

TARGETING, TELEVISION AND NETWORKING:  
AN INTERVIEW WITH SAM WEBER

Paris,  
November, 2006

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Introduction

In this interview Samuel Weber discusses aspects of his two latest books, *Targets of Opportunity* and *Theatricality as Medium*. Targeting is identified as a modality of conceiving the world that is as old as Western thought but which assumes an increasingly pervasive character in the contemporary globalising political and technocultural milieu. Mainstream and emerging representational and communications media are considered in this perspective for both their tendency to proliferate target thinking (Broadcast TV news, military management of the Gulf War campaign) and their potential to open other modes of being engaged. The predominant forms and ideas of the network (the internet, gamer networks, creative networks) are examined as particular kinds of netting and working that constrain and yet retain some of these other modes of intersubjectivity.

PC

In your recent book, *Targets of Opportunity: On the Militarization of Thinking*, you speak about a ‘certain kind of targeting’ that operates as a ‘paradigm of action’ across philosophical, critical, strategic-political and other domains (p.21). Could you explain what this targeting of thought entails?

SW

It is associated with what one usually thinks of as a kind of intentional, teleological or even philosophical notion of ‘action’, that is, both action and thinking that are goal-directed. This notion is fairly commonplace; it is what we usually associate both with our actions and with our thoughts. The specific dimension of targeting, however, adds something to that. It adds an element of the desire to control, to hit the mark. It is associated traditionally with sport, for example archery and all kinds of shooting sports. The word already indicates a possible direction which has to do with a certain sort of militarization, a militarization of thinking. Targeting itself of course is not necessarily military; it was originally more a hunting term that has taken on a largely but not exclusively military connotation. It’s also by the way very widely used. In fact one of the impetuses for the book was the sense that this word was being used in all sorts of different areas and that this fact was quite symptomatic. It seemed a significant development that this term was suddenly being used in a number of apparently unrelated areas. Basically what I have tried to do in the book, in a very unsystematic way, was to focus on some of the possible interrelations of those areas.

I should add that the book title is not just about targeting but about targets of opportunity. That phrase is also used in lots of different ways and areas. I first encountered it in American university life where it designates a certain type of appointment in which the usual recruitment procedures are circumvented because the “target” is someone who doesn’t fit the usual criteria. So you don’t have the same kind of search procedures as in the normal hiring process. The target of opportunity can be a function of affirmative action policy or be somebody whose qualifications are unusual enough that you would not find them with a regular search process following criteria peculiar to an individual discipline. But the term also exists in astrophysics. There it involves the

fact that, whereas access to the very powerful telescopes is planned far in advance, situations can arise where you anticipate that there is going to be an event in real time, let's say a nova, that will only be observable within a certain time frame. Given such an event, you can therefore apply to use the telescope without having reserved it long in advance and in this sense bypass and disrupt the established planning. Either you get access to the telescope in a certain period or you miss the opportunity of observing the event.

It's interesting that in both academic hiring and astrophysics 'targets of opportunity' is used to designate an unusual event, an exception to the established institutional procedures. Based on what? Based on what I would call the singularity of the event, which qua singular doesn't fit in, and therefore can't be entirely planned in advance. So what interested me in the book was, on the one hand the association of targeting with the aim of controlling the future, controlling your environment by identifying a target, localizing it and hitting it or reaching it, depending on what area you are in, military, economic etc., and on the other hand the notion of opportunity, which suggests the unpredictable emergence of an event that can't be entirely planned. The coupling of the two terms suggests that targeting, rather than just designating an abstract activity in which, unencumbered by constraints of time and space, you identify something you want to accomplish or a goal you want to reach and then you do everything to achieve that, involves responding in a very determinate situation spatially and temporally to an unpredicted, unforeseen event, trying to get that event in some sense under control.

The word 'opportunity' itself is interesting because it already condenses this idea of the unpredictable, singular event being turned into an occasion to do something else. An opportunity means precisely to be able to do something with the event. Quite literally, the word suggests a portal, *op-port-unity*, a gateway through which you can pass into another domain. The latter can be construed as a realm of goals, and then the opportunity is instrumentalized, like the target. But it can also suggest an area that may not be definable strictly or primarily in terms of goals, aims or ends. In the latter case, you can't be absolutely sure that you are going to be able to reach your target or even that there is one. So you have this tension between the two terms, target and opportunity.

PC

The electronic media are evidently central to the circulation and the shaping of thinking about the world today. How do the contemporary mainstream media perform in relation to the targeting of thought you characterize in *Targets of Opportunity*?

SW

Well it's interesting that your question refers to the mainstream media. Because when I talk about the media I like to emphasize that I don't believe that there can be a discourse simply on *the* media as such, electronic or other. Because although obviously *the* media, electronic, digital and so on share certain characteristics in common, the actual significance of what's happens in and with the media depends on factors and variables that are not all intrinsic to them. So when you say mainstream media my experience of mainstream media is limited to certain highly capitalistic countries where those media are mostly—indeed, increasingly—organized as profit-making enterprises. Basically, these media are then organized in order to sell audiences to sponsors and advertisers, at least as a major dimension of their enterprise. There's nothing inherent in the media as such that requires them to be used in this way. That this has come to pass of course is anything but totally fortuitous. But I think it important to recognize that there are other possibilities for uses of media which would not necessarily be counter to their structures and dynamics, even if it would involve drastic changes in the ways they are used, the development of their technologies, and so the structure of the media as we know them.

But your question is directed at mainstream media. Now let me narrow that question a little bit because there are big differences between different media: radio, television, internet, videogames and so on, there are lots of different new media. I'm specifically familiar, as basically an end-user, a viewer, with television. I'm an inveterate television watcher. And there my experience has been largely limited to American and European television. Television might be different in Australia and somewhat different in Europe, although my sense is that a kind of homogenization is taking place in many of these countries so that the characteristics of the American media are being imposed globally. The privatization, for example of what were formerly state-owned media is taking place in most places (although not everywhere), so that the American media may be imposing its logics on others. By using the word "imposition" here I don't mean to imply a one-way street, which would be too simple: what is being imposed entails also the desire to have such media—otherwise the imposition wouldn't work. But I don't believe that the process of imposition responds simply to preexisting desires either: it is part of an overall process that helps create those desires, which in turn probably involve more than what we commonly associate with "desire", above all anxiety, but also resentment, ambition, hope, beliefs of all kinds and perhaps most important of all, a changing sense of identity and of identification. So this approach to the media does not reduce it to socio-economics, or to psychology any more than it does to technology.

One of the characteristics of American broadcast media is to offer a view of the world in which certain elements of this targeting process as I analyze it are almost naturalized; paradoxically, because you are dealing with a highly technological media. Of course, media technology has always been a kind of prosthesis for the bodily senses. For example, television can be seen as an extension of sight and hearing, the main senses through which we generally think we have access to the world, to 'reality'. But everything depends, therefore, on how those senses are experienced. The way they're presented in the mainstream televisual media in the U.S tends to suggest that images and sounds are intrinsically meaningful. By that I mean that the viewer-listener doesn't have to know what happened before, what happened after, you don't have to look outside of the visual frame, you don't have to think between the lines of what is being said. Everything is immediately meaningful as it is presented. And this not only promotes targeting in general, it promotes a kind of targeting that abstracts from the conditions under which targets are identified. The situation of the target is assumed to be self-evident, meaning-ful, and therefore not requiring any further thought, knowledge or memory.

Another way of putting it is that the framing of the target is taken for granted. In the book I start with a discussion of what I take to be one of the earliest and most powerful scenes of targeting in Western literature, namely the return of Ulysses and the killing of the suitors of his wife, Penelope, who during his long absence gather in his home. I spend a great deal of time analyzing the lavish preparations that he makes in order to then finally accomplish the deed. Those preparations have to do with sealing off the great hall where the suitors are, making it impossible for them to escape, impossible for them to get their weapons etc. So there's a great deal of planning.

I consider this planning and its implications in relation to the whole story of the Odyssey, which isn't just a history of the past, but one that gestures toward the future. Specifically, it does not end with simply with the return home of Odysseus. I put a great deal of weight on the fact that in the Odyssey his return is a transition. He will not stay at home even if the story stops there. But before it ends, and after he's killed all the suitors and reestablished his property rights, he reveals to Penelope that he has to leave Ithaca again and this time for good because he feels obliged to follow the prophecy of Tiresias who has told him that he must seek out a people who are ignorant

of the implements of the sea, an agricultural people, and that only when he has encountered such a people, far from his home, will he be able to settle down and conclude his life, basically in exile. So the famous story of Odysseus which is often interpreted as homecoming, which it is, is also one in which homecoming is not the end. The end is exile, in some sense a destiny that Ulysses assumes. And that to me is a way of suggesting that this scene of targeting, in which he recovers his home, his wife and his property by sealing off a certain space within which he will finish off the suitors, has to be placed in a larger context that is open-ended, or rather that ends with something that is not simply a goal but also an interruption.

The end of the *Odyssey* points to his future departure elsewhere. My sense is that this kind of open-ended narrative is, to a certain extent at least—and I'm thinking here specifically of the way the news is prevented, presented. I just said prevented, which is not what I meant to say but which is at least as interesting. A good slip. Precisely what's prevented in the presentation of the news, or at least what is not encouraged, is thinking of the conditions under which framing takes place, the precondition of targeting in other words. The defining of a field within which a target can be sited. But this kind of prevention, or preemption, tends to reduce the ability to grasp the complexity of events, a reduction that makes possible the kind of horrific policies that we've seen over the last few years, in which you have to actually go and experience disaster before you can acknowledge it. The American military intervention in Iraq is a good example. The whole policy was undertaken as though the end could be identified with the occupation of Baghdad by American troops. This kind of thinking is encouraged by a certain use of mainstream media—not the media per se (there is no pure "se" of the media, or of anything else)--which uses the target in order to mesmerize viewers, who are encouraged to take it for granted by disregarding all relations involving invisible complexities and openness. You focus on the target, you accomplish it, mission accomplished, and then "move forward" to the next one. But each segment, each act of targeting is supposed to be self-contained. And that's where the problems begin. In the case of Iraq this was all predicted incessantly in print, in the newspapers (although very little in the US press, including those that are today most critical, like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*). Most observers outside the US, and many inside, who had limited access to the mass media, insisted that the problem would not be that of getting from point A to point B but rather of what would happen afterwards. And nevertheless the American people, through the manipulation of their anxieties, were led to follow their policymakers who were virtually unanimous in approving and what today is largely recognized as a disastrous mistake, if not indeed suicidal policy.

And the same sort of thinking, the same use of targeting obtains in the financial domain as well, where the maximization of profit in the short term takes precedence over all other considerations and has come to undermine the very foundations of the capitalist economy that produced it in the first place. The current financial crisis deriving from the use of "subprime mortgages" is an excellent example of this tendency. Targeting in this sense seeks to eliminate the uncertainties of time by considering it primarily as "short term" and thus as amenable to the accomplishment of certain goals, the maximization of profit primarily, without worrying about what comes next. One reaction to this is the growth of ecological concerns, about "sustainable" growth, but these are then quickly exploited by the very same system dominated by finance capital and short-term profit maximization.

PC

In another recent work, *Theatricality as Medium*, you consider the theatrical nature of media works containing special effects and similar spectacular displays. Given the deliberately 'staged,' highly spectacular nature of terrorist acts and those selected for coverage of the 'war on terror,' what do you have to say about the theatrical nature of the medialization of terror and counter-terror?

SW

If you are talking about theatricality with regard to the mainstream media, I would say that for reasons just mentioned, the mainstream media are organized to promote the idea that the reality of what's going on in the world is accessible to the naked eye—which means the eye of the autonomous, sovereign, self-contained “individual”—but only with the aid of the prosthesis that is television. Television is not a microscope, it's not a telescope, it can be high definition, but it still is regarded or experienced as basically an extension of the eye of the individual viewer—of the viewer qua individual. What I mean by that is that this viewer is presupposed to have, indeed to be defined by a single indivisible perspective, which is extended and made global through television. However, the same media technologies are also responsible for spreading the sense that perhaps the most potent aspects of reality are not accessible to that kind of observation. To an observation that is not just that of the naked eye or ear, but that depends on a frame of reference that takes itself to be absolute, in the most precise sense, namely that of being detached from, absolved of, all involvement in networks of relations that are not and cannot be made accessible to any single vision or unified perspective.

Considered from this perspective, it is interesting to reread some of the statements made by President Bush in his famous speech prefacing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, made in the National Security Paper of 2002, in which he spoke of the terrorists operating in shadows with elements of mass destruction, and concluding that states in general, and the US in particular could no longer wait as they had in the past until there were sufficient visible signs of a threat to justify preemptive action. Such states therefore had the right and the obligation he argued to attack before the threat became visible. In other words, at the same time that the visible and audible world was being foregrounded as more than ever before accessible to individual viewers and listeners, there was the assertion that the same technology had reduced the significance of the visible and audible world by subordinating them—their institutions—to forces that were no longer simply visible or audible. The name for this interestingly confounds object with affect, action with emotion: “terror”.

Terror strikes me as an indispensable notion required to produce this conflicted sense of technological medialization. Why? Because it raises the question of visibility and invisibility. With the end of the Cold War and the concomitant shift away from nation states as the major institutional repositories of power and force in the world—and this shift is multiple; it can also be seen with multinationals who are in league with certain types of technologies so that they are far less dependent on individual, territorially bound nation states but are in fact precisely transnational—the traditional mission assigned to political entities in the West for the past five centuries, since the Treaty of Westphalia, namely, that of protection and security, has had to respond in a new way to the dangers it is protecting against. The notion of terror condenses that problem of how this project has to be defined in order to justify the various sacrifices required of individual citizens and residents that allow the state function. Going back at least to Hobbes, individuals have to give up their freedom in order to be protected. At the same time, to the extent to which the enemy is now associated not just with states or super-states (“The International Communist Conspiracy” for instance, centered in the Soviet Union) but with groups and forces that are not static in the way the state is static and not visible in the way an organized state is, they are no longer objects of what I would call fear but rather of anxiety in its most extreme form, i.e. terror. Fear can still identify visible-audible objects as its cause; anxiety, above all as terror, cannot. Or at least, cannot in a stable and durable manner. Because now you see them and now you don't. And since targeting has been one of, if not *the*, major strategy of addressing dangers both at the individual and political level over the past centuries, the question becomes: How do you target something that is essentially invisible, and essentially inaudible, something that is very

difficult to locate once and for all? How do you target a network rather than a person, a state or an army? What results is a constant back and forth suggesting there's an enemy out there that requires total mobilization, that requires the Patriot Act, continual surveillance, the abrogation of existing law, the abandonment of civil liberties, the suspension of due process, of traditional legal guarantees—in short, the abrogation of the rights of individual citizens, of citizens qua individuals, while at the same time, the problem of identifying the enemy, visualizing and localizing it remains unresolved. The task of “the media” here thus becomes overtly interminable—indispensable, especially to individuals who insist that reality is what can be seen with their own two eyes (and ears), and entirely unreliable..

Interestingly, a certain ludic element therefore can come to the fore. You may remember—although precisely for the reasons outlined our memory-span gets shorter and shorter—soon after the Americans had conquered Baghdad, they came out with a brilliant PR move which involved a deck of cards. Each card had the face of a ‘most-wanted’ Iraqi, arranged in a hierarchical order. I must say that as much as I was horrified by the war I was very impressed by that PR act. It was also very significant; it suggested that the war was a game. But it was also a one-sided game, it was a card game of a different sort. It wasn't being played against somebody as an equal opponent. These cards were being produced to suggest that on the one hand the enemy was multiple and plural, and at the same time that it was individualizable. This latter aspect is crucial. For a system based on capitalist property relations, ultimately you have to have a “private” owner, an individual juridical subject in order for the whole system to function. The equivalent of that individual, private subject was the pack of cards. Each Bathist or whoever else was the target was thereby put in his proper place, ranked, and thereby identified. But as the elements in a familiar game in which the victors, as always, controlled the rules. In that sense the game was target practice. As each one was found, they could be checked off the checklist, and so on. But this was all done for and before an audience—the televisual audience, which was invited to join in the game as spectators, as they are incessantly invited to “participate” in sporting events, but mainly as spectators. Here, it was the home team that had all the cards, or that soon would have them all.

PC

And they became at the same time collectible, like the cards kids collect.

SW

Absolutely. I wouldn't be surprised to have seen them offered on Ebay....

It's interesting because the idea of the card is very much along the lines of the kind of targeting that I'm suggesting. A playing card is manipulable, controllable, all of the cards belong to the same set, they are all therefore easily recognizable and classifiable, but also fully displaceable. And unreal: just a pack of cards. The pack of cards thus confirmed the traditional logic of identity while reducing the individuals concerned to passive targets. However the basis of the “pack” was adherence to the Saddam Hussein Bathist regime, and hence to a nation state, however “rogue” it might be considered. This distinguishes that enemy from Al Qaeda, for instance, which names a terror grouping that cannot be reduced to a pack of cards—which is precisely the problem for the Bush regime and its policies. The more you kill, the more there are. The more they are localized, the more they spread over other localities, beyond the local. The pack escapes the deck and is therefore no longer compactible as a pack.

To venture an overall answer to your question, objects of reality take on their meaning with respect not only to other objects of reality but to the way in which they are perceived, apprehended and transformed through that apprehension. And that is the sense in which I would say that the audio-visual media in general have made theatricality ubiquitous today. By

theatricality I mean more or less simply representation for another. That would be my minimal definition of theatricality. Representation that cannot be enclosed in a deck or as a pack. It has to take place on a stage which is a relatively delimited time and place, but that place is always defined with respect to what it does not contain. The theater audience, for instance. The audience is not homogeneous, but constantly changing. Theatricality in that sense is not identifiable with the institution of the theater that it presupposes because the theater is always delimited in a certain place. It's like the field of targeting or the deck of cards. Theatricality is the dimension which presupposes but also transcends its delimitation or instantiation in and as any defined theatrical space since such a space is constitutively dependent on what it doesn't contain, on an elsewhere whether in time or in space or rather in both.

PC

That observation seems to connect up to what you were saying a moment ago around the idea of the network and its connection to terror. A reconsideration of the notion of the network emerges as a major concern of *Targets of Opportunity*. What is at stake for you in your questioning of the dominant conception of the network in such phenomena as the terrorist network, the Internet, and networked online communities more generally?

SW

If the tendency of targeting with which I'm most concerned, and which I find most problematic, involves that of presenting reality essentially in boxes or as decks or packs, as being self-contained, and meaningful, then the network reminds us that the cardgame is made possible by the deck but never limited to any particular configuration of it.. This is because the basic element of the network is the link, and the link—a term that has become ubiquitous today—is in itself nothing. It is only that which joins by separating, and vice-versa. With the link, spatio-temporal localization is not that of the self-contained box, it's that of the always situated but always open link. Now, what I would suggest is that the two tendencies we have been discussing are at work in the English (or for that matter German) word, network. The one is the process of concatenation, of signification, of pure relationality, and the other is the equally inevitable fact that that relationality has to be defined and delimited. These two tendencies, that themselves are indissolubly linked but also divergent, can be identified with the two component words that make up the word network: the process of signification is that of the 'net' and the process of closure, always temporary, always provisional, that of the 'work.' Both of these are interesting because they are both very old words, which refer to pre-digital, pre-electronic technology. Work I take to be that which is a product precisely of a more or less deliberate intention, informed by an idea or a concept. Going back to Plato's *Republic*, you must have an idea of the end, the bed for example, before you build a bed. And that is what leads Plato to argue that the idea is predominant in his notion of reality. You can't have a practice, a techne, a craft, without it being informed, quite literally, in-formed by the goal that it has.

The net by contrast involves a very different set of connotations. Net takes us back somewhat to targeting but it involves something much more aleatory, something precisely connected as much with opportunity as with targeting. A net is, for example, something used in a hunt, to entrap a prey, to catch something. Or a net is something you get caught in. Like work, it tends to suggest a deliberate, intentional plan, but it also acknowledges the fact that the implementation of the intention depends on factors that may never be entirely controllable. In that sense the notion of net is much more ambiguous than the notion of work. The notion of work strikes me as much more teleological. The work fulfills, the net can interrupt. That's why we distinguish in various languages between work and labor, although labor is not a very common word at least in American English (I don't know how it is in Australian English). Labor would be the activity of laboring, whereas work, either as verb or as noun, implies a meaningful self-contained object as a

point of departure, as a goal. Net implies the effort to bring something under control but, at the same time, the risk of being caught in and by the trap that one lays out to ensnare the prey.

It strikes me that the network in its various instantiations today displays both traits or tendencies. What is somewhat 'new' is not the work aspect but the netting aspect, suggesting that reality is determined not so much as work but as net. The notion of work tends to domesticate the aleatory, uncontrollable aspect of netting. It tends to want to take for granted the setting of limits through intentionality, the location of the target through the targeting, and so on. Whereas netting (without the definite article and using the present participle as gerund) suggests that that will always be subject to relativization, to the unpredictable, to forces that can never be enclosed within any particular frame. Netting involves interruption rather than completion.

PC

The work tends to go back to a 'certain kind of targeting,' as you put it. That phrase suggests there are other kinds of targeting. Do you see other kinds of targeting active in the shaping of critical or political-strategic discourse today?

SW

Certainly. And that's precisely one of the 'targets' of that book, to define or at least to suggest possible alternatives. It's a small book and I don't go very far in that direction. Toward its end it does however provide an example of a possible alternative. It is surely no accident that this alternative involves poetry. Certain kinds of poetry can involve a relation to language in which something like netting as I just described it predominates over the finality of a work. In other words poetry can involve readers in a experience of relationality as a singular event. And I'm speaking specifically of poetry here rather than prose, or rather prose as narrative since narrative as generally understood—again, not per se—entails a practice of language that is more easily assimilable to meaning than poetry. In the case of a poem, if you paraphrase its meaning you still are far removed from whatever is decisive in its experience. The significance of a poem really has to do with the simultaneous emergence and disappearance of meaning, or put differently, with the way in which signifiers are arranged. 'Meaning' by contrast is a term that generally designates the boxing in of significance—its reduction to propositional statement. Why? Because if you formulate in predicative propositions, the suggestion is that those propositions stay the same over space and time. This point of view suggests that, if you have interpreted Shakespeare 'correctly' the circumstances in which that interpretation is inscribed and transmitted are secondary. The text is presupposed to be the same and its meaning unchanging, whereas the idea of a poetic interpretation I suggest proposes that interpretation is more like a theatrical staging that always depends on the singularities of the specific configuration in which the text is being read.

It's not that the words themselves necessarily change, but that their meanings change depending on the contexts in which they are inscribed and reinscribed, produced, transmitted and received. It's interesting that Heidegger, who is worried about many similar things in his essay on 'The Question Concerning Technology,' points there towards poetry as an alternative to the fixating effect that he sees as predominant in modern technology despite or because of its frenetic dynamics: what he calls the Gestell. And by the way the cell phone is an excellent manifestation of the Gestell: it allows a certain mobility but in it puts people always "on call", makes them "bestellbar" in Heidegger's words. The characteristic of modern technology, according to Heidegger, is precisely this: that it puts people permanently on call. That is, it makes people totally mobile, but also in their mobility, always reachable, always connectible, always targetable. And this has become a bloody reality, for example with targeted assassinations in the Middle East (and surely elsewhere) where the cell phone has been used both as a way of detonating a bomb but also of locating people, making them into targets no matter where they are.

PC

Which would be the ultimate *net-work* as opposed to the netting potential of the network.

SW

Exactly, mobilizing the net as a way of work, or as Heidegger says of the “work of art”, putting truth to work. In this sense I would distinguish poetry radically from what Heidegger describes as the work of art. But this is only one example and there are surely many others. Poetry is just the one that I’m most familiar with. Much of my training has been in literary studies. But I am also convinced that many of the developments going on with the Internet today raise similar issues. The issues are also there in military discourse, although the military is obliged by the system it serves to try to get the net under control, i.e. to put it to work.

PC

You looked to poetry as one of those possibilities for other kinds of targeting. In the context of internet-based forms of sociality or interaction do you see this dynamic being played out between these forms and a ‘main-streaming’ of the internet?

SW

First of all I think the internet is enormously important in propagating and presenting possibilities for being involved in reality not as black boxes but as links, not only as works but as netting. I also want to suggest, however, that the kind of linkage I’m thinking of there is by no means limited to the internet. For example, people who approach poetry and therefore language in a certain way also form a certain kind of community which can crisscross and overlap with other groupings and which is not homogeneous but which nevertheless has some things in common. A major task today appears to me to be that of discovering those kinds of experiences and groupings which have this potential of bringing the work into play as a process of netting. By contrast, one of the major obstacles to this experience remains a deeply ingrained tradition that puts the individual subject and the Self at the centre of reality. By that I mean a subject that is literally indivisible, that is “self-fashioning” and therefore corresponds in a strange way in its sense of self and identity to the black box, or the deck of cards in its sense of being self-contained. And if that tradition continues to predominate, then I don’t think that all the work on the internet is going to change things very much.

The need for a unified, stable perspective, which can be allowed to change from place to place as long as in the end it ultimately stays the same--this contributes to the perpetuation of the individual tradition of the Self. Because it is not simply motion or movement or change that is at stake here, but rather the ways in which such movements are measured that is decisive. And here is where I think that both ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ experiences come into play, of which the internet is a very important one. But also the experiences of video-gaming presumably. For instance, with first person shooter games, there are surely very different ways of playing them. For instance, how do these different ways of playing the games determine or relate to the singularity of the shooter? Is it that of an individual, of a self bent on defending its identity as self-contained, as autonomous, as basically independent of and superior to its relation to others? Or is it a self that acknowledges its heterogeneity and with it the pain and the pleasure, the anxiety and the desire that such recognition can entail? What I would call, coming from a more Freudian point of view, a self that can accept and experience its ambivalence in a world that is no less ambivalent rather than being obliged to reduce such ambivalence to some kind of opposition or structure of identity or unity.

These would be the sort of criteria I would use to judge the nature of a particular form of the network and to “measure”—non-quantitatively—its movements. But such criteria are not invented by the internet or by new technology. They require as broad a historical and philosophical understanding, and a memory that is not just “long” but also aware of its constitutive finitude, in order to be able to distinguish what is really going on and what is possibly new and different in the spread of networking today. That’s my overall sense of the question of the potential of networking, but beyond this what would be required is detailed analysis that we can’t get into here. However at this point I would hold onto this criterion as a way of distinguishing between groups, practices and experiences that ultimately are there to defend the prerogatives of the individual subject and those that see that subject and its Self as links defined by a certain divisibility rather than by indivisibility.

PC

Samuel Weber, thank you very much.