Penetrating global consciousness: Art, killing as art, art as subversion, peace and the inversion of speed and power

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Ian Liebenberg1*

Abstract: War chariots and armoured beasts of war played a major role in wars and influenced the outcomes of battles. The industrial era and age of total war saw new transmutations of this tool of war. When the first tanks rolled out at the battle of the Somme in September 1916, and a year later, an entire tank corps at Cambrai, a mobile tool of war was born that would weave itself deeply into battle space and global social consciousness, in fact humanity itself. Usually, the tank is viewed as the concrete manifestation of speed, mobility, all-round protection and firepower on the modern battlefield. It received attention in terms of design, armament and upgrades, as well as strategy and tactics. The tank redesigned battle space and impacted on national psyches and collective memory. Earmarked for killing, this object penetrated social consciousness, art, political discourse and issues of morality and peacemaking. This article reflects on the broader socio-economic, political and sociological outcomes of this invention. At a time of high technocracy, hyper-globalisation and transhumanity amidst increased global fragmentation, alienation, oppression and poverty, this tool still plays a problematic role. The tank constitutes a central component of the global industrial–military complex as much as it forms part of the (dis-)fragmentation of current society and political discourse, it invokes critical reflection.

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*Corresponding author: Ian Liebenberg, Faculty of Military Science, Director of the Centre for Military Studies (CEMIS), Stellenbosch University, Private Bag X2, Saldanha 7395, RSA
E-mail: ianliebenberg@sun.ac.za

Reviewing editor:
Julius Ruiz, University of Edinburgh, UK

Additional information is available at the end of the article

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Ian Liebenberg is director of the Centre for Military Studies (CEMIS), Stellenbosch University and is associated with the Faculty of Military Science at the same university. An earlier version of this work was delivered at the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA) Congress, January 2014 in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

As a political scientist and sociologist, Ian Liebenberg is interested in the philosophy of war and the social effects and outcomes of war. Some of his previous works relate to South Africa’s involvement in the Angolan War (1974–1988), covert operations under the apartheid regime, developments in North Africa and the South African liberation struggle. He is co-editor of the critically acclaimed Reflections on War: Preparedness and Consequences (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2012), an editorial board member of the Journal of African Union Studies and an editor of the journal Scientia Militaria.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
War has impacted deeply on society. Some claim it is inevitable, while others argue that war is the much-needed trigger for scientific development and others resist war in principle as an unnecessary tool of mass violence and death. What is important is that one remains aware of war and the consequences thereof.

The tank as symbol of war has had a deep influence on humanity from the first World War up until contemporary conflicts in the Middle East. This article explores the role and the influence of the tank on society.
1. Introduction: More than just a mobile killing tool
War chariots and armoured beasts of war have played a major role in wars. They certainly influenced the outcomes of battles, but the industrial era and an age of total war saw new transmutations of this war tool. Most works published on the tank deal with the phenomenon as a mechanical killing machine, an invention viewed as the concrete manifestation of speed, mobility, all-round protection and firepower on the modern battlefield, and it has received ample attention in terms of design, armament and upgrades, as well as strategy and tactics, including the evolution of armour strategy, doctrine and particularly tactics on the battlefield. This mobile war-fighting tool, envisaged before the Renaissance, redesigned battle space and impacted on national psyches, political movements and local communities alike. Simultaneously, it penetrated social consciousness, art, political discourse and issues of morality and peacemaking. This article reflects on the broader socio-economic, political and sociological (even philosophical) outcomes of this invention in the current human environment. Keeping the tank, its past and future evolution in mind, no thinking human being can ignore it in an era when peace and war mesh increasingly without clear demarcation, and that at a time of high technocracy, so-called hyperglobalisation and the notion of transhumanity, all amidst increased global fragmentation, oppression and poverty. 2014 commemorates a hundred years since the First World War, for some, the first total war in modern history. Since the First World War, the tank has constituted a central component of what was much later to be called the global military–industrial complex. Today, the tank, as military tool, forms part of the (dis-)fragmentation of current society—a war machine that has penetrated not only battle space, but also social consciousness. As such, it is worth reflecting upon because it touches the full spectrum of human life.

2. Scope of the article
In reading the technical, scientific, historical, tactical and strategic literature on the tank and its application in war, it is only by re-thinking, re-membering and existential introspection that this war tool invokes deeper critical reflection. In this article, I will touch on these ideas and their implications by sharing some thoughts on a work written by Wright (2001), on the tank in its broader sociopolitical and economic–cultural settings, though the literature about the social and philosophical implications of this tool will also touch numerous other sources. It is nigh impossible to cover all the themes reflected upon in Wright’s work. I will explore four or five here. I do not have time to delve into the tank and the psychology of laughter that is addressed by Wright (2001) and numerous psychologists. I also sidestep, the more-than-worthwhile story of how the mass use of tanks assisted in winning a world war and thereby sowed the seeds of another international war and thus again played a role in the death of millions of people a mere 20 years later.2

3. The research question
The tank has informed military discourse since 1915. The introduction of the tank transformed battle space and impacted strategy and tactics (Barnes, 2014). There is little doubt that the invention reconfigured power relations on the battlefield and influenced the projection of political and military power by countries/states/nations, including defence diplomacy, force preparation and force projection. This article is particularly interested in the question: “What more is there to the tank?”, and will explore this question in some detail with reference to social history and contemporary society. In the course of the discussion, sociological concepts, social histories and (social) philosophy will enter the collage.3

4. Historical notes on the main actor
In 1335, Guido da Vigevano suggested a battle car. He was to be followed in 1484 by artist engineer Leonardo da Vinci, who suggested a similar contraption, no doubt like other visionaries contemplating and designing tools of battle, hoping for extra income and public recognition (Forty, 2006; Ogorkiewicz, 1974). Da Vinci’s design on paper was both arty and crafty, but it saw no working prototype.
In 1838, John George and his son in Cornwall wrote a petition to the House of Commons proposing that their design of a “modern steam chariot” be considered for manufacture and purchase by the British Military. In their presentation, they asked what would have happened at the Battle of Waterloo if their enemy had possessed a piece of heavily protected mobile firepower with more speed than a horse or human. They suggested that this war tool would have “broken through the hollow British squares and allowed Napoleon’s cavalry to change the battle and the fate of nations” (Wright, 2001, pp. 23). The designers realised that a highly mobile armoured tool with destructive firepower could conquer static geography and change battle space. And they appealed to nationalism to see this truth—probably thinking they would fill their pockets when the political elite had a kairos/enlightening moment on hearing this convincing argument. But the political leadership had no time for such weird dreamlike engineering. The military leadership, steeped in orthodoxy as military leadership tends to be, did not see any use for such an out-of-the-war-world invention.

John George and son were not alone. “A number of designs [were] proposed for bizarre-looking mechanical devices in both Britain and France, but all had been summarily discounted or pigeonholed” (Forty, 2006, pp. 10). Lancelot de Mole’s design, submitted in 1912 to the War Office, is one example (Forty, 2006, pp. 11). While Diplock caterpillar tracks, a “Big Wheel” design and Mole’s design did not make it, the British Royal Engineer officer, Ernst Swinton, succeeded in convincing the powers that be that the concept of a motorised fighting vehicle was a workable option. Swinton had the support of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, and hence the Landships Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Tennyson d’Eyncourt, with a team of people in support, including Swinton (Forty, 2006, pp. 11).

The Tritton machine for crossing trenches was produced and soon followed by “Little Willie” (1915). These two designs were soon superseded by “Big Willie” or HMLS Centipede (also known as “Mother”). Mother was completed in February 1916 and moved in secret to Hatfield Park, where it performed before a VIP audience and later the king. The observers were impressed (Forty, 2006, pp. 11). The tank was born and with it a war tool able to “cut across immobilised geography” and break the “trinity of trench, machine gun and wire” (Fuller quoted in Wright, 2001, pp. 24).

In France, due to, among others, the influence of the designer Colonel Estienne, a land battleship or cuirasse terrestre was produced. From this followed the Schneider, the effective FT-17 light tank series and later the St Chamond heavy tanks (Forty, 2006, pp. 11).
HG Wells, the science fiction writer’s “Land Ironclads” had become real.

During the First World War, the British and the French spearheaded tank development. The Mark I ("Mother"), Mark II and Mark III and eventually Mark IV (heavy tank, of which more than 1,200 were built) and then the Mark V became trademark British First World War tanks. The British Medium A Whippet became well known (Forty, 2006, pp. 84–87, 89, 96).

France produced Char d’Assault Schneider CA 1, the Char d’Assault Saint Chamond heavy tank and the Renault FT-17 light tank (Forty, 2006, pp. 68–69, 126–127).

The Germans caught on late with the A7V Sturmpanzerwagen with its large crew of 18 (Forty, 2006, pp. 46).

The USA was a late starter and tanks, such as the Ford 3 Ton Tank (only 15 ever built), Ford 6 Ton Tank (M1917, copied from the French FT-17), the Holt Gas-Electrical Tank, Holt’s Steam Tank, the Skeleton Tank, the “One-Man Tank” and the Studebaker Supply Tank never saw action (Forty, 2006, pp. 75–77).6 (Figure 1).

5. But the tank reached further
During a recent travel from Coventry to the Netherlands and from there on to Berlin, I was struck by the variety and number of publications commemorating the centenary of First World War. In many of these publications, the image and role of the tank feature prominently. In the year 2014, 100 years later, social memory and collective consciousness clearly entwine in remembrance of this war tool. Wright points out the social role of the tank in the memory of a nation or rather, in the perpetuation of nationalist-religious propaganda. One example is a series of stained glass windows at St Mary’s in Swaffham Prior (Wright, 2001, pp. 111). While the congregation was singing a hymn, the author noticed that the stained glass windows contained images of weaponry, such as howitzers, Zeppelin airships and, for him, the “incongruous tank” (Wright, 2001, pp. 111). Every image was inscribed with a quotation from the Bible. The tank sported “But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron”. Swaffham is not the only place of Godly worship where the tank found a sanctuary: images can be found in Lockton and in the memorial windows in the north transept of St Andrew’s in North West London (Wright, 2001, pp. 114–115). If the tank was born in the church of industrial mechanisation, it was certainly welcome in the Church of the Lord, and was presented as a redeemer of national loss, a symbol of eventual victory and the fervour of a nation reinvigorated (Wright, 2001, pp. 115).

Churches and tanks, and tanks in churches, are not where the flirtation of artists with tanks ended. Taking a look at Hilda Doolittle’s work, especially Sea Garden (1916), Wright suggests that “like those taut Imagist poems, the tank was a [design] of sudden conversion that broke up habituated perspectives to outline new and fluid possibilities” (Wright, 2001, pp. 55). As the land battleship crawled into action and human imagination, it took with it seamen’s terms and the sea as image, metaphor or art piece. The commander was a skipper and his men a crew. Williams Ellis suggests, quoting from Sergeant Littledale: “We were to sail over stranger seas than man had ever crossed” (Wright, 2001, pp. 54). The tank was an abnormal factor, it was “in the air” and “the tank broke over the static geography of trench warfare with all the force of a freakish sea crashing over land” (Wright, 2001, pp. 54). A monster from the deep, it represented transformative geography in war time and space; in short, it was traversable, transformational and broke through human obstacles; the great destroyer breaking through the stasis of the now. “[I]ts unsuspected movements suggested and effected a deep structural change in the social world” (Wright, 2001, pp. 55) (Figures 2a, 2b and 2c).

It does not stop there. Wright shares an anecdote: Gertrude Stein recalls an instance in Paris during the First World War when a camouflaged military truck passed by. Picasso hailed it as an outcome of Cubism (Wright, 2001, pp. 55). In the 1930s, Stein herself claimed that the Great War itself was Cubist and a decentred activity with no beginning or end (Wright, 2001). Stephen Kern
Figure 2a. The tank being a secret, few had any idea what it looked like. After its first battle action, rumours abounded and imagination followed suit. Seen here images from Punch magazine, 27 September 1916. The photos shown below the tank caricatures provide an idea of the real machine (Wright, 2001, pp. 247).

Figure 2b. Allied officers and soldiers observing a British Mark IV heavy tank crossing an obstacle.

Source: Ditsong South African National Military Museum.

Figure 2c. While contending politicians repeating nationalist mantras with the support of the Church, capitalist bosses and generals were looking at battle maps, sometimes with glee, sometimes boredom or degrees of anxiety, millions of men were butchered in the slaughterhouse of hell, mud, gas, dysentery and waves of artillery fire on the front between 1914 and 1918.

Source: Ditsong South African National Military Museum.
suggested that Stein’s Cubist War entailed “the war’s fragmentation of time into endless flux of life in trenches […] a cataclysmic differentiation”. Moreover, for Kern, “the ‘Cubist’ provided a decisive breakthrough in the geography of modern battle” (Wright, 2001, pp. 55). Perhaps the link was hyperbolic, yet Marinetti’s Futurist insistence, as Wright remarks, implied that “art should offer a machine-like assault on forces of the unknown” (Wright, 2001, pp. 57). Swinton, the tank designer, viewed the tank as a “gigantic Cubist steel slug” (Wright, 2001, pp. 57). HG Wells refers in this regard to the British, Futurist and Cubist CRW Nevinson. At an art exhibition held in 1916, Nevinson’s work (Nevinson was by now known as a “soldier-cubist”) was described by an art critic in the *Evening Standard* as “clinching the appearance of Nature with a discreet application of Cubism” (Wright, 2001, pp. 59).10 For C. Lewis Hinds, Nevinson was a “fighting artist who rampaged like a tank through all modern movements […] Out of Cubism he has brought to birth a curious geometrical formulae, sharp glittering like a sword, which is admirably suited to his vision of this scientific mechanical war” (Wright, 2001, pp. 59, quoting from the *Daily Chronicle*, 30 July 1916).

The First World War art would become inscribed in human memory. Paul Gough’s work, *A terrible beauty: Art and the imagination—British artists in the First World War*, presents a telling story. For Gough, British war artists “would shape modern British art for decades to come” (Gough, 2010). Among others, he discusses the work of Paul Nash, Percy Wyndham Lewis, William Roberts, David Bomberg and Stanley Spencer as well as Eric Kennington and Richard Nevinson. Nevinson’s work made him the *enfant terrible* of the British art scene for a while. “He met the essential criteria of the war artist: dogged, dangerous, inspirational; capable of rendering the dreadful nihilism of the war in an uncomplicated figurative form that blended realism with geometric modernism […] and he had the proven credentials” (Gough, 2010).11

Nevinson himself seems to be more sceptical. Rather than hailing the machine, Nevinson suggested that, “man made the machine in his own image. The machine has retaliated by re-making man in its own image” (Wright, 2001, pp. 59, quoting Hare from *Ploughshare*, December 1916).12 Perhaps, because of this statement, some of his future paintings were censored by the War Office. Kennington, another war artist, later suggested that tanks are “male monsters. The jolly female names chalked or painted on it won’t fit. I imagine the embodiment of what is left of man when all his culture is removed and then add strength and combatativeness a thousand-fold. The result is the tank” (Wright, 2001, pp. 61). And here, the gender debate enters. However, I will address this later.

While some artists talked about a “Cubist war”, others were less concerned with Cubism and more with art in practice on the battlefield (art as tool of war, one may describe it). Art in the killing practice, art as camouflage and camouflage as art: Sun Tzu, military philosopher and strategist from ancient China, suggests that good concealment is the guarantor of victory: “The experts in defence conceal themselves; those skilled in attack move from above the ninefold heavens” (Tzu, 1971, pp. 85). Elsewhere, Tzu, on the art of manoeuvre, suggests that manoeuvre is one of the soldier/commander’s most challenging tasks (Tzu, 1971, pp. 102). A sound knowledge of maps and terrain is as essential as knowledge of the enemy (intelligence), but camouflage as art is likewise, as all war is based on deception (Tzu, 1971, pp. 102–103, 105–106).

Solomon J. Solomon was one of these “practical” artists. He admitted that Monet and Sorollo y Batista offered unique new vistas through their art, yet such a reaction to sentimentality “was going too far” for Solomon (Wright, 2001, pp. 57). Deploying his artistic skills, Solomon ironically became a war artist/artisan/analyst during the Great War. He was employed to identify German camouflage from aerial photography. The argument was that the trained eye of the artist could see through the muddled fudge and *ipso facto* the “other side of the hill no longer exists”. In the future, war intelligence was to become a techno-existential struggle between the camera and *camouflage* (Wright, 2001, pp. 56).13 Wright remarks, “That, far from being Cubist, Solomon’s deciphering of German camouflage was a triumph of the classical perspective over modern perspective” (Wright, 2001, pp. 57). Solomon and some of his art colleagues played a major part in the development of tank
camouflage, thus extending Tzu's argument on deception in battle, keeping material geography in mind. On reflection, science and art met again and again in the church of mechanisation, were sanctified by nationalism and Christianity, and underpinned by profit.

Seamen's jargon or poetry, for tank crews in battle, there was little smooth sailing and less poetry:

We were sailing along nicely when [...] there was a tremendous bump right in the belly of the tank [...] we were trapped [...] saw about a hundred and fifty lying there dead [...] the crew stood there for about five minutes and just looked. It made us think. We looked at each other as we came away and the sight of it remained with you always. (Private F. Collins quoted in Arthur, 2008, pp. 216–217)

We were sailing along when [...] we were hit [...] we were under terrible fire [...] the state of the ground was terrible, there were great pits of water full of dead mules and the stench was indescribable [...] in another shell hole we found two dead men. I knew them. It was an officer and his driver, and the officer's brains had been blown out. (Arthur, 2008, pp. 218)

“One officer went mad [...] another shot himself while others suffered nervous breakdowns” (Wright, 2001, pp. 49)

Tank driving over dead bodies [...] horses, machine guns, barbed wire [...] pulverized corpses of mules and horses [...] countless dead soldiers too [...] a shell landed nearby [...] covered in slime [...] absolutely horrible—I can still smell it

(interview with Mac Francis, 99-year-old veteran, quoted in Wright, 2001, pp. 119).

For tankers, the imposed art of killing and beckoning seas was clearly far from what was traditionally understood as art by the bourgeoisie (Wright, 2001, pp.47). And for those (infantry) men of friend or foe that first encountered a tank, an unsettling experience it was. Compare Bert Chaney, 7th London Territorial Battalion:

We heard strange throbbing noises ... lumbering towards us came three huge mechanical monsters such as we had never seen before ... they stopped and opened a murderous gunfire, enfilading us left and right. There they sat, squat monstrous things, noses stuck up in the air, crushing the sides of our trench out of shape with their machine guns swivelling around, firing like mad.

Was it, in this case, enemy (German) tanks; it was not. The territorial battalion was caught up in the fire of their own forces (Lewis, 2014, pp. 243–244).

However, there were others who envisioned, dreamt about this armed piece of rolling mechanics and with great enthusiasm advocated it; even if it was advocacy against the grain.

6. Rigid minds, bureaucracies and tank philosophers
Soldier-philosophers are a rare breed. Then there are military mavericks. The latter may share some characteristics with the former. This is perhaps because soldiering is a career/life choice driven by the somatic being, underpinned by the will to survive and excel in battle. Thus, survival on the battlefield frequently invokes the need for perseverance and manoeuvre on a smaller/restricted scale and therefore demands tactical thinking, rather than strategic thinking. Some individuals reconcile the notions of strategy and tactics; others reject the reconciliation of such simplistic concepts and move beyond any restrictions; they seem to escape or simply bypass the iron rules of traditionalism and groupthink.
Frequently, those who think broadly or “out of the box”, given the rigid hierarchy of the military, are seen as mavericks—even troublemakers. The soldier-philosopher is seen as a person with an unorthodox mind. Military mavericks are more difficult to comprehend. They may have a flagrant disregard for convention, and some say that they are inclined to anarchist thought (Rooney, 2000). They are an extraordinary breed. For traditionalists, they spell discomfort and create uncertainty by consistently subverting conventionalism. They laugh openly at both traditionalist and so-called higher order thinkers, while being aware that they will receive criticism and might even lose their rank. They gaily seem to play hocus-pocus with hallowed tradition without necessarily seeking any recognition.

I will briefly address the so-called tank philosophers; thinking soldiers looking “beyond the hill” through inculcated experience and information gathered and reflected upon. One may argue that they developed the potential to function intellectually in the realm of “operational art”, which Alexander Svechin delineated from the traditional fields of “tactics” and “strategy” (Wright, 2001, pp. 203). One can agree with Svechin, but there is more: it also seems that such persons keenly seek new images and their curious spirits travel simultaneously over “the already seen” and “the what could be seen” in a continuous somatic flex.

Among these tank philosophers, I count JFC Fuller, Michael Tukhachevsky, Vladimir Kiriakovich Triandafillov, Heinz Guderian, De Gaulle and to a lesser extent, Basil Liddell Hart and Erwin Rommel.

These tank philosophers may have been mavericks, but they certainly changed battle space when it came to mobility. Virilio (1983, pp. 57) states the obvious when he remarks “the question of speed is central”. Power follows in its wake (Virilio, 1983, pp. 58–59). The tank philosophers understood this and advocated it ceaselessly, despite aversion to their “far-out” ideas.

To gain some empathy for the tank philosophers, let us take a step backwards to see the military structure, military socialisation and the mindset of the military (and political) commanders and strategic theorists/advisors through their eyes. Military structures resemble “total institutions” and this arguably complicates the matter (Van Gils, 1971, pp. xi). Add Weber’s notes on bureaucracies objectified and, indeed, we find ourselves barefoot on hot sands.

The military (and other institutions) is a supposedly stable entity with predictable social arrangements (Ferrante, 2011, pp. 122). An institution allocates scarce resources and promotes ideologies that legitimate its interests (Ferrante, 2011, pp. 122–123). An institution stresses the impersonal factor in social relationships and spawns its own (rigid) customs and values (MacIver and Page, 1969/1950), pp. 18). Hierarchy and cultural control mark institutions (Johnson, 1981, pp. 417). These top-down cultural controls permeate the customs and values of the system. Since ancient times, formal militaries have been built on hierarchy, rather than dialogue and reflexivity. Paparone argues that the modern military (and its knowledge system) is assumed by the institution as part of a larger, monistic body of positivist science; it is a “homogenized worldview of the military [and military science ... for some it is] constraining and unnerving” (Paparone, 2013, pp. ix). Bring in an overarching ideology and the issue of group interests, and the military tends towards a total institution and groupthink becomes a virtue, rather than a weakness for those in the system. To be fair, one has to add that, even if less of a total institution, civil bureaucracy and politicians also suffer from frozen habits, mental myopia and, frequently, groupthink.

The tank philosophers, alienated from such foundationalist thinking, frequently found themselves at odds with the typical military mindset. They were described as men with “fantastic ideas” and as the “happy thought brigade” (Wright, 2001, pp. 27). Swinton, in turn, describes the War Office as a place of “rigid non-receptivity and complacent omniscience” (Wright, 2001, pp. 27). Swinton, although diplomatic in his description, was nevertheless technically removed from his post. Incidentally, Heinz Guderian, the German tank philosopher, was also fired from his command post
for suggesting that frontline service during the First World War was of “no help in understanding this one”—referring to the Eastern Front during the Second World War (Guderian, 1990/1952), pp. 268). It probably came as little surprise to Guderian, who felt that “My conversation with Hitler was a complete failure” (Guderian, 1990/1952), pp. 268). But then, way back in 1929, a certain General Otto von Stülpnagel had told Guderian that “You’re too impetuous […] neither of us will see German tanks in operation in our lifetime” (Guderian, 1990/1952), pp. 25).

But back to the British—Evan Edwards Charteris, temporary captain in the tank corps, referred to Lt Colonel Matthew-Lannowe, as “all that is unsympathetic in the War Office mentality […] a disciplinarian of the old school […] who believes everything can be done by order […] rigid and quite uneducated outside soldiering […] the kind of colonel that thinks that martial law is a remedy for strikes, shooting a cure for discontent, and bayonets a cure for all social ills (Wright, 2001, pp. 62)”. Tankers like Charteris at Bermicourt, the tank-training section, would refer to the “stupidity and lack of imagination of the General Head Quarters [GHQ]” and say that the British High Command (HC) offered the “absolute negation of a guiding mind”. Colonel Hugh Ellis would tell his superior that “fighting the Germans is a joke compared with fighting the British HC” (Wright, 2001, pp. 68). Other descriptions varied from “hidebound traditionalists”, “horse minded and no doubt blinkered too” and designation for superior officers in London as “Stone Age” and “Blockhead” was not uncommon (Wright, 2001, pp. 68).

In his writings, JFC Fuller suggested that developments at the time were “impeded everywhere by convention, vested interests and the bovine stupidity of the red tabbed hierarchy […] backed up by dim witted politicians”. These bovine types “could chew on a cud of habit but never in a million years digest or convert it into new forms” (Wright, 2001, pp. 145). To deviate for a moment and touch on military socialisation and the influence of the cultural arena in which soldiers are deployed: Fuller is an interesting case in terms of his personal interests and philosophies. He was an admirer of Aleister Crowley (Wright actually refers to Fuller as Crowley’s “first disciple”) (Wright, 2001, pp. 157). Fuller met Crowley in 1905 when he served with the Oxfordshire Light Infantry. After service during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), Crowley served in India, where he immersed himself in the Bible, Eastern philosophy and Oriental religions. He studied the Upanishads, the Veda movement, the Muslim Ahmadiyya movement and yoga while writing spiritual poems. Under the name of Saladin, he contributed to the Agnostic Journal and Eclectic Review and wrote a book entitled Why Jesus Wept (Wright, 2001, pp. 159). Fuller was a firm believer in Crowley’s eclectic philosophy and wrote a book on what he called Crowleyanity entitled, The Star in the West (327 pages). Crowley’s philosophy included a concentrated assault on Christianity, the (Western) state, esoteric traditions, including sexual rituals, ceremonial magic, and he referred to Western traditional (elite) thought as a “philosophy of slime” (Wright, 2001, pp. 157–159, 161ff). Fuller would later claim that his work on Crowleyanity was a mere “leg-puller”. Wright opines that at the time it was far from it, rather it was an appeal for “Crowleyanity or Nothing”, raising the philosophy of Crowley to an ideology of Crowleyism. But let us return to the tank philosophers.

The tank philosophers pursued their ideal within practical limitations, despite adversity and mockery, until the tank found its way into real-life battle space. One wonders what Da Vinci, or those before him as far back as Xenophon, would have made of it. The tank was as much of a break in the history of warfare as it was in the static geography of battle and it influenced the future space and reach of nations. Erich Maria Remarque, in All Quiet on the Western Front, describes the phenomenon: “From a mockery tanks have become a terrible weapon” (Wright, 2001, pp. 146). The German General von Zwehl would later say, “It was not the genius of Marshall Foch that defeated us, but ‘General Tank’” (Wright, 2001, pp. 146). The spasmodic antics of the armoured battle wagon had by 1918 become the slaughter of humanity. Another full circle was completed. (Figure 3)

Contemporary tank philosophers, with the help of high technology, have re-configured the tank to put the man (read: human) at the centre of the tank. Wright’s chapter “The Steeling of Zion” is fascinating (Wright, 2001, pp. 319–345). He starts the chapter with a quote from a song from Harrison
Birtwistle’s opera The Last Supper. The song, written by AM Klein, a Ukrainian-born Jewish Canadian, goes: “Don’t you hear the Messiah coming in his tank, in his tank? Messiah in metal armoured tank?” The song ends with “And the seraphim a-shooting from his flank! O Messiah, he stands grimy in his tank!” (Wright, 2001, pp. 319). For Wright, here is “the Messiah, the appointed God who might be expected to travel on nothing more than a supercharged white donkey, trying to bring Justice and Redemption to a modern world that had already crashed the gates of Paradise with a technological apocalypse of its own making (Wright, 2001, pp. 319)”. Earlier we spoke about tanks and churches, and tanks in churches, and tanking and religion. Mass mechanisation also came into the picture. Here, it all meshes. The technocratic society, as Marcuse contended, became one dimensional, and rationality, the instrumental reason, aimed at techno-bureaucratic control in a fully commodified society. And perhaps, if viewed from a pessimistic perspective, such as that of Theodor Adorno, religion, the technocratic mentality, single-minded commodification and the instrumental reason turned-into-profit objective are, rather than liberating humanity, leading to ultimate alienation and death.

One concrete example is the reconfiguration of the design of the Israeli Merkava tank, in which the driver and crew are now more centrally situated. Israel Tal (a general in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF)) played an important part in the new reconfiguration and in this sense, he can be counted as one of the tank philosophers. With a fundamental redesign, the tank becomes material metaphor for the land, the home. So, man is now at the centre of the tank, rather than in the tank. Man and tank are no longer complementary, but systemically enmeshed. A synthesis of successfully designed aggression has been created. Thus, our tank rolls on in this version with the purpose to kill, not to save (the Other). Despite all the brilliance of the tank philosophers, the questions about the Other and how to deal with it have not been answered—or rather, have been made increasingly difficult to answer, let alone act upon within the historical prisons we inherited (Figures 4 and 5).

7. Tanking through the cyber
In the so-called global world, or the globalisation of social life, cyber rule goes beyond the days of Batman, Tank Girl, the Dirty Dozen, James Bond or a recent TV series, the Walking Dead. And far less innocent it is.

Guderian meets Virilio? Asimov meets the ever-hungry zombie? No doubt speed and power remain a powerful fixation in the modern world—a also in the world of war and the military industrial complex. Space and time imploded under globalisation or what some call hyperglobalisation (personally I prefer MacDonaldisation). So did the killing speed of weaponry, including tanks. Wright shares some impressions from a visit to the US Army Armour Centre at Fort Knox:
The US tank, the M1A2 Abrams, allows the crew to scan the battlefield through thermal viewers, to acquire targets, to move with the help of an intervehicular information system (IVIS) more advanced that GIS; in short, a digitalised tank intended to relegate all opponents to the dustbin of history (Wright, 2001, pp. 409). Fukuyama should be proud; the West finally won again. The tank of the future "will be a landship sailing over a frictionless ocean of virtual turf", boldly say the military planners in the Army after the Next Program (AANP) of the USA (Wright, 2001, pp. 413). Distributive interactive simulation (as land parable for cyber war) will enable, with the help of cyber consultants, "new wave warfare" (Wright, 2001, pp. 413–415). "Bombing up", "tooling up", "kitting out" and "up-gunning" get a total new meaning in tank warfare.

Among others, the Armour Centre employs Pamela Jaye Smith of MYTHWORKS that provide mythic tools and archetypes for Hollywood. "Her worthy opponents include Patton and Rommel, but also Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader" (Wright, 2001, pp. 413–415). Karma and the Astral Field play a role. (Wright, 2001, pp. 413–415). To attain something “radical” is important (note that the term radical here is divorced from its root meaning). Smith’s idea of the new world is to “realign our modern warfighters [sic] with their noble heritage”. The notion of this new warrior space includes the “battle blob” and “transferring battle intensity into everyday life”. “Higher forms of loving”, “warrior bonding” and “turning spirit into matter with sudden force”, “Mental Plains and Divine Law and Order” are important in this “higher order thinking” (Wright, 2001, pp. 424). It seems that the New Age, in the eyes of MYTHWORKS, beckons us to further war as if by magic art, sanctified by spiritual forces beyond the current (no mention of racism, Christian religion, crusades or nationalism though ...).
Will they find soldiers (or rather operators/agents/players) for the job? Well, this new warfare is based on “no body bags” and “the kids who have done a lot of DVD-games have exactly the right kind of hand eye coordination [...] Nintendo has done great things for this generation” argues the Chief of Staff of the Armour School, Colonel Lenze. He neglected to say that the needed hand–eye coordination of the “new generation” is aimed at killing and maiming people (for obvious reasons).

8. On speed and power: Future invocation or subversion of the very idea
In a globalised world, news travels fast; time and space implode and images are not confined to national borders. Needless to say that in history, a lone person stood up to a tank. One can easily imagine this happening during Franco’s invasion of Republican Spain, the German invasion of Russia in 1941, in East Berlin in 1953, Hungary in 1956 and Prague in 1956, and with the day-to-day resistance by Palestine people in their occupied lands against hardcore religious racists. In most cases, it was and still is a lone, last stand, a moral outcry or just a desperate existential gesture, but few survive it. A single human does not weigh up to a 50- or 60-ton piece of mobile material steeled in non-compromise.

One image momentarily received universal recognition, though. That was of Wang Weilin, the Chinese student who stood in the way of a line of tanks at Tiananmen Square. The image was quickly picked up by international media and “Tankman” was born. As Wright put it: “He has produced an image that the CIA could [...] hardly hope to fabricate)” (Wright, 2001, pp. 10). And; “[Around the world people] fell upon the image of Tiananmen, unravelling and recombining its elements to convert it into a sign of the spiritual and political condition of our times” (Wright, 2001, pp. 10). For Italian literary theorist Giorgio Agamben, it heralded the beginning of a new kind of “non-state” going beyond mere protest movements (Wright, 2001, pp. 10). The image has recurred again and again, not only in Amnesty International’s media campaigns, but also in radical publications. Moreover, hard-line conservatives using the image proclaim to those who are deemed in need of liberal democracy that it signifies that liberal capitalism (limited democracy plus expanding profit) can be spread and upheld. Some consensus was established: the image was a sign of “the subdued subject standing out against the ever-more total power of the state” (Wright, 2001, pp. 10). Yet, despite this image, the tank still rolls on (Figure 6).

How many incidents are needed to transform an object of violence from weapon to relic for sale on e-Bay?

The Prague incident of 28 April 1991 is worth mentioning. On that morning, citizens woke up to see their tank memorial (Tank No 23), set up to commemorate the death of Soviet soldiers liberating Prague, painted bright pink. David Cerny, a student at Prague’s Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design and his colleagues chose to do the job. Uproar broke out, not only in Prague, but over the whole East Block. The Czechoslovak Government, aware of touchy negotiations on sensitive economic and trade issues with the Soviet Union, denounced this public disturbance (Wright, 2001, pp. 380). President Vaclav Havel expressed discontent because the same tank also commemorates
It was clear that different generations in Czechoslovakia had different interpretations of the tank as symbol in the history of the country and its people (Figure 7).

The tank was repainted in its military colours by the municipal authorities, but some members of parliament restored it to its pink order. The re-pinked tank was again a political weapon, rather than a weapon of war (Wright, 2001, pp. 385).

It is true that Czechoslovakia’s defence industry, including its tank production, was curtailed, but that had far more to do with economics and transition than the work of the Neo-Stunners, one may argue. In any case, in the whole East Block, armaments production took a dip. Later, however, as some of these countries joined NATO, they imported what they believed was more sophisticated NATO weaponry (certainly more expensive).

So did pinking stop the tank? Momentarily it slowed it down, but stopped? No.

9. The costs of tanking: Notes on the military industrial complex

The tank has its supporters and its resisters. However, much like the contest between a single person and a tank, it seems that the tank still has weight on its side. The notion of the military-industrial complex and its global outcomes cannot be ignored. In industrialised states where the direct role of the military in politics is theoretically curtailed, a close meshing of military and industrial interests remains not only a possibility, but a reality (Giddens, 1993, pp. 370). D’Anieri (2014, pp. 484) defines the military-industrial complex as “a group consisting of a nation’s armed forces, weapons suppliers and manufacturers, and elements within the civil service involved in defence efforts”. As defined by Ferrante (2011, pp. 368), the military-industrial complex is “a relationship between those who declare, manage and fund wars [the Department of Defence, the Office of the President and Congress] and corporations that make the equipment and supplies needed to wage war. Corporations and their stakeholders come to need war to maintain their employment”. In other words, in the military-industrial complex, both structures and groups of people mesh, become agglutinated and a shared world view based on profit and power emerges. Such societies “bank on the tank”.

The bank of the tank and banking on the tank are (soon to be) confronted by inescapable realities; not the mantra of realism in theory, but hard material economic realities:
Currently eight million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive. One billion people are stuck at the bottom (of the world economy). The twenty-first century world of material comfort, global travel, and economic interdependence will become increasingly vulnerable. As the bottom billion diverges from an increasingly sophisticated world economy, integration will become harder, not easier. (Collier, 2008)

Global society and specifically the political leaders and financial elite have to accept that poverty and exclusion are a scandal reflecting upon them; a scandal that if unchecked, will be blamed on these elite as a crime—and rightly so. “The world has seen the spectacular rise in poverty since the 1980s. We are witnessing (increasing) worldwide inequalities, accompanied in most societies by an increase in the number of individuals living in absolute poverty with the regions affected the most Latin America southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa” (Mayor & Bindé, 2001, pp. 57). At the turn of the century, 266 million people out of 590 million lived below the poverty line in Sub-Saharan Africa. Over three billion people worldwide lived in poverty and 1,5 billion lack access to clean water (Mayor & Bindé, 2001, pp. 58).

To return to the notion of scandals and crimes: a real chasm opened up between rich and poor. The number of world billionaires increased from 157 to 447 between 1989 and 1996 (Mayor & Bindé, 2001, pp. 58). The three richest people in the world by 2000 accrued fortunes larger than the total GDP of the 48 poorest countries (Mayor & Bindé, 2001, pp. 58). These global tendencies seem to be reflected in other countries as well. Inside countries, the gap between rich and poor is widening.

Ferrante points out that a latent dysfunction of the US global military presence is that it drives a growing military–industrial complex (Ferrante, 2011, pp. 368). For example, of the world’s military spending in 2009, the USA’s constituted 48%, Europe’s 20%, China’s 8%, Latin America’s 3%, Sub-Saharan Africa’s 1%, Russia’s 5% and Central and East Asia’s 10%, with the remainder accruing to the Middle East, mostly regimes closely allied with the USA (Ferrante, 2011, pp. 36). There is little doubt where the nexus of the global military–industrial complex lies.35 Caffrey, McGerty and Eastman (2014, pp. 29) argue that 2014 is likely to see a rise in global defence budgets. In 2009, the US spent USD 1,651 billion on defence. Europe spent USD 242 billion in 2013. The defence budgets of US-aligned states in the Middle East now account for 83% of all the spending in the Middle East (Caffrey, McGerty & Eastman, 2014, pp. 30) (Figure 8).

Despite the three-trillion dollar war in Iraq, it seems that little has changed, as the defence financial analysts argue that marginal growth in 2014 will “offer some respite” to defence manufacturers. The term “respite” is interesting in its usage here; one would expect it to be used for the horrors of extended droughts, food shortages, people affected by floods or dislocated by regional wars. No wonder that some argue that the military–industrial complex is one of the main drivers of the increasing international monetary crisis.

Did no one foresee it or warn about it? Time and space prevent giving a full run-down of theorists, economists and expert practitioners who have sounded this warning over the past decades. Many have. President Dwight D Eisenhower warned the USA citizenry about the murky future of such a growing endeavour (Ferrante, 2011, pp. 368). Back in 1969, the political scientist, John Kenneth Galbraith (1969, pp. 9, 84–85), in his work How to control the military warned against this very syndrome and suggested critical citizen action to arrest this trend. In essence, Galbraith appealed for a normalising of civil–security relations and extended structures to oversee the manufacturing and distribution of arms; in other words, broadening civilian oversight of the military to include arms companies (the military–industrial complex). Earlier, C Wright Mills, renowned sociologist, sounded the same warnings.36 Then and now, these warnings were/are ignored. On the contrary, the drive towards a global economic crisis continues, the tank securely ensconced in this seemingly unstoppable convoy. If Tankman cannot do it, are there others who (will) try?
10. Social art as subversion of the military/authoritarian and military–industrial complex

In 1983, one of Francesc Torres' multimedia creations reflected on the tank. The exhibition was entitled *Tough Limo*. The link between the limousine, as a symbol of the upper class, and the tank, as an aggressive tool to uphold privilege, was highlighted. The result was both innovative and a telling extension of social criticism of capitalist society and its upholding by military force. Note that in a limousine as in a tank, the passengers/crew are isolated from the surrounding community and by their very class position/placement are situated in a strained, isolationist, if not antagonist, stance in relation to the community. The protection that the limo and the tank offer is for those who represent exploitation and oppression. The tough limo is the cold and shielded selective protection of a self-appointed community, namely the haves. As such, they are carriers of estrangement, alienation and (proto-)wombs for social conflict.

Torres suggests that the tank reflects a reptilian complex. He claims that “the reptilian nature of the tank is evident on many levels; it is a territorial weapon, it intimidates by appearance and it crawls on terrain and is camouflaged for concealment” (Wright, 2001, pp. 377). Another artist, Anselm Kiefer, portrayed the tank as an “enemy of art and spirituality, it emblems abstract power and aggressive forgetfulness” (Wright, 2001, pp. 378).

Lilian Lijn, David Hepler and Ian Hamilton Finlay tried to “repossess” the tank and give it new meaning. Among others to cast it in stone, camouflage it and thus revert the object of aggression to the past as a static symbol; thus both objecting to the object and objectifying the object into a stasis, a paralysis, a tool of death, itself declared dead. Was the tank stopped in its tracks? I fear not; the tank rolled on ...
During the 1990s “communism collapsed” and quasi-philosophers such as Francis Fukuyama, claimed that the world is at the end of history. At the time, a change from bipolarity to a short perceived honeymoon of multipolarity took place, but was soon forcefully sidelined by a new era of unipolarism. Before the USA moved from global policeman towards dangerous international rogue as observed by Dyer (2006), it was conceivable that the tank could be “taken to pieces, stripping it of its symbolic power and even returning it to the art gallery” (Wright, 2001, pp. 379).

By 1991, the real tank lurched forward again in service of hyperglobalisation, unipolarism and McDonaldisation. Iraq was invaded in Operation Desert Storm, then through a decade of sanctions, forced into attrition and invaded again under false premises; the regime was toppled and the leader sentenced to death. The USA moved from global policeman to international rogue, and its Abrams tanks were part of the symbolism of this new aggressive campaign to spread democracy to countries with much-needed scarce resources. If the Abrams tank was the symbol of a hyper-projection of power, the 2008 financial crisis in the USA was but one warning not to bank on the tank (the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq cost roughly three trillion dollars, with immense consequences, the beginnings of which are now being felt in the USA and Europe).37

Ironically, in the same year that the USA invaded Iraq, local authorities in New York invaded and demolished one of their major shanty towns. New York elected its first black mayor in that year. The new mayor, David Dinkins, promised progressive policies, financial reform and support for the poor. But the budget defaulted and the mayor flunked a major test of leadership (Wright, 2001, pp. 392).

Wright describes a desperate situation around the homeless, a situation usually associated with so-called “Third World” societies:

> There were said to be at least 100,000 homeless people in New York, and perhaps the same number living as squatters, many of them in derelict buildings [...] these outcasts were everywhere to be seen. They shuffled along, loaded up with greasy plastic bundles or pushing improvised vehicles filled with salvaged bottles and tin cans. They crouched weeping in doorways, and stood on the corner ranting insanely or begging: sometimes obscenely, sometimes with exaggerated and unreliable politeness. (Wright, 2001, pp. 392–393)

Leaders, who fail on promises, rather than step down with maturity, frequently turn authoritarian, and likewise Dinkins and his cronies decided on a clean-up of shanties in Dinkinsville. The USA version of Robert Mugabe’s Operation Clean Up in Harare, Zimbabwe, started on 15 October 1991 when bulldozers under armed guard went in to wipe away the shanty town (and presumably all social ills).

In reaction, an artist, Krzysztof Wodiczko, developed the polis car as a critical commentary on the undermining of promises of social justice and the subversion of deliberative democracy (Figure 9).

The contraption, part mobile home, part art, part mobile social statement, according to art critics, included images from Kafka, Goya, Aldo-Rossini, Tatlin’s Tower and harked back to earlier designs by Leonardo da Vinci (Wright, 2001, pp. 394). The design was described, among others, as “resembling a tank”, a “paradoxical vehicle”, “a rational mechanical structure”, “a creation both menacing and comic” (Wright, 2001, pp. 394).38 One observer remarked that the polis car was a design “with a tank shaped body geared to survival in a police state” (Wright, 2001, pp. 393).

The polis car was first seen at Tompkins Square Park, background to the Jimi Hendrix Experience, the Grateful Dead and the Fugs concerts, as well as the “skirmishes of full-scale street battles with punks and anarchists in solidarity with squatters” (Wright, 2001, pp. 395).

The polis car, unarmed yet mobile, redefined public space and the safety of the squatter: it was mobile house, mobile shop and a political statement. It could disappear, reappear and disappear again. Even adaptations were possible: larger wheels to improve pavement-crossing capabilities; more or less place for personal belongings or goods to sell; fitment of civil band radios to enable a
protective communication network. In short, it symbolised an instrument of manoeuvre, not battle; of mobility and displacement; safety (a home away from the home destroyed); and it increased the sense of security. It was a civic guerrilla strategy for survival against authoritarian and elite practices aimed at emasculating the homeless and deepening the gap between rich and poor.

The polis car also heralded a demilitarised option against an increasing atmosphere of authoritarianism and non-care. Despite the dreams of a homeless network, there were setbacks. As the artist himself argued, the Left argument of the “homeless” as having a “common interest” is rather simplistic. The homeless are not uniformly needy and helpless, but diverse, leave their own mark and fight back on a scale of strategies influenced by group dynamics, context and available resources.

However, other people (among them the Homeless Network) argue that others can assist the homeless with some mobility and some security to regain their own architecture and space (Wright, 2001, pp. 397). The polis car is one example, but remained mainly symbolic.

This creative demilitarisation of technology provided a sociopolitical pointer. For those soon-to-be homeless, it symbolised a brave point of resistance. But, if authoritarianism and non-care were a metaphor for the tank, the tank rolled on and Dinkinsville disappeared (Wright, 2001, pp. 402).

11. Conclusion: Tanking towards social justice
We have made a wide traverse in the story of the tank. The tank philosophers brought about change, but did not push through to other deeply embedded questions. Could it be that they themselves got caught up in a philosophy/practice of slime? The new *digm* of inventive change of the tank philosophers, one may argue, moved to paradigm and then from paradigm to techno prison. Arguably, even the latest of the tank philosophers, Israel Tal, could not make the final breakthrough.

That breakthrough is eventually about being human or the common core of humanity. The tank philosophers got caught up in the broad whirlwind of war, despite all their open-mindedness and groundbreaking innovations. And their innovations only accelerated war. And since the Second
World War, the military-industrial complex has expanded virtually everywhere. Banking on the tank turned to closed-mindedness when broader social conditions were at stake.

It seems that despite measures of sophistication in the so-called human/Western civilisation, there remains what Shi Ming calls “the crude consciousness” still in need of “many levels of training stage by stage until a certain kind of qualitative transformation takes place” (Ming & Weijia, 1994, pp. 57). But can such qualitative transformation ever be achieved? Given the suction of liberal capitalism and the powerful addiction of the military-industrial complex, is escape possible? Especially, if we remind ourselves that the military-industrial complex is but one outcome of global materialism.

Does the current situation leave us finally with the pessimism of Theodor Adorno? Or shall we take a cue from Milan Kundera and just laugh at the tank as kitsch, and thereby reduce it to the kitsch it is? If none of these options work, how shall the resistance and the inversion of speed and power proceed further than philosophy and art?

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Author details
Ian Liebenberg
E-mail: jcrf@mz2.sun.ac.za

1 Faculty of Military Science, Director of the Centre for Military Studies (CEMIS), Stellenbosch University, Private Bag X2, Saldanha 7395, RSA.

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Notes
1. The Canaanites used the war chariot at the start of the second millennium BC. According to the Old Testament, King Solomon’s forces boasted at least 1,400 chariots (1 Kings 9:22). Assyrian sources suggest King Ahab contributed 2,000 chariots to the allied forces that fought at Karkar against the Assyrians (Fensham & Oberholzer, 1986). Laying a Tice: The Battle of Qadesh 1274 BC by Lowell (n.d.) relates the story of this battle, where, at times, the encounter between the Egyptian forces of Ramesses II and Hittite forces involved military forces that, at various times, deployed up to 2,500 war chariots on the battlefield.

2. The problematic Peace of Versailles sowed the seeds for a next war, a war in which tanks would play a major role. It also introduced a system of technocratic control directed at the extermination of whole groups of people in combination with near total ideology of politics to justify such actions. Approximately 6,000,000 people of Jewish descent were killed by the Nazi regime according to post-Second World War sources. The numbers of Gypsy, Communist, Atheist, Pacifist and Christian objectors to Nazism permanently removed from society form part of the rough figure of 6,000,000, but no research has been done to distinguish between those exterminated by the Nazi regime. As frequently in history, the numbers quoted are generic and as a totalling project, statistics end up under a single conceptual rubric. Sadly, little distinction is made by researchers about the social identity of groups killed under Nazi rule. Outside the areas under German occupation, the exact numbers of civilians killed in Eastern Europe during the German campaigns of 1939 and 1941, because of their Slavic origin, is still largely unknown.

3. In the course of an evolving interest in the history of warfare, especially the Second World War and the use of the tank, I have read many works since 1972. In reading the work of Patrick Wright, I was enthralled. Here was something entirely new. Wright broke new ground. I made contact with the author and we had an interesting email discussion. Wright mentioned that his work “fell between the chains”. Historians were not impressed and philosophers felt that the tank was too mundane an issue to reflect upon. Art critics felt that the references to art when related to the tank “did not touch real art”. I was forewarned. The proof came when I submitted the article to a philosophy journal and it was rejected. Following this, I reworked it and submitted it to a journal of military science. The peer reviews came so close to rejection that I withdrew the article. Perhaps Wright was right; on the tank, at least in critical reflection, one should not write.

4. In their excellent work, Panzerkrieg: A History of the German Tank Divisions of World War II (pp. 7–8), McCarthy and Syron refer to numerous other tank-like or at least armoured fighting vehicle (AFV) inventions between 1420 and 1905. An excellent work on tank development, including the role that tractors played in the development of tanks is The New Excalibur: The Development of the Tank 1909–1939 by A J Smithers.

5. In an article on British blockhouses during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), it is mentioned that in the Kimberly area, there were seven “mobile blockhouses”. These were “a construction that was similar to the Rice-Type blockhouse placed on top of an ox-wagon” (Hatting & Wessels, 2013, pp. 102). The authors observe that “with little imagination, the mobile blockhouses can be regarded as the forerunners of the first tanks in the Great War” (Hatting & Wessels, 2013, pp. 102). During the Anglo-Boer War, self-propelled Fowler armoured tractors protected by steel plating were used, though they could hardly be described as tanks (Ahlers, 1996, pp. 7).

6. The French FT-17 lasted into the Second World War in the service of numerous countries. The late-First World War developed Char 2C heavy tank that France produced (crew 12, weight 69 tons) did not see action during the First World War and was unsuccessful in the Second World War, hardly firing a shot in anger. A joint UK/USA attempt at another heavy tank, the Mark
14. Solomon during his sojourn as camouflageer visited the French camouflage atelier at Amiens and met many.

15. It is well known by those visiting or living close to the sea that wind and sea produce ever-changing smells and images.

8. Picasso, one may be led to believe, critically reflected on this only later when the German Condor Legion was assisting Franco’s Falangiste with tanks and bombers to topple Republican Spain. In solidarity with France’s right-wing movement, Mussolini and Hitler supported the right-wing Falangiste with arms and dedicated “seconded” forces (Carr, 1986, pp. 38ff, 174ff). The German Condor Legion that deployed to Spain had the opportunity to test Blitzkrieg, in which tanks played a pivotal role in battle conditions. German tank tactics and tank development benefited from this. Picasso’s Guernica was painted as a moral outcry against war technology and its dehumanising effects after an aerial bombardment on the town (much later than his reference to the military as Cubist art).

9. Perhaps as much as Captain Nemo’s submarine was a forceful and mobile steel slug sharpened to the sea environment in the novel by Jules Verne.

10. In a Quaker Magazine, Ploughshare, William Loftus Hare, a conscientious objector, wrote that “men are no longer personalities; they are squeezed and given an equal shape size and value”.

11. See also comments by Andrew Kelly (2010) as reviewer of Gough’s work. On Paul Nash, Kelly remarks: “Most [artists] once they experienced the front would have agreed with Nash that the only justification was to ‘rob war of the last shred of glory, the last shine of glamour’”. An excellent article develops the arguments in Wright’s book with a focus on art (Wallen, 2000).

12. “The tank is a mechanical monster whose fuel is flesh and whose lubricant is blood; we see it as the triumphant achievement of science without sympathy”. Hare suggests that the tank is designed for one purpose: “to conquer the markets of the world for competing dynasties of capitalism—for profit”. But more gloomy: “[the tank] drags its body over all lands, all homes, all hearts, to the destruction of everything human” (Wright, 2001, pp. 60). Alienation of the human from the machine is discernible here. Theodor Adorno came to a similar conclusion when observing the Second World War (where tanks played an as important role as the technocratic–bureaucratic Nazi killing of people). Human life in negative dialectics triggered by instrumental reason was to lead to total dehumanisation. For Adorno, this implied that what is left of humanity dies in the ashes of Auschwitz, On Adorno’s “pessimism” consult Kolakowski (1984, pp. 380); Held (1981, pp. 215ff, 229–230, 221–222; and McLellan (1979, pp. 266). Some more research and reflection are suggested here for those interested in societal change in favour of principled equality.

13. This contest continues today. While aerial photography is now undertaken by UAVs, drones or satellites, the art of camouflage remains a basic part of the battlefield context.


15. More recent examples would be the role of the tank in concrete battles as well as expanding Western influence under leadership of the USA to Iraq and Afghanistan and in other cases, less openly, like Libya and Syria. Also Israeli destabilisation of neighbouring states since 1981, including the use of tank forces. See arguments offered later in the text as well as some endnotes.

16. In September 1916 tanks made their first appearance at Flers–Courcelette during the Battle of the Somme (1 July–18 November 1916). By November “the battlefield would turn into a sea of freezing mud”. British and Commonwealth losses were 420,000, French losses 204,000 and German losses 465,000 (Grant, 2011, pp. 74). Thus a few less than a million bodies were expended in less than a semester. At the Battle of Cambrai (November–December 1917), known for the first detailed, hard use of tanks en masse (378 of them), total losses amounted to 50,000 with little gain of territory (Grant, 2011, pp. 758).

17. Wright contemplates that “in the blood-soaked mud of the Somme, evolution itself seemed to have gone spiralling off in reverse”.

18. For a broad and somewhat fluid definition of “military mavericks”, consult Rooney (2000). Rooney includes in his list Alexander the Great, Shaka Zulu, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Lawrence of Arabia, Von Lettow-Vorbeck, Heinz Wilhelm Guderian and Giap. As mavericks he excludes General Jan Smuts (SA Boer War leader and state of the prison or South Africa and believed in an international Commonwealth) and Marshal Georgi Konstantinovich Zhukov (famous the Second World War Soviet General and Hero of the Soviet Union). Under mavericks, he includes the famous “tank philosopher” Heinz Guderian, while tank philosophers such as Erwin Rommel and Charles de Gaulle are excluded. I tend to disagree with Rooney’s classification of Lawrence of Arabia as a maverick. The reflection upon and use of the algebraic element, the mathematical factor and “the nature of the biological factor in command”, the use of insights from and the use of Xenophon’s diatribes in explaining the tactics of Cyrus (Lawrence, 1965 (1926), pp. 197–200) were unique in philosophy, but not maverickish. Lawrence for me is more of a philosopher–soldier. Lawrence’s Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph (1965) is a worthy read.

19. Xenophon, Plato, Jan Smuts and Churchill could be seen as possible examples of philosopher–soldiers.

20. In this contribution, I focus mostly on the the First World War tank philosophers. An attempt to deal with, for example, Heinz Guderian would require several more articles. Two works worth complementary reading in this regard are Guderian (1990/1952) and McCarthy and Byron (2003).

21. Admittedly, Rommel far more than Lidell Hart. Rommel was more versed in “operational art” and a better tactician—and he had the added touch of a feeling for strategy. On a somewhat pessimistic note, Rommel’s acute understanding of the dynamics between tactics and strategy may have led to his death at the hands of Hitler’s security services. But that is a story for another day.

22. One may argue that the military mindset can be described as a supremely solidified form of structural functionalism devoid of vision or fluidity of choice.

23. Total institutions: where people are under control of superior staff for the purpose of changing their values or self-identities. Prisons are mentioned as an example with the military and established institutions for the “treatment for depression and related problems” in tow (Popenoe, Cunningham and Boult, 1998, pp. 99). Anyone entering the military is “modified” by the institutional and a “new military self” is constructed (Popenoe, Cunningham and Boult, 1999, pp. 190). Compare also Collins & Maksowski, 2005, pp. 231.

24. Groupthink: a phenomenon of small group decision-making whereby a group arrives at a single conclusion (mostly in consensus) and closes off any further debate (see D’Anieri, 2014, pp. 176). Groupthink may
have disastrous consequences in (international) policy-making or strategic decision-making, even in small communities (think about apartheid as groupthink or the phenomenon of witch burning).

25. Then as now, the military establishment (even its political commanders) is “suspicious of mavericks and much inclined to mutter about discipline and proper staff college qualifications” (Wright, 2001, pp. 63). With reference to a well-known, often loved and but also deeply despised British commander, Major General Orde Wingate, David Rooney argues: “[His] character and philosophy were so dominant that he remained for many years after his death as controversial as he was alive ... [he] rejected most military conventions and most social conventions as well”. As a result, “he was positively hated by large numbers of army officers who had never seen him” (Rooney, 2000, pp. 201).

26. It falls outside the ambit of this article to discuss the costs which are still escalating due to the replacement of USA forces with private security forces and security-military companies, see Stiglitz and Bilmes (2008).

27. An art critic-turned ideologue chose to see the polis car because of its pointed ends, as being “designed by men, if not for men” and even less sympathetic “a war toy for the homeless” (compare with Wright) and, in doing so, trapped not only a lack of understanding of social issues but simultaneously proved her inability to escape a deep-seated bourgeoisie mentality.

28. Nevinson’s statement that the machine remodelled man (humankind) in its own image, reminds one about the critical theorists who warned against unbridled technocracy. “Capital now produces […] the entire human being—intelligence and senses—into an object of administration (and one may add ‘design’—own insertion), geared to produce and reproduce not only goals but also the values and promises of the system, its [own] ideological heaven […] the power structure is no longer ‘subliminated’ in the style of a liberalistic culture, no longer even hypocritical, but brutal, throwing off all pretensions of truth and justice […] True and false, good and bad, openly became categories of the political economy that define the market value of men and things” (Marcuse, 1972, pp. 14–15). For the social conditions and the problems created by modernity, consult Jameson (2002, pp. 1ff, 139ff, 211ff).

29. Interestingly, Tal studied the philosopher Spinoza.

30. On a more critical note, it seems little has changed from the time of Crowley and Fuller to Pamela and her employer friends, although the word Cubism has gone into disuse.

31. At the time, some references were made to art movements, such as the Neo-Stunners and the Pinkos.

32. Unlike the regular reminders of the holocaust in Western media, which indeed is a crime against humanity, less is heard about the mass killing of Slavic people during the Second World War. Under Nazi rule, no one was safe as the demise of numerous socialists, Christian objectors, pacifists and even generals and SAS leaders testifies.

33. In Poznan, Poland, a tank was fully woven into pink flowers and pink netting by a group of female artists from the time of Crowley and Fuller to Pamela and her employer friends, although the word Cubism has gone into disuse.

34. Interestingly, it is not only lay people who are not aware of the pervasiveness of the military–industrial complex and its negative consequences. Two well-known theorists on the military and military culture, Creveld (2008) and Ouellet (2005), made little note of the complex. In the works mentioned above, the term does not feature at all in the indexes. Neither do the terms “arms industry”, “arms manufacturers” or “industry”.

35. Even as the relative decline of the USA’s military expenditure since 2010, it retains the lion’s share of global defence expenditure (compare Caffrey, McGerty, and Eastman, 2014, pp. 30–31). See the data included here in the pie-chart and graphs from Jane’s Defence Budgets (2014).

36. In Europe, critical theorists like Theodor Adorno and members of the Frankfurter Schule, albeit from a different angle, did the same with seemingly little effect. More recently in the USA, the arguments by persons such as Noam Chomsky come to mind.

37. On the costs of the Iraq conflict to the USA economy, see the data included here in the pie-chart and graphs from Jane’s Defence Budgets (2014).

38. An art critic-turned ideologue chose to see the polis car because of its pointed ends, as being “designed by men, if not for men” and even less sympathetic “a war toy for the homeless” (compare with Wright) and, in doing so, trapped not only a lack of understanding of social issues but simultaneously proved her inability to escape a deep-seated bourgeoisie mentality.

39. Here, some of the tank philosopher artists meet Marcuse. Technocratic society yields such one-dimensional power that even planning an escape causes us to be caught up in “design”.

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