military practices. Other narratives including narratives

<sup>33</sup> Ryan, "A Personal Reflection"; Jackson, "A Tale of Two Designs"; Pedro Javier Rojas Guevara, "Damascus: The Renewed Doctrine of the National Army of Colombia," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>34</sup> Ryan, "A Personal Reflection."

opposed to reflexive military practitioners remain to be uncovered, analyzed and challenged. This is particularly important as reflexive military practitioners and observers are more or less aware of narrative logics. Narratives can make the difference between the rise and the suppression of reflexive capacities not only in the military, but also in most professions. After all, these narratives also reveal power relations. The next section explores this direction.

### **Excavating Suppressed Reflexive Military Practices**

This last direction suggests excavating recent and past histories by paying particular attention to the co-constitution of power and knowledge behind the walls of military organizations. This direction is an attempt at recovering the fascinating stories of resistances, suppressions and repeated resurgences of reflexive intellectual life in military circles and its evolution. This corresponds to the need of (re)constituting this arguably important, although suppressed, tradition of reflexivity in military affairs and strategic studies. The artifacts requiring restoration can be found far away in time or in contemporary battlefields where some intellectual-soldiers are practicing 'reflexivity' intuitively as an adaptation to the radical contingencies of war.

The inherent contradiction in contemporary military organizations discussed above — between a need for rationalist formalism to optimize cohesion and the inhibiting effect of formalism regarding (recurrently essential) capacity to adapt and innovate — is not reserved for contemporary military organizations. Many do study the capacity of military organizations to change, adapt, and transform.<sup>35</sup> The task is to uncover, from a revisionist historical approach, suppressed stories and memories of reflexive military episodes. Production and retention of memories are affected by wars and their aftermath. Power relations in societies, governments and military institutions are integrated in the shaping of memory narratives about useful knowledge in past battlefields and military organizations. Military curriculums express, in part, these dynamics as they involve selecting what should be raised to the list of mandatory authors and perspectives. The prominence of some most often means writing off others.

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, see Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) and Terry Terriff, Frans Osinga & Theo Farrell, *A Transformation Gap: American Innovations and European Military Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

A methodology based on *emblematic cases* may serve to reveal these neglected, if not forgotten chapters of the history of military affairs and strategic studies. Future research could embrace the production of revisionist accounts focused on underlining the role of reflexivity in changing military epistemologies and ontologies. Then, a researcher could connect these changes to advantages from the battlefields to strategy. Analyzing the operations and biographies of key strategists would enable a researcher to interpret the artifacts left behind by past reflexive practitioners in order to reconstruct their suppressed reflexive legacy. Another problem of interest, directly linked to the first one, is the need to understand how and why military organizations and state institutions repeatedly suppress reflexive military practices. Could it be argued that reflexive capacities are inherently subversive and thus threatening to the secured status quo of the victor?

Dufort provides an example of this direction by reviving Carl von Clausewitz's suppressed reflexive legacy in this special issue.<sup>36</sup> In the early 19th century, Clausewitz problematized the deep causes of military defeats in front of the Revolutionary French Army. He considered the socio-political practices and rigidified mind-set characterizing the Prussian dynastic order as an impediment to military efficacy. Inspired by the emerging ideas of liberalism and dialectical methods he suggested society-wide reforms to defeat Napoleon. Military reforms, for which he remains famous for, cannot be divorced from the development of education reforms, the rule of law in the form of a constitution, and people's rights to name a few. While this holistic approach circumventing the civil-military divide was instrumental in defeating Napoleon, it is surprising to realize how fast Clausewitz's reforms lost currency in Prussia and throughout Europe straight after the Reaction's victory. Once the military threat collapsed leading to Prussia's geopolitical prominence, the lesser evil of reform became the main focus as it would challenge the very order sustaining dynasties in Europe. The Dynasty's new favorites among officer corps made every possible effort to reverse the reforms and fully return to the dynastic model. As a consequence, military curriculum and literature mostly emphasized continuities between *Ancien Régime* warfare and Napoleonic warfare. Clausewitz's ideas were a victim of their success. They allowed the defeat of Napoleon's Grande Armée and in so doing re-empowered the dynastic order.

<sup>36</sup> Philippe Dufort, "Carl von Clausewitz and the Invention of the Conservative Nation-State: Retrieving Instrumental Reflexivity in the Strategic Tradition," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017).

As a consequence, the dynastic order suppressed Clausewitz's reflexive military ideas as they were perceived to be too subversive and un-necessary in the absence of a systemic threat. Likewise, Ofra Graicer's restoration of MG. Orde Wingate's reflexive legacy echoes the same direction elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> While British Armed Forces applauded Wingate for turning a likely defeat into operational success in Burma during the Second World War, he was later suppressed from curriculum for being too subversive. Graicer not only restores this legacy, but also uses it to ground a theory of special operations.

The four Colombian contributions in this special issue also offer insights into the deployment of reflexive practices as an effect of war making, as a form of adaption. Col. Ruiz Mora and BG Puentes Torres share how some officers improvised new concepts and based their understanding of strategic issues on new ontological grounds.<sup>38</sup> They reproduced the intellectual framework of the Marxist insurgents in order to adapt their thinking to the reality of the war imposed on them by their adversaries. They dialectically changed their strategic thought and doctrine inspired by the rich conceptual arsenal of Marxism at war. Gen. Ospina Ovalle, when taking command of the Colombian Armed Forces, even founded the idea of legitimacy as the Centre of Gravity (CoG) of the Colombian military as a response to political warfare.<sup>39</sup> Some of the most innovative practices during that period were framed under mainstream US inspired doctrinal terms. Yet, these practices encompassed a rather idiosyncratic form of civil-military joint action when considered under ethnographic scrutiny. Col. Rojas Guevara completed his mandate as Director of the Colombian Army Doctrine Centre leaving behind a renewed doctrine preparing the Army for a post-conflict era. The question remains, to what degree will innovations developed during half a century of warring practices be institutionalized, suppressed or simply forgotten?

Those examples of revisionist histories offer an important lesson for reflexive military practitioners and for future research projects. Reflexive reformers may have been appropriated and then suppressed from Prussian, English or Israeli military and

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<sup>37</sup> Ofra Graicer, *Two Steps Ahead: From Deep Ops to Special Ops - Wingate the General* (Dayan base: IDF, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Ruiz, "Learning through our mistakes"; Fernando Puentes Torres, "The Continuous Judicial and the Judiciary Wars in Colombia: Critical Dimensions of Insurgent Political Warfare," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>39</sup> Ospina, "Notes from the Columbian Battlefield."



strategic tradition. However, military historians can retrieve their most innovative ideas and legacy thanks to the vast collection of artifacts produced at the time, including some that were recently made available.<sup>40</sup> Until now, a future military historian would lack, to a large extent, the artifacts to reconstruct the current reflexive turn. This special issue, its associated web platform and this research agenda seek specially to correct this by providing a space for reflexive military practitioners to leave traces behind.

The process of excavating and reconstituting this reflexive tradition is not exempt of power relations. Together with the translation and narrative directions presented above, we could argue that the production of revisionist histories is a central determinant to the legitimation of this reflexive turn in military curriculums and beyond. The polemical character of the process of memory production is at work when institutions decide to define themselves as heirs of a specific tradition or as pivotal forbearers. This process implies a confrontation between divergent interpretations of the past.<sup>41</sup> Underlying this perspective lays a decentralized and subjective conception of historical institutional memories as an “ideological and historiographical concept that comes to designate the conscious effort of human groups to connect with their past, be it real or imagined, valuing it and treating it with special respect.”<sup>42</sup> From this angle valorizing or suppressing the reflexive tradition takes an essential role in the politics of defining valuable and pertinent knowledge in military organizations and how to define their future transformations.

This last research direction could find inspiration in the methods put forward by Michel Foucault.<sup>43</sup> Conducting archaeologies and genealogies of reflexive military

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Daase and James Davis, *Clausewitz on Small War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *En busca del futuro perdido. Cultura y memoria en tiempos de globalización* (Fondo de Cultura Económica - Goethe Institut, México, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de la mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), as quoted in José Luis Esparza Guerrero, (TC), “De La Memoria Histórica Y La Historia Del Conflicto Armado En Colombia: Conceptos Fundamentales En El Camino Hacia El Postconflicto,” *Revista Fuerzas Armadas LXXXVIII*, 232 (2015): p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Volume III*, (New York: Pantheon, 1986); 1981. Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method,” *Ideology & Consciousness* 8 (1977): pp. 3-14; Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.E Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London: Tavistock, 1972); but see also Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham. *Using Foucault's Methods* (London: Sage, 2003); and Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1994) for a more palatable introduction.

knowledge in order to explore the relationship between military institutions and practitioners would be a promising start. First, it may be of interest to problematize, through archaeologies, how the deep contradiction between arguable gains in efficacy and adaptability stemming out of reflexive practices may become incompatible with a generalized culture of formalism, rationalism and convergent thinking in military organization geared towards internal cohesion. The diversity of contingent histories, reflexive discourses and military practices we may uncover in Western and non-Western archives may inspire new military curriculums, widen the art of the possible in military affairs, and inform the role of reflexivity in strategic innovation. Second, undertaking genealogies of possible reflexive tradition in military and strategic studies may serve to liberate upcoming military thinkers from the contingencies that made them in order to reach for new epistemological and ontological grounds to respond to the situation war may force on them. In other words, this may allow them to change themselves and reach for freedom in conceiving their action in the battlefield. This last objective of reframing deep commitments may arguably be the most powerful source of innovation in military affairs and strategic studies.

## Conclusion

At the crossroads of the translation, narrative and power relations directions lay the potential for engaging participatory research with current military practitioners in order to co-produce artifacts and revisionist stories. This last endeavor is, without a doubt, controversial as it would situate the involved scholars as proactive agents diffusing this reflexive turn. In this co-production process, the division between military intellectuals — enthusiasts of this reflexive turn — and us — scholars pretending to merely study them — would be profoundly blurred. Artifacts, emerging from prospective co-production within military organizations and beyond, would nonetheless reflect the evolving mind-set of defence organizations. This mind-set proves to be more and more supportive of reflexive approaches than a decade earlier.

All in all, we think that this reflexive turn in both the military profession and its institutions are necessary to tackle the challenges of contemporary conflicts and for better dialogue, understanding and decision-making with civilians. The primary

objective of this special issue was to bring to light current reflexive military experiences that are often silenced or marginalized, including in academia. This issue contributed, we hope, to letting reflexive military practitioners speak for themselves in order to make clear the features of this reflexive turn and to unveil how it is making a difference to military thought and practice around the world. Generating an understanding of the evolution of this reflexive turn — be it through sociology of knowledge, narrative analysis or revisionist histories — is of seminal importance to our understanding of changes in both the military and at society-wide levels. After all, this turn has not only the potential to change the nature of the military institution and profession, but also the nature of conflicts and of the very individuals who fight them.

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