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O APOCALYPSE, APOCALYPSE! WHEREFORE ART THOU APOCALYPSE? OR,
SEMIOTICS IN STATES OF EXCEPTION

Master Thesis

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I have written the Master Thesis myself, independently. All of the other authors' texts, main viewpoints and all data from other resources have been referred to.

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Introduction

In my thesis, I underscore some consequences and limits arising from the mechanism of hegemony in articulating the concept of the post-apocalyptic. I challenge the fundamental conceptualization of the post-apocalyptic as resulting from the moment of undesired apocalyptic intrusion. My objective, however, is not to redefine the post-apocalyptic or strive for a more accurate definition of the post-apocalyptic. I rather seek to highlight the inadequacy of the general division of states which presumes a moment of apocalyptic intrusion. In other words, my argument is that the post-apocalyptic as such is incapable of delivering its conceptual promise. Specifically, to the extent that the concept can be considered an adequate conceptualization, it is a narrowly provincial conceptualization that is adequate only in the context of certain limited class interests. I share Walter Benjamin's position in noting that "[t]he tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin 2003: 392)

In this sense, society is already a fractured notion even prior to the so-called apocalyptic moment; society as such already fails to deliver its promises even under so-called normal circumstances. I use examples from the political philosophers John Rawls and Robert Nozick to show that even an ideal political configuration, as it were, depends on the active suppression of elements or subjects which do not fit the hegemonic ideological orientation. Society as such cannot keep its promise to everyone—rather, it marginalizes or excommunicates those who disturb its framework. We may observe, for example, that certain political subjects participate in the public sphere only insofar as they embody the role of Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer*.

I investigate the ideological mechanisms which sustain such discrepancies, with substantial reference to psychoanalytically informed philosophers including Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, and Slavoj Žižek. Psychoanalytic thought—particularly Lacanian pscyhoanalysis—is a useful supplement to the understanding of the hegemonic mechanism insofar as the symbolic order (or big Other) can itself be considered fractured (or “barred”) and thus unable to achieve full identity with its symbolic mandates; hegemony is a likewise fractured totality which

continually struggles toward domination, but is always disturbed by counter hegemonic potential which prevents complete totalization. Additionally, I consider ideology as a form translation insofar as the mediation of the translation process is rarely unnoticeable.

Of particular interest to counter hegemonic inquiry, I have recruited Juri Lotman's notion of autocommunication, which offers the insight that the self can be constantly transformed through the process of autocommunication, and thus inherently resists any hegemonic totalization. Such a theory of constantly evolving identity complements other theories of subjectivity, such as Judith Butler's theories on the performative aspect of gender insofar as there is no pre-performative ontology of gender.

Ultimately, my thesis takes a heavily theoretical approach because even so-called reality is highly mediated by ideological narratives. Empirical data can be interpreted or even discarded based on an ideological narrative. My argument, therefore, seeks to confront directly the mechanism of ideology.

1. Inadequacy of the apocalyptic concept

While my thesis makes repeated references to the post-apocalyptic, it is not primarily a thesis about post-apocalyptic literature in a narrow sense. Indeed, my thesis challenges the very legitimacy of the category of the post-apocalyptic. I argue that outside of a narrow interpretive community, the post-apocalyptic as such is incapable of fulfilling its conceptual promise. In positing hegemony as the limit in articulating the concept of the post-apocalyptic, my thesis can obviously be regarded as an offshoot of the idea that hegemony is the limit to any articulation—in other words, any articulation is necessarily hegemonically mediated. Hegemony, in this argument, follows Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's definition insofar as “[i]ts very condition is that a particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it. Such a form of ‘hegemonic universality’ is the only one that a political community can reach” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: x).

The choice to focus on the so-called post-apocalyptic—“so-called” because it necessarily a hegemonic (rather than essential) post-apocalyptic—is undertaken with the following goals. It is partly to demonstrate the social relevance of what might be termed high theory. This can only be achieved, however, through a reading which accounts for the inexorable fact of hegemonic mediation, through the post-apocalyptic becomes a proxy for describing a range of states which are not narrowly or undialectically post-apocalyptic; i.e. the post-apocalyptic as such cannot be reduced to a predefined set of empirically verifiable criteria, from which an endless catalog could subsequently be derived—it cannot be reduced to a structuralism that merely identifies archetypes such as deluge, plague, atomic or other catastrophic intrusions. While this may be an acceptable first step, by itself, such identifications presuppose too much the possibility of unproblematic or transparent articulations of identity. As with the articulation of the so-called post-apocalyptic, the articulations of its various instantiations are also limited by the mechanism of hegemony, and therefore cannot properly fulfill their claim to conceptual representation.

The conceptual inadequacy of the post-apocalypse can be observed insofar as the very definition of the apocalypse as a violent intrusion into the normal social order is an ideological gesture privileging a narrow experience of the normal social order that obtains only for specific social classes. The principle anxiety that sustains post-apocalyptic fiction is the threat of

apocalyptic intrusion which disturbs the normal order things; however, what exactly is meant by the distinction between the cataclysmic event and the regular state of affairs? Apocalyptic literature usually portrays the contrast by juxtaposing post-apocalyptic obscenities with pre-apocalyptic idylls. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, for example, an ambiguous holocaust not only leaves behind a desolate wasteland, but also solicits the worst depravities among the remnants of humanity. The specter of cannibalism constantly threatens the father and his son as they straggle precariously across the barren wastelands towards the coastal area which they hope to find more hospitable. This hellish depiction is punctuated by moments from the father's flashbacks which sketch the gradual breakdown of society after the catastrophic intrusion.

Crucially, even if the ideological message ostensibly says that man is inherently evil and requires the social order to keep in check, it nonetheless opens up a critical space of ambivalence since *the logic as such must admit that external conditions play a crucial role in the particular manifestation or realization of man*. The scandalous implication of the idea that it is somehow the apocalyptic event which elicits the degeneracy permeating the post-apocalyptic landscape is at once the embarrassingly irrepressible question: *If the social contract signifies protection from such travails, what kind of structural arrangement must have been in place to systematically produce the deviancy regularly distributed according to specific patterns within the “normal” pre-apocalyptic society*. One is compelled to reckon with the idea that the regular “delinquency” prior to social breakdown therefore appears to be the result of systematic production and regulation; society as such was always already compromised.

By delinquency, I refer not only to its hegemonic variant—i.e. the kind of action explicitly designated as criminal by law. In fact, the regular delinquency includes what Foucault refers to as delinquency of wealth, the legally sanctioned systemic oppression, exploitation, and colonization of the underclasses—which “is tolerated by the laws, and when it does find its way to the courts, it can depend upon the indulgence of the judges and the discretion of the press” (1995: 288). From this perspective the underclasses experience the de facto breakdown of social order as part of their regular existence; even absent the apocalyptic event, they are already systematically disenfranchised from access to justice and other social goods.

2. Fractured hegemony

Here we may take a closer look at the conceptual inadequacy I am describing. I have suggested that the conceptual division between the pre-apocalyptic state of normality and post-apocalyptic state of emergency is a division that privileges ruling class interests. Namely, the presupposition is that it is the intrusion of the apocalyptic event which disturbs the normal order of affairs. My project is to demonstrate, to the contrary, that the so-called normal order is only normal from a certain perspective; the proper functioning of this order is maintained by sacrificing and violating the class interests of those who do not share the same material or ideological perspective.

However, as a consequence of the mechanism of hegemony, it must be emphasized that I am not attempting to establish a normative criteria which could be used to determine the so-called “normal.” The mechanism of hegemony is such that extant hegemony is necessarily fractured, and operates as a process which struggles toward its completion or realization. In this sense, hegemony much be distinguished between simple or static domination, but before elaborating further, I will briefly outline my objective in this chapter.

Keeping in mind the fractured nature of hegemony, my first task is to show that any hegemonic system does not simply exist by itself or in a static configuration, but it rather exists by continually and actively suppressing counter-hegemonic forces or possibilities. Moreover, this suppression occurs in a way that is irreconcilable to all the parties involved—it is fundamentally violent. To this end, I draw on the political philosophy of Robert Nozick and John Rawls. My reason for juxtaposing these nominally antithetical philosophers is precisely to demonstrate that my discussion of hegemony is not concerned with or in support of specific orientations (political or otherwise)—the mechanism of hegemony obtains regardless of the hegemonic (political or other) orientation or configuration. I show that in both cases, the articulation of a “normal” situation (i.e. the ideal political configuration) depends on the forced suppression of counter hegemonic interests. Regardless of its particular orientation, the hegemony thus achieved is therefore unstable or fractured insofar as counter hegemonic potential continues to simmer below the calm or “normal” surface of things, and may erupt to challenge the hegemony at any moment.

After this initial exegesis, I move into more concrete examples of hegemonic concepts which appear totalizing, and are indeed often mobilized as if they represented stable totality, but which are in fact fractured and fragile constructions that fail to fully achieve its purported identity or content. The examples chosen include the interrelated concepts of race, species, and humanity; while the examples could have been infinitely expanded, these are chosen because they represent various totalizing frameworks through which societies may be unified on different scales. Against the presumption that it is an apocalyptic intrusion which disturbs the unity of these various totalities, I show that each of these concepts are already fractured and incapable of delivering the originally promised unity. Indeed, to the extent that they describe any totality, it is necessarily a limited totality which represent specific (class or other) interests.

Now I turn to Nozick and Rawls on their respective conceptions of justice, starting with Nozick, who notes that the fundamental thrust of the Marxist critique centers on the lack of access to the means of production—which is charitable enough, yet the real consequences of this are lost on Nozick. The making of the working class is not the systematic removal of access to the means of production simply to keep wages low, as Nozick seems to think—“Hence (the story goes) the worker is forced to deal with the capitalist. (And the reserve army of unemployed labor makes unnecessary the capitalists' competing for workers and bidding up the price of labor)” (Nozick 1999: 254)—but rather to force workers into a relation of wage labor proper.

The real thrust of Marxist critique is that wage labor is always already theft. This point escapes Nozick, as he insinuates after introducing a fantasy—and a non sequitur at that—of continuously rising wages in the private sector:

If there would not be a change in the level or the upward movement of wages in the private sector, are workers in the private sector, heretofore unexploited, now being exploited? Though they don't even know that the public sector is gone, having paid scant attention to it, are they now forced to work in the private sector and to go to the private capitalist for work, and hence are they ipso facto exploited? So the theory would seem to be committed to maintaining.(Nozick 1999: 255)

Here Nozick clearly sees without seeing—and instead of challenging the actual critique, he proceeds to directly deny the empirical reality of exploitation:

Whatever may have been the truth of the nonaccess view at one time, in our society large sections of the working force now have cash reserves in personal property, and there are also large cash reserves in union pension funds. These workers can wait, and they can invest. This raises the question of why this money isn't used to establish worker-controlled factories. Why haven't radicals and social democrats urged this?" (Nozick 1999: 255)

The obvious answer—which again eludes Nozick—is that even if workers receive relatively high wages, or, if they have some personal cash or property reserves, they do not become capitalists proper—insofar as “they can invest” (Nozick 1999: 255)—but moreover the fact of exploitation remains; in the Marxist interpretation, the level of wages a worker receives only reflects the amount of capital that must be invested to reproduce labor as such—higher wages (even if this allows for some personal reserves) only means that it costs more to train, retain, and replenish a worker performing the function in question. It emphatically does not mean that there is any less exploitation.

Given Nozick’s primary goal of justifying exploitation (Nozick’s only direct argument against the Marxist theory of exploitation is that “there will be exploitation in any society in which investment takes place for a greater future product” [Nozick 1999:253]), none of these misreadings are surprising; however, this apparently leads Nozick to continue the series of bizarre non-sequiturs, including a discussion the problematic of risk—ultimately claiming that a socialist system forces workers to accept involuntary risk—and advocates for a system which instead “allows persons to shift risks they themselves do not wish to bear, and allows them to be paid a fixed amount [which really means: capitalist wage labor], whatever the outcome of the risky processes” (Nozick 1999: 261). This solution is precisely the source of capitalist exploitation, but even if one tentatively accepts Nozick’s argument, the outcome is merely trading the risk of failure on the market with the certainty of being exploited by the capitalist through wage labor.

In fact, a capitalist system of wage labor does not shield the worker from catastrophe on the market, but it does shield the worker from sharing in the regular profits—it is unclear how this can be attractive to anyone but the capitalist. Nozick’s argument therefore opens up precisely the

opposite conclusion—one would rather share risk for the promise of potential gain instead of sophistically eliminating risk by surrendering to the certainty of systematic loss as a wage laborer.

At the end of the series of non sequiturs, Nozick finally demonstrates that he is not entirely oblivious to the central Marxist critique: “How can there be profits if everything gets its full value, if no cheating goes on” (Nozick 1999: 262)? But instead of answering the question, he abruptly concludes with the snide remark that “[. . .] one might be left with the view that Marxian exploitation is the exploitation of people's lack of understanding of economics” (Nozick 1999: 262). I cannot engage Nozick in further detail at this juncture, but to reiterate my argument, it may be said that Nozick's project as such is demonstrably an imaginary solution to a real contradiction that nonetheless persists in a displaced form after the Nozickian intervention.

Rawls' understanding of justice is different, but he pursues a likewise imaginary resolution that leaves the real contradiction untouched. For Rawls, justice can be distributed based on a static model—specifically, one can effectively “accumulate” the fruits of justice; when discussing the principles of justice, Rawls indicates that “the general conception of justice imposes no restrictions on what sort of inequalities are permissible; it only requires that everyone's position be improved” (Rawls 1999: 55 §11). This is only possible if the goods, i.e. justice, can resist the multiplying effect of inequalities—the standard by which justice is measured must remain constant despite changes in the degree of inequalities. To be clear, one may imagine a situation where freedom of expression is involved. The guarantee of the negative right to expression is insufficient to realize Rawls' conception of the right unless the right is also positive enforced—i.e. in order to say in good conscience that subjects have an equal right to free expression, the efficacy of the acts of expression must be equalized; everyone must have an equal chance of persuading the audience, otherwise, it becomes a right in procedure only. This requires neutralizing any advantage that might be gained from inequalities of status or wealth (neither of which, in principle, are prohibited under a Rawlsian framework). Given that Rawls does not propose neutralizing such differences on this basis, the conception of justice that obtains only as the fiction of procedural justice.

Such a fiction is the idea of a kernel of justice that exists beyond the possibility of corruption from outside. This same fiction informs Rawls' assessment of what he refers to as "natural goods" (Rawls 1999: 54 §11)—e.g. "Health and vigor, intelligence and imagination" (Rawls 1999: 54 §11)—which "although their possession is influence by the basic structure, they are not so directly under its control" (Rawls 1999: 54 §11). Here one finds a strange and willful denial of the obvious implications of the evidence: even though these so-called natural goods are only natural in a very limited and artificial way—as Rawls admits—he nonetheless insists on maintaining integrity of their "natural" essence. This allows for a theoretical and ideological consistency, but the resulting conception of justice becomes narrow and specific to particular class interests. In principle, this would not necessarily be objectionable, but an examination of Rawls' "formal constraints of the concept of right" (Rawls 1999: 112 §23)—i.e. "the alternatives open to [persons in the original position] and their knowledge of their circumstances are limited in various ways" (Rawls 1999: 112 §23)—indicates that he explicitly wishes the principles of justice to be both general and universal in application (Rawls 1999: 113 §23); this suggests that Rawls should rather be opposed to the partisan justice that obtains from his formulation.

The exegesis given by Rawls on "general" and "universal" suggest that these are properly concepts with narrow and limited purchase; I will not develop this here but will rather move on to an even more ideologically invested concept that Rawls stipulates as a condition for the principles of justice: "that of publicity, which arise naturally from a contractarian standpoint" (Rawls 1999: 115 §23), and which, incidentally, is also to say that there is nothing "natural" at all about any of the conditions which are supposed to obtain. Even granting that "the parties assume that they are choosing principles for a public conception of justice" (Rawls 1999: 115 §23), the critical question, and primary ideological blindness, remains—what does it mean to say something is public? Rawls uncritically assumes that the public as such designates an absolute and universal sphere which ultimately includes "everyone"—it is effectively a prelude to the "universality" of the principles of justice: "The point of the publicity condition is to have the parties evaluate conceptions of justice as publicly acknowledged and fully effective moral constitutions of social life" (Rawls 1999: 115 §23). Yet this solution already belies the ideological difficulty— whence the struggle to the proselytize the subjects of the world? Rawls

suggests that there is essential moral kernel within the subjects that only requires enlightenment to realize: principle of justice “must hold for everyone in virtue of their being moral person” (Rawls 1999: 114 §23)—hence the solution of “publicity” as a condition for the principles of justice. However, such a essential kernel is demonstrably a fiction, and it is rather the effort at publicity and proselytization that produces the semblance of a universal moral kernel.

To reiterate my argument, these examples from Nozick and Rawls demonstrate the fractured nature of hegemony, regardless of the specific orientation. Earlier I took Laclau’s and Mouffe’s explanation of hegemony as a starting point. Here I will further develop that point. Another way to understand hegemony is to think of it as a metonymic process whereby the part comes to represent the whole. However, the elided parts are never fully effaced, as Raymond Williams reminds us:

Hegemony is always an active process, but this does not mean that it is simply a complex of dominant features and elements. On the contrary, it is always a more or less adequate organization and interconnection of otherwise separated and even disparate meanings, values, and practices, which it specifically incorporates in a significant culture and an effective social order. (Williams 1977: 115)

Indeed, in both Nozick and Rawls, we observe that dominate features cannot fully efface the marginal ones. Certainly the attempt is made to establish dominance, but our reading reveals numerous possibilities where the suppressed elements threaten to reemerge and challenge the hegemony.

2.1. What race?

There are a number of other ways in which the hegemonic notion of normality prior to the apocalypse is already fractured. The organizing principle based on race is one way in which we can detect such fractures. We may illustrate this using examples which are ostensibly racially motivated. The following passage by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri reminds us that an ostensibly racial anxiety is somehow also an anxiety that goes beyond race:

The one who passes for white but is not poses the greatest anxiety for the white supremacist, and indeed the cultural and literary history of the United States is filled with angst created by “passing” and racial ambiguity. Such anxieties make clear, though, that white supremacy is not really about bodies, at least not in any simple way, but rather looks beyond the body at some essence that transcends it. (2009: 34)

In this case, racism is not strictly concerned with so-called racial characteristics. I would argue that the anxiety “beyond the body” is precisely the anxiety of class relations. However, a totalizing vision of race is certainly not coterminous with class, and in the following examples I will show that a racial framing is often a misnomer precisely because the issue at hand concerns class interests—within the purported totality of race, the experience is nonetheless heterogeneous, and correlates rather more closely with class. I argue, therefore, that race is yet another example of a fractured totality which is unable to deliver its conceptual promise.

Adorno and Horkheimer note, for example, that “bourgeois anti-Semitism has a specific economic purpose: to conceal domination in production” (2002: 142). The success of this deception depends precisely on a misrecognition of the meaning of anti-Semitism; both the victims and the executive agents are kept equally in the dark. This means that in reality the victims are not just limited to Jews—even though they are the explicitly declared target—On the other hand, “the workers, who are the real target, are understandably not told as much to their faces” (Adorno 2002: 137). Racism as such becomes a cover for class warfare.

The supposed beneficiaries of anti-Semitism occupy an obscured structural function: “The older adults to whom the call for Jewish blood has become second nature are as ignorant of the reason as the young people who have to shed it . The high-placed instigators, who know the reason, neither hate the Jews nor love their own followers” (Adorno 2002:140). The agents operating on the frontline of anti-Semitism are not privy to the real objective that sustains the racist enterprise—which is quite different from the ostensible objective. The ostensible benefits never quite materialize: “as they remain the dupes they secretly suspect themselves to be, their pitiful rational motive, the theft which was supposed to rationalize the deed, is finally discarded entirely, and the rationalization becomes truthful against its will” (Adorno 2002:140). The

frontline executors are deprived of the promised booty from the anti-Semitic enterprise without their explicit knowledge.

For a more recent exemplification of this deception, one may look at New York's zero-tolerance policy, the racist dimension of which is well described by Loïc Wacquant:

A painstaking statistical study of the use of the "stop-and-frisk" policy commissioned by the New York State Department of Justice as part of its judicial review found that African Americans made up one-half of the 175,000 individuals controlled during 1998, and fully two-thirds of those checked by the elite Street Crimes Unit. [...] Worse yet, the Street Crimes Unit, whose unofficial motto is "We Own the Street," arrested an average of 16.3 blacks for every one charged with an offense, compared to 9.6 for white arrestees. These disparities cannot be fully explained by crime-rate differentials between neighborhoods and groups: *they stem in good measure from the discriminatory application of the policy itself.* (2009: 25 emphasis mine).

Here the point is not to dispute the assertion of racial discrimination, but to add further specification that explicitly connects the practice with its class dimension. The modality of deception is to allow would-be racists to misunderstand their structural position as absolute beneficiaries of racist practice, while allowing the putative victims to understand the situation similarly—on a structural level this has the advantage of thwarting any potential class solidarity between would-be aggressors and supposed victims. Without denying the reality of the statistics, one should keep in mind Adorno and Horkheimer's model when assessing the data:

A poll conducted in March 1999 revealed that *the over-whelming majority of blacks in New York City consider the police to be a hostile and violent force* that poses a threat to them: 72 percent judged that officers make use of excessive force, and 62 percent that their acts of brutality against persons of color are common and habitual [...]. As for white New Yorkers, 58 percent and 87 percent of them declared exactly the opposite: they praised the mayor for his intolerance toward crime and they felt unanimously less threatened in their city. (Wacquant 2009: 26)

It is tempting to conclude, as Wacquant does, that ““Zero tolerance” thus presents two diametrically opposite faces, depending on whether one is the (black) target or the (white)

beneficiary [. . .]” (2009: 26), which is certainly true up to a point, but one should also be aware that this kind of conclusion is precisely the kind of deep-structural deception that already co-opts the resistance.

One of the effects of the zero tolerance policy is a deliberate short-circuiting of the criminal justice system. As Wacquant writes:

For precarious members of the lower class, relegated to the margins of the labor market and forsaken by America's "semi-welfare" state, who are the main target of the policy of "zero tolerance," the gross imbalance between the activism of the police and the profusion of means devoted to it, on the one hand, and the overcrowding of the courts and grievous shortage of resources that paralyzes them, on the other, has every appearance of an *organized denial of justice*. (2009: 27)

Here one may recall the properly class dimension of the racist enterprise. Although racial minorities are explicitly targeted, *an entire class within society is the victim*. Like the anti-Semites who are incited to discriminate for a promised booty that never properly transfers, white New Yorkers who think they are the beneficiaries of the racist zero tolerance policy are likewise being instrumentally swindled.

Systematic racism as such produces the condition in which a disenfranchised population is colonized by the privileged members of society; this is a class issue in which the normal, non-apocalyptic, situation already prohibits access to critical social goods (on discriminatory basis). The ideology of apocalyptic violence is to suppress this awareness that various disturbances—including racism—that disrupt the normal functioning of society are already happening on a global scale.

2.2. Humanity divided

To further illustrate the fractured and heterogeneous nature of the so-called normal situation, we may consider the notion of “humanity” insofar as it can serve as a baseline for defining states of normality in which every individual may be granted so-called universal human rights or other similar such characteristics that integrate individuals within a collective known as humanity. The immediate problem is then to determine the criteria for inclusion or exclusion within the

collective, and I argue that it is not only a process that is highly susceptible to political exigencies, but it is also a process which produces a internally inconsistent and fractured collective.

2.2.1.Human versus animal

If we take the distinction between human and animal as a starting point, I propose the following problematic: what is the point of distinguishing between human and animal? If there is a difference come there must be a test(s) which can be administered to that effect. But I will argue that such tests are easily ideologically inconsistent, especially if they are based on the premise that man is a symbolic animal. In this case, man's capacity to think symbolically, is also precisely the potential to avoid thinking at all. Namely, it is possible to outsource so much of the thinking that the only thing left for man to do is "react." It is often through a sleight-of-hand that withholds radical implications of man's symbolic capability that man is shown to exhibit a fundamental qualitative difference from animals. At this point I suggest a variation to my opening question—not only should we ask the purpose of distinguishing between human and animal, but we should also ask the purpose of maintaining the consistency within a specific species—i.e. can all humans be considered properly human, and likewise can all animals be considered properly animal? In the case of humans, how often are they able to effectively exercise their potential for symbolic thought?

Articulated thusly, this question comes dangerously close to an idea of racial hierarchy in which some humans might be considered superior while others are considered subhuman; to avoid any misunderstanding, let me therefore emphasize that race as such is itself a contingent category—e.g. there was a time not so long ago when “[t]he American rule of racial identity has generally been that one drop of black blood makes a black person” (Michaels 2006: 25). The thrust of my argument is that the concept of species or race is an unimaginative, an inconsistent, and an ultimately violent way of designating the individual organisms or subjects within a category. Vis-à-vis this constitutive violence which inaugurates the law governing both the boundaries between and the continuities within species, I begin with the crucial question of asking for whom such law exercises its authority.

2.2.2.What is human?

My argument heavily emphasizes the philosophical dimension because it is this aspect that determines how the empirical facts—even granting the veracity of their facticity—are utilized. In other words, the fact that man is a symbolic animal is secondary to the reason why man is designated as such. An important point to my argument is that man only becomes properly symbolic under specific circumstances; in other words, despite having symbolic potential, it is only solicited for specific purposes. We may examine this using Rousseau’s explanation of the rise of inequality within civil society. Of particular relevance are two points. First, Rousseau’s narrative charts the path of man’s assimilation of and imbrication in symbolic language. Second, Rousseau complicates the distinction not only between man and animal, but also between man and man.

In this narrative, man begins in a state little different from other animals, in the condition of “infant man” (Rousseau 2002: 114). “[S]uch was the life of an animal confined at first to pure sensations, and so far from harboring any thought of forcing her gifts from nature, that he scarcely availed himself of those which she offered to him of her own accord” (Rousseau 2002: 114). Eventually, whether by necessity or by accident, man would be compelled to overcome various obstacles within his environment: “He learned to surmount the obstacles of nature, to fight when necessary with other animals, to fight for his subsistence even with other men, or indemnify himself for the loss of whatever he found himself obliged to yield to a stronger” (Rousseau 2002: 114). This struggle to survive is thus the beginning of man’s integration and development within a symbolic system, but it is not yet sufficient distinguish him from other animals, as the following explanation will show.

At this point in the narrative, man is “gradually able to acquire some gross idea of mutual engagements and the advantage of fulfilling them, but this only as far as their present and obvious interest required” (Rousseau 2002: 116). Men as such were “strangers to foresight, and far from troubling their heads about a distant futurity, they gave no thought even to the morrow” (Rousseau 2002: 116). It is this aspect of immediacy that prevents man from fully realizing the potential of symbolic language. It is a condition which “scarcely required a more

refined language than that of crows and monkeys, which flock together almost in the same manner” (Rousseau 2002: 116). From a functional standpoint, man is thus far indistinguishable from other animals.

This situation would eventually change, as social intercourse became increasingly complicated, and “we may a little better discover how the use of speech was gradually established or improved in the bosom of every family, and we may likewise form conjectures concerning the manner in which divers particular causes may have propagated language, and accelerated its progress by rendering it every day more and more necessary” (Rousseau 2002: 117). Man’s capacity for and ultimate refinement of symbolic language corresponded to his moving away from the immediacy of earlier intercourse (comparable to animals), and adopting a properly symbolic mode of intercourse: “It became to the interest of men to appear what they really were not. To be and to seem became two very different things, and from this distinction sprang haughty pomp and deceitful knavery, and all the vices which form their train” (Rousseau 2002: 122). This, then, is the end to which man’s symbolic potential is called forth.

The detachment from immediacy made possible by symbolic language induced the radical transformation of and the genesis of concepts such as justice, morality, and law:

The society now formed and the relations now established among men required in them qualities different from those which they derived from their primitive constitution; that as a sense of morality began to insinuate itself into human actions, and every man, before the enacting of laws, was the only judge and avenger of the injuries he had received, that goodness of heart suitable to the pure state of nature by no means was suitable for the new society. (Rousseau 2002: 119)

Even materiality itself underwent transformation: “Riches, before the invention of signs to represent them, could scarcely consist in anything but lands and cattle, the only real goods which men can possess” (Rousseau 2002: 123). According to Rousseau, this total transformation of social relations and genesis of novel realities “was, or must have been the origin of society and of law, which gave new fetters to the weak and new power to the rich” (Rousseau 2002: 125). Here I would like to synthesize this point with the crucial question I raised in the opening: both the configuration of society and the boundaries between species depend on certain laws; importantly,

whose interests are privileged and promoted by the laws which sustain these configurations and boundaries?

2.2.3.Whose humanity?

In the case of society, Rousseau is quite clear that law and the configuration of society which obtains as such services the ruling class. I would likewise argue that the distinction between human and animal is ultimately a political gesture that disproportionately serves the interests of the ruling class. To explain this, we must supplement Rousseau's remark on the difference between "to be and to seem" with a note on the difference between "to be made and made to seem." In other words, the effects of man's symbolic deception is not limited to himself—one does not only represent oneself as another, but one can also make another appear as yet another. As an example, we may consider any reconfiguration of territorial sovereignty, which recalls the familiar saying "we didn't cross the border; the border crossed us." The similar example of nationalism demonstrates the class bias in the demarcation of boundaries. Benedict Anderson writes that the nation "is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 2006: 7). Under the symbolic structure of the nation, unequal people are "made to seem" equal regardless of whether the nation as such actually "makes" people equal. Or, we must again ask in what sense people can be considered equal; e.g. merely formal or procedural equality will disproportionately benefit those who already control the greatest amount of resources.

In questioning the distinction between human and animal, we are thus implicitly also questioning the conceptual consistency of a given species itself. Even within the same species, the status of an individual or subject (in more narrowly political sense) depends on political contingencies which are unrelated to actual empirically verifiable capabilities. We may juxtapose concrete examples of humans and animals to illustrate. For instance, regardless of the actual ability of a French San Domingo slave to think as a symbolic animal, he could not have escaped his politically determined fate:

For the least fault the slaves received the harshest punishment. In 1685 the Negro Code authorized whipping, and in 1702 one colonist, a Marquis, thought any punishment which demanded more than 100 blows of the whip was serious enough to be handed over to the authorities. Later the number was fixed at 39, then raised to 50. But the colonists paid no attention to these regulations and slaves were not unfrequently whipped to death [...] Whipping was interrupted in order to pass a piece of hot wood on the buttocks of the victim; salt, pepper, citron, cinders, aloes, and hot ashes were poured on the bleeding wounds. Mutilations were common, limbs, ears, and sometimes the private parts, to deprive them of the pleasures which they could indulge in without expense. Their masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied the boiling cane sugar over their heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gunpowder and blew them up with a match; buried them up to the neck and smeared their heads with sugar that the flies might devour them; fastened them near to nests of ants or wasps; made them eat their excrement, drink their urine, and lick the saliva of other slaves. (James 1989: 12-3)

This gruesome treatment bears uncanny resemblance to the similarly politically determined fate of certain animals described by Peter Singer. Singer mentions, for example, the monkey experiments conducted by Harlow and Suomi, who “had the ‘fascinating idea’ of inducing depression by ‘allowing baby monkeys to attach to cloth surrogate mothers who could become monsters’” (Singer 2009: 33), an experiment which ultimately ended in the use of real monkey mothers who were monsters. Some of these mothers simply ignored the baby monkeys, while others: “[...] were brutal or lethal. One of their favorite tricks was to crush the infant's skull with their teeth. But the really sickening behavior pattern was that of smashing the infant's face to the floor, and then rubbing it back and forth” (qtd. in Singer 2009: 34).

Singer also cites examples of administering electrical shock to animals, sometimes with fatal results: “O. S. Ray and R. J. Barrett, working in the psychology research unit of the Veterans Administration Hospital, Pittsburgh, gave electric shocks to the feet of 1,042 mice. They then caused convulsions by giving more intense shocks through cup-shaped electrodes applied to the animals' eyes or through clips attached to their ears” (Singer 2009: 42).

The use of animals in drug and chemical testing is no less disturbing:

Some substances cause such serious damage that the rabbits' eyes lose all distinguishing characteristics—the iris, pupil, and cornea begin to resemble one massive infection.

Experimenters are not obliged to use anesthetics, but sometimes they will use a small amount of topical anesthetic when introducing the substance, provided it does not interfere with the test. This does nothing to alleviate the pain that can result after two weeks of having oven cleaner in the eye. (Singer 2009: 54-5)

And as a final juxtaposition, while the San Domingo slave was forced to drink his urine against his will, animals have perversely been made to do the same in a semi-voluntary fashion. In the process of breeding calves for veal, a technique of controlled anemia is used to “[keep] the flesh pale and the calves—or most of them—on their feet long enough for them to reach market weight” (Singer 2009: 133). And “[a]lthough calves, like pigs, normally prefer not to go near their own urine or manure, urine does contain some iron. The desire for iron is strong enough to overcome the natural repugnance, and the anemic calves will lick the slats that are saturated with urine” (Singer 2009: 134).

The examples are meant to question the conceptual consistency of the category of human—a species that undoubtedly has symbolic though can nonetheless be abused—and to rehearse the well-worn point, I would reiterate the question, for whom is the boundary between human and animal meaningful? It is certainly quite meaningless—except as a deception to cover over the atrocities committed against others of the same species—for the slave and most other subaltern groups. Of course, the logic of my argument is intended to work both ways, and we could similarly ask about the conceptual consistency of the animal.

2.2.4. “Species” as sleight of hand

My critique thus suggests that before the problem of exploitation and inequality within the species is resolved, we should resist attempts to categorize based on species. Otherwise, we are merely authorizing a different kind of exploitation or inequality. As such, I argue that Singer’s optimism concerning animal rights is rather misplaced:

We need a much more fundamental change in the way we think about animals. The first sign that even this could happen came in 2008 in the form of a historic vote by a committee of the Spanish parliament that declared an animal could be granted the legal status of a person with rights. (Singer 2009: xiii)

More cynically, I would say that this is simply a way of bringing animals into the fold of human exploitation—an expansion or intrusion of the properly human mode of exploitation towards the animal.

For example, via Rousseau we have observed the use of man's symbolic potential as a means of exploitation by assimilation within society and its corresponding laws. Nietzsche articulates this process as “[t]he breeding of an animal which is entitled to make promises” (Nietzsche 2008: 39). Taken alone, the engineering of this ability to make promises simply changes man's relation to the law and authorizes different forms of exploitation, for example:

The proletariat created by the breaking-up of the bands of feudal retainers and by the forcible expropriation of the people from the soil, this free and rightless proletariat could not possibly be absorbed by the nascent manufactures as fast as it was thrown upon the world. On the other hand, these men, suddenly dragged from their accustomed mode of life, could not immediately adapt themselves to the discipline of their new condition.

They were turned in massive quantities into beggars, robbers and vagabonds, partly from inclination, in most cases under the force of circumstances. Hence at the end of the fifteenth and during the whole of the sixteenth centuries, a bloody legislation against vagabondage was enforced throughout Western Europe. The fathers of the present working class were chastised for their enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers. *Legislation treated them as 'voluntary' criminals, and assumed that it was entirely within their powers to go on working under the old conditions which in fact no longer existed.* (Marx 1976: 896 emphasis mine)

We can see that the refined usage of man's symbolic capabilities to invent a sophisticated legal apparatus also engenders categories such as private property, contract, agency, etc. all of which are combined to exploit the underclasses. Recalling our earlier point on “made to be,” we again see that involuntary acts are “made to be” voluntary and that entire classes of people are “made.”

Such a range of men surely problematizes the notion of human as a coherent or consistent concept, and giving animals human rights as such is merely to authorize their exploitation as bearers of these “rights.”

2.2.5.Beyond “species”—philosophical and empirical considerations

I have focused thus far on the philosophical aspect of the problematic because empirical facts must narrativized before they acquire purpose or meaning—in this case, the fact that man has the potential for symbolic language only acquires its distinctive significance in certain social configurations; even within the same species, the meaning of this symbolic capacity is radically divided; for some it is the power to subjugate others within the species, while for others it is for themselves to be enslaved. But even on an empirical level, the distinction between human and animal is problematic to maintain.

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Thomas Sebeok insists that it is "scientifically inaccurate, as well as, even metaphorically, highly misleading to speak of a 'language' of animals" (Sebeok 1990: 41) because:

The code underlying any system of animal communication differs crucially from any language in so far as the former is simply tantamount to the total repertoire of messages at the disposal of the species, whereas a true language is always imbued by the structural principle that linguists have called 'double articulation' or 'duality of patterning,' involving a rule governed device for constructing a potentially infinite array of larger units (e.g. sentences, in the so-called natural languages) out of a finite, indeed, very small and stable assembly of smaller ones (viz., the uniformly binary distinctive features).

(Sebeok 1990: 40)

However, insofar as the rule for combination of units is concerned, Donald Griffin contends that our knowledge of animal communication is so limited that it is epistemologically impossible to discern significant combinations:

Here, again, the applicability of the criterion depends upon the size of unit considered. Bee dances or other forms of communication behavior can easily be subdivided into individual elements, such as single muscle contractions, which by themselves have no communicative significance. Human language obviously achieves a great deal of its enormous importance by use of compound and complex combinations of small elements; *but we do not know enough about animal communication to judge the degree to which*

combinations, as opposed to individual signals, may be important. (Griffin 1981: 84
emphasis mine)

This aspect of “duality” is part of a list of criteria meant to qualitatively distinguish humans animals. It stands out by being one of the few criteria that might be tenable, but only if one can overcome certain epistemological limits. The other criterion is “reflectiveness, the ability to communicate about the communication system itself” (Griffin 1981: 84-5). Again, Griffin points out the epistemological limit: “yet we should ask ourselves whether, if it does occur in animals, any of our available methods of investigation would suffice to disclose it” (Griffin 1981:85).

We should supplement this rejoinder with the comment: is meta-language proper possible even in humans? Specifically, is it possible to separate meta-language from ordinary language? According to Slavoj Žižek:

Metalanguage is not just an Imaginary entity. It is Real in the strict Lacanian sense — that is, it is impossible to occupy its position. But, Lacan adds, it is even more difficult simply to avoid it. *One cannot attain it, but one also cannot escape it.* That is why the only way to avoid the Real is to produce an utterance of pure metalanguage which, by its patent absurdity, materializes its own impossibility that is, a paradoxical element which, in its very identity, embodies absolute otherness, the irreparable gap that makes it impossible to occupy a metalanguage position. (Žižek 1989: 157)

A very brief explanation of Lacanian terminology will help explain this passage. The Imaginary can be seen as the thoughts which emanate from the subject itself; this is to be contrasted with the Symbolic or the Other, which can understood as a language or structure imposed from without. It is therefore understandable to see ordinary language as the Symbolic, and metalanguage as the Imaginary, as a counterpoint to the Symbolic. The Real, on the other hand, is that which resists symbolization and cannot be integrated into either the Imaginary or Symbolic registers—it is therefore an impossible position to properly occupy insofar as it is epistemologically impossible to confirm whether the space is actually occupied or even to delineate the actual space that would comprise the Real.

The crucial insight is that insofar as one can speak of a metalanguage position, does not all language already occupy that position? In other words, properly speaking, there is no separate

space for engaging in metalanguage—it would be an impossible task to isolate a space of metalanguage simply because we already perform the tasks of metalanguage through ordinary language. To put it in more concrete terms, when I construct my discourse in ordinary language, I already take into account the potential ambiguities or difficulties of expression and interpretation. From this perspective, any animal communication likewise already communicates based on a metalanguage—that is, if we insist on using this terminology.

If we interpret metalanguage as novel thought, and ordinary language as mere reaction, we can see that the following passage by Tim Ingold operates on a similar assumption:

Morgan in his time, and Griffin in ours, are suggesting that the distinction is not so absolute—that bees and beavers also plan things out, or envisage ends in advance of their realization. I do not think they do; *but more than that, I do not think human beings do either, except intermittently, on those occasions when a novel situation demands a response that cannot be met from the existing stock-in-trade of habitual behaviour patterns.* (Ingold 1994: 97 emphasis mine)

While Ingold emphasizes the lack of thought in habitual behavior patterns, I would say it is not so much a lack of thought as it is an outsourcing of thought onto the pre-packaged behavior patterns. In other words, thought is always present, and the separation of novel thought from habitual behavior patterns is redundant in the same sense that the distinction between language and metalanguage is redundant. At the same time, it is worth stressing that thought can indeed be displaced or externalized—it does not have to originate from or be localized in a single individual; e.g. eduction, culture, etc.

As I conclude, I will follow Cary Wolfe as a model for synthesizing philosophical and empirical research. Ultimately, Wolfe problematizes the distinction between human and nonhuman subjects by interrogating the philosophy of language that structures, regulates, or otherwise generates this distinction, insofar as it can be said to exist at all. Wolfe uses the following example from Lacan to illustrate one way by which this distinction is maintained: The human, as it were, is “that being, alone among the living, who can lie by telling the truth. [On the other hand], The animal, in Lacan’s terms, can pretend, but not pretend to pretend—only the human, as ‘subject of the signifier,’ can do that” (Wolfe 2009: 39). Here the “subject of the

signifier” is crucial—citing Derrida, Wolfe notes two points: “(1) the assertion that animals, however sophisticated they may be, can only “react” but not “respond” to what goes on around them. And this is so because (2) the capacity to respond depends on the ability to wield concepts or representations, which is in turn possible only on the basis of language” Command of language is thus positions man as the “subject of the signifier.” This is juxtaposed with Dennett’s formulation

No matter how close a dog’s ‘concept’ of cat is to yours extensionally (you and the dog discriminate the same sets of entities as cats and noncats), it differs radically in one way: the dog cannot consider its concept. . . . No languageless mammal can have a concept of snow in the way we can, because a languageless mammal has no way of considering snow “in general” or “in itself.” (Wolfe 2009: 40)

However, Wolfe points out that this line of argument is based on a exceptionalism of human language, and recent research by Noam Chomsky and other researchers suggests that with regard to speech there is “a much stronger continuity between animals and humans [. . .] than previously believed” (Wolfe 2009: 41). This new research is based on the contention that even if we distinguish between language in the broad sense and narrow sense, “linguistic uniqueness in this second sense “must be a testable hypothesis, not an assumption rooted in premises of human exceptionalism.” Most of the recent experimental data, however, does not support human exceptionalism.

Philosophically, Wolfe introduces a further critique from Derrida. The animal’s inability to speak is not simply an objective fact, but it is also taken to suggest an inherent lack within the animal. The lack of language as such “derives from the properly phenomenological impossibility of speaking the phenomenon” (Wolfe 2009: 42). This lack is fundamentally an inability to “respond,” according to Derrida; more specifically, to respond is “to respond with a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction” (Wolfe 2009: 42).

Wolfe contends that this line of thinking is untenable and is sustained only by metaphysical assumptions of an essential human difference from animals. Again citing Derrida, Wolfe argues that the processes—presumably some kind of thought process, the ability to command language or to exercise intentionality—all which supposedly distinguishes man from animal, can neither

be isolated nor tested. For instance, how can we reliably distinguish between on the one hand pretense and on the other hand the pretense of pretense?

At this point Wolfe invokes a more radical contention, again citing Derrida, that it is “less a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power . . . than of asking whether what calls itself human has the right to rigorously attribute to man . . . what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the pure, rigorous, indivisible concept, as such, of that attribution” (Wolfe 2009: 43)—in short, can man truly claim to be the “subject of the signifier?”

Overall, I am sympathetic to Wolfe argument, even though I have some reservations about his reading of Lacan (which is entirely paraphrased from Derrida). I will conclude by offering an actual reading of passages from Lacan. Lacan’s position on man as a symbolic animal—or, to use Derrida’s expression, a “subject of the signifier”—may be interpreted thusly: while it is true that it distinguishes man from animal, it is not a mark of superiority. If anything, it is at the very least a heavy burden. In *Seminar III*, Lacan compares man with an octopus, but says “I’m not in the process here of distinguishing man from the animal, since what I teach you is that in man, too, memory is something that goes round in circles. However, it’s made up of messages, it’s a succession of little signs of plus or minus [. . .]” (Lacan 1993: 152)—in short, a symbolic order. But at the same time, we should also keep in mind that Lacan says “I emphasize this. The symbolic order has to be conceived as something superimposed, without which no animal life would be possible for this misshapen subject that man is” (1993: 96). In other words, man is enchainied by the symbolic order. As such, man is not in control of language, it is rather the opposite. Is this not similar to the idea conveyed when one ask whether man is truly—as Derrida put it—“subject of the signifier?”

2.3. Have we reached the apocalypse?

In our present-day world of global capitalism, Jeffrey Sachs describes the precarious plight of one billion people:

If economic development is a ladder with higher rungs representing steps up the path to economic well-being, there are roughly one billion people around the world, one sixth of

humanity, who live as the Malawians do: *too ill, hungry, or destitute even to get a foot on the first rung of the development ladder*. These people are the "poorest of the poor," or the "extreme poor" of the planet. They all live in developing countries (poverty does exist in rich countries, but it is not extreme poverty). Of course, not all of these one billion people are dying today, but they are all fighting for survival each day. If they are the victims of a serious drought or flood, or an episode of serious illness, or a collapse of the world market price of their cash crop, the result is likely to be extreme suffering and perhaps even death. Cash earnings are pennies a day. (Sachs 2005:18 emphasis mine)

Somehow, the enormity of this phenomenon is not sufficient condition to categorize the condition of one sixth of humanity as a post-apocalyptic situation—despite the fact that “they are all fighting for survival each day” (Sachs 2005:18); almost as if to imply they have not already been victimized, Sachs adds “if they are the victims of a serious drought [. . .] the result is like to be extreme [. . .].”

I especially want to compare the last example from Sachs with a post-apocalyptic classic, *Level 7*. In *Level 7*, we find a sense of utter hopelessness in a story where people are selected to go to an underground facility in which everyone has a function to perform, and the most important task of pushing a button to launch a nuclear counter attack is given to a soldier designated only as X-127. The facility offers protection from nuclear attack but only the deep levels are truly secure. In the end, it turns out that the facility is not so secure, and everybody dies, even X-127, in the deepest level, level 7. For the purposes of my argument, I want to point out two things. First is the total despair, but moreover, the people chosen for the upper levels of the underground facility have the explicit secondary function of dying—by design those parts do not offer true protection, but only the illusion thereof.

If we put Roshwald’s Level 7 together with Sachs’ description, we can see that both systems, the underground facility and the world economy—or what Sachs refers to as the economic development ladder—are systems which intentionally create conditions of despair, and put people into what is similarly a post-apocalyptic situation deprived of any guarantee of survival. Much like those chosen for the upper levels of the facility in *Level 7*, those on (or not even on) the low rungs of the economic development ladder, are intentionally placed in a situation of

hopelessness. The point is that we do not need a so-called post-apocalyptic event to induce what is effectively a post apocalyptic situation—the economic system does this by design, and as such enforces and regulates this condition.

These examples demonstrate that the post-apocalyptic intrusion is only properly post-apocalyptic from a “normal” standpoint of the ruling class—only when there is a violation of the daily life of the ruling class, even though for much of the world’s population, whether in highly developed or underdeveloped parts of the world, these anxieties are not hypothetical but are in fact already the everyday reality. As Walter Benjamin puts it, “[t]he tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ’state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (Benjamin 2003: 392).

3. An anatomy of ideology

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, totalities which purport to represent various social amalgamations are generally incapable of delivering their conceptual promise; namely, there is a tendency to over-universalize what is in fact a limited outlook. It is clear, therefore, that the mere empirical reality, so to speak, does little to prevent an inaccurate narrative from developing. Moreover, it is also clear that even the so-called reality is already mediated by ideological narratives. With this in mind, the present chapter is concerned with the ideological mechanisms that enable and sustain such discrepant conceptualizations.

Here I briefly explain my approaches. This first part of this chapter comprises psychoanalytically inflected philosophy. A Lacanian psychoanalytic framework is especially suited to explain the process of hegemony since the symbolic order (or big Other) can be considered fractured (or “barred”—similar to the fractured and incomplete totality of hegemony—and thus unable to achieve full identity with its symbolic mandates. The second part attempts to see ideology as a form of translation insofar as translation is rarely a transparent process, and thus causes a contamination of meaning in the process; hegemony, as we have seen, likewise cannot make a transparent transfer of its conceptual promises—somewhere in between the promise is broken.

3.1. Ideology and psychoanalytic philosophy

Resisting ideology cannot be accomplished simply by injecting or excavating more data to represent “reality.” It should be clear that the data is always already compromised by a “fictional” operation. One may recall the scene from the film adaptation of L. Ron Hubbard’s *Battlefield Earth* in which the alien colonizer Terl attempts to "gain leverage" over captive human slaves--otherwise known as Man-animals--by ascertaining man's favorite food. Terl deliberately allows a few to escape (including the protagonist) in order to observe human feeding habits in the wild. The escapees run for three days without stopping to eat and when they finally feel safe enough to rest, they are so hungry they eat rats—raw. All of this happens under the "covert" surveillance of the self-congratulating alien captors, believing that they have gained crucial insight into human feeding preferences. It is obvious that there is nothing "covert" or

even neutral about this operation—the apparent "preference" for raw rat is constituted precisely by the very act of subterfuge—the “empirical data” as such is already compromised.

Far from being just an idiosyncratic absurdity endemic to fantastic aliens, this type of epistemological flaw undergirds, among other fictions, the fable of homo economicus:

The whole discourse on consumption, whether learned or lay, is articulated on the mythological sequence of the fable: a man, ‘endowed’ with needs which ‘direct’ him towards objects that ‘give’ him satisfaction. Since man is really never satisfied (for which, by the way, he is reproached), the same history is repeated indefinitely, since the time of the ancient fables. (Baudrillard 2001: 39)

Homo economicus as such is a predictable animal that operates on “fixed” principles, namely:

1. Pursue his own happiness without the slightest hesitation;
2. Prefer objects which provide him with the maximum satisfaction. (Baudrillard 2001: 39)

The predictive efficacy of the fable depends on certain interconnected preconditions which must work in tautological concert with the predicted outcome: the particular rationality that determines preference, needs, and satisfaction must combine with an autonomous subjective agency which manifests as consumer.

However, the self-referentiality of this circuit presents a significant problem. So-called needs can be artificially created—though it is perhaps more accurate to say that there is always already something artificial about needs. On a theoretical level, Baudrillard reminds us, for example, that the consumer and advertising are co-constitutive:

Advertising, like GARAP, is mass society, which, with the aid of an arbitrary and systematic sign, induces receptivity, mobilizes consciousness, and reconstitutes itself in the very process as the collective. Through advertising mass society and consumer society continuously ratify themselves. (2001: 13)

Badiou’s conception of the truth reflects precisely an awareness of this epistemological dishonesty: “I shall call ‘truth’ (a truth) the real process of a fidelity to an event that which this fidelity produces in the situation [...]. Essentially, a truth is the material course traced, within the situation, by the eventual supplementation” (2001: 42). Not only is truth unavailable prior to

observation, but the process of observation is imbricated with the creation of the truth. Truth as such depends on the event, but the event as such only exists through the fidelity of the subject. While it may thus seem that the subject is ultimately the decider of truth, it is not entirely the case insofar as the subject as bearer of fidelity necessarily carries an excess component or appendage.

The subject as such is “the bearer [...] of a fidelity, the one who bears a process of truth” (Badiou 2001: 43). “Truth” is a process insofar as “truth proceeds in the situation, and nowhere else—there is no heaven of truths” (Badiou 2001: 42-3). It is through this process that the subject called into existence or “induced” as Badiou puts it. The subject thus serves as a vessel for a calling in excess of his own self-awareness, “simultaneously himself, nothing other than himself, a multiple singularity recognizable among all others, and in excess of himself, because the uncertain course [...] of fidelity passes through him, transfixes his singular body and inscribes him, from within time, in an instant of eternity” (Badiou 2001: 45). The excess, then, is what constitutes the subject as a bearer of fidelity to the event. It is a disinterested interest whereby the subject is “suspended, broken, annulled; dis-interested. For [the subject] cannot, within the fidelity to fidelity that defines ethical consistency, take an interest in [himself], and thus pursue [his] own interests. All [his] capacity for interest, which is [his] own perseverance in being, has poured out into [the event . . .]” (Badiou 2001: 49).

We may supplement Badiou’s description of the multiple roles of the subject with Althusser’s formulation of ideology. According to Althusser, “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects” which means “individuals are always-already subjects. *Hence individuals are 'abstract' with respect to the subjects which they always-already are*” (1971: 175-6 emphasis mine). This means that the function of the individual is separate from the function of the subject. The subject as such is an embodiment of interpellation, “even before he is born” (Althusser 1971: 176). Indeed, regarding an unborn child, “it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father’s Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived” (1971: 176).

Badiou makes a similar distinction insofar the subject which is the bearer of fidelity “does not overlap with the psychological subject, nor even with the reflexive subject (in Descartes's sense) or the transcendental subject (in Kant's sense)” (2001: 43). These other subjects are not structurally predetermined through a process of interpellation (though they are nonetheless susceptible to determination *as individuals* in the Althusserian sense); their subjectivity is rather coterminous with their capacity to preside over what Badiou refers to as “objective situations” (2001: 41) or “the ordinary state of relation to the other” (2001: 41).

Badiou's situational truth should be supplemented with Žižek's exegesis of the temporality of the truth insofar even the situation as such is necessarily retroactively recognized. The temporality of the production of truth and subjectivity underscores a hermeneutic problematic. One question is whether communication as it is putatively understood (in which interlocutors transparently send, receive, and decipher messages) is possible as all, especially since Lacan contends that “the world — as a given whole of objects — [does] not exist, [and] neither do language and subject exist” (Žižek 1989: 72). But as Žižek points out, the obvious question is “If the world and language and subject do not exist, what does exist; more precisely what confers on existing phenomena their consistency” (1989: 72)? According to Žižek, the Lacanian answer is precisely “symptom” (1989: 72). Symptom as such immediately poses an hermeneutic solicitation: “the symptom can not only be interpreted but is, so to speak, already formed with an eye to its interpretation: it is addressed to the big Other presumed to contain its meaning” (Žižek 1989: 73). This degree of interpretive imbrication is arguably greater than normally presumed under many (though certainly not all) communicational situations. However, we are thus compelled to reappraise even putatively transparent communication (in which the message might be considered straightforward or in which the medium, from interlocutor to technological interface, is not presumed to contaminate the message). The fundamental question is whether communication occurs in language (and thus necessarily subject to its structural limitations) or through language (as disembodied thought with infinite translatability).

The Lacanian insight suggests that language (insofar as it can be referred to as such) is necessarily an actively constitutive element in the process of communication—it does not allow the perfect reconstitution of an original message: “As soon as we enter the symbolic order, the

past is always present in the form of historical tradition and the meaning of these traces is not given; it changes continually with the transformations of the signifier's network" (Žižek 1989: 56). But in order to bring out what Žižek refers to as Lacan's anti-poststructural emphasis, it should perhaps be said that not only can the original message not be reconstituted perfectly, the original message as such does not even exist—at least insofar as it fundamentally resists symbolization.

In other words, it is not that we are getting the wrong message, it is rather that we are only ever getting the message we create and retroactively attribute to the various traces supposedly comprising the message. It may help to recall Lacan's concept of foreclosure: "whenever we have a symbolic structure it is structured around a certain void, it implies the foreclosure of a certain key-signifier" (Žižek 1989: 73). Attempting to integrate a message into a symbolic structure is fundamentally impossible—the key-signifier is missing—we can never quite reach the essence that interpretation is supposed to draw out. The void characterizes the Real insofar as:

The Real is nothing but this impossibility of its inscription: the Real is not a transcendent positive entity, persisting somewhere beyond the symbolic order like a hard kernel inaccessible to it, some kind of Kantian 'Thing-in- itself--in itself it is nothing at all, just a void, an emptiness in a symbolic structure marking some central impossibility. (1989: 195)

We may recall Lacan's point that "symbolic representation always distorts the subject, that it is always a displacement, a failure--that the subject cannot find a signifier which would be 'his own'" (Žižek 1989: 198), to which it must be supplemented that the Lacanian insight here is not that the subject has some "interior richness of meaning which always exceeds its symbolic articulation" (Žižek 1989: 198) but rather that "the surplus of signification masks a fundamental lack" (Žižek 1989: 198) and that "the subject of the signifier is precisely this lack, this impossibility of finding a signifier which would be 'its own': the failure of its representation is its positive condition" (Žižek 1989: 198). It seems, then, it is precisely the void as such that allows the perpetual investment and reinvestment of signification; were the void actually occupied by some transcendent essence (or "interior richness"), there would be no possibility for such

fluidity. The subject is therefore always already contaminated by this process of signification: “the subject of the signifier is a retroactive effect of the failure of its own representation” (1989: 198).

The lack of center or the condition of perpetual supplementarity does not mean that the interpretive endeavor is destined to be fruitless—it is precisely part of a process “interpretation of symptoms and going through fantasy” (Žižek 1989: 74). The element of enjoyment complicates this process and requires a reformulation of symptom as sinthome, but ultimately one must understand: “you, the subject, must identify yourself with the place where your symptom already was; in its ‘pathological’ particularity you must recognize the element which gives consistency to your being” (Žižek 1989: 75). We see in this process an outsourcing or externalization of subjectivity. As subjects, we are therefore not self-contained and complete, but rather constituted through “the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world” (Žižek 1989: 75).

3.2. Ideology as translation

Insofar as ideology operates as a perpetual investment and reinvestment of signification, we can also understand ideology as a form of translation. As such, it is a continuous process which does not admit access to the source (so-called reality), except by way of ideological symptoms, which can only be actively and continuously interpreted

Louis Althusser offers an instructive analysis of ideology. There is a layer of mediation that separates ideology from false consciousness--in other words, ideology can be understood as false consciousness only insofar as it does not directly signify the false consciousness itself, but rather a mediated version thereof.

According to Althusser, “[ideology] represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1971: 162). It is easy to read the “imaginary” merely as a non-correspondence with reality; however, Althusser points out a problem with this interpretation: “why do men ‘need’ this imaginary transposition of their real conditions of existence in order to ‘represent to themselves’ their real conditions of existence” (1971: 163)? In

other words, why is ideology not a direct representation of reality? We will see that this is ultimately an epistemological impossibility.

Althusser explains why the obvious explanations are incorrect: The first is “the existence of a small number of cynical men who base their domination and exploitation of the ‘people’ on a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to enslave their minds by dominating their imaginations” (Althusser 1971:163). The second is “the material alienation in the conditions of existence of men themselves” (Althusser 1971: 163-4). Both of these interpretations are unsatisfactory, according to Althusser, since they “take literally the thesis which they presuppose, and on which they depend, i.e. that what is reflected in the imaginary representation of the world found in an ideology is the conditions of existence of men, i.e. their real world” (1971: 164). Herein lies the epistemological impossibility which Althusser’s addresses with his real question: “why is the representation given to individuals of their (individual) relation to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence and their collective and individual life necessarily an imaginary relation” (1971: 165)? The mechanism of ideology already recognizes the impossibility of identity between the signifier and the signified.

In this sense, the imaginary relationship (as opposed to a real relationship) that ideology represents can be understand as a supplement in the Derridean framework: “The overabundance of the signifier, its supplementary character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be supplemented” (Derrida 2005: 367). The signified can never be adequately represented, and as such the signifier can only perpetually expand its signification without ever reaching the signified.

3.2.1.The misnomer of original versus translation

Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of translation is helpful in this regard: “Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when a work, in the course of its survival, has reached the age of its fame. Contrary, therefore, to the claims of bad translators, such translations do not so much serve the works as owe their existence to it. *In them the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding*” (Benjamin 1996: 255). In this sense, the original only attains its full meaning after translation and

retranslation, and it does not have a privileged status that can be separated from translation. Indeed, as Torop observes “[i]t might be said that culture is a permanent process of intersemiotic translation, and even usual interlinguistic translation proves to belong to the possible world of semiosis” (Torop 2000: 96). If culture is a “source text,” it is a dynamic text that constantly undergoes translation, and does not have a consistency outside of this process—there is no original or untranslated culture.

In this sense, the so-called original is a mirage that can never be grasped. Especially when we consider that the reader of translation is one who cannot read the original text for some reason (lack of access or ability). The original as such becomes a mythical object which supposedly exists and which somehow authorizes the translation, but which existence can never be verified (otherwise there would be no need for the translation). If we accept the distinction between original and translation, it follows that we must contend with the issues of difference, authenticity and originality, etc. While distinction between original and translation recognized that difference is also a sign of similarity or sameness insofar as the translation meant to reproduce the original without becoming the original, it must admit that this distinction cannot be discerned simply by looking at either the original or translation itself.

We may illustrate this using Lotman’s notion of autocommunication: In the “I–I” system the bearer of the information remains the same but the message is reformulated and acquires new meaning during the communication process. *This is the result of introducing a supplementary, second, code; the original message is recoded into elements of its structure and thereby acquires features of a new message.* (Lotman 1990: 22 emphasis mine)

Here we observe that the so-called original can undergo radical transformation in meaning even when the message remains ostensibly the same. The difference is established through the introduction of a secondary or external code; it is this code which establishes the relationship or distinction between the original and translated message, and not the ontological consistency of the the so-called original or translation itself—messages become original or translation only in specific relational circumstances.

This artificiality of the distinction that separates original from translation is not limited to linguistic messages such as those which might occur in autocommunication. We find a similar

problematic in art generally. In *On Poesy or Art*, Coleridge raises question of authenticity. Variations on the concepts of “imitation” and “copy” appear at multiple points throughout the Coleridgean oeuvre, with “imitation” as the preferred method of presentation; his position in this essay is no different but with a particularly forceful indictment of “copying,” which is seen as fundamentally reprehensible. Coleridge offers a philosophical distinction between the two concepts: an imitation presupposes difference while a copy attempts to feign similarity. In his own words, “you set out with a supposed reality and are disappointed and disgusted with the deception; whilst, in respect to a work of genuine imitation, you begin with an acknowledged total difference, and then every touch of nature gives you the pleasure of an approximation to truth” (2002: 362). The key to successful imitation lies in a deliberate and palpable coexistence of the “two constituent elements [of] likeness and unlikeness, or sameness and difference” (2002: 362). Here we might make a comparison with Lotman:

Art is born not from the “I-s/he” system or the “I-I” system. It uses both systems and oscillates in the field of structural tension between them. The aesthetic effect arises when the code is taken for the message and the message as a code, i.e. *when a text is switched from one system of communication to another while the audience keeps awareness of both.* (Lotman 1990: 32 emphasis mine)

Different codes must coexist in Lotman’s scheme to produce the aesthetic effect, and in Coleridge we may say these are precisely the codes of “likeness and unlikeness” or “sameness and difference.” Coleridge similarly insists on the simultaneity of codes: “in all genuine creations of art there must be a union of these disparities” (2002: 362).

There is emphasis on a quality which transcends pure replication of formal characteristics. As Coleridge points out in *Biographia Literaria*, this quality manifests itself through “an imperceptible infusion of the author’s own knowledge and talent” (2002: 348). It appears, then, that his use of the term “imitation” implies a sense of creative generativeness. Indeed, he goes on to explain that “if [the genius] were to begin by mere painful copying, he would produce masks only, not forms breathing life” (2002: 363).

The difference between imitation and copying is the acknowledgement or denial of the mediatory process. Further to illustrate this point, it is necessary to return to the concept of

authenticity. Coleridge's conception of mediation requires the existence of the "original" which can be imitated (or copied). The stipulation that in all imitation the two elements of likeness and unlikeness must coexist (2002: 362), and the contrast between "supposed reality" and "acknowledged total difference" (2002: 62), can only exist through the concept of originality or authenticity. The act of copying, as defined by Coleridge, destroys the concept of originality. The copy represents a "likeness to nature without any check of difference" (2002: 362), or, a simulation which lacks "motion and [. . .] life" (2002: 362), the result of which is "disgusting" and "loathsome" in proportion to the degree of verisimilitude with the "original" (2002: 362). The phenomenon that by the copy "we are shocked as by a falsehood, every circumstance of detail, which before induced us to be interested, making the distance from truth more palpable" (2002: 362) describes the effacement of the originality and authenticity.

What is objectionable about the copy is the exactitude of resemblance to the original in "every circumstance of detail" (Coleridge 362). Walter Benjamin discusses the concomitant appearance of this kind of effect with the rise of mechanical reproduction: "The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility. Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so vis-à-vis technical reproduction" (1968: 222). Again, the existence of the copy is based on the possibility of distinction from the original; with the rise of technical reproduction, the authority of the original is destroyed. The kind of technical reproduction that Benjamin refers to is film and photography, the ultimate manifestation of the simulative effects Coleridge talks about with regard to the act of copying. The masking of the mediatory process effected by this mode of reproduction radically unsettles the foundations of ontological understanding that Coleridge is trying to maintain through his insistence on a distinction between truth and falsity that serves as a constant reminder of the impossibility of direct, unnegotiated experiential interaction with the real in which one's existence transpires. In other words, the adverse reaction to copying—which at one point is referred to as "simulations of nature" (2002: 362)—may be seen as an anticipation of what Baudrillard has termed hyperreality, or, the "precession of simulacra" (2001: 169).

Baudrillard's argument represents the ultimate projection of the Coleridgean anxiety—the possibility of “counterfeit and reproduction” morphing beyond the merely the “mirror-image” into an “image [that] can be detached from the mirror and be transported, stocked, reproduced at will” (2001:185). He observes that “reproduction is diabolical in its very essence; it makes something fundamental vacillate” (2001:185). The “fundamental” can be interpreted as the essence of mediation, and what is shaken is the very possibility or validity of such a mediatory act. As Baudrillard's example shows, “representational imaginary, which both culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographer's mad project of an ideal coextensivity between the map and the territory, disappears with simulation” (2001:170). The corollary of simulation (which Coleridge fears) is that “with it goes all of metaphysics. No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept” (2001: 170). Simulation (or copying) destroys the very frame of reference necessary to assume a vantage point that recognizes the always already negotiated characteristic of the ontological experience. Coleridge's obsession with “truth” is explained by Baudrillard's observation that “thus perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of images [...] all of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange” (2001: 173). The resulting catastrophe that Coleridge does not directly mention, but is the logical end in a system that does not distinguish between the imitation and the copy, is that “then the whole system [...] is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference” (Baudrillard 2001: 173). The Coleridgean “copy” may thus signify the production and perpetuation of the self-exchanging economy represented within the Baudrillardian simulacrum.

Following this line of thought, we might say there are two possible outcomes in translation. On the one hand it may come so close to the original as to replace or efface the original, and on the other hand, it may retain a difference that signifies its translatedness. As I mentioned earlier, however, depending on who the intended reader is, the scheme of translation presupposes a mythical original which cannot be immediately verified. As such, even a highly literal translation depends on the cooperation of and the supplementation by the imagination and the

faith of the reader. Benjamin writes: “to some degree, all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines; this is true above all of sacred writings. The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation” (1996: 263). To say that a translation must be “between the lines” is precisely to deny the possibility of a purely literal translation, and any translation must therefore be infused with an element of imagination or interpretation. The Scripture is indeed a perfect model of this process insofar as, on the surface, it is supposed to be the literal word of God, and yet this is always already impossible due to the mediation from prophets and other ecclesiastical institutions.

4. Counter-hegemonic desires

The constitution of the subject is not unilateral and is a site active contention. What is at stake in the process of ideological formation is the creation of an synchronization of desire, which may be conceived as the political dimension of aesthetic experience:

Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination that it presupposes disturbs the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations. What it produces is no rhetoric persuasion about what has to be done. Nor is it the framing of a collective body. It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world where they live and the way in which they are ‘equipped’ for fitting it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation. (Rancière 2008: 11)

The political effect as such facilitates the realization of possibilities not previously imaginable or recognizable. It cannot simply be “persuasion” or “framing” because these outcomes are entirely predictable given existing presuppositions. In this case, we might say it is not only an analytic operation, but it is also one in which causation is erroneously assumed—as if the supposed objective somehow caused its audience to assume a position congenial to the objective; in fact, it is rather the case that the audience is already susceptible to a particular line of thinking which is merely retroactively designated as the cause of such thinking.

Ideological contestation depends on the cultivation of synchronized desired within the audience. To take Rancière’s reference to Plato as an example:

[O]ne had to ‘believe’ that God had put gold in the souls of the rulers and iron in the soul of the artisans. That nature was a matter of an as if. It was not necessary that the artisans get convinced in depths by story. It was enough that they sensed it, that they used their arms, their eyes and their minds as if it was true. And they did even more so as that belief about fitting fitted the reality of their condition. (2008: 10)

It is perhaps possible to maintain this coincidence between “belief” and “nature” when the scale is sufficiently small, which assures that the audience shares similar conditions such that they are

likely to experience similar ideological biases, bodily desires and other proclivities: “This is the point where the *as if* of the community constructed by the aesthetic experience meets the *as if* at play in social emancipation” (Rancière 2008: 10 emphasis in original). This homogeneity of the audience allows certain narrative elisions, which suggests two directions for analysis. According to Fredric Jameson “in narrative analysis what is most revealing is not what is said, but what cannot be said what does not register on the narrative apparatus” (Jameson 2005: xiii). A direct analysis of what is explicitly or positively articulated in the discourse (textual or otherwise) quickly reaches the impasse that Slavoj Žižek addresses in his exegesis of the Lacanian “Che vuoi?”—“You’re telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at” (1989: 111)?

The ambiguity of meaning—even when supposedly explicitly articulated—is an ever present specter that problematizes any discursive situation. Variations on this problematic include Roland Barthes’ injunction that “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash”; Raymond Williams’ reflections on the regulation of categories or genres of writing that purport as such to identify “essential” characteristics of particular discourses—in fact, the actual writing “surpasses any reduction of ‘creative imagination’ to the ‘subjective,’ with its dependent propositions: ‘literature’ as ‘internal’ or inner’ truth; other forms of writing as ‘external’ truth” (Williams 1977: 148); the incredulity towards “grand narratives” in the condition of postmodernity described by Jean-François Lyotard. These formulations suggest that any direct engagement with the explicit discourse cannot properly determine meaning—insofar as the expectation is to “recover” an essential or authoritative meaning (though the procedure may well rather “produce” this meaning)—unless the analysis is supplemented by consideration of the absently present ideological dimension, i.e. the part of discourse that speaks without speaking (or without the necessity of being explicitly articulated).

4.1. Subversive political potential—Lotmanian autocommunication

Lotmanian autocommunication offers a promising foundation for resisting hegemonic totalization. As I will show, the “I” in autocommunication is unstable and changes with each articulation and imbrication with the contextual codes. Therefore, any attempt to hegemonically impose a reified subjectivity is certain to meet resistance. This is not to say that a hegemonic force cannot make renewed attempts to establish influence, but it is rather a way of saying that the process of hegemony requires these repeated attempts in order to subdue, if at all, the counter hegemonic foundations produced by autocommunication. Indeed, as Raymond Williams points out:

A lived hegemony is always a process [. . .]. Moreover (and this is crucial, reminding us of the necessary thrust of the concept), it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. *It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.* (Williams 1977: 112 emphasis mine)

Moreover, my interpretation of the mechanism of autocommunication should also show that it bears resemblance to performative theories of gender insofar as they are both theories of subjectivity which resist pre-given identities.

We may begin by looking at the two modes of communication—“I-s/he” and “I-I”—from a functional standpoint:

In the “I-s/he” system the framing elements of the model are variables (addresser could be replaced by addressee), while code and message are invariables. *The message and the information contained in it are constants, while the bearer of the information may alter.*

In the “I-I” system the bearer of the information remains the same but the message is reformulated and acquires new meaning during the communication process. *This is the result of introducing a supplementary, second, code; the original message is recoded into elements of its structure and thereby acquires features of a new message.* (Lotman 1990: 22 emphases mine)

We may surmise that the critical feature of the “I-s/he” system consists in maintaining the consistency of the message regardless of the bearer of information. In the “I-I” system, the

critical feature is the reformulation of the message such that it requires new meaning. In both cases, it would seem that the actual relationship between addresser and addressee is functionally irrelevant.

This is more or less explicitly stated—though the way these modes are designated, “I-s/he” and “I-I,” somewhat obscure this formulation—e.g. “addresser *could* be replaced [but not *necessarily*]”; “the bearer of the information *may* alter [again, not necessarily]”; the case of “I-I,” on the other hand, is a bit more ambiguous since the text does say “the bearer of the information remains the same,” but Lotman makes the further specification: “The ‘I-s/he’ system allows one merely to transmit a constant quantity of information, *whereas the ‘I-I’ system qualitatively transforms the information, and this leads to a restructuring of the actual ‘I’ itself*” (Lotman 1990: 22 emphasis mine). As such, the two “Is” turn out to be different in the “I-I” system, and in fact it might even be argued that the “Is” are necessarily different (otherwise no communication can be said to have taken place). It is not just the message that is transformed, but also the “I.” It would be pedantic and irrelevant to contemplate this apparent semantic contradiction of the “I-I”—here the point is simply to establish that the designations “I-s/he” and “I-I” should be read as shorthand for what would be a much more unwieldy even if less ambiguous formulation that is more precisely descriptive.

Structurally, autocommunication might be compared with the Lacanian symptom. According to Slavoj Žižek:

The symptom arises where the world failed, where the circuit of the symbolic communication was broken: it is a kind of 'prolongation of the communication by other means'; the failed, repressed word articulates itself in a coded, cyphered form. The implication of this is that the symptom can not only be interpreted but is, so to speak, already formed with an eye to its interpretation: it is addressed to the big Other presumed to contain its meaning. (Žižek 1989: 73)

As noted already, in the “I-s/he” model of autocommunication, “the message and the information contained in it are constants [...]” (Lotman 1990: 22). Symbolic communication likewise presupposes direct access to and exchange of meaning. When this mode is broken, however, the communication becomes similar to the “I-I” model of autocommunication in which

“the message is reformulated and acquires new meaning during the communication process” (Lotman 1990: 22). The symptom is “the failed, repressed word articulates itself in a coded, cyphered form” (73); it always already invites interpretation. The message is thus changed as it is in the “I–I” model.

4.1.1. Subjective reorganization via autocommunication

Lotman notes “the ‘I–I’ text has a tendency to build up individual meanings and to take on the function of organizing the disordered associations which accumulate in the individual consciousness. *It reorganizes the personality who engages in autocommunication*” (Lotman 1990: 29 emphasis mine). He repeats this with an alternate formulation:

[. . .] We are dealing with an increase in information, its transformation, reformulation and with the introduction not of new messages but of new codes, and in this case the addresser and addressee are contained in the same person. *In the process of this autocommunication the actual person is reformed* [. . .]. (Lotman 1990: 29 emphasis mine)

Insofar as communication is concern, we have observed that the “I–I” model is structurally similar to the Lacanian symptom. Here we may further specify some characteristics of the subject presupposed by autocommunication. As Lotman notes, the subject is “reorganized” or “reformed.” This formulation is similar to Alain Badiou’s description of the relationship between the subject and the event: “There is only a particular kind of animal, convoked by certain circumstances to become a subject—or rather, to enter into the composing of a subject” (Badiou 2001: 41). Badiou suggests that these circumstances are a constitutive supplement to the subject and he refers to the supplement as the event. The constitution of the subject involves a “truth process” which involves “*thinking* [. . .] the situation according to the event” (Badiou 2001: 41 emphasis in original). Lotman’s description of the constitutive effect of autocommunication can thus be seen as a less radical articulation of Badiou’s formulation in which the subject is “is absolutely nonexistent in the situation ‘before’ the event [and in which] we might say that the process of truth induces a subject” (Badiou 2001: 43).

4.1.2.Heterogeneous subjectivities

The aspect of “supplementation” is worth noting insofar as by itself it does not preclude other forms of subjectivity. In other words, it is not exactly a replacement, but it is rather a process of layering. We have interrogated the issue of whether the “Is” are actually identical in autocommunication; Lotman suggests that they are indeed identical insofar as the bearer of information is the same in autocommunication, but we have shown that even Lotman himself appears to challenge this interpretation. One way to reconcile this ambiguity is to examine the way supplementation functions. In the following passage, we see that one message is not replaced with another but it is rather supplemented by a code:

[A]lthough the secondary code aims to liberate the primary signifying elements from their normal semantic values, this does not happen. The normal semantic values remain but secondary meanings are imposed on them which are the result of the effect of the various rhythmical series on the signifying elements. (Lotman 1990: 28)

We might therefore see this as different aspects of the same subject or different expressions of the same subject. Here Badiou’s clarification of the subject is useful:

It is important to understand that the “subject,” thus conceived, does not overlap with the psychological subject, nor even with the reflexive subject (in Descartes's sense) or the transcendental subject (in Kant's sense). For example, the subject induced by fidelity to an amorous encounter, the subject of love, is not the 'loving' subject described by the classical moralists. For this kind of psychological subject falls within the province of human nature, within the logic of passion, whereas what I am talking about has no “natural” pre-existence. The lovers as such enter into the composition of one loving subject, who exceeds them both. (Badiou 2001: 43)

The subject as bearer of truth does not replace other modalities of subjectivity that one may embody. It is rather a new configuration of relations which is triggered by the event. The previous modalities of relationships are not denied as a result of this new subjectivity. In this sense the Lotman’s “Is” are identical insofar as they are different facets of what is nonetheless the same subject.

At this point it should be clear that the subject or the “I” produced through autocommunication cannot be unproblematically subjugated by a hegemonic imposition, and such qualities bear resemblance to the theory of gender which Judith Butler articulates. Similar to the continual restructuring of the “I” in autocommunication, “the gendered body is performative [insofar as] it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler 2002: 173). Moreover, autocommunication involves repetition as secondary codes are layered upon the original signifying elements, which describes the way gender is constituted through external layerings gathered from repeated performances: “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (Butler 2002: 179 emphasis in original).

4.2. Limits of reading Lotman politically

Despite the promise that Lotman offers for counterhegemonic politics, Lotman cannot be unambiguously appropriate for subversive politics. In this section, I enumerate some reservations, namely the fact that Lotman fails to be explicitly political, even when the subject matter is highly political.

Insofar as the Tartu-Moscow school is concerned with culture it is clear that culture is not a homogeneous or monolithic entity:

The opposition "culture-extracultural space" is the minimal unit of the mechanism of culture on any given level. Practically speaking, we are given a paradigm of extracultural spaces ("infantile", "exotic-ethnic" from the point of view of the given culture, "subconscious", "pathological", and others). The descriptions of various peoples in medieval texts are constructed in an analogous manner: in the center there is situated a certain normal "we", to which other peoples are opposed as a paradigmatic set of anomalies. It should be emphasized that from the "inner" point of view the culture appears as the positive member of the aforementioned opposition, whereas from the "outer" point of view the whole opposition appears as a cultural phenomenon.

From this passage we can see that culture is always already an imbrication between a cultural and an extracultural space. There is ambiguity, however, what the “extracultural” refers to; is it merely an external or anterior culture—an other? Or is it possibly “non-cultural”—e.g. explicitly political? Such questions only make sense if we presume already a separation between cultural, political and other spheres, but what is unambiguous here is the matter of viewpoint—culture appears different depending on ones relation to it—either “inside” or “outside.”

My contention is that such a distinction between viewpoints is a political outcome, even though Lotman does not explicitly argue the political dimension. On the matter of viewpoint, let us look at the following passage from Lotman:

So while on the metalevel the picture is one of semiotic unity, on the level of the semiotic reality which is described by the metalevel, all kinds of other tendencies flourish. While the picture of the upper level is painted in a smooth uniform colour, the lower level is bright with colours and many intersecting boundaries. When Charlemagne at the end of the eighth century brought sword and cross to the Saxons, and St Vladimir a hundred years later baptized Kievan Russia, the great barbarian empires of East and West became Christian states. But their Christianity was a self-characterization and as such extended to the political and religious metalevel beneath which flourished pagan traditions and all sorts of real-life compromises with them. It could not have been otherwise considering that the conversions to Christianity were forced on the masses. The terrible bloodshed wrought by Charlemagne on the pagan Saxons at Verdun was hardly likely to foster acceptance of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount among the barbarians. (Lotman 1990: 130)

In this passage we observe the apparently “semiotic unity” or identity of Christianity imposed upon the barbarian pagans through violent conquest. Again, the status of politics is ambiguously articulated: “[. . .]But their Christianity was a self-characterization and as such extended to the political and religious metalevel beneath which flourished pagan traditions and all sorts of real-life compromises with them [. .].” In this formulation, the “political” is seen as a metalevel distinct from the level of “real-life” in which all manner of “compromises” take place. But “real-life” is undoubtedly already the outcome of politics—e.g. the forced and incomplete conversion

to Christianity. While Lotman undoubtedly recognizes the political contribution to this outcome, he nonetheless minimizes the status of the political by referring to it as merely another “meta-level” rather than—as I argue—the more appropriate “absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation” (Jameson 1983: 1)

The political determination of viewpoint goes precisely to the epistemological question of what can even be properly recognized as culture at all. Again, the Tartu-Moscow school is clearly not oblivious to this fact even if they do not pose it as an explicitly political problematic:

Also essential is the question about the construction of the typology of cultures in connection with the correlation of text and function. By text we imply only a message which performs within the given culture a textual function. In a more general form this tenet is applicable to any semiotic system. Within another language or another system of languages the same message may not be a text. Here we can see a general semiotic analogue of the linguistic concept of grammaticalness, which is of cardinal importance to the modern theory of formal grammars. Not every linguistic message is a text from the point of view of culture, and conversely, not every text from the point of view of culture is a correct message in a natural language. (Lotman et al. 1998: 44)

Here we can see the epistemological problem of recognizing texts and messages. But without posing it as a political problematic, the status of culture itself (the epistemological arbiter in this case) does not receive enough critical inspection. In short, we recognize culture (and ignore some other cultures) too hastily. Again, we must ask from whose perspective can a culture even be recognized?

Lotman defines culture as the “totality of nonhereditary information acquired, preserved, and transmitted by the various groups of human society” (Lotman 1988: 213) and emphasizes culture as information:

[E]ven when faced by the so-called monuments of material culture (such as the means of production) we must bear in mind that these objects perform a double role in the society that creates and uses them; although they serve a practical purpose, they also concentrate in themselves the experience acquired during past working activity and ultimately become instruments for preserving and transmitting information. (Lotman 1988: 213)

This process of acquisition, preservation, and transmission necessarily involves an active curation insofar as not everything is included for reproduction. In other words, one might say that cultural process is also one of discarding, neglecting, and inclusion. The outcome as such is the result of a struggle. As Lotman notes:

[W]e must note that at the level of “speech” (of empirical reality) every cultural text unfailingly represents not the incarnation of a certain code but the union of different systems [. . .] The code of an age is not, therefore, the only key to the cipher, but the prevalent one. It predominates, and while it deciphers some fundamental texts, it organizes others only partially. (Lotman 1988: 216)

And depending on the modality of cultural curation, we can specify different cultural typologies. Lotman offers two distinctions: the “medieval” type and the “enlightenment” type. The medieval type “is distinguished by its high semioticity” (Lotman 1988: 216) and “for this type of code, meaning is the index of existence: nothing is culturally meaningless” (Lotman 1988: 217). There is, as such, “the tendency to interpret every text as allegorical or symbolic, as well as the principle that truth is to be sought through interpretation of a text” (Lotman 1988: 217). An important consequence is that “the value of objects is semiotic to the extent that it is not determined by their intrinsic value but by that of the things they represent” (Lotman 1988: 217). Crucially, the value must derive from a higher authority which serves as a model from which to project value.

Lotman’s emphasis on culture as information allows for a fairly open-ended, even if not entirely neutral, account of different cultures. The epistemology as such is not neutral simply because it presupposes an equivalence between culture and information, but insofar as we can speak of an equivalence, it must be through a process of translation, and since translation occurs in language, it is necessarily contaminated by its linguistic medium. The main problem, by extension, is that in practice the contours of language are the result of a struggle for hegemony. When confronted with language, we are unavoidably also confronted with the question of ascertaining the whole range of the language from which the dominant configuration of the language emerges.

For example, national newscasters adopt a specific modality of diction and enunciation that is clearly distinct from many segments of the actual population towards which the news is directed and purports to serve. It is clear in this case that insofar as this modality of speech can be considered representative of the general population of the nation, it is only achieved by forcibly universalizing a narrow set of elocutionary peculiarities belonging to a specific social class.

The point, then, is that if language itself cannot be considered neutral insofar as one's specific usage will necessarily privilege a certain vision of language that corresponds to particular class interests, the use of language in translating culture to information is necessarily also a translation that privileges a particular rather than a universal conception of information as such. Lotman is clearly not oblivious to this complication:

At a certain level these codes will turn out to be opposed to one another. However, it is not a case of the opposition of unconnected and therefore differing systems, but of an opposition within a single system; therefore, at another level, the opposition can be reintegrated on the basis of an invariant codifying system. (Lotman 1988: 215)

In this approach, while Lotman acknowledges the struggle which produces the hegemonic codifying system, it nonetheless leaves the question of whether culture as such can reflect the voice of the subaltern. If we are already examining the end result of the "reintegration," then our perception of culture is necessarily skewed towards the dominant vision of culture. This inevitability is not surprising given what we have noted as the bias of Lotman's initial definition of culture as information, but at some points it even seems that Lotman is actively making normative claims from a perspective which privileges the dominant vision. For example, the following goals of the typology of culture clearly suggest a universal vision of culture, which in practice is very likely to be only the dominant vision:

(1) description of the main types of cultural codes on the basis of which the "languages" of individual cultures, with their comparative characteristics, take shape; (2) determination of the universals of human culture; (3) construction of a single system of typological characteristics relating to the fundamental cultural codes and universal traits that constitute the general structure of human culture. (Lotman 1988: 214)

What is to be done with the elements which cannot fit into this schema? It is not so simple as saying they would thus constitute a separate culture—insofar as the subaltern voices do not conform to the hegemonic vision, the subaltern is actively erased and forgotten; the plane on which discourse is articulated, regulated, and reproduced is already hostile to the subaltern as such. By the same token, the hegemonic voice is articulated and reinforced even in the absence of an actual “voice”—the very structure of the discursive space is already biased, and supports the hegemony through various ideological or state apparatuses.

I suggest that Lotman’s theorization allows for too much heuristic “expediencies” and as such cannot sustain the urgency of the political dimension, which can as such be given less emphasis for heuristic reasons. I should clarify that I am not saying Lotman does not recognize the political dimension but rather that he does not emphasize it sufficiently. For example, in discussion primary and secondary modeling systems:

The opposition of “primary” and “secondary” communication-modeling systems has *a heuristic significance* corresponding to the fifth rule of Descartes’s Rules for the Direction of the Mind: “to reduce involved and obscure proportions step by step to those that are simpler, and then starting with the intuitive apprehension of all those that are absolutely simple, to attempt to ascend to the knowledge of all others by precisely similar steps.” (1988: 95 emphasis mine)

The distinction has a “heuristic significance,”—but at the same time Lotman proceeds to complicate the matter by saying that “it is apparent that there are not sufficient grounds for concluding that the scheme ‘first primary, then secondary modeling systems’ also corresponds to the historical process of the formation of complex semiotic structures and can have chronological significance attributed to it” (1988: 95). As such, it is mainly a gesture for convenience, but one which must be made while keeping in mind its limitations in modeling “reality.” Part of the difficulty is that primary modeling systems are not entirely “primary” or uncontaminated by other modeling elements. As Lotman notes, “the data of ethnography and archaeology do not enable us to distinguish any period for even a single social group during which the system of natural language was already available and yet there were still no secondary systems, either social, religious, or aesthetic” (1988: 95). But while it seems that we cannot avoid

interpenetration between so-called primary and secondary modeling systems, Lotman accepts this distinction nonetheless for heuristic expedience.

When Lotman makes the separations or distinctions for “heuristic” reasons, what is missed is precisely the way in which the “objective” analysis is constituted by this separation. This “truth” is already contaminated by the convenient analysis. In this last part of the paper, I will give reasons why the political should rather be considered the absolute horizon of all interpretation, and cannot be disregarded for reasons of convenient analysis.

For example, the very space or position (physically, socially, economically or otherwise) from which we articulate any analysis is already a product of a particular configuration. I will use the imbrication of politics and the public sphere to illustrate. The separation (between the political sphere and others) that obtains in this case is the product of a particular configuration of space-time which is itself sustained by a particular regime of politics (or, in other words, a particular manifestation of hegemony). To exemplify, we may highlight two points from Habermas’ discussion of the public sphere. Namely, the external conditions necessary to sustain a (particular) distinction between public and private, and the bourgeois nature of the so-called public sphere which has more recently come into being.

In the context of the Greek city states,

The political order, as is well known, rested on a patrimonial slave economy. The citizens were thus set free from productive labor; it was, however, their private autonomy as masters of households on which their participation in public life depended. The private sphere was attached to the house not by (its Greek) name only. Movable wealth and control over labor power were no more substitutes for being the master of a household and of a family than, conversely, poverty and a lack of slaves would in themselves prevent admission to the *polis*. Exile, expropriation, and the destruction of the house amounted to one and the same thing. Status in the *polis* was therefore based upon status as the unlimited master of an *oikos*. (Habermas 1989: 3)

That this relation between political (public) and private (household) is a Greek situation is not so significant as the fact is *specific* to a situation at all—there is no distinction between political and private outside of specific circumstances or points of contact, interaction, and so on. The crucial

point is that such circumstances vary depending on the way society is configured, and this configuration is precisely a political act or situation. Of course, *what* is political is not fixed or stable and can be culturally, economically or otherwise influenced and thus changes depending on the prevailing conditions, but this supports precisely the contention that the political sphere cannot be separated from other spheres. Insofar it is considered separate, however, it is a kind of reification that privileges particular class interests.

To see what interests are privileged in this case, we may ask what does it mean for something to be public? Habermas observes several meanings, for example:

We call events and occasions "public" when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs—as when we speak of public places or public houses. But as in the expression "public building," the term need not refer to general accessibility; the building does not even have to be open to public traffic. "Public buildings" simply house state institutions and as such are "public." The state is the "public authority." It owes this attribute to its task of promoting the public or common welfare of its rightful members. The word has yet another meaning when one speaks of a "public [official] reception"; on such occasions a powerful display of representation is staged whose "publicity" contains an element of public recognition. There is a shift in meaning again when we say that someone has made a name for himself, has a public reputation. The notion of such personal prestige or renown originated in epochs other than that of "polite society." (Habermas 1989: 1-2)

We can see from these observations that "public" does not necessarily imply universal accessibility or reach; it implies rather a specific modality of spectacle or presence—specificity as such means there is a certain gaze for which the spectacle is staged, and in this sense "public" is necessarily a limited group. It is of course true, on the other hand, that the rise of the public sphere was premised on universal access, even though strictly speaking it was properly universal only for specific social classes:

The public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of universal access. A public sphere from which specific groups would be *eo ipso* excluded was less than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere at all. Accordingly, the public that might be

considered the subject of the bourgeois constitutional state viewed its sphere as a public one in this strict sense; in its deliberations it anticipated in principle that all human beings belong to it. (Habermas 1989: 85 emphasis mine)

In practice, however, insofar as the public sphere arose from the salons, “[t]he coming together of private people into a public was therefore anticipated in secret, as a public sphere still existing largely behind closed doors” (Habermas 1989: 35), and the public sphere as such was quite limited: “it was the bourgeois reading public of the eighteenth century [. . .]. The educated strata were also the property owning ones. The census, which regulated admission to the public sphere in the political realm, could therefore be identical with the tax list” (Habermas 1989: 85). Fundamentally, it is a question of who is allowed participation within the public sphere. The de facto barriers to entry mean that certain classes of society retain disproportionate influence within the public sphere. The public sphere as such is effectively a bourgeois public sphere.

I have already suggested that Lotman’s theorization is open-ended yet potentially reactionary due to the lack of explicitly engaging the political dimension that is always already present, and I would like to conclude by offering an example of a nefarious turn made possible by separating politics as a discrete sphere.

A separation of the cultural (or other) sphere from the political sphere is indeed often a matter of expedience—e.g. academic analysis, public policy, etc. Walter Benjamin offers this example:

Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish. It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses—but on no account granting them rights. The masses have a right to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them expression in keeping these relations unchanged. The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life.
(Benjamin 2002: 120-1)

What occurs here is the ostensible separation of the aesthetic sphere from the political sphere. The masses are given “expression,” but not properly political agency. This is done precisely through the separation of spheres, as if they were distinct, and as if the aesthetic sphere were not already the result of a political configuration. The “aestheticizing” of political life is thus a retroactive disavowal of the connection between the aesthetic and the political. What is denied

by the such an ideology of “art for art’s sake” is that “[t]he way in which human perception is organized—the medium in which it occurs—is conditioned not only by nature but by history” (Benjamin 2002: 104), to which it should be supplemented, as Benjamin underscores, “the social upheavals manifested in these changes in perception” (Benjamin 2002: 104). To use the words of Fredric Jameson, we may say that “[f]rom this perspective the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not becomes something worse than an error: namely, a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life.(Jameson 1983: 4-5)

5. Uses of reality and fiction

Thus far I have explored the political potential of the ideological imagination, and more specifically the conditions under which ideology has the potential to support radical politics. The introduction or recovery of an aesthetic dimension in ideology provides a point of entry insofar as this facilitates an imagination that is drastically different from the extant order of things. Aesthetics is in a unique position to supply the requisite imagination to effect such a change in orientation. To this end, we may begin with Bertolt Brecht's take on realism:

Even the realistic mode of writing, of which literature provides many very different examples, bears the stamp of the way it was employed, when and by which class, down to its smallest details. With the people struggling and changing reality before our eyes, we must not cling to "tried" rules of narrative, venerable literary models, eternal aesthetic laws. We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men in a form they can master. (Brecht 1980: 81)

The key insight is that realism is a contextual notion, and, therefore, what constitutes realistic is ever changing; it would be a mistake to use a particular notion of realism belonging to a particular set of circumstances as a general yardstick against which to measure all so-called reality. One example is the Christian Bible, which is read variously as a sacred text, literature, and even as "waste paper," as the following example shows:

And the holiest of books—the Bible—bearing both the standard of the cross and the standard of empire finds itself strangely dismembered. In May 1817 a missionary wrote from Bengal: "Still everyone would gladly receive a Bible. And why? - that he may lay it up as a curiosity for a few pice; or use it for waste paper. Such it is well known has been the common fate of these copies of the Bible . . . Some have been bartered in the markets, others have been thrown in snuff shops and used as wrapping paper" (Bhabha 1994: 92)

At the periphery of the imperial and ecclesiastical network which supports of the official or proper reading and interpretation of the Bible, we find the "interpretive community" reaches an entirely different conclusion regarding the status of the Bible. To go on a somewhat scholastic

tangent, in Stanley Fish's original formulation, the notion of interpretive community seems inescapably totalizing, insofar as it is within which a

shared understanding is the basis of the confidence with which they speak and reason, but its categories are their own only in the sense that as actors within an institution they automatically fall heir to the institution's way of making sense, its systems of intelligibility. That is why it is so hard for someone whose very being is defined by his position within an institution (and if not this one, then some other) to explain to someone outside it a practice or a meaning that seems to him to require no explanation, because he regards it as natural. (Fish 1980: 320-1)

For Fish, the problematic is fundamentally epistemological—knowledge is only possible according to the specific institutional framework of the interpreter. Of course, this framework can be variable (“if not this one, then some other”), but it will inevitably produce a different interpretation compared to an alternative framework. Crucially, an interpreter is always already situated within one institution or another. I would suggest, however, that this ostensible inevitability can be disrupted precisely by an artistic mode of imagination—and to use realism as a modality of imaginative expression—especially the kind of realism that is “wide and political, sovereign over all conventions” (Brecht 1980: 82) such that “We shall not speak of a realistic manner of writing only when, for example, we can smell, taste and feel everything, when there is ‘atmosphere’ and when plots are so contrived that they lead to psychological analysis of character” (Brecht 1980: 82).

This kind of “sensuous” realism is but one way of articulating reality, and, crucially, it is only under a particular aesthetic regime that this kind of “reality” is accepted as “realistic.” This can be illustrated via Benjamin’s genealogy on “aura.” Aura as such can be seen as contributing to a sensuous realism insofar as it posits a direct connection between the artifact and its enabling circumstances:

The uniqueness of the work of art is identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition. Of course, this tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for instance, existed in a traditional context for the Greeks (who made it an object of worship) that was different from the context in which it existed for

medieval clerics (who viewed it as a sinister idol). But what was equally evident to both was its uniqueness—that is, its aura.(Benjamin 2003: 256)

This configuration enables another concept known as authenticity, which is particular way for one to relate to an artifact. However, the introduction of mechanical reproduction or technical reproducibility disrupts this sensuous mode of realism: “From a photographic plate, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense. *But as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics*” (Benjamin 2003: 256-7 emphasis in original). An explicitly political understanding imagines the relationship between artifact and its context differently, in a way that is not tied to a sensuous mode of realism. We might say instead that such is an abstract realism or a realism of “empty signifiers,” which for Ernesto Laclau is the precondition for politics: “Politics is possible because the constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through the production of empty signifiers” (Laclau 2007: 44). This is yet another way of saying that the “authentic” cannot be properly be identified as such—more information or more description cannot help with the identification of authenticity because it is “not a being which has not been actually realized, but one which is constitutively unreachable” (Laclau 2007: 39).

Realism under such a configuration might be described by Jean Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality insofar as “Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 2001: 169). This is a condition where the notion of an authentic origin is discarded from the very beginning. This may appear to be an excessive radical and overly ambitious formulation, but it should be emphasized that hyperreality as such is not detached from, nor does it deny, positive, material reality. This is merely a conception of reality that accounts for the epistemological limitation that the real can only be detected through the “system of fictions,” as Alain Badiou puts it: “Nothing can attest that the real is the real, nothing but the system of fictions wherein it plays the role of the real” (2007: 52). Reality as such does not have an essential existence prior to its active constitution by the discursive system we refer to as fiction.

To say that reality or hyperreality is a discursive construction is not to deny its material reality. Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe remind us that “[t]he fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 108) insofar as “[w]hat is denied is not that [. . .] objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 108). An awareness of the discursive construction of reality is merely to register reality in such a way that we understand it cannot be directly accessed transparently or without mediation.

Mediation, moreover, is an active process, and here we may return to Brecht. We have already discussed the basic idea that “[w]hether a work is realistic or not cannot be determined merely by checking whether or not it is like existing works which are said to be realistic, or were realistic in their time” (Brecht 1980: 85)—in other words, we cannot reduce realism to merely sensuous realism—but here we must make the further specification that “[t]he intelligibility of a literary work is not guaranteed merely if it is written exactly like other works which were understood in their time. [. . .]. Steps had been taken to make them intelligible [. . .]. There is not only such a thing as *being popular*, there is also the process of *becoming popular*” (Brecht 1980: 85). We must emphasize the process of “becoming” as an active undertaking—what is considered realistic is the result of a struggle for a hegemonic understanding of reality, and the conception of reality that prevails at a given moment is not an eternal conception of reality.

In fact, the hegemonic conception of reality is often undergirded by otherwise “outrageous” fictions. Consider the example of blue cheese—if not for our faith in food regulation and consumer protections, and not to mention the influence of marketing, I suspect that most people would think twice before ingesting the slimy, hairy, and colorful “stuff” before them that we call blue cheese—in fact, outside of the particular fiction of blue cheese, it would mostly likely be unimaginable to eat foods with a similar rancid appearance; our “reality” in this case tells us that such things belong in the trash can, and not in our stomach. But again, “reality” as such is a process of becoming, and we find many similar instances where the “fiction” restructures our reality, e.g. processed meats—hotdogs, Spam, McDonald’s, etc.—all things people might not

choose to consume outside of the fiction of legitimacy that has been constructed around them such that they appear safe and even palatable to eat.

Here the point is not simply to decide between the choices pre-given or already available, but rather to create new choices and new possibilities —imagine how radical it must have been to be the first person take a bite of blue cheese, fundamentally changing the available conceptual options, and challenging the prevailing hegemony of so-called reality.

5.1. Reality is just someone else's fiction

Despite the specific narrative structures under which “reality” obtain, the concept of reality is often a cover for its own fiction. It projects an aura of self-evidentiality that so-called fiction lacks. However, many institutions we normally don't associate with fiction do in fact have fictional component. For example, Benedict Anderson has called the nation an “imagined community,” which means the nation is often a sign for many characteristics which it cannot accurately represent. For one, most of us have only actually seen a limited handful of our countrymen, yet we have no trouble believing that the nation nonetheless exists in its entirety. Additionally, we can often find that access to social goods such as education, health, justice, politics, are unequal within the nation, and yet most of us have no trouble imagining these disparate populations as belonging to the same nation.

Earlier we discussed the epistemological difficulty of distinguishing between fiction and reality or rather the mutual contamination between the two categories. Žižek's offers a pertinent reminder:

Usually we say that we should not mistake fiction for reality — remember the postmodern doxa according to which 'reality' is a discursive product, a symbolic fiction which we misperceive as a substantial autonomous entity. The lesson of psychoanalysis here is the opposite one: *we should not mistake reality for fiction* — we should be able to discern, in what we experience as fiction, the hard kernel of the Real which we are able to sustain only if we fictionalize it. (2002: 19)

The critical insight is the necessity of experiencing reality as fiction in order for the reality to be bearable. In short, we should be vigilant to the truth which permeates the so-called fiction.

The apocalyptic fantasy thus returns us to the question of “*Che vuoi?*” The ambivalence is that while one is ostensibly tempted to ask: are we doomed to this savagery at the cusp of catastrophe—the even more unbearable question that shadows the first is: what if we are already savages even without a catastrophe? The lack of an “excuse” for savagery is the overwhelming anxiety—and an inherently ambivalent one at that—on the one hand, one is afraid of turning into a savage for no good reason, but on the other hand, the lack of an “excuse” means precisely the impossibility of justifying savagery. Here we only need to recall Garrett Hardin’s Malthusian lifeboat fantasy—does not Hardin’s genocidal master plan depend precisely on the condition of perpetual catastrophe (of overpopulation)? It is no accident that Hardin insists on fantasizing the ultimate disaster scenario—to cover over the truly unbearable reality that there is an utter lack of the apocalyptic conditions, without which he is impotent to realize his ultra-retrograde machinations.

This representation of the apocalypse is therefore precisely the mode in which reality becomes fictionalized in order to limit its traumatic impact—it permits the illusion that the degeneracy is an exceptional event. It is helpful to supplement the understanding of this mechanism of fictionalization with Žižek’s contention that “the *sine qua non* of successful communication is a minimum of distance between appearance and its hidden rear” (1989: 42). In other words, successful communication is inherently contains a fictional component. For example, recent advances in color blind racism have induced some belief that racism proper does not exist; in other words, the ideological message is ostensibly saying that there is no racism, and in order for this message to be successful, the receiver of the message necessarily has to misunderstand (fictionalize)—i.e. in order to believe there is really no racism, one has to misinterpret the lack of formal racism, and falsely universalize this particular type of non-discrimination as the direct manifestation of non-discrimination proper. If, on the other hand, one truly understood the message--i.e. there is no misunderstanding that the true message describes a kind of reactionary advancement in racist technology--there would be civil unrest to no end; the message would be seen as outrageous, and it would no longer be possible to accept the message. Communication breaks off, war begins, and we can say that communication has in fact failed--precisely because there is no misunderstanding.

The idea of successful communication as misrecognition further underscores the ambivalent distinction between reality and fiction, but it should be stressed that the point is not simply to reduce one to the other. In other words, these categories serve a structural and regulatory function. Jameson's reading of Althusser provides the initial entry point:

What Althusser's own insistence on history as an absent cause makes clear, but what is missing from the formula as it is canonically worded, is that he does not at all draw the fashionable conclusion that because history is a text, the "referent" does not exist. We would therefore propose the following revised formulation: that history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious. (1982: 20)

The first moment corresponds to the idea that reality and fiction should not simply be conflated—so even though history appears as a fiction, there is nonetheless a real history. The second moment or reformulation invites precisely investigation into the structural function of the categories of reality and fiction—the “textualization” and “narrativization” of history is effected through the distinction between reality and fiction.

Insofar as the tension between reality and fiction is concerned, we may recall the following passage from Jean-Luc Nancy:

Nietzsche said that “we have art in order not to be sunk to the depths by truth.” But we must add that this does not happen unless art touches on truth. The image does not stand before the ground like a net or a screen. We do not sink; rather, the ground rises to us in the image. *The double separation of the image, its pulling away and its cutting out, form both a protection against the ground and an opening onto it. In reality, the ground is not distinct as ground except in the image: without the image, there would only be indistinct adherence.* More precisely: in the image, the ground is distinguished by being doubled. (2005: 13 emphasis mine)

In this passage, we note that the image has a double function, "as protection against the ground and an opening onto it." This might be interpreted à la Žižek insofar as it seems to mirror the understanding that fantasy functions as a support of reality. In other words, reality would be to

traumatic unless it experience as fiction or mediated by fantasy; direct access to the truth is both impossible (epistemologically) and overwhelming. If the ground to which Nancy refers is the truth--or perhaps it can be interpreted as the Lacanian Real of sorts--then the parallel is quite obvious: the image is a certain fantasy that mediates access to the Real or truth of the ground; and moreover, this is the only way the ground can ever appear as distinct, through the process of symbolization mediated by the image. That the ground is also doubled suggests precisely that there are two aspects--the one which is integrated into the symbolic coordinates of the image, the amorphous Real experienced as "indistinct adherence." Indeed, the "protection" against the ground is precisely to subdue its traumatic presence.

Conclusion

One way to illustrate the conceptual failure of the so-called post-apocalyptic is through the lens of Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer*. Certain political subjects participate in the public sphere only insofar as they embody the role of *homo sacer*—the outlaw, the camp prisoner, even the brain-dead—all figures of bare-life. In questioning the ideological consistency of the so-called post-apocalyptic, we find—as we find *homo sacer*, the one who is killed without the commission of a homicide—one suffers the de facto and the perpetual imposition of an exceptional condition without commensurate symbolic recognition—e.g. the quotidian lack of access to social goods or “universal” human rights, etc. might be framed as “moral failing” rather than catastrophic intrusion. Indeed, *homo sacer* rather exists in a perpetual state of emergency or so-called post-apocalypse even absent a general or universal catastrophic event.

This is not simply call for an empirical accuracy; we would only ever be chasing a mirage as the continuous re-staging of our relationship to the aesthetic (or other) object under changing artistic regimes reminds us—or, in Alain Badiou’s terms, the “passion for the real that is obsessed with identity [. . . which] can only be fulfilled as destruction” (*Century* 56). The “destruction” here is precisely a case of failed conceptual promises as a result of the attempt to establish a hegemonic interpretation. Moreover, any empirical catalogue of the “real” post-apocalyptic is real only insofar as it is framed by a fiction: “Nothing can attest that the real is the real, nothing but the system of fictions wherein it plays the role of the real” (Badiou *Century* 52). Even the empirical reality is always already interpretive through the frame of ideology.

Despite the conceptual failure of the so-called post-apocalypse, it nonetheless repeats itself in the struggle to establish hegemony, but the positive thrust of my thesis is to elucidate means for resisting hegemony. Though a combination of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, translation theory, and Lotmanian theory, I believe it can be clearly seen that any hegemonic imposition is already a fractured concept, and its move to establish dominance is therefore not irresistible.

It is likely that the most contentious aspect of my thesis lies in its radical counter-hegemonic appropriation of Lotman. To this I would conclude with the following note: mutual difference should not *prima-facie* be reason to regard each other merely as incommensurable pluralities. For example, the dissimilar conceptualization of social justice between the Levinasian—who

acknowledges the original trauma to the ego from the primordial solicitation by alterity—and the Nozickian—who insists on the autonomous and self-owning subject—would register rather more productively as a structurally related difference ultimately united by historical contingencies under which social justice has been characterized “as providing in the first instance a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed” (Rawls 1999: 8). The common thus emerges even across ideological disparity—if the Nozickian libertarian recognizes that taxation is theft, then in principle he can recognize in the laboring subject a Levinasian “original trauma” of wage labor itself, which in Marxist theory is always already theft. Such a reading puts a disparate range of thinkers in a productive cooperation, and indeed my thesis is intended to make a similar contribution towards discovery and new productive alliances by putting Lotman together with a range of more explicitly radical thinkers.

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Resume

Semiootika Erandite Olukorras

Oma väitekirjas, ma rõhutan tagajärgi ja piiranguid, mis tõusevad hegemoonia protsessist, mis väljendub apokalüpsi järgses kontseptsioonis. Ma esitan väljakutse fundamentaalsele apokalüpsi järgse kontseptsioonile, mis päädib mitte-soovitud apokalüptilise sissetungiga. Minu eesmärk ei ole uuesti defineerida post apokalüptilist või püüelda täpsema definitsiooni poole. Pigem soovin toonitada ebapädevust üldises jagunemise olukorras, mis eeldab apokalüptilise sissetungi. Teisisõnu minu argument on, et post apokalüptiline kui selline ei ole võimeline väljendama oma konseptuaalset olekut. Täpsemalt, kuni selleni, et seda kontseptsiooni saab pidada ebapädevaks kontseptsioniks, see on piiratud tähendusega kontseptsioon, mis on adekvaatne kindlas kontekstis, mis on limiteeritud kindlate klassihuvidega. Ma jagan Walter Benjamini seisukohta ”täheldades seda allasurutute pärimust, õpetab meile, et hädaolukorras, milles me elame, ei ole erand vaid reegel.” Selles mõttes on ühiskond juba mõranenud mõiste isegi juba niinimetatud apokalüptilist hetke; ühiskond kui selline juba algsest ebaõnnestub oma lubaduste täitmises isegi niinimetatud normaalsetes oludes. Me võime täheldada, et teatud poliitilised subjektid osalevad avalikus sfääris ainult niikaua kui nad omandavad Giorgio Agambensi homo saceri rolli. Ma uurin ideoloogilist mehanismi, mis hoiab alal sellist lahknevust, tugeva viitega psühhoanalütilistele filosoofitele kaasaarvatud Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Ranciere ja Slavoj Žižek. Lisaks vaatlen vastandlikke hegemoonilisi võimalusi, et vastu seista konseptuaalsele totalisatsioonile. Erilise huvi all olen võtnud Juri Lotmani autokommunikatsiooni mõiste, mis aitab mõista, et mina saab pidevalt transformeerida läbi autokommunikatsiooni ja seetõttu loomupäraselt seisab vastu igasugusele hegemoonilisele totalisatsioonile. Me võime võrrelda sellist pidevalt muutuvat identiteeti teiste subjektiivsuse teooriatega nagu on Judith Butleri teoriad sugude performatiivsest aspektist. Minu väitekiri on rõhutatult teoreetilise lähenemisega, sest isegi niinimetatud realsus on enamjaolt vahendatud ideoloogiliste narratiivide poolt. Empiirilisi fakte saab tõlgendada või isegi hüljata põhinedes ideoloogilisel

narratiivil. Minu argument, seetõttu otsib otseselt vastandumist ideoogilise konstruktsiooni mehhanismile.

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