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SIGNIFICATION-SWITCH IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC-FILM

Master's Thesis

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I have written this Masters Thesis myself, independently. All other authors' texts, main viewpoints and all data from other sources have been referred to.

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1.0 Introduction:

In this paper, I will introduce the idea that empty signifiers provide a possibility to switch the meaning of signs in different discourses (i.e. an empty signifier becomes a meaningful signifier and vice versa). Using Ernesto Laclau's definition of an empty signifier, this paper aims to investigate empty signifiers, providing a hegemonic possibility to develop different ideological content for a dominant system from excluded totalities. Also, this thesis attempts to provide background information to understand why empty signifiers not only develop one particular discourse at certain moments, but also make other discourses possible in the future. In his book *Emancipations*, Laclau mentions that the empty signifier signifies to the system its incompleteness though it tries to fulfill itself. There is always something absent in the system for which the empty signifier operates as sign for. However, the empty signifier can once again become meaningful in a new discourse depending on the constructive application of the signifier. He explains that with empty signifiers: "we are left with the paradoxical situation, that what constitutes the condition of possibility of a signifying system-its limits-is also what constitutes its condition of impossibility-a blockage of the continuous expansion of the process of signification"(1996:37). Laclau speculates that the ambivalent nature of the signs is based on the double reflection between a particular dynamic system and a totality of excluded systems that are in a deactivated state. The application of signs is dependent on the interaction between dominant signs and repressed signs that try to reconfigure their discursive positions in relation to one another through the sign-switch.

This paper will use Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* as a research object and a model to exemplify the topic of the empty signifier in the political context. The film reviews the idea of how something that is perceived as empty can suddenly become a new dominant signifier in the system through a hegemonic struggle. In this film dramatization of the Joan of Arc -trial, the political elite perceive Joan of Arc as a "political horror" because there is no common denominator that the elite can use to label her. This alienation of Joan, in Jacques Lacan's sense, defines the absence of specificity in the system through empty signs. Joan of Arc is the "other" who does not and cannot have representation in the court-room because everything there is defined by the Burgundian court system. Using Lacanian framework, the "other" actually builds a hegemonic possibility to exchange the current discourse with new content. Lacan explains: "The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of signifier that governs whatever may be made present in the subject – it is the field the subject has to appear"(1974:203). In Lacan's sense, the otherness is the non-signifying area in which the excluded signifiers develop different forms of identities and applications for the empty signifiers.

By using Laclau's book *On Populist Reason* as primary material, this paper develops the theory of an empty signifier as a hegemonic construct that creates the framework for a certain totality to become the next carrier of meaning into a new possible discourse. Simply put, this is what is meant by "signification-switch". The hegemonic process defines the antagonistic relationships between differently valued signifiers inside the system. A new discourse is only realized if it is separated from the non-signification area. In his book, Laclau defines hegemonic constructs as creating possible advancements in political structures that are used to organize a society according to the certain parameters. Laclau explains: "hegemony is nothing more than the investment, in a partial object of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical" (2005:116). To Laclau, semiotic agents will only have a particular application of the hegemonic construct by negating other possible uses of the same object. The hegemonic construct itself becomes a signifying object for the empty signifiers to be organized as part of a certain order, and thus the hegemonic process becomes part of a systematic machination. In this system, the discourse is the driving force that prohibits empty signifiers from other possible applications by restricting it to one particular identity.

In the second chapter, this paper will try to explain the framework for why *The Passion of Joan of Arc* as an object of study showcases the idea of excluded signifiers operating as sign-switches to create other possible ideological discourses. Empty signifiers should not be perceived as empty blank spots that offer some kind of "innovative" or alternative possibility for a new fresh beginning by denouncing the presence of the previous discourse. These signs are always equivalently opposite to the meaningful signs inside of them by providing them with boundaries for their identities. However, empty signifiers do offer a hegemonic possibility to reconstruct a new discourse through the signifier-hybridization process between earlier dominant discourses and excluded hegemonic constructs. The absence of specificity in the dominant signs is a clear indicator that this type of system is a dysfunctional construct because the empty signifiers provide the hegemonic possibility for the signs to have different identities. Thematically, this section will uncover Joan of Arc's symbolism as a dangerous continuum of another totalitarian turn, if the previous systematic content is in total sense rejected in the new discourse.

In the third chapter, the discussion will be centralized around a system of differences that showcases empty signifiers as a means to create a boundary for the dominant system. Laclau defines this as a complex systemicity that organizes and divides signifiers in the social sphere into dominant and empty signifiers. An empty signifier is a "non-signifying signifier" for the system because it acts as a boundary that reveals the absence of specificity in the dominant signs. In a system of differences, signifiers can rapidly switch their signification positions if there appears to be a disturbance in the system because of a hegemonic struggle. Using Marianne Jorgensen's and Louise Phillips' discourse analysis of Laclau's theory for empty signifiers, this reading reveals on how Laclau's discourse theory focuses on those signs that try to create visible distance between dominant and repressed signs. Empty signifiers will always operate as a reminder for the system of its boundaries.

In the fourth chapter, the concept of totalitarian discourse will be related with the end sequence in the film by analyzing how empty signifiers provide a hegemonic possibility to replace totalitarian discourse with another system. Totalitarian discourse- theory presumes to have total control over the reality by claiming that everything is part of itself, even the empty signifiers. By using Umberto Eco's short piece about counter-culture, the fourth chapter reviews why a totalitarian system attempts to totalize everything as a part of itself and does not become hybridized with other systems. A totalitarian discourse is a closed -system that does not presume there are weak points in its structures. Ironically, this signification closure makes the system weaker because there are no dynamic counter-parts (empty signifiers) to reformulate the dominant signs' content inside of the

system. Hence, the empty signifiers offer a direct, critical methodology against the dominant ideological discourse by redefining the content of current dominant signs.

In the last chapters, the discussion will be formed around empty signifiers operating as signification-switches between different hegemonic constructs. However, inside of the system there are floating signifiers that operate in a similar manner as excluded signifiers. Structurally speaking, floating signifiers try to replace the absence of specificity in the system by filling this void with specific meaning. Metaphorically, floating signifiers function as signifying mediators between dominant and empty signifiers by providing a framework in which they can be reformulated with new content. Utilizing floating signifiers as part of the discussion, this exemplifies how totalitarian discourse is also dependent on the concept of empty signifiers because they constitute a boundary that allows dominant signifiers to remain meaningful in the system.

In Laclau's sense, the excluded signs create a new hegemonic possibility for any meaningful discourse to become the new dominant discourse that is developed set of social relationships. Laclau mentions: "to conceive social relations as articulations of differences is to conceive them as signifying relations" (1982:40). Laclau defines the discourse as meaningful through the opposite sign compositions (the dominant and empty signifiers) that constitute social articulation to the society as whole in the form of a system of differences. By using an empty signifier to frame the possible foundation of the system of differences, the idea of totality must be investigated to build an understanding of why empty signifiers actually matter. Hence, the attempt of this paper is not to reinvent the wheel by conceptualizing the empty signifier in the context of political systematization. On the contrary, the empty signifier provides another method of interpretation to understand that signifiers can have multiple applications through the signification-switch. For instance, if the dominant sign becomes weaker in the current discourse, then it will be excluded out of the system and maybe later some aspects of it will be once again applied to another new dominant sign.

All in all, this paper will try to develop a framework to understand how political-signifiers form a semiotic-system and remain dynamic with each signification changes. Using Laclau's political analysis of empty signifiers, this helps to understand why the politics are always a product of temporary circumstances and why in any kind of political systemicity, the semiotic agents always attempt to fulfill the absence of specificity in the discourse by using the excluded signifiers to redefine it.

1.1 Historiography of Empty Signifier:

The definition of an empty signifier became a dominant feature in 1920s European politics when there was need to redefine the social order in the aftermath of World War I. In the social sphere, particular social signifiers were troubling for many people because these signifiers were used to exclude many social agents from the social order. The idea of totalizing a social system was encountered with skepticism amongst the average population that was becoming anxious with the worsening social situation in Europe. Interestingly, Laclau analyzed 1920's fascist Italy as an example to showcase why the absence of specificity in a certain order allows the hegemonic struggle to become more visible, as if it was a viable replacement for the old order. Laclau explicates: "the signifier 'revolution' was an empty one, representing people's feeling that the older order coming from the Risorgimento was obsolete and that a radical refoundation of Italian state was needed"(1996:95). Laclau proposes that the creation and appearance of a certain system is dependent on excluded signifiers that loop meaningful content into the system. In the case of the Fascist revolution, Benito Mussolini and his supporters were constantly looping a particular application to support their political agenda through the empty concepts. For them, these empty signifiers were going to replace the current dominant signifiers that did not aid their political cause. The idea was to redefine the entire social life through those excluded signifiers that did not have social representation or agency in the current order.

An empty signifier is not a directly representational signifier of nothing, but rather it is ambiguously measured as a less valuable signifier according to the dominant order. The systemicity creates a temporary symbolic order between these meaningful or undetermined signifiers. The pre-description for meaningful signifiers to have an opposite counterpart was briefly discussed by Ferdinand De Saussure who suggested an equivalent relationship between different signifiers. He defined the arbitrary structure of a signifier as dependent on the particular systemicity that created a mode for any kind of signifier to be meaningful, if they it is applied in such manner. Saussure explicates: "The signifier, though to all appearances freely chosen with respect to the idea that it represents, is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it" (1959:71). He considered the community as a constructive mechanism for deciding what signifiers were perceived as more meaningful in relation to other signifiers. Through fixed positions in the system, the signifiers were interpreted to create particular values for the system. Similarly, in set-theory, the mathematical signifier changes its value and identity when new evidence appears to challenge the

old content with proper factual data, and also it depends on whether it is established as a proper signifier amongst the mathematical community.

The dominant signifier is temporarily defined as part of the system by actively applying its form to the system. Therefore, the meaningful signifier is given a statutory position in the system to fulfill a particular function in comparison to empty signifiers. In Saussure's analysis, the signifiers are circumstantial concepts that identify other signification processes occurring in the environment by recognizing them. Saussure applies linguistic theory to map out why it is impossible to specify or assign an identity to the linguistic signifier that might or might not exist between different languages due to the lack of similar kinds of expressions. He continues to detail how: "the value of just any term is accordingly determined by its environment; it is impossible to fix even the value of the word signifying "sun" without first considering its surroundings" (1959:116). For Saussure, the meaningful signifier is always relational to the symbolic order that recognizes its role in comparison to other signifiers applied in the environment. Similarly, in fascist 1920s Italy, Mussolini applied the concept of "revolution" constantly to make the fascist hegemonic-struggle more visible in the social sphere. The repetitive application of "revolution" made this concept emptier because there was no continuum for it in the social sphere. The fascists did not want to hybridize their agenda with other discourses because they were, in fact, totalizing everything by tautologically looping of the meaning of "revolution". Ironically, the emptying process of this concept allowed other hegemonic discourses to become more valuable in future discourses.

In the later academic discussion, the concept of a floating signifier was used to depict the absence of specificity in any kind of discourse. It was a preliminary label for the empty signifier concept that became actively applied in psychoanalysis and anthropology research. This concept was used to assert some kind of arbitrary value for ambiguous signifiers that could not be defined directly with a particular identity. Paradoxically, the floating signifiers switched their meaning due to the circumstantial conditions in which they either became valuable or valueless depending on how the research was conducted. In Jeffrey Mehlman's paper, "*The Floating Signifier from Lewis-Strauss to Lacan*", he analyzes the appearance of this concept rooted in linguistic studies (i.e. Saussure) that motivated theorists in other fields to categorize and observe everyday human behavior as it appeared to them. The floating signifiers operate as referential cues for psychoanalysts and anthropologists to have common ground for decrypting something that appears to them as "otherness". Mehlman describes that in this kind of situations theorists are: "faced with the impossibility of significantly knowing the otherness of the others" (1972:17). Mehlman believes these theorists have a problem recognizing what their counterparts consider to be other. For

instance, to Benito Mussolini, the old rule represented a place for dysfunctional otherness for which the Fascists acclaimed to have an instant solution, in the form of revolution. However, during Mussolini's own reign, he labeled the Italian resistance movement as the repressed "other", and ironically, he was later hanged by these same people on April 28th 1945. In Mehlman's sense, both the Italian resistance movement and Mussolini switched their relative positions of political power with each other through the concept of "otherness" as it operated as a floating signifier.

Peculiarly, the definition of an empty signifier became a dominant concept in scientific research by way of linguistic studies. To Saussure, the application of a word is always interconnected with signification and other relationships in a meaningful environment. For instance, the term "empty" already means something specific in relation to something that we consider "full;" for example, the doctor who can recognize "fake" symptoms from "real" ones. The "full" signifier is something very specific that is identified as the dominant signifier inside of the system, whereas "empty" is a representative concept of any kind of signifier that is excluded out of the system. The floating signifier is a metaphorical elevator that operates arbitrarily between these two dimensions by making the signifier either full (dominant) or empty. In psychoanalysis and anthropology, the empty signifier was a suitable term to define something that was not dominantly present in the scientific discourse, and it allowed theorists to become acquainted with new information. This exposure to a new signifier was just a conceptual disguise to comprehend one form of application to the particular signifier. In Mehlman's analysis of Saussure, he mentions that language is an empty concept that does not have a specific form. Mehlman states: "language (langue) is the collective, structural, unconscious system of differential relationships which constitutes the condition of possibility of any individual speech act (parole)" (1972:24). Similarly, in Laclau's texts, Mehlman's approach tried to explain the reason why signifiers actually matter in the social sphere; when they are dependent on people's uncertainty of not knowing how to use them. In any kind of discourse, the individual acts of speech help to recognize different values given to signifiers in the collective systemicity. Dominant signifiers are representative images of what a system values and considers important for the social life in a particular moment. Specially, in the film *The Passion of Joan Arc*, the historical development of the concept of the empty signifier becomes very recognizable due to the psychoanalytic influences in 1920s European Cinema.

1.2. The object analysis of *The Passion of Joan of Arc*

Carl Dreyer's film offers an interesting opening to review the question of nationalistic representation through the symbolism represented by the titular character, Joan of Arc. In the film, Joan is portrayed as a tragic victim of the oppressive Burgundian law that perceives her heroism as a serious threat to their governance. This image of martyrdom was perceived in the early 20th century Europe as some kind of inspiring anti-nationalist lore that many artists felt were important and they utilized it as part of the growing nationalistic-sentiments inside of the Europe. Especially after First World War, in Nadia Margolis analysis *Trial by Passion*, she analyzes the varying imagery of Joan of Arc represented in the European counter-art, describing her as a therapeutic heroine that redefined those empty social signs that had lost their symbolic value during the Great War. Especially, she mentions: "Dreyer's particular contribution to this portrait is to de-nationalize Joan. He aims to enlarge her significance, and that of her trial, to a transcendent confrontation between a pure believer and cynics seeking to destroy her by "the proper channels"(1997:473). For Margolis, Dreyer investigates the impossibility of returning to the nationalistic idealism that was presented before the war. There was a need to develop the idea of a new totality that was not based on the ontological belief of a particular nationhood. On the contrary, the artists desired a new humanistic idealism for the new creative human reborn after the war.

Dreyer depicts Joan as a mythological character who has an individualistic need to belonging to "the universal group" that is not represented in the dominant discourse. In Dreyer's film, Arc martyrs herself for this ontological "group's" cause because this belief does not have an official representation in the dominant political system. This "universal group" is a floating signifier that only has one identity when it is applied to part of the particular hegemonic struggle. Joan operates as a symbol for this unrecognized universal desire through her gender-representation. For Laclau, the idea of the individual becoming a representative character for a particular ideology has the potential to inspire other repressed semiotic agents to become politically active against the oppression practiced by the dominant discourse. Laclau says: "popular identities, in my sense, always constitute totalities" (2005:234). In his work, Laclau reviews the popular identity as the embodiment of a particular hegemonic desire that is not represented in the current political system. The popular identity is generalized as a signifier for other desires that people want hybridize as part of the dominant discourse. For instance, in the women's suffrage movement in 19th and 20th century, suffragists actively pushed the social agenda of equality against the patriarchal politics in which women were not allowed to vote or become members of the political order. The popular identity of democratic membership inspired many of them to fight against this political

mistreatment in which women were not allowed to be equal members of the common society. It was a totalizing desire to obtain an equal voice for women in their hegemonic struggle.

The populist identity always requires a particular embodiment in any kind of system so that it can become hybridized as part of the dominant system, and thus chain the current discourse with a new ontic content. Similarly, in many 1920s European films, there were constant attempts to depict the dynamics of the human body in relation to the human psyche, operating as a metaphor for the populist struggle. The silent film offered the perfect method to simultaneously investigate the character's state of mind through explicit and implicit visual cues in relation to the character's surroundings. To the film theorist Jean-Pierre Oudart, in this era, the filmmakers were confronting the nihilistic side of a psychoanalysis theory by deconstructing of a particular cinematic body or character. Oudart explains "In certain films of this period there is only one thing at stake: to evade the death of the filmic body which is inscribed in the very matter of its ghostly reproduction" (2000:309). Oudart points out that the idea of devastation is an opportunity for the filmmakers to investigate the reutilization of concepts that were already present in the old medium. For instance, many avant-garde filmmakers deconstructed the known cinematic elements to create new dimensions in their cinematic work. In Dreyer's case, the repetitive use of threatening rhetoric used by the Burgundians creates a distressing echo from the dominant power who has no control over Joan's representation in the courtroom. Her symbolic disconformity in this political space makes her become a populist identity for the "universal desire." According to Oudart, the metaphoric presentation of death in narrative films examines the chaotic elements of the political space, limiting the character's openness towards their environment. Especially, this film limits actors to be framed inside of specific acting areas in which they are not allowed to move much, as if the characters are violently trying to adjust to the environment to which they cannot fit in.

The use of violence in this film creates an opportunity to investigate the relationship between the human mind and body in a limited space. In Oudart's sense, the death of a cinematic character's body is a metaphorical allegory for a particular discourse or situation that cannot be continued anymore because the dominant discourse cannot totalize or incorporate everything as part of itself. For instance, in the film, the Burgundians have established a rigid political space in which the elite cannot act freely because they have limited themselves with their own bureaucratic system. The self-destruction of this very space allows Joan the hegemonic possibility to link the discourse with another one. The film as a medium provides a specific voice to recognize Joan's struggle as the dominant opposite of the Burgundian law that appears as the dominant other in the story. The

Burgundians are depicted as monstrous people that do not give any value to Joan's position in the courtroom.

The absence of specificity in the dominant structure reflects the idea of how any kind of systemicity can only briefly appear, in a particular place at a certain time. This forces the system to adapt to other hegemonic desires in an attempt to maintain its position by way of political hybridization. Empty signifiers are reminders for the system, to know that the dominant signifiers are only applied in a particular manner depending on the situation in which the dominant discourse visibly practices its power against repressed desires. Laclau calls the discursive system a heterogeneous construct that aims to separate the dominant signifiers from excluded signifiers through the system of differences, and because of this, the system fails to be a "concrete" thing. Laclau says that: "heterogeneity, in the sense in which I conceive it, has as one of its defining features a dimension of *deficient being or failed unicity*" (2005:223). To Laclau, the dominant discourse fails to obtain its totalizing form because of the absence of specificity inside of the system itself. The excluded signifiers will always develop the hegemonic promise to replace the current order through systematic hybridization that allows empty desires to become visible in possible future discourses.

2.0 Empty Signifiers

An empty signifier is a description for the impossible homogeneous constructs that are not allowed to have a dynamic form inside of the system. In Rodolphe Gasche's text, *How Empty Can be Empty?*, he analyzes Laclau's conception of the concept of "empty" as a universal definition of many different signifier applications that have ambiguous values outside of the dominant discourse. They operate as reminders of the absence of specificity in the dominant discourse. This creates a hegemonic possibility for the empty signifiers to create new meanings. Gache theorizes through the concept of universality in Laclau's theory that: "his reference to universality as an empty space also suggests that this is a space still to be thought, or differently worded, a space that coincides with a task—the task to think the universal" (2004:17). In Gache's analysis, Laclau perceives the particular application of totality or universality to exist temporarily through a dominant discourse that considers the system to be a "total" version of itself. However, all kinds of systems fail or become obsolete due to the absence of specificity in the application of dominant signifiers; they will become stagnant due the lack of change. Empty signifiers offer alternative applications to these systems and allow them to develop new dominant discourses through a hegemonic struggle. These excluded signifiers allow the system to be dynamic at those particular times.

2.1 Definition of Empty Signifier

The signifiers can be considered to be empty or meaningful depending of the current application that is practiced in certain discourse. The attempt of this paper is to investigate on how the sign operates as a sign-switch for itself and other signs become meaningful or empty inside of the system, and also on how the signifier changes the structures of the system itself. In Laclau's analysis, something can be considered as an empty signifier by the dominant system if the signifier is ambiguous but valued as an oppositional sign to the dominant sign. To the system, empty signifiers operate as the reminder for the system's boundaries. When the system is scaled into a certain limits, the signifier starts to signify something meaningful in relation to another sign. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein points out interestingly the implied significance of a sign already being used in a certain discourse because it is the system that makes it appear as dynamic. He says: "Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives it life? In use it is alive" (1953:432). This short observation by Wittgenstein shows remarkable consideration for what is meant by the sign application. The value for the sign is created in the use, inside the system that gives it value. However, it is the signification of the "non-significant" empty signifier that allows the system to measure how much the dominant signs can be valued in relation to the exclusion boundary. To Wittgenstein and Laclau, the idea of signification depends of the dominant system that is active because it regulates the meaning for it. Ironically, the system tries to give full meaning to the sign but it only can provide only a certain application for it. Similarly, the empty signifier cannot fully ever be empty because it carries the possibility of becoming part of the future discourse.

Before we can explicate more in detail what is meant with signification processes in relation to the system and its excluded totalities, the term of empty signifier must be defined first. The empty signifier (in short ES) as itself does not carry any specific meaning in relation to other signs because it is a "non-signifying" sign that creates the remark for the system to recognize its boundaries. In a social context, these empty signifiers do not produce or constitute directly anything meaningful for the social mechanism. They can be associated with multiple meanings without actually having one specific meaning. For instance, individuals can have a specific definition for the color orange in a society that knows how to define orange through a red-and-yellow color mixture. However, there is no constituted definition for the orange color in a society that is only fascinated with the yellow color. In Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*-book, he analyzes how ES does not have a fixed point in the semiotic system, but rather it is an empty reminder existing outside of the system that can potentially be used to mean something else. Laclau explains: "we mean that there is

a place, within the system of signification, which is constitutively irrepresentable, in that sense it remains empty, but this is an emptiness which I can signify, because we are dealing with a void *within* signification.”(2005:105). Laclau views ES not to be a visible part of the social construct but rather as a meta-structural element of it. These signs are not an ordered part of the structure because they do not contribute anything meaningful to it. Empty signifiers provide opportunities to individuals to fulfill these signs with new meanings, if they become utilized in such a manner.

Wittgenstein’s approach to the dead sign resembles the idea of empty signifier in that it is not a dynamic manner used in any discourse. An empty signifier is in the passive state amongst other empty signifiers that are excluded out of the dominant discourse, and thus sharing the common fate together of being empty. They are all outside of the system, waiting for the hegemonic situation in which they will once again being used meaningfully. The possibility of empty signifiers becoming meaningful depends of the conditions inside of the system’s own structures. In his early works, Wittgenstein speculated that signs could be dependent on the system given the specific model for how the sign should be applied. It is very vital to understand in the later works of Wittgenstein that the sign always needs some kind of system to give it a form to signify something. In his early works, Wittgenstein does not acknowledge the antagonistic nature of the sign system. However, he had a precise idea for how to develop a dynamic system through signification equivalency. Wittgenstein explains in his early work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that: “we should construct a system of signs with a particular number of dimensions--with a particular mathematical multiplicity” (1999:5.745). Wittgenstein states that the signs need the system to give them a strict form to keep them active because this separates these signs as oppositional forms against those signs that are empty. Any kind of system is always dependent on particularizing certain signs in relation to other signs. This operation defines these particular signs as more meaningful than those repressed signs that are excluded out of the system. However, what signifier function can make the hegemonic structure become the new dominant in relation to the previous discourse?

The topic of this paper tries to answer this question by investigating how an empty signifier and the dominant signifier in the certain discourse switch into a new meaning due to the appearance of the new ideological discourse. To exemplify this change, the discussion will be in later chapters centralized around totalitarian discourse concept to explicate the totalitarian turn between different discourses. In this analysis, a sign is always “double reflective” for its structure as if it was a light switch that would switch on-and-off depending its function in the system. The discourse is the representational mode for the signs to have a meaningful space in which they can appear in a certain manner. Laclau analyzes this to be equally important to the excluded signs

because they get represented by the system as empty reminders of the system's boundary. Laclau explains: "representation is a two-way process: a movement from represented to representative, and correlative one from representative to represented" (2005:158). Both Laclau and Wittgenstein discussed the signifier as pulling double duty by being passive or active depending on its representation in the system. The signifier has different symbolic volume through the discourse in which the value for it is measured through its application. Similar to the light-switch metaphor, the function of a sign-switch changes the value of a sign immediately to be empty or not. There is no middle ground for the sign to have a signification average. The function of a sign-switch can be analyzed in the context of a film in which the Joan of Arc-character becomes the symbol for this totalitarian turn by replacing the framework of the current system with another one. The main attempt of this paper is to argue if this change is actually a change for the better or not.

2.2 Why use the film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* as the research object?

This 1928-film by Carl Dryer makes an interesting cultural double reflector to the totalitarian discourse-mentality present in Europe in the 20th century. Similarly, it is a historical analysis of a 15th century trial-case in which the totalitarian discourse-mentality was the main engine for the “witch-hunt.” In the story, the Burgundian County tried to find any reason for getting her rid of her by using the heresy clause against her gender appearance. Using the gender category as an excuse to prosecute her, the Burgundian law created a symbolic distance between them and Joan of Arc with use of the identifiable signs. For the political power, Joan was a representational character for the “terrifying other” who was able to challenge their current system with her political views for the liberated French-nation. This vision of French nationhood threatened England’s attempt to occupy France during the Hundred Year War. If found guilty of heresy claims, her political representation of French nationalism would have been perceived wrongfully. The film theorist Sean Desilets believes that film aesthetics depict Joan as completely isolated from the ideological system. Desilets comments Desilets comments: “the alienation grows out of spatial rather than temporal dislocation is of course significant, but the referential function of allegorical hermeneutics remains the same: to collapse that dislocation” (2003:62). For Desilets, the dislocation of the sign appears when the structural form of the system becomes hollow. Hence, the totalitarian discourse can only temporarily hold itself as one piece before it completely collapses. If there is no change in the totalitarian system, then it cannot continue because of the system’s inability to adapt with other signification systems.

In the context of the film, the dominant discourse shows its totalitarian power through visible brutality and thus avoids acknowledging its structural weaknesses. The Burgundian establishment has already fixated certain ideological points in the system which they do not wish to give up. For instance, the Burgundian establishment introduces Joan to the torture room by explaining that if she does not agree to confess to these claims, she will be tortured. This visibility is the depiction of the Burgundian’s symbolic order in which Joan appears to be completely isolated from the system. This constant antagonism between the establishment and Joan allows them to have the system of differences. In this structural mechanism, the Burgundian law becomes the dominant ideology in relation to other possible discourses when they utilize fixed symbols to make them appear as the highest authority in a certain space. Laclau believes different systems need signs to have a certain identity because this makes the systems more meaningful. For Laclau, a system does not give value to the signs directly, but rather, empty signifiers give meaning to the system. Laclau

explicates: “The system is what is required for the differential identities to be constituted, but the only thing—exclusion—which can constitute the system and thus make possible those identities, is also what subverts them.” (1996:152). For Laclau, the boundary created by the excluded signs gives the dominant discourse the possibility to identify with its structural parts. The stronger representation the sign has in the system, the more dynamic the sign becomes for this particular discourse. Laclau analyses the particular discourse in a way that depends on some signs appearing more dominant in relation to each other and thus creating more emphasis towards their systems. The focus is given to the dominant signs becoming visibly fixated in the relation to empty signifiers. In Laclau’s analysis, the appearance of dominant signs is an indicator only specifying a certain application of the signs in comparison to the excluded signs.

Carl Dryer’s film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* deals with issues of estrangement and otherness in the political platform where the repressed signs are visibly made empty signifiers by the dominant discourse. This distance between the signs is created through the system of differences that tries to establish totalitarian discourse at the expense of Joan’s political presence. The authoritative body tries to legislate Joan’s political representation with a specific identity to which she is forced to conform. This area in the film becomes exactly the political double for the historical struggle to understand why some signifiers become legislated as dominant or repressed signs. In the end, this horrendous performance of cruelty drains Joan of Arc’s political presence by killing her. She becomes completely empty of the signification because the establishment creates a clear distance from her. This powerlessness of this otherness appears on the surface to be completely empty, but it is actually a new hegemonic possibility to create a different discourse. Desilets defines this dislocation of certain significations as a turning point for other possible discourses to emerge as part of the system by chaining its structure. These are the signs that appear as dramatized “truth” in the film that can only be taken as visual cues for the ideological change. He explains: “The process by which truth appears in the immolation of the work is the process of rhetorical substitution” (2003: 73). To Desilets, the powerful position is depicted as steadiness and this becomes visibly changed between the dominant and repressed signs, indicated by the aesthetic rhetoric. Joan of Arc is clearly shown as a victim in this film and her story becomes the passion for a new hegemonic possibility. The viewer is introduced to the totalitarian power through the idea of a “truth” that, in the end, visibly makes Joan of Arc a martyr. However, the most problematic question arises here: should the artistic dramatization of Joan’s death in this film be read as a positive or negative dramatization? The answer for this question must be defined through the mechanisms of the sign-switch.

To properly analyze the shift in this film, the empty signifier must be considered in the framework of a system working as a double reflector between the dominant and repressed signs, forming a boundary between each other. The empty signifier indicates to the system the empty signifier's antagonistic foundation in which these signs signify the absence of specificity. For instance, Desilets argues for the signs displacement inside the system allowing one to understand why every system cannot hold its position without systematic hybridization. The system always lacks specific meaning because the hegemonic analysis can always substitute the current discourse with another. In the context of the film, the Burgundian authority is shown to perceive itself as the ultimate representation of totalitarian power. Ironically, Joan of Arc is represented in this ideological mechanism, too, because of her total commitment in her vision to God. Joan's character represents united French, but in this vision English people do not have any means to become French. This is exemplified through Arc's attitudes towards the English authorities presented in the courtroom. In Laclau's analysis of the possible totalitarian discourse, he notes the possibility that unexpected situations can provide change for another totalitarian turn. This depends on the extreme form of brutality that is practiced visibly through the certain discourse with a particular identity. He states: "a certain identity is picked up from the whole field of differences, and made to embody this totalizing function" (2005:81). Laclau perceives the totalitarian discourse as based around a certain identity that will dictate the rules on how rhetoric will be used in the system. Symbolically, at the end of the film, the populist opinion shifts to Joan of Arc's side when the common people sympathize with her vision a united France. For the common people, her struggle against the visible brutality inspires them to have this change of heart. However, this also creates a dangerous situation for another totalitarian turn because the current system is hugely unfavorable amongst the common people. If the parts of the current totalitarian discourse are not hybridized with other possible discourses; the total negation of the previous discourse can cause another totalitarian system to reappear.

2.3. Is Joan of Arc's Struggle an Opening for Another Totalitarian Turn?

In the film, this political antagonism between different signs is recreated within the frames of limited *mise-en-scène* in which the actors move around very little in the large space. This creates a metaphorical echo for the total control that the Burgundians are visibly practicing in their attempt to diminish Joan's vision for the united French nation. The constant use of the close-up shots and shadows creates a claustrophobic atmosphere for the political platform in which the political discussion does not produce anything fruitful. Everything becomes representative of the totalitarian discourse's struggle to find a reason with which Joan can be charged. The lack of common ground makes it very dangerous to predict the consequences that might follow from the decisions made by Burgundian law. The struggle of the dominant discourse becomes very expressively displayed through the characters' attempts to make their point of view visible. Joan of Arc has the hegemonic possibility to change the current discourse with her *own* radical view in which she has a totalitarian desire to get rid of England's presence in France. This becomes exemplified in the courtroom-sequence in which the idea of truth operates as a floating signifier between both sides. The demand for the "truth" does not have any common point for both sides because it means different things to them. In political theorist Julie Drew's article *The Politics of Persuading*, she concludes that repressed signs have the possibility to influence the current discourse by switching the meanings of the signs with more precise focus to different parts of the system. Drew states: "Hegemonic struggle is not merely domination by more powerful groups but is, rather, a never-ending process in which identity and power are always at stake" (1999:292). In Drew's analysis, the repressed signs can change the system by becoming a part or not becoming a part of the system because there is no direct place to say where the system can be located. It is always defined in an arbitrary manner through those excluded signs that give a meaning for the system's evolution in a certain way. The question of truth in this film is a problem of interpretation on how the truth becomes recognized and applied in the hegemonic struggle.

In *the Passion of Joan of Arc*, the conflict arises from the people's inability to recognize the political boundaries of the concept of truth. Simultaneously, some parts of it are located in the dominant discourse and some parts of it are excluded out of the system. Truth becomes a floating signifier between different interpretations that cannot give definitive reason for it to be either dominant or repressed. The Burgundians cannot directly implicate Joan of Arc for

violating the institutive concept of truth that is their definition of “truth.” Joan’s own version of the truth is based on the populist notion. It is a representation of political non-identity that creates a direct threat to the institutional truth by inspiring the French people, swiftly changing their opinion to favoring the idea of a French nation. The demand for something signifies that empty signifiers are operating as sign-switch for replacing the dominant discourse possibly with another one. Through the hegemonic framework, the excluded signs can become meaningful signifiers in the new discourse if the demand for something is practically made to happen. However, the demand for something can paradoxically either become meaningful or not. Laclau explains the demand can easily create a levelling instinct in which the people do not have a particular “identity” anymore. The people can easily start to riot due to the presumption there is a reason to riot, but there must be continual identity for it to last. Laclau states: “if this levelling instinct can be attached to the most diverse social contents, it cannot, in itself, have a content of its own” (2005: 76). To Laclau, this leveling instinct cannot be a reason in itself that causes the riot to occur. The reason for it must already be established in the hegemonic struggle that gives it a coherent identity. The real change in the dominant discourse can only be caused by the temporal continuity in which the hegemonic constructions can continuously developing between different events. If there is a lack of common identification amongst the people, then they will most likely emulate the dominant discourse by relinquishing and reversing the power to by themselves, thus establishing a totalitarian turn.

Emulating the similar conditions of the totalitarian reason used in the previous discourse is based on this levelling instinct. The new discourse re-applies the same methods of brutality that were used previously against them. There is a terrifying dimension in the film when Joan does not show any kind of sympathy towards the dominant discourse. During the trial, she states, in the film “Of the love or hatred God has for the English, I know nothing, but I do know that they will all be thrown out of France, except those who die there”¹ The trial records clearly indicate Joan’s hostility towards the English people occupying France. She does not express any mercy for them because in her vision for the French future, there is no possibility for the France to become a hybrid nation with the English people living there. If Joan’s perception became the new dominant discourse, this would be a clear indicator of a totalitarian turn. The possible totalitarian discourse would emulate the previous totalitarian discourse by negating the possibility of there to be a cooperative existence combining English and French nationalities. Drew interestingly explains through Laclau how there is a risk for the repressed discourse to become the new totalitarian discourse if the repressed group does not redefine those dominant signs used in the previous

¹ 15 march 1431 <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/joanofarc-trial.asp>

discourse. Drew explains: “The danger, he warns, in recognizing only the particular within hegemonic struggle is that individual groups, while asserting their identities and their claims, will avoid entering into relations of solidarity with other groups”(1999:293). For Drew, the lack of hybridization with other discourses can cause the repressed discourse to become the new totalitarian discourse that tries to overcome the influence of the previous dominant discourse but becomes just as totalitarian as the old discourse. Laclau points out the levelling instinct to be based on a certain identity that gets more exposure from the use of power. The identity of the new hegemonic discourse should avoid the totalitarian trap by becoming more open to changing the identity with new influences or else it becomes fixated on and limits itself to a particular identity.

The totalitarian turn in the dominant discourse provides a clear model to comprehend the sign-switch theory in the content of this film. For instance, in the end-sequence, the public rises against the authority’s decision to visibly punish Arc in the public space. There is a sign-switch between the dominant and repressed signs in which the public redefines their relationship with the authority. The film implies that the political opposition becomes possibly the new dominant discourse if the authority does acknowledge the populist desire for a united France. Joan of Arc’s symbolic representation as martyr for her cause showcases that signs have this potential to create a change between different systems. The stronger need for the demands can easily flame up the levelling instinct in which totalitarian turn becomes real. Laclau points out the excluded signs provide the stagnant positions for the system through particular meanings. Laclau mentions: “there is no totalization without exclusion, and that such an exclusion presupposes the split of all identity between its differential nature” (2005:78). In Laclau’s analysis, empty signs provide the meaning for the totalized system to have a very specific identity in which the signs are fixated in a certain relationship to each other. The exclusionary boundary reveals the arbitrary nature of the system by describing it to be a product of the temporal moments. In this dramatization, Joan was not by any means looking at a temporary identity of French nationality, but rather she was looking for its ultimate definition and establishment at the cost of English nationalism. There must be separation here between the historical version of Arc and Dryer’s vision of Arc that operates as a critical perception for the 1920’s post-WWI Europe. Dryer’s work of art operates as an open medium to investigate the possibilities of a particular totality to exist by substituting one totality for another.

3.0 Empty Signifiers- The Meaningful Boundary for the System of Differences

In this section, the theoretical framework for the systems of differences is mapped out and then its different parts are introduced in relation to the signification boundary. Firstly, the system of differences forms a discourse that is modified through the ideological content that provides form to it. The discourse always has a certain kind of hierarchical order between different signifiers that are incompatible with each other. This creates a signifying distance for the signs inside of the system in which the dominant signs matter only if they are applied in a meaningful manner. In scholars Marianne Jorgensen's and Louise Phillips' book, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, they analyze Laclau's discourse-theory implying that the system of differences is never going to be complete. The discourse does not fully define the signs because there are many ways they can be interpreted. Jorgensen and Phillips explain: "the discourse establishes a closure, a temporary stop to the fluctuations in the meaning of signs" (2002:28). In their interpretation of Laclau's approach, the totalitarian discourse always captures one specific application of the sign without consolidating it for other signs. Ironically, the system that defines itself as a total, complete system is not able to perfect its craft without becoming hybridized with other excluded totalities. For Jorgensen and Phillips, in this theory, the discourse is always the embodiment of previous discourses that are hybridized into a particular discourse in a certain moment. The system cannot last forever and hence there must be certain changes in the discourse at some point.

3.1. What is the system of differences?

In the totalitarian discourse, the system of differences creates a closure for the sign to be fixed with a particular application. If there is an interruption inside of the system, one of the fixed signs is applied differently and thus chains the structure of the system to something else. Jorgensen and Phillips believe this arbitrariness in Laclau's theory to be based on how dynamically the system operates (as mentioned earlier). For instance, in Roman Polanski's *The Pianist*, the film starts with a Polish-Jewish piano player performing a concert piece on the radio when suddenly his home city is attacked by the Nazis. In an ironic manner, the film ends with him redoing the same concert after the war in the same place. The ideas of a "normal" day (the pianist playing the concert piece) and its interruption (the Nazis attack) are based on the same form of discourse where power is maintained to briefly keep antagonistic forces in line. Similarly, the Burgundian law wants to maintain order without Joan of Arc disturbing "day to day" activities. In Yuri Lotman's tradition, the cultural explosion is simply this, a socio-cultural manifestation of signs getting different values in relation to each other through unpredictable consequence. Lotman comments: "an explosion can also be realized as a chain of sequential explosions, each of which changes the other, creating a dynamic, multi-levelled unpredictability" (2009:120). Lotman's analysis of unpredictable explosions is dependent on the structural antagonisms suddenly becoming something else. This resembles Laclau's analysis of the hegemonic struggle where the dominant discourse is modified, or in the extreme case totally replaced with a new discourse. When there is closure in the hegemonic construct and the new dominant system is established, the focus on particular signs allows the system to temporarily become "normalized" until the meaning of the signs is changed again.

In any kind social order, the sign-switch occurs unexpectedly and one must learn to adapt to this experience as it happens. Joan of Arc is a symbolic representation for this when she refused to become part of the dominant discourse. The system does not develop by itself, but rather through an ongoing process in which antagonisms are constantly forming the system. The visible tensions between the semiotic agents define the structural direction of the system through their behavior. Hence, the sign-switch operates under this semiotic disguise of repressed signs that allows all of them to have an equal opportunity to become the new dominant discourse. Joan of Arc's refusal to become part of the same ideology easily makes her a symbolic representation for the radical opposition. In Jorgensen's and Phillips' analysis of Laclau, they mention the important fact

that how the signs are used in many discourses must continuously be defined and modified because the application of a sign can never be stagnant in any discourse. They explain: “discourses are always only temporary and partial fixations of meaning in a fundamentally undecidable terrain” (2002:39). In their analysis, any kind of a society is based on the certain discursive mode that is only a temporary construct of particular signs. The society itself cannot be a holistic place even if the idea of a “boundary” is meaningless in the system. The Burgundian elite tries vigorously to showcase their dominance in the trial-room, but they eventually lose their debate with Joan of Arc. Hence, the Burgundians’ desire to overcome their judicial failure by taking Joan into the torture room to make her feel threatened by their power. Jorgensen and Phillips analyze the dominant discourse as always having a particular statutory position towards other discourses that are not represented in the system. It is a framework for the discourse to focus towards certain signs that are becoming dominant.

The system of differences is built on the dominant and repressed signs. This system is arbitrarily constructed because it does not have a specific foundation anywhere. Rather, it is a moving process that is a collection of various signifiers that form an antagonistic relationship to each other in a certain order. In his article *Politics and the Limits of Modernity*, Laclau depicts the system as a functional framework in which discourse is practiced through moving roles. He comments: “social agents appear in concrete situations and are constituted by precise and limited discursive networks” (1989:80). For Laclau, these networks aim to establish a functional framework in which the discursive content becomes explicitly visible. For instance, it aids us in understanding why the police are a representative symbol of the authoritative figure in the institutional system. However, a security guard does not have the same visible rights of the police, thus defining the security person’s job description as “limited”. The discursive network allows the semiotic agents to operate in a certain manner. For the Burgundian elite, they have established a particular order in the courtroom where Joan of Arc appears as the intruder. She is not given the right to a defense attorney nor does she receive any kind of support from anybody. Joan is completely on her own to fight against these accusations.

Systematic socialization can become visibly dangerous if roles are fixated on a particular mode. Especially in the totalitarian discourse, the fixated roles fail to fulfill their meaning because of the absence of specificity. The police can be authoritative as long as there is an institutional reasoning behind their actions. All of societal living is based upon the application of particular signs divided between the dominant and repressed signs. Wittgenstein’s prognosis that signs have a life in the active application reveals something crucial about the semiotic nature of

human life. People need signs to operate in a civil manner with each other and this very act provides an arbitrary reason to explain on how life appears as itself. In Jorgensen's and Phillips' analysis of Laclau, the nature of the system is dependant on signs being dynamic at all times, otherwise society as such does not exist. Jorgensen and Phillips continue to explain: "we continuously produce society and act as if it exists as a totality and we verbalize it as a totality" (2002:39). For Jorgensen and Phillips, semiotic agents use politic functions to establish a system in which they can operate meaningfully with each other. The idea that society appears to be orderly and practical is an image of a particular totality. However, the absence of specificity in the system creates a hegemonic possibility for another discourse to become the new "dominant" at some point, if the systems become hybridized in such a manner.

3.2. The System of Differences in Totalitarian Discourse

In this part, the function of the system of differences will be detailed in the context of totalitarian discourse and then the discussion will continue to explore how empty signifiers create meaningful boundaries. By fragmenting the totalitarian discourse-framework, how the system operates through fixed tautological loops in the form of floating signifiers can be analyzed. The discussion of how floating signifiers function in a totalitarian discourse will be detailed more in the sixth chapter. The system of differences does not try to develop a hegemonic construct, but rather it tries to create a visible distance from it by temporarily fixing certain signs in the role of the dominant. The discursive closure gives the system arbitrary ground to have temporary foundation for which the signifiers can be referred to. In Yuri Lotman's words, the system has a discursive character that is based on this mechanistic closure giving its temporal form. Lotman explains: "the system, passing through the stage of self-description, undergoes changes: assigning to itself clear boundaries and a considerably higher degree of unification" (2009:172). To Lotman, the self-organized system becomes identified in Jorgensen's and Phillips' sense as a particular totality in which the signs are hierarchical to each other. The closure of the system defines a certain hegemonic discourse as the new current dominant discourse.

The director, Dryer, makes it very clear through the visible power games in the trial room that the dominant discourse knows Joan is a strong candidate for causing a disturbance in the current system. Hence, they must fix a certain label to her through the dominant discourse (i.e. heretic) that clearly marks her as the "other." Laclau believes the discourse to be a dynamic process in which the system only has in the arbitrary sense, a "form". He explains that in the dominant system: "what matters is the determination of the discursive sequences through which a social force or movement carries out its overall political performance" (2005:13). To Laclau, the system plays out through the performativity that organizes the social order via the systematic process. However, this structural basis is constantly dissolved through multiple social antagonisms that redefine the systematic order in the praxis. The visible presentation of power determines the valuation of the system to be perceived as holistic whole. It is only through an allegorical misinterpretation that a particular totality is perceived to be par excellence for a certain symbolic order (it should be clarified that the totalitarian discourse operates in this manner). On the contrary, the signs that are

visibly presented to the semiotic agents in the discursive sequences temporarily systemize the totality of a certain position.

In the film, the Burgundian law knows Joan of Arc to be a dangerous deviant which is why they must find some reasoning to accuse her of a particular crime. In a similar manner, the totalitarian discourse tries to continually repress other signs for not developing hegemonic constructs. In philosopher Slavoj Žižek's book *Parallax View*, he states that Laclau speculates on how the oppositional dichotomies are framed within the system of difference to point out the differences between "them" (the excluded discourse) and "us" (the dominant discourse). Žižek interprets Laclau as speculating that "a system of pure differentiability would lead to a pure equivalence of all its elements—they are all equivalent with regard to the void of their Outside" (2006:36). For Žižek, this approach deals with antagonism that becomes latent through canonized equivalence in the system by stating that there is a difference between them and us. The dominant and repressed signs are still equivalent to each other, even if the excluded signs are situated outside of the system. Žižek perceives the system of differences developed over positive thinking by stating that there is no particular reason why the dominant *remains* the dominant at the expense of the repressed sign. To encounter this positivistic approach, Žižek requires the dynamics of systems to be reviewed through the naming process of the sign relations. Instead of considering why the police are "automatically" considered to be the authority, and then contrasted in the relation to the deviants, Žižek examines these labels more clearly for why such an antagonistic relationship exists at all.

The Burgundians clearly understand their systematic position in relation to Joan of Arc because they know they have no clear reason to persecute her. To break up the differential positions between them, Joan must be accused of something very specific (in this case her cross-dressing habits) so that she can be merged into the totalitarian discourse in a "positive manner". In the Žižekian sense, this positive thinking is a form of a leveling instinct that tries in the equivalent manner to reduce the antagonistic tension between the dominant signs and repressed signs. By making the discursive situation more tolerable for the totalitarian discourse, Joan becomes completely consumed by those forces that wanted her to accept the English-rule in France at this time period. Žižek brilliantly pokes fun at Laclau's theory that lacks this negative power that would give the repressed signs the hegemonic possibility to become a new hegemonic constructs. Žižek explains on the same page that: "there is no "primordial" duality of poles in the first place, only the inherent gap of the One"(2006:36). To Žižek, the system of differences only occupies a certain ideal that is emulated once again in some form in the new hegemonic discourse. The parts of the previous

system will influence the new hegemonic system, but the new system will be detached of the polemic forces of the past. Similarly, the French existentialist school of thought was established on this same premise, that the social reality is always defined in the temporary moments by being disconnected from the previous discourses.

Using this logical framework, one can analyze how the totalitarian discourse represents a sign-systems for certain sociological/political/cultural content in which the discourse becomes defined as a systematic mechanism. In this system, politics is the functional mode for the totalitarian discourse to create a signifying hierarchy for the social agents. It organizes the environment according to the requirements defined by the system in the form of laws, rules, etc. The totalitarian discourse tries to construct a system of differences in which there are no boundaries. It does this by trying not to have any interruptive significations emerge outside of the system. The totalitarian discourse tries to build a reason or myth for having a new mythical foundation to its existence. This provides a critical point for Laclau counter-react to Zizek's criticism of his work by accusing Zizek of being a fast-food nihilist for denying the existence of a "primordial" antagonistic notion in order for the hegemonic struggle to be real. Laclau explains: "The Real cannot be an inexorable spectral logic and even less something that determines what goes on in social reality for the simple reason that the Real is not a specifiable object endowed with laws of movement of its own" (2006:657). In Laclau's analysis, there is always a possibility for totalitarian turn to occur in the hegemonic struggle if it is reduced to a minimum without it appearing as "real". The "real" is always some kind of ontological description for the reality as it appears to the semiotic agents and its content always different. When Joan is burned alive at the stake, there is an immediate distance between the brutality of power exhibited by the dominant discourse and the repressed semiotic agents that are subjugated by this brutality. This clearly provokes the public, who become vocal about Joan's mistreatment and thus the vicious cycle of violence can easily be repeated through a totalitarian turn if there are no more opportunities available for consensus.

With mapping out the discourse-theory, the attempt of this section was to create foundation to the sign-switch theory that will be discussed in the next chapters. By explicating the system of differences to be the result of a certain discourse, this model reveals the influence of previous ideological forces that created it. Any kind of sign is always a potential sign to switch the meaning of the current discourse with new meanings. Laclau uses this as criticism against Zizek by saying there is always a certain foundation for other possible systems to develop hegemonic structures that can appear "real". There are no real antagonisms existing as such in nature, only variations of different systems organized to operate in this manner. In Laclau's own analysis, the

antagonisms cannot be reduced to the level of “real” because this definition is already based on the arbitrary structure of some kind of system. Laclau explains: “We will identify with some symbols while rejecting others, but that is no reason to assert that the matrix of a symbolic structure varies according to the material content of the symbols” (2006:653). For Laclau, symbols do not originate from some special content that specifies that some kind of antagonistic structure exists in human socialization. Every discourse and sign-system is arbitrarily defined through human productivity to appear temporarily “real”. Hence, the sign antagonism exists temporarily through the current dominant system which keeps it dynamic for a certain time. The material content of the sign always transforms the system into something else, depending, of course, on whether or not the current dominant system is able to hybridize with other hegemonic constructs. To analyze this sign-switch theory, the convention of the empty signifier must be discussed in relation to the system of differences.

3.3 How does the system of differences function in the relation of empty signifier?

In the system of differences, the sign-antagonisms form the content of the discourse by navigating the system to develop in a certain direction. This machination creates a practical framework for the human beings to operate with each other in a civil manner. It is a semiological system that creates a behavioral discourse for human beings to follow by creating content for it. Remarkably, Roman Jakobson's zero-sign theory closely follows this linearity by analyzing the formation of grammatical systems, based on similar types of sign-application modes. Jakobson explains the patterns of grammatical systemicity: "based on the opposition between something and nothing that is, on the opposition of contradictions" (1984:153). In Jakobson's analysis, the recognition of a contradiction provides the systematic matrices with a concrete form or focus to determine how the dominant signs become recognized in the system as something or nothing. This theory is closely similar to Laclau's analysis of excluded signs that create a meaningful boundary for the system. The signs labeled as something are given a selective particular character in the system with a certain value in relation to other signs that signify nothing. These empty signs do not have any value inside the system. If they did, they would change the formation of the system with their presence as a different kind of content.

The exclusionary boundary of the system specifies the roles and rules for the semiotic agents to operate under, as regulated through signification differences. Excluded signs are given a temporary form as the dominant signs in the system, becoming something meaningful. In Dryer's film, the political space visibly shows the characters' relationships to be something meaningful or not. Joan of Arc is given the role of the deviant who occupies this political space "owned" by the Burgundian state. She does not have equal representation in this space and therefore she is treated according to Burgundian law. For instance, her refusal to dress in women's clothing is met by the opposition with mockery and ridicule. Hence, Joan becomes treated as a male prisoner because this helps the Burgundian elite practice their political power over her. The system of differences in the totalitarian discourse applies negative characteristics towards those repressed signs that are not given positive representation in the system by making them become emptier. The totalitarian system's attempt is always to totalize all the sign-relationships into fixed positions because this makes the system operate smoothly— at least, temporarily. In Daniele Monticelli's dissertation *Wholeness and its remainders*, he explicates that the systems are fragile and poised for the dominant

signs to become emptier due to the hegemonic constructs weakening the consistency of the exclusion boundary. He states: "The overlapping of significance, identity and existence characteristic of totalization break down in the border-space which exposes the system to the possibly disturbing effects of its remainders" (2008:160). Monticelli points out the weakening influence of the boundary, possibly revealing the functional problems in the system itself. If the dominant signs are visibly fixed in specific positions, then they can only be dynamic temporarily, and thus they can self-destroy themselves through fixed stagnation. Totalization can never reach its full potential because of the absence of specificity in the systematic order.

In the discursive analysis, the totalitarian discourse becomes identified as a separate independent structure through the exclusionary boundary that is structuralized by empty signifiers. These excluded signs are secondary starts for other possible discourses in the future to be applied in such a manner. The social content used in any dominant discourse is always some kind of arbitrary format that gives practical guidelines for individuals to cooperate with each other under temporary conditions. The discourse is a systematic mechanism for the social agents to reflect on their own behavior by developing self-made schemes for analysis of their own behavior. The discourse creates the content to human life and society, as it was defined in Jorgensen and Phillips analysis. However, the question of logic of discourse arises; is it something particular for some semiotic agents (in Laclau's rhetoric) or it is something universal that includes all the semiotic agents in itself (in Zizek's sense). To map out the answer to this question, the signs used in the totalitarian discourse must be investigated through ideological perception. The ideological analysis gives an understanding of how the signs are applied in any kind of discourse. In particular, the totalitarian discourse helps to simplify this analysis by providing concrete examples of what is meant by the ideology. The ideology operates as mirror to reflect those ideas that are represented in the system and what justifies the dominant signs as having power over other signs. In Laclau's article *The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology*, he declares the ideological discourse as not able to have any particular essence because of the absence of specificity in the system. In discourse, the dominant sign is only a temporal sign carrier of a certain meaning. Laclaus explain that: "In that case what we are dealing with is the presence of an absence and the ideological operation par excellence consists of attributing that impossible role of closure to a particular content that is radically incommensurable with it" (1997:302). Laclau says that signs are structurally arbitrary in a way that disallows the system to never have full closure of its form. In the case of the Burgundian elite, they are not able to find explicit reasons that Joan can be tried on. The Burgundians are not capable of having closure for their political power games. Their accusations towards Joan cannot be

fulfilled due to the lack of evidence. Hence, their ideological discourse is challenged by the public that has a new hegemonic desire to becoming ideologically critical towards the current system when Arc is visibly exterminated in the end.

To Ernesto Laclau, the ideological critique provides a new framework to redefine particular ideological discourses to examine the area of otherness in which all other possible ideological discourses are located. This is the area of non-signification for those signs that are isolated from a particular discourse. Laclau explains: "Ideology is a dimension which belongs to the structure of all possible experience"(1997:311). Laclau explains an ideology to be universally structured in the area of otherness that is used as functional building block for certain discourse to become the dominant discourse in society. Paradoxically, ideology appears particularly in different forms of discourses that utilize ideology to explain reality as it is. These discourses will construct a system of differences in which they will set up certain signs to be either dominant or repressive. Meaning only arises in the discourse through social content that is formulated into the particular ideological structure. The ideology is not self-producing mechanism, social agents must construct it in such a manner through certain discourse, i.e. a reason or a belief. Laclau points out that discourse is a form of narrative to explaining how life is organized by social agents. Metaphorically, the ideology is the paint (the content) brushed onto a canvas by the discourse (the painter/-s) and the political boundary is the framework for it. The discourse formulates a dominant collection of signs into a certain order that are used to repress other signs under it.

The dominant discourse tries to label these excluded signs in the general sense by creating distance between them and other meaningful signs. In Dreyer's film, Joan of Arc is directly identified as threatening other in the social discourse by the establishment. Her subjective point of view does not get represented in the system of differences. Joan is the enemy (a repressed sign) and the elite are symbolized as the dominant authority (the dominant sign) that is the primary moderator of the system. With the establishment creating the political identities between different oppositions, this creates spatial distance between them in the ideological discourse. Joan of Arc is personified through the elites' point a view as the terrifying other that can disturb their status quo with her role. However, the totalitarian discourse cannot erase empty signifiers completely because there is always the possibility of a hegemonic signifier becoming meaningful once again. In Monticelli's article, there is an intriguing idea whether or not the absence of specificity in the system is related to the possibility of applying signs differently out of the norm. Monticelli states: "when we speak of a not-yet, of something outstanding, we speak of something lacking but if something is lacking there must be some uncompleted being in terms of which lack can be thought"(2008:51). In Monticelli's

paper, the idea of wholeness refigures its system through the remainders of something that is not recognized inside of the system. They can easily become a part of the systematic whole by the hegemonic struggle in which discourse is redefined with different ideological content.

In the totalitarian discourse-analysis, dominant signs are put into practice in certain environments or space that made the particular form of ideology concrete (or in other words, visible) to the social agents. Through the dominant discourse, the categories are put into practice by addressing social agents according to their roles. The discourse creates functional modes (or rather political functions) for the individual to perform in the social sphere through specific behavioral models. The effect of non-politics creates boundaries for the discourse, recognizing the dominant features in the system of differences. This focuses the system so that it gains meaning through the application of dominant signs. For instance, the Burgundians demonstrate their dominant power throughout the trial by using different fear tactics. However, Joan contradicts these fear tactics by not giving in to the Burgundian power-trip. Joan of Arc's French nationalistic desire is an empty signifier in the Burgundian County in which the English political presence is clearly visible. Using Roman Jakobson's analysis of zero-sign, it can be noted that these excluded signs on the rhetorical level do not show the absence of specificity in the dominant signs. On the contrary, the zero meaning develops a possibility to assign meaningful representation to those empty signs that are not represented in the general system. For instance, Jakobson points out that the concept of genders in the Russian language have zero-value in the present tense. He explains: "even though the grammatical system limits the "accumulation of meanings", it does not by any means exclude it"(1981:154). Similar to Laclau's analysis of the empty signifier, the gender-based terms become empty signifiers in the Russian language that can be addressed on multiple occasions. By the same token, gender becomes the empty signifier in the context of the movie because there is no clarification at any point of what is specifically meant by it. Particularly in the context of totalitarian discourse represented through the Burgundian elite, the question of an open gender definition becomes somewhat taboo.

4.0 The Structure of Empty Signifier in the Totalitarian Discourse

In the film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, the idea of androgynous gender role becomes an empty signifier in the Burgundian law system that cannot find a way to judge Joan of Arc as either a male or female prisoner. The inability to define Joan of Arc's androgynous behavior creates confusion in the dominant discourse. This unknown behavior creates a boundary in this particular system for the dominant discourse's failure to know it. They can only try to label Joan with other supposed charges for the sake of punishing her. In Jacques Lacan's analysis, the empty sign is the ultimate manifestation of otherness by operating as a reminder for the system's boundary. Lacan says: "a lack is encountered by the subject in the other, in the very intimation that the other makes to him by his discourse" (1973:214). Lacan depicts the limitation of the system as dependent on the discourse sustaining its equivalent position towards the excluded signs. These empty signifiers are fixed points for the system to recognize the limited possibilities that can be constructed. For Lacan, the empty signifier creates disturbance in the system of differences, revealing the impossibility for the discourse to ever become meaningful. Similarly, the Burgundian law is not able to categorize Joan of Arc when they lack the systematic recognition to categorize her. The system of differences is functionally interrupted when the empty signifiers become utilized as part of a new discourse, thus replacing the system with another type of system.

4.1. The Fixed Positions of Empty Signifiers

The logic used in the system of differences is based on the notion of indifference in which the signifiers do not match with each other in equivalent manner. There is a constant antagonistic tension in the present between different signs that the dominant discourse tries to fulfill with specific meanings. The heterogeneous system is dependent on the signs not being compatible with each other because it allows the system to appear dynamic, and most importantly, alive through the idea of that contradiction. This should not be confused with a need for emotive confirmation of the semiotic agents in the dominant discourse to apply signs. On the contrary, the ambivalence in signification is established through the lack of expression for this need, and because of this, the system of differences is created to help formulate an “ontological real” in which the idea of need is distant. This particular totality will always be unreachable. The dominant discourse can never fulfill its promise without other hegemonic totalities emerging to create a new, particular totality. Laclau points out that the focus in the system of differences is exactly constructed in this absence of specificity. In Laclau’s words, the heterogeneous is what lacks any differential location within the symbolic order”(2005:108). For Laclau, the signifiers in the system of differences do not fit together and thus they create antagonistic relationships with each other. One always becomes dominant in comparison to another signifier, automatically ordering the signifiers. If there is more distance between signifiers, this proves that the particular discourse only concentrates around a few dominant signs in the system. For instance, a researcher who is utterly concentrated on one part of his or her research topic might easily overlook other valuable information on his or her topic. This makes the research limited to a particular scope, and thus too narrow to be applied to other theories. Similarly, the Burgundian elite do not pay any attention to Joan of Arc’s character because they do not encounter all pertinent information.

Totalitarian discourse aims to fix signifiers to each other into permanent positions, thus creating tautological loops that make the system itself even emptier. The attempt of this paper is to analyze totalitarian discourse in order to frame its ambivalent foundation to the system of differences by utilizing the denial of empty signifier. The idea of totality must be investigated to build an understanding of why empty signifiers are important. An answer to this question can be found in the Lacanian definition of the “lack of otherness” in the totalitarian system. If the system does not recognize “otherness,” this can disturb the totalitarian system itself. A system with a fixed closure can only operate for a short time because it is not capable of keeping its form without being hybridized with other discourses. The system that closes itself off from others destroys itself. In

Yannis Stavrakakis' article *Peripheral Vision*, he analyses censorship methodology that operates to protect the users of the system from outside influences. Ironically, this leads the censors to accidentally censor themselves. He explains: "repressive censorship is often replaced by various forms of self-censorship with ourselves becoming the best censors of our own imagination"(2008:1040). Stavrakakis points out that harsh forms censorship lead to a path of self-destruction (particularly in a totalitarian discourse) in which fixed positions cannot construct new boundaries for already fixed positions. Hence, those dominant signs will start reconstructing limitations for those signs that are already inside of the system and floating signifiers will become tautological loops for the current discourse to redefine itself by the same concepts. In the film, the Burgundians' constant attempts to redefine Joan of Arc's juridical position during the trial makes the totalitarian discourse becoming weaker by the absence of specificity in the system itself. The majority defining the minority through fixed positions in the totalitarian discourse limits the definition to be open for being hybridized through other discourses.

Totalitarian discourse is limited in function around a certain discursive semiotic network in which the significations are dependent on the semiotic agents' performance. However, there is a functional part that is often overlooked in totalitarian discourse. Repressed signs do not always have to be in the position of "otherness;" they can also be sub-elements of the totalitarian discourse, represented in the system as floating signifiers. In Laclau's sense, totality can never be fully empty or meaningful because the different levels of significations will define signifiers into having variable positions relative towards each other. He states: "Between total embodiment and total emptiness there is a gradation of situations involving partial embodiments" (2005:166). For Laclau, the sign changes between different signifiers are temporarily developed with each new discourse. They are hegemonic constructs constantly changing their value due to other sign antagonisms, and thus the sign cannot be permanently affixed. In the case of a totalitarian turn, the hegemonic construct might appear to totalize a certain discourse as dominant. However, this may be a false promise that the totality is to be replaced with another one because the appearance of a totalitarian turn may be another tautological loop inside of the system. In this case, Laclau's definition of a leveling instinct can be considered a tautological loop if there is no social contingency outside the system to provide gradual functionality.

In the case of the public protest at the end of film, it can be speculated that it triggers the hegemonic structure to become a new dominant discourse in the discursive analysis, as the film would suggest. The community witnesses a publicly visible brutality practiced by the Burgundian elite in which Joan of Arc is punished for her vision of a unified France that is contrary to the dominant discourse. The idea of a possible continuity of this public outburst is left open at the end by not showing the historical events that occur after it. This film dramatization does create closure for the possible totalitarian conceptualization of Joan of Arc's symbolism in the form of a totalitarian turn. In Lacan's analysis, the signification closure is unpredictable beginning for the otherness to provide hegemonic possibility a new subject to appear outside the system. Lacan explains "The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present of the subject- it is the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear"(1973:203). To Lacan, this signification closure is the point of disappearance of certainty in the dominant signs. All of the excluded signifiers can be considered as potential candidates for the sign switch, starting a new discourse. In Lacan's sense, all the antagonisms can be considered as empty in their foundation until they are considered part of the subject of some kind of system. In any case, Zizek's Lacanian reading suggests that every signifier is empty whether or not it is a part of the system. On the contrary to empty signifiers, floating signifiers are operating as tautological loops in the discursive theory that provide temporal meaning to the dominant sign.

4.2. The Self-Destruction of Totalitarian Discourse

Discourse in a system of differences must be attended to sternly without the having the dominant signs lose their signification in the social sphere. By reconstructing the governing elements, this helps pre-established structures recreate different versions of the previous dominant discourse (i.e. a hybrid version of it). In the beginning of Dryer's film, Joan of Arc is perceived as representative of a dangerous otherness that could be potential threat to the Burgundian rule. Modifying Joan of Arc's ideological presence in the system (the social role assigned to her), the establishment tried to demonize her position in the trial-room. Similarly, in Umberto Eco's analysis of the Nazi Germany, he analyzes how the ruling group was incapable of continuing governance because of their inability to accept the idea of change in their social discourse. If the totalitarian discourse was capable of redefining their social concepts, it would have been possible for the system to survive in a hybrid form. Eco explains that Nazism: "was a culture that contained the seeds of its own destruction: racism prevented the hybridization" (1994:123). Eco points out that the downfall of Nazi Germany's discourse was rooted in their inability to accept the existence of otherness. The discourse became stagnant because the repressed signs were not completely "emptied". These signs would have stayed there and still existed as part of the discourse. Ironically, the dominant signifiers in the Nazi's discourse became emptier without having excluded signs draw attention to its boundaries.

Total devastation of otherness caused a collapse of the system of differences and required dynamic oppositions, creating social matrices for this particular discourse. Eco suggested that the Nazi regime did have the possibility to sustain its social structure, if only they had created a hybrid formation with their racist discourse. The Nazi ideology destroyed itself without any attempt to adapt to (or rather hybridize with) those empty signs that created delineation of its boundaries. Laclau defines systemicity as recognizing the absence of something in the system through those excluded signs. This signification void shows that it is impossible for the system to keep up with its structures. By using those excluded signifiers, discourse can reformulate and "re-invent" itself, creating a new hybrid version of the previous discourse. Laclau reviews this totalitarian discourse's attempt to create a holistic social sphere in which there is no equivalency between meaningful and empty signs. Laclau interprets: "totalitarianism drastically eliminates any difference or ambiguity and maintains the myth of an absolutely transparent social organization"(1990:90). To Laclau, the totalitarian discourse does not presume that new boundaries appear when all the signs are kept meaningful. Transparency dispels doubts that the social hierarchy has any social "glitches."

Totalitarian society touts itself as the best model of society without having any reason to become hybridized with other ideologies. However, the attempt to universalize everything to become meaningful does not happen so painlessly. In Eco's analysis of Nazism, the dominant signs become emptier when the totalitarian discourse itself denies the hybridization process. Without having an equivalent opposite for the dominant signs in this system, the closed system is doomed to fail.

The Burgundians' rule of law operates in a similar manner when they try to find a specific reason to categorize Joan of Arc, in an attempt to get rid of her altogether. Framing her as deviant during the trial, the establishment tries to affix a position to her, in order to frame her within their discourse. This totalistic approach delimits the signifiers' appearance in the system by making them become fixed a particular position and thus making them become emptier. Similarly with Nazism, many communities were excluded from the common discourse in an extreme fashion through racial discrimination and bigotry. Consequently, the dominant signifiers developed a myth of total perfection in which there were no empty signifiers to remind them of the system's boundaries. In Lacan's analysis, this otherness provides an intimidating recognition of the emptiness in the discourse itself. Hence, Eco's situation of self-destruction in the totalitarian system occurs because there are no empty signifiers to provide a continuum for this discourse in the hybrid form. Unless it becomes redefined once again, it is completely dysfunctional. In Laclau's view, totalitarian discourse will never be functional as a closed sign system. It does not attempt to recognize those signs outside the system that give meaning to it. Laclau continues: "radical contextualization of meaning, when it is coupled with the recognition of the unstable character of all context, means that there is no meaning that contain in itself the guarantee against its own corruption"(1990:95). Laclau believes the totalitarian discourse deceives itself by becoming an absolute system for a particular discourse. It tries to deny the previous discourses that helped formulate this system in the first place. This denial allows the closed system to define a mysterious pure foundation for itself that is justified through structural transparency in the totalitarian regime. However, this transparency is the downfall of the totalitarian system because there are no systems that can operate perfectly. Laclau points out that this totalitarian approach is constantly unstable without having a fixed counterpoint working as an equivalent reminder outside of the system. Without a doubt, it is possible that the total discourse can easily become "tainted" by its own content as Laclau suggests, and thus the system collapses under its own weight.

The collapse of the system requires its parts to become weaker as the fixed signs are incapable of remaining in their positions. In Laclau's sense, the totalitarian discourse attempts in all its efforts to maintain the social order sacrificing some dominant signs for sake of other dominant signs if and only if the system becomes threatened by outside influences. In the context of the film, the Burgundian elite tries to maintain the normal social order with fixed sign positions that Joan's political presence cannot disturb. If she confesses to the heresy charges, Joan can survive by living in the prison rest of her life. By not accepting this proposal, the Burgundian authority arranges for Joan of Arc to be executed as a warning to other French people who wish for France to become its own nation. Similarly to Stravakakis' analysis of censorship, the totalitarian system uses the systematic closure to create a "safe" distance towards excluded signs by beginning to censor itself. This helps the totalitarian system not to recognize the boundary between itself and the excluded signs because if the system becomes exposed to empty signifiers it would start a systematic collapse. In Michael Foucault's book, *Society Must Be Defended*, he also analyzes Nazism and proposes that "Risking one's life, being exposed total destruction, was one of the principles inscribed in the basic duties of the obedient Nazi" (2003: 259-260). In totalitarian discourse, the dominant signs are expected to be available for self-destruction for the sake of other signs, in order to prolong the meaningfulness of the system itself. Like Eco, Foucault believes this this to be one of the leading causes for why totalitarian discourses are doomed. Consequentially, they are not able to keep their form unless they are hybridized with other discourses.

4.3. Why does Totalitarian Discourse Attempt to Totalize Everything?

To build a critical understanding of totalitarian discourse, this term has to be defined through the excluded signifiers outside of the system. The determination to completely eliminate repressed signs makes the dominant discourse more vulnerable to its own flaws. In any sense, the fascistic or authoritarian approach (or any kind of totalitarian discourse) infuses all of the signifiers inside the system because the ideal is to create a perfect, functional society. In 1930s pre-fascistic Italy, Benito Mussolini defined and filled the authoritarian system with the idea of dogmatic faith. Mussolini stated that in fascism: “The State is the guarantor of security both internal and external, but it is also the custodian and transmitter of the spirit of the people” (1923:14). To Mussolini, political faith allowed individuals to directly decide which signs should be excluded from society because they were perceived to slow down the totalitarian regime. Mussolini believed the functional state was a utopian place that did not have any need for empty signifiers to create a boundary for the system. With total control over society, the state was believed to have a superior ability to expand itself without being limited by anything. Mussolini also felt that the state should be the ultimate manifestation of the human spirit. It should have been the extreme social construction to make all empty signifiers meaningful in the system because this was believed to help the human spirit become more successful. However, there was no safe mechanism available to the fascistic regimes for their own inner-structural problems, and because of this, they were vulnerable to any kind of human error made inside the system.

In the film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, the establishment tries to show that Joan of Arc is a deviant because her social position in terms of gender cannot be defined. This creates a reminder for the establishment of the political boundary of the system. For totalitarian discourse, the recognition of this boundary disturbs the system itself. Similarly, in Mussolini’s authoritarian system, the attempt was to diminish the idea of boundaries by creating tautological loops inside the system that would regulate the meanings inside of the system. The authoritarian state was the main regulator of the system by being represented everywhere without any boundaries to disturb it. This system is based on a totalitarian discourse that does not allow semiotic agents to have individualistic characteristics because everything becomes aesthetically recognized as the same. Monticelli analyzes the process of political totalization in the system by trying to develop a systematic and totalizing character for the system. Monticelli states: “the universal representability

of the political field as *polis*, *politea*, or State is aimed at making it into a self-enclosed totality without any remainder where significance, identity, and existence finally come to coincide” (2008:212). The total representation of a system through a certain character restricts the semiotic agents to operate with a limited amount of signs in the political sphere, depending, of course, on whether or not all of the social conceptualities emerge together. To Monticelli, the visible delineation of structural elements outside the system provides a concrete form to that particular totality. This brings more focus to dominant signs that become meaningful when contrasted with empty signifiers that are not included as part of the system. In this case, the totalitarian discourse tries to eliminate these empty signifiers. For instance, under Pol Pot’s totalitarian regime in 1970’s Cambodia, the older generations were ordered by the child soldiers to work in the fields. This was a brutal and horrendous form of a totalitarian turn in which the new form of totality was utilized to get rid of older generations. However, the absence of specificity in this particular totality is also in all forms of totalitarian discourses. The trauma of this horrifying experience is clearly visible in the current day Cambodia and the reminders of previous discourses cannot be erased or even forgotten.

In the context of Dryer’s *Joan of Arc* film, the possibility of a mass rising against the Burgundian elite in the end sequence is similar to Pol Pot’s terror in 1970’s Cambodia. What if the violent outbursts of oppressed people emulate similar kinds of horrors that were present in the previous discourse? If the previous discursive system does pave the road for other discourses to become hybridized with it and consequently solidify the system even further, there is a great danger that any systematic horror becomes doubly reflected by the totalitarian turn. Laclau says that the structural developments of social situations are a determining factor for how the hegemonic struggle will turn out. He says: “when people are confronted with radical anomie, the need for some kind of order becomes more important than the actual ontic order that brings it about” (2005:88). To Laclau, the systematic derangement can allow the otherness to be emulated through the discursive actions that were practiced in the previous discourse. Similarly in this historical dramatization, Joan of Arc’s social presence is the direct reference to a leveling instinct that might cause major turmoil in the Burgundian society if there is no social continuity between hegemonic constructs. This forces the Burgundian law to realize that there are other political desires out there to replace the dominant discourse if something goes wrong. In extreme cases, this idea of an unknown danger (that is perceived to exist in the form of empty signifiers) can create a systematic fear in the social hierarchy that causes it to establish a totalitarian discourse in which empty signifiers are given an everlasting label of otherness. Hence, the totalitarian system tries to save its functionality by totalizing every part of its system through practical totalization.

Ironically, the totalitarian discourse attempts to make these labeled signs more meaningful by making these signs dominant through the discursive action. However, it fails to achieve this goal when the totalized system is not able to hold its form and thus becomes emptier. For instance, Pol Pot's vision of a new Cambodia tried constructing a certain utopian totality in which the present image of the past was completely destroyed and substituted with a new totality. By idealizing a certain totality, these fixed positions separate signs as proper or improper inside the system. This ideal model of a totalizing utopia is a distorted image of the particular system, which perceives itself as the total reality without any boundaries. No visible boundary is allowed to appear between the system and the excluded zone in a totalitarian system because the idea of it does not exist in a closed system even though it is there. A totalizing system identifies the properness of a certain sign and fixes it to a particular sign hierarchy in which signs operate as oppositional cues. If the sign does not have any representation in the totalizing system, then that sign is identified as meaningless. The organized closed system differentiates signs as either dominant or repressed in the social hierarchy through fixed positions.

In both of these examples, there is an attempt to create ideological deviation between something proper and improper. An equivalent approach creates a coherent and systematic model for certain signs to develop meaningful sign-matrices in the social sphere. In the film, the Burgundian elite tries to distance themselves from Joan of Arc and her totalizing system that is developing, but they fail to do so. For instance, in the trial sequence, they try any trick in the book to lure her into making a false confession because if they do, it will help them establish their political dominance over her. In Pol Pot's case, this dictatorship was fully committed to defining the role of a proper citizen through an equivalent sign boundary between the dominant sign (something that is proper) and the other sign (something that is improper, the deviant). Laclau points out that the system of differences is dependent on empty signifiers formulating limits that allow the dominant discourse to recognize its parts. Using the example of fascistic-ideology, Laclau explains: "to be a fascist was not just be a collaborator: it was to be a collaborator in terms of very precise ideological convictions and of very precise political commitments" (1990:91). In this discourse, it was not enough that a fascist was a friend or neighbor who shared the same values and ideas, but rather the people needed to totally commit themselves to behaving and living their life according to these ideas. In the totalitarian system, empty signifiers were become tautological signs inside of the system when the idea of a boundary was not allowed to exist. Laclau says this belief-system is constructed around the precise values and orders that cannot be interpreted with empty signifiers.

The idea of a boundary does not exist in this type of totalitarian discourse because it would deconstruct “the ontological basis” of the system. The semiotic agents in the totalitarian discourse would no longer commit themselves to the common cause due to the disappearance of this belief . In this scenario, there would be no need to rely to this system anymore.

5.0 The Anatomy of Totalitarian Discourse

In politics, empty signifiers are used to showcase the system's symbolic distance towards the field of otherness through the concept of boundaries limiting a particular totality. For Mussolini, in the Authoritarian regime (i.e. the proto-fascist regime) the idea was to eliminate this distance by creating strict and coherent recognition of this otherness by making it part of the totalized system. Everything was controlled through a belief-system at the state-level and thus no empty signifiers could exist outside of the system to remind the system of its boundaries. In this type of totalizing discourse, it is important to be coherent when discussing the idea of a system with specific boundaries. Eliminating the concept of a boundary, the totalitarian discourses create a long-lasting symbolic order that cannot be disturbed by hegemonic constructs. By fixing signifiers in a certain social order, the social discourse was believed to operate smoothly by itself. The ideal social order is a system with clear social character, from which everything can be referred back to. Similarly, the Burgundians are skeptical of Joan's message from God that orders the elite to become part of a unified France. To the Burgundians, these are invalid statements in comparison to the written word of God in the Bible because she represents the deviant idealism of a united France. The sovereign authority interprets the Bible to be the ultimate reference for God's law, allowing them as church leaders to become part of the English kingdom. Interestingly, both of these political discourses rely on the aspect of "God" to be the highest authority that validates how the earthly order should be restored. Hence, the political character, "God," makes both Joan of Arc and the Burgundians representatives of a certain kind of totalitarian discourse in which the social order is manifested in a particular form of total control.

5.1 What does totality represent in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*?

Totalitarian discourse is always based on a particular belief that verifies the semiotic agents positions against each other's, through the system of differences. The appearance of a meaningful signifier in the system makes it a token for a certain kind of role. In the context of the film, the Burgundians are the sovereign power that characterizes Joan of Arc as deviant in their juridical system. The closed system verifies the role of fixed signifiers inside the system to operate as reminders of the boundary. A totalitarian system (as a form of a closed system) continually struggles against the reemergence of the boundary by denying its existence. However, the ultimate censorship of excluded signifiers makes the system vulnerable because the closed system does not recognize those temporary empty signifiers that give it form. Totalitarian discourse is based on certain ontological content that is used to totalize everything around particular beliefs. In Laclau's analysis, any kind of a system can only operate temporarily through the ontic content that defines certain belief-values for its systematic roles. Laclau explains:

“we have to differentiate between two aspects: the ontological role of discursively constructing social division and the ontic content which, in certain circumstances, plays that role. The important point is that, at the same stage, the ontic content can exhaust its ability to play a role while the need for this nevertheless remains” (2005:87).

For Laclau, the ontological roles are structuralized through many sign-antagonisms that allow the semiotic agents to modify these roles creatively to become something else. However, these roles are tautological loops inside the system that practice particular habits and behavior-patterns continually throughout the ontic content. For instance, the change of guards in the governmental institution exhibits this tautological loop in which the guards must change their duty with another guard through a repeated custom. The ontic content creates a particular meaning for the role that appears as a meta-structural attribute (the system creating definition for the role), whereas, the ontological role is the role in itself that makes the system appear dynamic (the role is practically regulated in relation to the system through the ontic content). In Laclau's sense, ontic content can lose its meaning if it is not effective enough against the semiotic agents. If the particular institutional military system collapses, there is no systematic reason for the changing of the guard ritual to exist.

In a totalitarian discourse, the ontological role is believed to be a direct representation of the political system. Similarly, Mussolini's authoritarian regime utilized this discursive methodology to imbue the state with the ultimate ontological role in society. In any kind of discourse, totality is always a floating concept on a practical level that is not usually applied as "the dominant sign". The Burgundian elite is the dominant power that defines the ontological roles of different social agents by totalizing everything in their environment. There is a clear need to declare Joan of Arc guilty; otherwise England's influence in France will become stronger. In Carl Schmitt's book, *Political Theology*, there is an interesting analysis of the political concept; it is a system that represents a particular "ontological real" that aims to totalize every sign's role in the discourse. Schmitt mentions in his second edition preface how: "We have come to recognize that the political is the total, and as a result we know that any decision about whether something is unpolitical is always a political decision" (1985:2). To Schmitt, any kind of action is always political action, unless the attempt is to act apolitically. The concept of the political in itself is a totalizing concept that confines many meanings, but this does not mean the discourse is so.

Both the Burgundians and Joan of Arc envision a particular totality in which there are specific forms of order by including all the signs as part of the same system. However, their positions in this discussion are opposing. The Burgundian's totally control the political arena with particular rules and norms. Joan of Arc is an un-political deviant who does not have the legality to espouse her opinions in this political space because she represents a dangerous otherness. Hence, her refusal to become a member of the current political system makes her apolitical character. Schmitt believes the apolitical decision-making process is exactly this, to operate against the political totality. The hegemonic struggle between apolitical structures and a particular system does not aim to replace a certain system with another system, but rather to find a hybridized compromise between them. In the case of a totalitarian turn, the system is only temporarily "changed" to another system. A totalitarian system is a closed-system that does not "approve" of its closed boundaries. Metaphorically, the closed system is similar to a case of the hiccups that can possibly be cured by drinking a glass of water, otherwise the hiccups will not be cured for a while. The hiccup example resembles a hegemonic struggle in which the semiotic agents are trying to figure out what to do with the dysfunctional closed-system. The closed-system will eventually be challenged by empty signifiers that will give rise to more dynamic sign antagonisms.

To discuss empty signifiers on the political level, the start of a hegemonic struggle does not happen through the dominant discourse. On the contrary, new politics are established outside of the system by negotiating with those meanings that are already present in the current system. This creates a hybridized discourse between empty signifiers and the previous discourse that together compose a new antagonistic system. Totalitarian discourse does not aim to develop any kind of connection with excluded signs because of the systematic denial of the exclusion boundary. Totalitarian discourse can be perceived as a scientific experiment that has gone wrong. What appears to be an ideal, abstract idea on paper goes haywire when it is made to happen without comparing it to other similar kinds of theories beforehand. Figuratively speaking, both the Burgundians and Joan of Arc are political representations of their own ideological discourses. There are no ideologically correct or naturally dominant systems that form society as a concrete place. On the contrary, the political discourses are temporary and arbitrary systems that are constantly chaining their forms to something else. It would be impossible to constitute a closed system that would be able to operate without being influenced by empty signifiers. In Laclau's text, *On Real and Absolute Friends*, he analyzes Schmitt's concept of state war as a representative depiction of how the ontological commitment to one's own ideological discourse inside of the system allowing the semiotic agents become negotiable participants between each other. Laclau exemplifies the state war through the game of chess:

"The situation could perhaps be compared to that of two chess players: the antagonistic moment is certainly present there—each wants the defeat of his adversary—but the rules of chess playing are accepted by both. The antagonistic situation only increases if one of them cheats or kicks the board."(2005:6)

To Laclau, Schmitt does not perceive the dominant discursive totality as a closed system that would try to create a connection between hegemonic constructs as a totalitarian discourse would do. On the contrary, the open system allows the chess game to be played in a civil manner without the dominant system trying to directly oppress the possible hegemonic constructs. If the repressive side wins this fictional chess match, a new discourse will emerge. However, in the case of direct hostility between the players, the game will be conducted in uncivil manner. Similarly, this occurs between the Burgundians and Joan of Arc in the trial room, as they play rhetorical chess with each other. In the end, Joan withdraws her participation in the game by becoming an apolitical person in the current discourse. Hence, there is a clear ontological hostility between them, and thus, the totalitarian discourse transparently erases the boundary between itself and Joan of Arc's position.

5.2 How Does Discourse Totalize a Particular Space?

The boundary is believed to create problems in a totalitarian system because the discursive system would have then appeared to be “weak”. To understand why totalitarian discourse negates the idea of a boundary, the application of a signifier must be investigated in relation to the system of differences. A signifier allows different signs to have many values. For instance, the dominant signifiers operate in a certain manner inside of the system indicating their position towards other signs that are perceived to be empty. Due to the absence of specificity in the dominant signs, empty signifiers can be perceived as more valuable because they provide the hegemonic possibility for signs to be applied multiple ways. These excluded signs define the totality in the system, even as they are outside of it. Theorist Rares Piloiu implicates the distance as forming a boundary and signifying a meaningful space in the discourse to temporarily exist through signifiers. Rares Piloiu continues to explicate on how in this: "the signifier plays a double role: indicator of the lack and substitute for the lack" (2002:29). To Piloiu, the system of differences is articulated through many signifying networks that assert the identities of different signs inside of the system. Empty signifiers are symbolic reminders of this lack of appearance in the system in the form of a boundary. They are equivalent oppositions to meaningful signs in the dominant discourse because together they form a system of differences.

By having empty signifiers appearing outside of the system and the meaningful signs form the system, Piloiu notes that the sign switches its position between the area of otherness (outside of the system) and the dominant discourse (inside of the system). The application of the sign changes if it is chosen to replace an ineffective sign in the dominant discourse with an empty signifier that has potential to be meant something else. It requires having a concrete possibility become effective within a society in which there is instability or uncertainty in the decision to continue with the current dominant discourse. The sign switch requires interruption in the dominant discourse by an empty signifier that becomes the new dominant through the hegemonic process. This issue will be addressed later in Chapter 6 when the process of the sign switch shall be discussed more in detail through the discussion of tautological loops. For now, one can say that the process of equivalency is the parameter of the signifier to change its position inside and outside a particular system.

In a totalitarian discourse, there is no lack and therefore no need for any sign-related substitutions inside this system. In other words, it is already defined inside the system through the holistic belief in the ontological roles and ontic content, and that because of this, the system does not need to be “fixed” or replaced with anything specific. The totalitarian discourse perceives itself as perfect without having boundaries, blaming human fallacy for any errors that occur. This belief creates a symbolic guarantee for the system to have a mythological foundation that cannot be perceived to be faulty. In Joan of Arc's trial, the law cannot accept Arc's position as part of the system; otherwise this will make them appear politically vulnerable. Joan of Arc challenges the legitimacy of the Burgundian regime by not allowing herself to become categorized as the “other” inside of the system. Joan of Arc wants to create a disturbance in this order by challenging the people to think of other ideological alternatives. If the social system becomes unstable, this will change the equivalency between the signs in the social order.

Piloiu analyzed Laclau's text to perceive this as a turning point for a specific discourse to be substituted with another one. Hence, certain empty signifiers once again become meaningful in the redefined discourse with a different equivalency and boundary. Piloiu states: “By questioning the political legitimacy of any essence, their permanent validity is not acknowledged, creating thus the premises for their modification in accordance to collective pronouncements on their righteousness or invalidity”(2002:32). Piloiu describes these excluded signs as parts of the potential future discourse. By undervaluing the dominant discourse, its continuity becomes emptier when the equivalency can be substituted with other possible discourses. Joan of Arc attempts to do this when questioning the establishments' treatment towards her beliefs. She questions the Burgundians' constitutional stance by asking why their canonical interpretation of God's word in the form of law is “truer” in comparison to her own word. The canonized vision of God's word in the legal system is an extreme form of a totalitarian discourse in which there is no room for free interpretation of God's word outside of the dominant authoritative system's interpretation. If Joan had support for her views, this would challenge the present discourse with another possible discourse.

The totalitarian discourse occupies the space without allowing any excluded signs to be present. Empty signifiers are fixed to the position in which they do not have signification as other forms. Ironically, this extreme exclusion does not make them emptier, but in fact, it can even make them more meaningful. They become a double reflection for totalitarian discourse, as these empty signifiers have the potential through to become something else that is not expected in the dominant discourse. The empty signifier is a form of disguise that allows the sign to become a meaningful part of the discourse when the dominant signs do not recognize them as a threat anymore. Both Laclau and Piloiu's analyses of the signifier's double nature create an interesting outlook on how the signifier's representation can switch, through the extreme distance in the system. Laclau exemplifies: "in a situation of radical disorder, some kind of order is needed, and the more generalized the disorder is, the less important the ontic content of that which restores order becomes" (2005:160). For Laclau, the dominant discourse can hold its power as long as it is able to create a symbolic equivalency between meaningful signs and excluded signs. In any functional society, the general depictions of signs are more meaningful than the belief given to these signs. Mussolini's belief for the state was only a brief solution to the real social structural problems that were not directly addressed. For instance, Mussolini's fascistic propaganda stated that the trains would arrive on time at the station when this really was not the case in the Fascistic Italy. During this era, there was no state official evidence to deny this false statement but because of propaganda was used as signs and symbols to legitimize the statement as genuine fact².

The Burgundian elite tried its best in a similar manner to find some kind of bulletproof reason to find Joan of Arc guilty. She had become a symbolic hero for the public and created many problems for the establishment, who wanted to put a symbolic distance between her and the totalitarian authority. They needed to create the perfect reason with which to accuse her at the trial that could not be challenged by anyone. However, Joan of Arc was able to challenge their belief system by inspiring the public to revolt against this establishment. In Joseph Ruane's and Jennifer Todd's article, they discuss about fundamental reasons for why the conflict occurs and why the dominant discourse is substituted with another one. Specifically, Joan of Arc's dramatized characterization in contemporary cultural history (and even during her time) operates as a critical symbol for certain nationalistic beliefs. Both of theorists explain: "In Joan of Arc, we see the hegemony of a particular politico-cultural interpretation of France and of the French republican tradition transmitted via a historical origin-narrative"(2004:221). Ruane and Todd view the

²The Myth of Locomotive <http://www.snopes.com/history/govern/trains.asp>

symbolic Joan of Arc as not having a fixed temporal position in French nationalistic history because she does not directly represent any specific constitutional model in French culture. Symbolically, Joan of Arc is a timeless manifestation of this spiritual nationalistic identity that cannot be ascribed to anything specific. To Dreyer, the representation of “spirituality” is a certain interpretation of another possible discourse that is not rooted in any kind of totalitarian discourse. It is a hegemonic possibility for constructing another framework for a new discourse through different equivalency. This signifier will either be excluded outside system completely or it will have a minimum presentation in the system as floating signifier.

5.3. The Ambiguous Totality

The evaluation of an empty signifier is always either over- or undervalued in an ideological discourse where the dominant signs are the “standard.” Exemplifying Joan of Arc’s story, the empty signifier can be defined through how the definition of gender is over-interpreted by the totalitarian discourse. For Joan, her androgynous behavior is based on God’s will to operate in this manner by having a non-political identity. The prosecution tries to assign some kind of valuation to her position and thus assign a valuation to her. Joan of Arc is asked to explain her reason for wearing male clothes instead of female clothes by the court. She answers, “I am content with this, since it is God's will that I should wear it”³. In the film, this becomes a sign for Joan to appear simultaneously as a man (the dominant) and female (the other) in a social system that tries to harness her as part of its gender politics. When she declines to have a “political role” in the form of a gender role in this trial, Joan of Arc becomes an enigma for a court who cannot define her androgynous character. In Ernesto Laclau’s book *Emancipations*, his definition of the empty signifier states that: “the being or systemicity of the system which is represented through the empty signifier is not a being which has not been *actually* realized, but one which is constitutively unreachable” (1996:39). Laclau’s analysis provides an explanation for the fact that an empty signifier cannot suddenly be discovered because it is already constitutively known to be empty. In Laclau’s sense, Joan of Arc’s role does not become signified as part of the common discourse because the representation of her identity is something that cannot be reached. It is the process of the signifier becoming something. There are no selected meanings in this ideological system that would constitute her non-political role in the specific system.

In contemporary Greek-society, the Enfia tax can be perceived to create similar problem with definition of being “poor” person through the current debt-arrangements⁴. The individuals who cannot pay their debts are imprisoned as criminals whereas the people who are poor (not because of the debt) are perceived as “proper citizens.” Paradoxically, the poor Greek person (who is either poor through debt or poor due to low income) is at the crossroads of being considered either a “proper” or “deviant” citizen without there being an official representation for this differentia. Similarly, Joan of Arc has a non-political presence in a system that cannot identify Joan through gender politics. In his old seminar text, Laclau finds the political subject to be simultaneously recognized as part of the dominant group and part of the oppressed “otherness.” In

³Medieval Sourcebook: The Trial of Joan of Arc pg: 164 XIV. URL: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/joanofarc-trial.asp>

⁴<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/01/enfia-tax-greece-new-symbol-austerity-201413012454548507.html>

this contradictory situation, the individuals do not have in a constitutive manner an official presentation in the system. He states: “the question of difference is no longer posed as a relation *between* subjects, but rather as a differential articulation of positions within social agents themselves” (1982: 43-44). To Laclau, the problem is the lack of clear common definitions for stating the individuals’ positions in a social hierarchy. It is not the problem of political rhetoric in the social sphere, but the lack of social structures to recognize these repressed signs in comparison to the dominant signs. For the social order, these signs that lack proper definition appear vague and thus these signs will become emptier. In the Greek situation, Enfia-tax stigmatizes the social position of poor people by delimiting their mobility in the social hierarchy. With only these blurry concepts to define their social positions, they become empty signifiers for a social system that does not recognize them.

In this film, Joan of Arc’s dramatization becomes a contemporary echo for this kind of social dilemma by questioning what is meant by the unclear definitions that are constitutionally positioned to be empty (as definition) in the social order. Joan of Arc is perceived as enemy by the establishment due to her political beliefs but simultaneously she is innocent in the eyes of the law until proven guilty. The lack of common knowledge of how to define what kind of crime she has committed makes it harder for the law to conduct a ruling against her. For instance, if she was defined as female, then she would be easily persecuted for witchcraft. Without a clear definition for categorizing Joan Arc, the non-political identification aids her struggle against these accusations by being in the position of “otherness” (at the level of political rhetoric). Joan of Arc is once again paradoxically represented and not-represented in the same space by being the accused, but not really being accused to any specific crime. This position allows Joan to redefine those empty signifiers that are overlooked by the canonical law that tries its hardest to condemn her. This process resembles Jacques Lacan’s convention of recognizing the gap between known and unknown signifiers that are identified by their representations in the ideological context. Lacan explicates: “the signifier, producing itself in the field of the other, makes manifest the subject of its signification” (1973:207). For Lacan, those conventions that are not identified in the field of “otherness” have the potential to become noticeable if they cause interruptions in the populist discourse. The empty signifier creates the potential for subjects to exist out of this structural void, if they become constructed by the individuals to mean something for somebody.

In the courtroom, Joan of Arc is partly in the field of otherness because she does not have direct representation to be part of canonical law. Her non-gender presentation is an empty signifier for the Burgundian law that limits her ability to be a free social agent. In the Lacanian sense, the empty signifier is always rooted in the idea of an alienated sign in which the effect of a signifier becomes diminished (or rather emptied) when it is gradually isolated by the populist discourse. Lacan continues: “by separation, the subject finds, one might say, the weak point of the primal dyad of the signifying articulation, in so far it is alienating in essence” (1973: 218). Lacan reviews the primal dyadic (signifier and signified) model to be a direct representation for the canonical order. This form categorizes meaningful signs into the hierarchy of the social system through the political rhetoric. The empty signifiers are unrecognized parts of the social mechanism that require individuals in the field of “otherness” to reconstruct them to become meaningful. Similarly, Joan of Arc recognizes the question of gender politics to be unnecessary for her political cause. She is more interested in establishing a potentially a new identity for French nationhood that is not controlled by the British nation. The gender discussion is a mere attempt for the establishment to have Joan of Arc condemned for a heresy, which is why Arc actively separated the discussion of gender from the idea of French nationhood. This topic was a taboo in the courtroom, where the jury was formed by the British and British-sympathizing French clerks.

In Lacan’s analysis of the separation, he concludes that the subject (alienated from the common discourse) aims to recognize those common features in the society that are overlooked by the social system. The individuals are trying to redefine those empty signifiers to construct new meanings in the field of “otherness” by unifying different meanings together. Similarly to Lacan’s approach, Laclau defines the empty signifiers as allowing individuals to reconstruct those meanings that are not clear enough in the populist discourse. The void within signification is a meta-structural scratch in the visible social structure that is not recognized by the social system. The Lacanian view of a reconstructed signifier in the field of otherness entails the idea of the restoring the void to a place so that the signs can become meaningful in a different manner. Laclau sees the empty signifiers as mediators for the social agents, to rearticulate these unrecognized features in a new context. Laclau analyzes the Lacanian approach, explaining: “the identity and the unity of the object result from the very operation of naming” (2005:104). Laclau believes that the redefinition of a sign’s identity is dependent on the fact that it is totally an empty signifier. The empty signifier offers a possibility to identify other empty signs in later discourse, depending on whether they are utilized in such a manner. However, in the totalitarian discourse, empty signifiers are avoided through the tautological loops that are structuralized by floating signifiers.

6.0 The Disappearance of Boundary in Totalitarian Discourse

In this section, the concept of floating signifier is reviewed as a variant to the empty signifier by not having a specific identity ascribed to it. A floating signifier creates a kind of temporary importance for the signifiers to have identities inside of the system. The system of differences is composed through these floating signifiers that constantly change their position in relation to each other. These signifiers are not fixed in the system but rather, their position remains open in the system. A floating signifier appears in the tautological loops in which the same sign has an ambiguous value without a specific identity. It can either be meaningful or not, depending on the sign application. In totalitarian discourse (i.e. the closed system), floating signifiers have an arbitrary position in the social order by representing something meaningful or not, depending on whether or not they become identified and applied as such. The application of floating signifiers is defined according to the current order. However, if the discourse is changed, the definition of a floating signifier will also be replaced with a different definition but the form of the content might stay the same.

6.1 Floating Signifiers in the Totalitarian Discourse

Laclau perceives floating signifiers to be forms of a similar kind of a sign that will be represented in different content inside of the same discourse. Laclau explains the form of a sign to be associated with specific discourse that creates a new specification in the content. He continues: "It is no longer that the particularism of the demand becomes self-sufficient and independent of any equivalential articulation, but that its meaning is indeterminate between alternative equivalential frontiers"(2005:131). The application of signs can be left lolling around between different semiotic agents, but only the contextual application can be changed in the relation to discourse. To Laclau, a floating signifier can have a specific meaning in a certain event occurring inside a system. For instance, Joan of Arc's androgynous behavior is a good example to understand the structure of floating signifiers in a closed system. The Burgundians put in a lot of effort to make Joan feel guilty for her androgynous behavior; however, Joan of Arc perceives this behavior as justified by God, who has given her the right to behave in such a manner. In the trial room, there is no singular definition of gender for which the androgynous behavior can be reduced to, thus it becomes a floating signifier for the debate.

Similarly, in April 2007 in Estonia, there was the Bronze-night in which a Second World War memorial, a bronze statue of a soldier, become a hot topic between local people and international authorities. The dispute of moving this statue to a new location went through two stages. Firstly, there was civil unrest among the Estonians and Russian-Estonians about moving this statue because of the question of historical content related with the Soviet Union-era Estonia. Thenthe quarrel expanded to the international level between the Russian Federation and Estonia over a diplomatic disagreement about what this statue represented to whom and why. In this case, the structure of a floating signifier appears simultaneously meaningful and empty for different semiotic agents, thus providing a systematic framework for the dominant discourse to appear. In Peeter Selg's paper, *A political-semiotic introduction to the Estonian "bronze-night" discourse*, he finds emotively constructed opinions that were used by the semiotic agents against each other to make sense of this situation. Selg explicates: "the "people" was discursively split: "for" or "against"...different sides of the issue were intensively in the "picture", incarnated by live coverage"(2013:97). Selg concludes that this discursive action is based on the over- or under-interpretation of a floating signifier because of the need to establish a social reason to make sense of

this situation. The media's attempt to build a discursive picture about "what is going on right now" painted an image of how the system of differences was molded through this event at the moment by dominant semiotic agents, as if it was a football match that the media tried constantly to cover through the form of "breaking-news." However, for the locals, this event was one of those defining events in Estonian history for which discussion would be conducted in some form in the near future.

In the film, both sides are emotionally committed to their ideological cause because they cannot agree with each other due to the emotional commitment in their belief systems. This exemplifies how human behavior has the emotive need to change the meaning of signs and ontic content through floating signifiers to make the system more adaptable to the emotional experience. These unfixed signifiers in the system allow the current discourse to maintain its form by reconstructing a discursive structure internally using these emotional cues. In doing so, it can develop a meaningful way for the dominant sign to still stay dominant. In the case of the "Bronze-Night", the definition of it becomes a floating signifier that is constantly changing its position inside of the system due to the media's attempts to "make sense of it." This kind of discursive rhetoric is based on the authority's visible presence in public space to create a communicative distance between them and others. Selg believes the media coverage during this event was based on generalizations that created a snowball effect for this singular event, a local riot, to become part of a larger international scandal between the Russia Federation and Estonia. Selg explains: "'bronze-speak' operates primarily through phatic communication: it sustains the contact with the addressee, but its informative value is almost zero"(2013:90). This "bronze-speak" addresses the public from these events in a polemic manner, thus turning the discussion of the event into an empty signifier, as if it has become a Jakobsonian zero-sign. Both sides, Estonian and Russian, are represented in the discussion without there being any common ground to understand why the discussion was conducted in such a manner as it was done, thus reflecting the zero value of the discussion.

Using the Bronze-night as an example, how can the dominant discourse be favorable towards those floating signifiers that aid the system to maintain itself? Ruane and Todd's note that Joan of Arc's status in French culture treats her as a national symbol in a similar manner as the statue is treated in the Bronze Night incident. Joan of Arc's historical characterization has become a floating signifier for the French identity. In their analysis, the form of this signifier exists in the identification of one's own participatory membership in relation to the system but what content it should include in itself is a matter of interpretation. They interpret that: "A system retains distinction from its environment, rather than merging into it, or being changed by outside forces; new "impacting" elements are assimilated within the system, which thus "adapts" to a changing

environment" (2004:224). Ruane and Todd point out that the dominant system aims to reproduce itself as the most powerful by reinforcing those elements that are inside of it. A floating signifier exists as a convenient tool to give a structural option for the system to be developed into something else. The dominant discourse is always its own systematic machination that does not share common ground with the excluded signs, even though they operate as complimentary opposites to each other in the form of a boundary. Ruane and Todd believe that if there appears to be changes in the discourse, floating signifiers should be applied to specify different meanings for the familiar terms that are already known in the discourse. As the signifying elements become redefined in different ideological discourses, the system keeps its composure somewhat as it adjusts to the changing environment. The function of the political system does not change but the ideological content of it does.

Interestingly, the ambiguous structure of floating signifiers allows contemporary politicians to play out with the exclusion boundary as something that can give rise to a “fake” empty signifier, what actually is floating signifier in disguise at the rhetorical level. For instance, in recent political events during time this paper is being produced, the Russian Federation president Vladimir Putin is suddenly “visiting” Ukraine’s territory of Crimea in an attempt to either make this area an autonomous region of the Russian Federation or become its own independent nation through political elections. In his rhetoric, Putin is appealing to the majority in Crimea who identify themselves culturally as Russian, as opposed to other people in Crimea who identify as Ukrainian. It should be noted that the Crimeans who identify as culturally Russian represent a small minority of the overall population in Ukraine (the majority of whom identify as Ukrainian)⁵. Distinctively, the concept of a floating signifier is cleverly used in Putin’s rhetoric’s to imply that something can simultaneously be perceived as part of the majority (inside Crimea) and part of the minority in the context of Ukraine as a nation. Similarly, Joan of Arc is given the possibility to receive forgiveness if she becomes a member of the dominant discourse by admitting to the charges. In Joan of Arc’s own mind, admitting to the charges would be a lie and a betrayal to her beliefs. If she lied and admitted to the charges, there would be no way she could feel free once released by the Church.

⁵Address by President of the Russian Federation march 18/2014 (rechecked april 19/.2014) <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>

In Martin Muller's analysis of the article *Rethinking Identification*, there is an intriguing correlation with how the identity of something is represented simultaneously as something meaningful and non-meaningful. He states in the context of Putin's Russia that: "The success of the hegemonic discourse of a strong Russia is predicated on the ability of various forces to claim that they fill the empty signifier of "strong Russia" (2009:335). In this context, "the strong Russian" appears to be discussed as an empty signifier; it is something that is dominantly named and ironically, it is not even empty. On the contrary, the "strong Russia" is there to be fully represented in the political system as a description for a system that is depicted as "lack" something. Through Muller's analysis, one can speculate how something that appears to be an empty signifier is actually a floating signifier. In the Russian Federation, there is no lack of a "strong Russian" identity because it is strongly represented in this somewhat closed system. If the closed system begins to realize its weakening position due to the arbitrary structure of its sign-system, it will utilize those aspects already inside the system that appear to be "weak." The system tries to hybridize itself through these common significations to develop a steady framework on how the dominant discourse tries to appear to the public through rhetoric generalization. Hence, there are interesting similarities between Putin's recent media rhetoric's and the "Bronze-speak" used by the media because they are not trying to create "dialogue" with the public; rather they are distancing the public from the authority. Scarily, this might be a reminder for another discursive turn in which the idea boundary is not denied anymore, but rather the idea of a boundary is fixed inside the system in an attempt to make other possible empty signifiers become part of it.

6.2 The Tautological Loops in the Totalitarian Discourse

In any kind of open discourse, a meaningful signifier recognizes an empty signifier as a reminder of the boundary that separates the dominant signs from these repressed signs. Equivalency is the symbolic parameter for this open discourse to check up on its stability in the social sphere. If the signifier is fixed in a certain position due to the totalitarian discourse, there is a danger for these signifiers to become false representatives of something that is considered to be empty signifiers. Hence, the equivalency of signs should not be taken granted. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek points out in his book *Parallax View* that the social discourse temporarily locks a signification to a particular sign and thus distorts its content until it becomes suitable for the discourse itself. Similarly, Žižek refers to capitalism as a kind of: “system which reproduces itself through constant self-revolutionizing” (2006:297). The closed-sign-system constitutes a particular discourse by applying floating signifiers to establish a tautological loop. In totalitarian discourse, repressed signifiers inside of the system are presumed to become emptier when they refer directly to themselves through these looping processes. Žižek proposes that these tautological signifiers gain more meaningful representation in the discourse through double verification of the same sign (i.e. a floating signifier has two possible representations in the closed system by either being dominant or repressed). Žižek states: "What one encounters in tautology is thus pure difference, not the difference between the element and other elements, but the difference of the element from itself"(2006:28-29) Žižek analyses tautology establishing the same sign as empty and meaningful in the same articulation. A floating signifier is re-signified to represent itself in the dominant discourse because it helps to standardize the lack of boundary in the system by disguising it.

The totalitarian discourse does not presume there is anything faulty with its own logic because the standardized recognition of a floating signifier allows these signs to ignore any possible empty signifiers outside the system. The closed system presumes a signifier becomes signified itself when it is maximized as the dominant signifier in the system. For instance, racial discrimination is based on this logic when social constructions repeatedly state that “something which is alien is alien”. Here, alien is defined as someone whose outward race is different than the majority of society, but it also refers to that which is different is so radically different as to be estranged and ostracized in the social sphere. Reutilization of the same negated and repressed signifiers in the totalitarian discourse creates tautological usage for these signifiers. For instance, the exclusion of an

alien person in the social sphere makes this person to be considered as *alien*. This particular individual has become a direct representation of this signifier and, hence, alien cannot be anything else than just alien. The same signifier represents in itself; the difference of itself. Similarly, Joan of Arc is tautologically deemed to be a deviant in the trial-room because there are no alternatives for her become a “non-deviant”. The Burgundian elite do not want to redefine either her or their ideological agency because this will cause a conflicting situation in the social order.

If Joan gets the upper hand against the establishment by influencing them with her views, this could make her appear as part of the closed system by becoming the dominant semiotic agent. However, the Burgundians have fixed the dominant signs in such a manner that this cannot be possible. The double representation of a floating signifier creates an illusion of the same signifier either being meaningless or meaningful, depending on the structure of the system. Laclau explains this conceptualization as the system itself interpreting how it wants to perceive the order of things. Laclau continues: “Categories such as “distortion” and “false representation” made sense as long as something “true” or “undistorted” was considered to be within human reach” (1997:298-299). Laclau’s viewpoint is that these categories are maintained to create the system of differences between the dominant and repressed signs. It is a certain ontological claim to state how things should be operating through the dominant discourse. For example, Mussolini built an authoritarian framework around this idea by forming an extreme version of it because it was a reinforcing, or totalizing, discourse that included all the elements of the system inside itself. If this logic is undermined within the social structures, then the totalitarian discourse changes its organization in the attempt to maintain a similar kind of order once again, by making some of the dominant signs emptier in comparison to other dominant signs.

In the case of Joan of Arc, the Burgundian elite need to have a symbolic distance towards her by categorizing her as a deviant person through heresy charges in the totalitarian discourse. Joan of Arc’s social characterization is not perceived to fit in any of their social categories because she is a hierarchical anomaly. There is a clear need for the establishment to create a totalitarian discourse in this social environment because it will help them to become part of the English nation. With the use of tautological claims in the social discourse, the Burgundian elite are able to torture Joan of Arc by means of what are floating signifiers because there is no fixed position or role assigned to her. In the tautology, the dominant signs stigmatize the repressive signs, which become a symbol of for otherness inside the system. It must be clarified that tautology does not make a signifier emptier but rather tautology makes the closed system fulfill the absence of specificity in the system through floating signifiers. In the closed system, the sign becomes a more

meaningful representation by pointing to itself. Eco analyzed this to be the ultimate cause of the fall of Nazi-regime when they were not able to establish new boundaries for the empty signifiers. The Nazis pretended to structuralize an everlasting society that would not be limited by the idea of a boundary creating opposition to it. Eco demonstrates this logic to be faulty through the absence of counter-culture (outside of the system as in the form of excluded signs) as a dynamic equivalency to the dynamic core culture. He says: “there is no such a thing as a meta-rule for defining victorious cultures...rule does exist for defining losing cultures, or cultures that are incapable of perpetuating themselves”(1994:120). Eco defines practical rules that obligate the dominant discourse to become acquainted with the excluded signs. The establishment cannot erase empty signifiers out of the social sphere because these signs form the boundary for it. A tautological approach attempts to ignore the signification of this boundary and create a society without it through systematic totalization. By developing a victorious myth of everlasting society, Eco exemplifies this logic to be silly when there is no meta-rule in any kind of perpetuated logic that can prove this. All of the social discourses presented in human history are hybridized products of different social mechanisms.

During her trial, Joan of Arc becomes a dangerous social agent in the eyes of Burgundian law because she is able to deconstruct the tautological categories that are used against her. For instance, Joan knows that androgynous behavior cannot be related directly to gender categories because there is no specific way to explain gender related behavior. In tautological articulation, the same sign is expressed in relation to itself. For instance, in the statement “alien is alien”, the first signifier does not signify anything relevant in the comparison to the secondary signification of the same sign. The second sign verifies the boundary to this sign through itself. This kind of rhetoric is used in totalitarian discourse where the dominant signs create symbolic distance from repressed signs. The dominant signs acclaim their fixed positions through visible representation towards repressed signs in a system of differences, but some signifiers will remain between them as floating signifiers. Through the extreme form of exclusion, the totalitarian discourse uses tautology to demonize the repressed signs for becoming “emptier”. However, it is the closed-system that becomes emptier due to its inability to keep repressed signs fixed in the particular position. Total oppression would make repressed signs disappear from the system and hence the closed system cannot exist without them. For instance, if the Nazis had eliminated all the minorities, they would have started to eliminate themselves.

Zizek analyzes the totalitarian discourse to doubly recognize the position of those repressed signs that become “forever-empty” through their own actions. Zizek explains: “the two terms in a tautology are not at the same level: the first occurrence of the term is as a signifier, and the second as a signifier within the signified”(2010:68). In these two levels, as Zizek points out, there is a loop of meaning in which the double reflection of the same signifier makes it immediately more meaningful inside of the same articulation, but it does not create meaningful relation between them. Within this logic, it aids the totalitarian discourse to limit the exposure of these repressed signs in the social sphere. In a closed system, that which is “alien” stays “alien” if it does not have any given value in the social hierarchy. It is an empty loop in the system that only has an unfixed position in the discourse as a floating signifier. A floating signifier is a loop that does not signify anything other than what it tries to express on a minimal level; that alien is just alien. This false representation of a meaningful sign is an unrecognized empty sign that does not have any meaning. It is not enough to explain why alien is just alien. In Zizek’s sense, tautology provides floating signifiers that have a common reference point in the system from which the semiotic agents will determine how they will be applied.

A loop of the same sign in the tautological signification provides a good example for summarizing the idea of a floating signifier. For instance, the statement “alien is alien” provides differentia for the same sign by separating it into a two sign-categories: sign A (alien categorized as empty signifier) and sign A1 (meaningful definition for this term-alien). Both of these signifiers are pure distinctions of themselves and they also operate as equivalent oppositions to each other. In this statement, the sign-A1 utilizes the sign-A for constructing some kind of a significance to itself. The signification-loop showcases equivalency between these opposite signs through the same sign working as differentia categories for itself. The ambivalent recognition between the subject and the other is based on the ambiguous valuation of the opposite meaning of the same sign. This sign A1 is identified through the signifying distance for which sign A is operating. In any case, there is no medium representation of this sign in this tautological articulation. It is either over- or under valued within the discourse in relation to itself and thus making it a floating signifier inside of the closed system.

6.3. What Is the Role of the Floating Signifier in this Film?

In the context of Dryer's film, Joan of Arc's symbolic representation evokes oppositional feelings in the Burgundian discourse because her androgynous behavior is perceived with hostility. The open question of gender related behavior operates as the floating signifier during the trial situation in which there is no clear meaning for this kind of behavior in the current order. With the use of tautological logic, Joan's androgynous role was reduced to the position of a repressed sign. Similarly, the Nazis used tautological statements to "prove" that Jewish people were direct deviants from them because they were part of Judaic-culture. In Eco's sense, a floating signifier creates a new hybrid form of the sign in the dominant discourse by not really chaining the definition to anything new inside the closed system. Eco explains through cultural analysis that: "The dominant culture tolerates parasitic counter-cultures as more or less innocuous deviations, but it cannot accept critical manifestations which call it into question"(1994:123). Eco differentiates the counter-cultures that are part of the closed system, with some in a comparatively tolerable position to the dominant discourse in contrast to excluded signifiers. In open discourse, empty signifiers are verified already in the structural basis as excluded signs from the boundary and because of this they do not have a direct representation or foundation in the system. However, they are the representative signs to the counter-culture in the open system. Eco implies that excluded signs can cause disturbances in the open system if they become actively applied as parts of other counter-cultures and discourses because they provide the hegemonic possibility for the change in discourse, thus producing hybridized new discourse. The closed system does not attempt to become hybridized with other discourses, instead attempting to maintain its traditional symbolic order. If the Burgundian elite sentence Joan to prison, she will then become fixed with a certain role. In this case, Joan of Arc will only be a representative member of the establishment by being the repressed other in a closed system not a tolerated counter-culture in an open system.

The position of otherness is established within the meaning of a floating signifier because it defines the structural conditions of the dominant signs as having an oppositional counterpart in the closed system. In the open system, the dominant discourse will tolerate other ideological discourses that do not challenge or create any destructive element to the system itself. However, in the totalitarian discourse, there are only fixated positions to floating signifiers to re-establish the system of differences, if there happens to appear a systematic glitch to the certain sign.

In the open system, a floating signifier provides the possibility for fixed signs to have different meanings. In Jorgensen's and Phillips' analysis, the floating signifier has more hegemonic possibilities than the excluded signifiers to create new social constructs that can replace the current structure if the system remains open. Jorgensen and Phillips explain: "the floating signifier belongs to the ongoing struggle between different discourses to fix the meaning of important signs"(2002:28). To Jorgensen and Phillips, floating signifiers either 1) establish the dominant signs' positions in new possible hybrid systems or 2) they are applied to reconfigure important sign positions in the closed system.

In the open system, floating signifiers try to develop a bridge between the current discourse and other possible discourses to create temporary balance to the system Jorgensen's and Phillips' analysis reveals that Laclau's analysis of the system forms a particular body in which there does not appear to be any systematic glitches in the dominant signs. Floating signifiers are used internally to fix these problems by resemiotizing those signs that are dislocated inside the system. Due to the absence of specificity, the dominant signs applied in any kind of discourse can never fulfill their roles because they are only applied in a particular manner at any moment. The presence of temporality reveals the dominant signs relations to repressed signs by explicating why the system of differences is organized in such a manner at certain times. In the case of the "Bronze-night", the question of emotive function was not important to the media because they were more interested in sensationalizing these events as "breaking-news." The media's ontological role was to utilize "Bronze-night" as a floating signifier that was only temporarily significant in that time-frame. There was no common reference point for the media (on both the Estonian and Russian sides) to use any kind of rhetoric to build a common solution to this situation, due to the sentimental, nationalistic differences towards this issue.

Similarly, the Burgundian law tries to reestablish its dominance over Joan Arc in the trial sequence with the use of political rhetoric but they fail to do so. In the end, the dominant discourse clearly gets the upper hand at its own political game when Joan of Arc is burned alive at the stake in public. The visibility of power practiced in the same space creates a huge distance between the dominant signs and the repressive signs by visualizing the totalizing influence of the closed system. The Burgundian establishment wants to clearly demonstrate that *they* have the power to decide what to do with this deviant, even if they fail to win the political discussion. They do not need to use any political rhetoric against Joan of Arc anymore because she decides that her own fate, and her own life will be ended in such a manner. This is the point for floating signifiers to become signified and fully meaningful because the political rhetoric can work as long as the floating signifier is not fixed to the particular position. Laclau says that floating signifiers are

dependant on the looseness of the situation in which the signifiers openly chain the formation of the structure. Laclau explains: “the floating dimension becomes most visible in periods of organic crisis, when the symbolic system needs to be radically recast” (2005:132). To Laclau, the floating signifiers do not disappear anywhere when the system tries to maintain its order by refiguring the content of its discourse. They are locked in certain positions between different possible discourses. Depending on shifts in the discourse, the floating signifiers can once again be reutilized part of same discourse or even become empty signifiers.

A floating signifier brings focus to the system of differences by filling the absence of specificity in the dominant signs with new content. These signs have a somewhat free-position by either being functional or dysfunctional. Especially in the closed system, floating signifiers can allow discourse to have a temporary “extension” with the system reconfiguring what dominant signs are repressed for the sake of other dominant signs. In Foucault’s example in the third chapter, the Nazis were encouraged to be constantly suspicious about their neighbors because they could potentially be deviants in the disguise. In the closed system, floating signifiers provide the possibility for semiotic agents to start applying those significations that were inside of the system, and to use them against other semiotic agents. To Foucault, it is peculiar that the Nazism was able to functionalize the society totally by developing a discursive system that could depend on itself. He states: “this is a society which has also generalized biopower in absolute sense, but which has also generalized the sovereign right to kill” (2003:269). To Foucault, this kind of total control is able to sustain itself by getting rid of those signs that are the dominant and dynamic elements of the system by turning them into deviant and repressed signs. With denial of the boundary, this closed system can only operate temporarily in a short-time until it is not able to perpetuate continuum for itself anymore. In Foucault’s sense, the idea of biopower was similar to the closed system in which people are controlled in groups by delimiting the application of power into a particular system. In this case, the closed system can cause a lot of devastation in to some semiotic agents if the upcoming discourse does not hybridize some elements from the previous discourse. Hence, the totalitarian turn that emulates the previous totalitarian discourse can be equally devastating or even worse.

7. Conclusion: Empty signifiers—do they not actually matter in totalitarian discourse?

The attempt of this paper was generally to define the sign-switch process through the excluded signs and provide a new hegemonic possibility for a different systematic discourse. In his book *On Populist Reason*, Laclau argues that empty signifiers are valuable discursive measurements to comprehend the value of political discourse in relation to other hegemonic possibilities outside the system. It must be explicated clearly that empty signifier has two political functions for the dominant discourse. Firstly, an empty signifier creates a boundary for a specific totality in the dominant discourse, and secondly, it creates specific pre-conditions for the sign before it becomes part of the dominant discourse or not. These political functions provide a hegemonic possibility for the repressed semiotic agents in the interpretative manner to define those excluded signifiers that are outside of a system or certain discourse. Also, it tries to solve why these empty signifiers can be used to explain (or rather clarify) why certain representations of totality created through the system cannot be sustained. Empty signifiers define the system as structurally incomplete because the discursive content of any kind system is always a hybrid product of previous dysfunctional discourses.

In the open system, the appearance of a boundary through excluded signs helps the system to become aware of its signification problems that cannot be fixed without the sign-switch process. Similarly, floating signifiers provide different values for those signs inside of the system. The conceptuality of the sign-switch (between the dominant signs and repressed signs) is comparable with the Russian Formalism's approach of literary evolution analysis that is gradually developed through "periodic-shifts". In Shukman and et.al 's book, *A Contextual Glossary of Formalist Terminology*, it is stated that as compared to the literary period shifts (through the emergence of a new function in the system): "If we grant that evolution is a change in the interrelations between members of a system i.e. a change of functions and formal elements then

evolution amounts to a shift of systems”(1977:32). The shift of meaning in the system because of a new function describes the system as hybrid product of the previous systems that are produced through the hegemonic struggle. An empty signifier becomes part of the dominant discourse if it is applied meaningfully in a particular way.

For Laclau, empty signifiers create an equivalent opposition for those dynamic signs that are used in the system of differences. In this system, without any specified identifications, those signs will become isolated out of it and eventually become empty signifiers. Laclau describes this extreme form of exclusion: “the various excluded categories have to cancel their differences through the formation of a chain of equivalences to that which the system demonizes in order to signify itself” (1996:39). Laclau points out that the exclusion of repressed signs inside of the system of differences transforms them into empty signifiers. In Dryer’s film, Joan of Arc becomes a sign for the pure evil inside of the system when she is ruled by the court to be burned alive at the stake. At that moment, Joan is no longer considered to be a fully functional social agent but rather a complete *persona non grata* in the social sphere. The Burgundian law system demonizes Joan and makes an example of her; she becomes the epitome of an empty sign—something that does not exist or signify anything meaningful to anybody.

Social agents are representatives for many signifiers depending on which ontological roles they play in the social sphere. In the case of Joan of Arc, she appears simultaneously as a suspect and a war-hero in the courtroom. There is no clear political identity that they can attribute to Joan during the trial. Her ontological role becomes a floating signifier throughout the trial where there are many differencing opinions about her “role”. In Laclau's sense, the concept of a social agent must be differentiated and labeled in the system for it to be considered as the representational carrier of an empty signifier. In Rodolphe Gasche’s text, he review Laclau and says that Laclau sees the totality as the empty void that constitutes multiple possibilities for the signifiers to either be functional or dysfunctional for the system. Gasche comments: "the very notion of universality is testimony to the constitutive gap that pertains to all identity or to any communitarian order"(2004:27). Gasche defines Laclau’s definition of the empty signifier as a homogeneous constellation in which its definitions do not signify anything meaningful. In this void, or “empty place” as Gasche refers to it (2004: 27), the signs do not have particular identities or forms that would organize these signifiers into a certain order. They are simply there in the “empty place,” signifying nothing. Similarly, as a suspect in the courtroom, Joan of Arc is neither innocent nor guilty until she is proven to be one or the other. She is socially in the empty role that does not specify or identify her with anything. In Gasche’s terms, Arc is socially in the non-signification

void where the dominant signs and the system are constructed to support these repressed signs to stay meaningless.

In the system of differences, signs are extensions of a totality that constitutes their positions in relation to each other and thus framing a particular universality. When the dominant signs are applied in this particular totality, the repressed signs are excluded from the system of differences by becoming emptier. For instance, the society that is obsessed with the dominant political group-A might not value candidates in the oppositional parties because the party-A has become the dominant symbol for their society. However, the opposition politically creates the legislative boundary for party-A to have its rule inside of the system, and because of this, they are both represented in the system. Alternatively, apolitical groups are in the position of empty signifier because they do not have a constitutive role in this system, and thus they provide the hegemonic possibility for radical change in the current system through signification-switch. Laclau says that the constitution of signs is never meaningful until the sign's boundaries are defined in the system through the excluded signifiers. Laclau explains: "to grasp that totality conceptually, we have to grasp its limits...we have to differentiate it from something *other* than itself"(2005:69). To Laclau, the system of differences can only be organized in a proper manner if it is reconciled temporarily with those signs that are excluded from it. The excluded signs create a structural limit for the particular system to recognize those boundaries that constitute the very system. Outside of those boundaries, the empty signifiers are not dynamic because they do not signify anything.

In the context of Joan of Arc, the clerical culture is accustomed to justifying a prisoner's position in the courtroom according to their gender. Joan of Arc does not meet this quota directly which is why the establishment must find an alternative method of accusing her. The androgynous behavior is perceived as a floating signifier when it does not correspond to any kind of systematic category. It is a tautological loop that allows the clerical culture the open possibility to forcefully identify her into one a social category. This notion for the open interpretation of Joan's cross-dressing ways becomes a topic of discussion. Using Laclau's approach, the idea of Joan as an androgynous person is perceived as an empty signifier. In this case, the function of the empty signifier is represented as the sign for the absence of specificity in the system of differences. The exclusion of Joan's own vision of herself (how she wishes to be represented in the system) is undermined by the clerical culture that is eagerly waiting to identify her as part of their social categories through her cross-dressing habits. In the end, Joan of Arc sacrifices her social position by becoming a representational agent of the empty signifier when she is burned alive in stake.

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Resümee

Tähenduse vahetus *The Passion of Joan of Arc*-filmi kontekstis

Signification Switch in the Context of *The Passion of Joan of Arc*-Film

Oma magistritöös kontseptualiseerin tühja tähistajat kui vahendit, mis võimaldab tähenduse sisse-ja välja lülitamist erinevate diskursuste vahel (kuidas tühi tähistaja saab tähenduslikuks ja kuidas selle tähendus kustub). Kasutades Ernesto Laclau *tühja tähistaja* mõistet, püüan näidata, kuidas see funktsioneerib erinevate ideoloogiliste sisude hegemoonilisteks kehtestamise võimalikkusena. Oluliseks saab siin süsteemist väljaarvatu potentsiaalsus dominantse diskursuse kehtestamisel. Magistritöö analüüsib loodud raamistikust lähtuvalt Carl Dreyeri filmi *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). Analüüsis püüan näidata, kuidas miski, mida on varasemalt tajutud tühja tähistajana, saab võitluses hegemoonia pärast uueks dominantseks tähistajaks. Film jutustab Joan d'Arc'i kohtuprotsessist, kus Burgundia eliit tajub naist kui "poliitilist õudust" ("political horror"), kuna ta ei käi mingi eksisteeriva sotsiaalse kategooria alla. Niisugune, Joan d'Arc'i võõrandumine (*alienation*) Lacani mõisteis, määratleb süsteemisisese erinevuse puudumise tühja tähistaja kaudu. Joan d'Arc on "teine", mis ei kuulu Burgundia õigussüsteemi diskursusesse.

Teoreetilise raamistiku peamine allikas on Laclau teos *On Populist Reason*. Magistritöös püüan näidata, kuidas totaalsust loov hegemooniline tühi tähistaja saab järgneva diskursuse allikaks tänu tähistamis-lülitamisele (signification-switch). Hegemooniline protsess määratleb süsteemisisese antagonistliku suhte erinevaid väärtusi tähistavate tähistajate vahel. Uus diskursus saab võimalikuks tänu piiritlemisele mitte-tähistamise väljast (non-signification area). Laclau jaoks omavad semiootilised toimijad (semiotic agents) üksnes partikulaarset hegemoonilise konstrukti rakendamist, nullides sama objekti teised võimalikud kasutused. Siin on oluline tähele panna, et hegemooniline konstruktsioon saab ise tühja tähistaja kehastatud objektiks, mis organiseeritakse kui teatav süsteemne korrastatus ning seega saab hegemooniline protsess osaks süsteemses mahhinatsioonis. Selle loogika tulemusena hakkab diskursus määratlema tühja tähistaja rakendusvõimalusi ja määrab tühja tähistaja kehastama ainult ühte partikulaarset identiteeti.

Dryeri filmis näitab dominantne diskursus oma totalitaarset võimu nähtava brutaalsuse kaudu ja püüab seeläbi varjata oma struktuurilist nõrkust. Burgundia eliit funktsioneerib kui teatud ideoloogiliste erinevussuhete süsteem. Selles struktuurilises süsteemis on Burgundia kohus saavutanud domineeriva positsiooni, kuna on suutnud fikseerida sümbolid endast kui kõrgemast autoriteedist. Teadupärast esinevadki Laclaul tühjad tähistajad kui domineeriva diskursuse piirid, mis teeb tähistussüsteemi (täendusliku diskursuse) võimalikuks. Joan d'Arc kujutatakse filmis kui ohvrit ning ta tema lugu hakkab funktsioneerima uue hegemoonilise võimalikkuse kirena. Vaatajale näidatakse totalitaarse võimu tõe näivust, mis omakorda loob Joan d'Arcist märtri.

Filmis *Passion of Joan of Arc*'is ilmneb konflikt rahva võimetusest näha selle "tõe" poliitilist, võimusuhte kehtestamisest tingitud iseloomu. Tõde muutub erinevate interpreteeringute vaheliseks hõljuvaks tähistajaks, mida ei suudeta lõplikult määratleda kui dominantset või kui represserit. Kohtu jaoks ei suuda burgundia rahvas selgelt mõista, miks on vaja Joan d'Arci piinata, kuna nad lähtuvad rangelt üksnes oma "tõe" versioonist. D'Arci enda versioon peegeldab pigem rahva arusaama tõest. See on poliitilise mitte-identifikatsiooni representatsioon, mis, olles ohuks võimude "tõele", saab ühtlasi aluseks Prantsusmaa *rahva* kujunemisel Prantsusmaa *rahvuseks: prantslasteks*. Niisugust diskursuse transformatsioonilooget püüangi seletada *märgilülituse (sign-switch)* mõistega.

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